

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2016

**Colwall
Village
Society**

Revealing Our Heritage

REFLECTIONS by Lorna Cook

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My family begged me to write about my childhood, growing up on a farm, on the outskirts of the lovely little village of Colwall, on the border with Worcestershire nestling into the side of the Malvern Hills. I did promise that I would do it 'one day'! Recently, whilst tidying up a drawer, I came across a haphazard collection of scraps of paper with 'scribbled thoughts' on – hence this little book, in which I have endeavoured to 'transform' those 'scribbled thoughts' as a means of capturing some of my early experiences, before my brain becomes more forgetful and my ability to concentrate diminishes!

These memories cluster around two main areas of my childhood - the village itself, and Hoe Farm, the farm that was my home as I grew up. It, therefore, seemed logical that these formed the 'chapters' of my book, giving me scope to explore the amenities of the village and the range of activities that were undertaken on the farm, at that time.

Looking back, I can see that what I learnt from these early experiences was to underpin and influence my adult life.



The Malvern Hills from Hoe Farm

CHAPTER TWO: THE VILLAGE OF COLWALL

Colwall is a village in Herefordshire, England on the border with Worcestershire, nestling into the side of the Malvern Hills - a truly beautiful spot.

In the centre of the village stood 'The Stone' a rock of limestone. Legend has it that the Colwall Stone was rolled down from the Malvern Hills by a giant... as a child I was told that 'the giant got angry and kicked the stone down into the village' - I spent a lot of time worrying in case he got angry again and the next stone fell on me.....!

Another feature of Colwall at the time was 'The Clock'. The Clock was built in 1931 by Tom Pedlingham, in memory of his very popular wife, Alice. Hence the Clock was affectionately known as 'Aunt Alice'.

The Village shops

There were several village shops, certainly adequate for most of the needs of the local villagers, who had to use 'Shanks's Pony' (i.e. their legs!) to take them shopping, as very few people had cars. These village shops were essential to the community - where villagers not only did their shopping but kept up to date with all the local gossip! Most people did take a daily newspaper but few had a radio and certainly no one a television!

The Butcher

The first shop I would arrive at when I went into Colwall from home was the Butcher. I remember vividly the 'rationing' that took place during the War. All meat was strictly rationed - on Saturdays, we often had stewing beef from the Butcher's and it was my job to make a pie with a potato crust using a recipe I obtained from school! Brisket, one of the cheaper meats, was available on 'ration'.

Anyone with a garden was 'allowed' to keep a pig of their own - when it was killed, owners had to send 'half' to the Butcher to help out with the rationing.

The Barber

Next door to the Butcher's was the 'never busy' Barber's! I could never understand how the Barber's managed to survive and make any money as the men usually shaved at home, using the cut throat razor, a dangerous looking implement, and parents usually cut their children's hair and frequently each other's!

The Baker

Next came the Baker's - we always loved going passed the Bakers as there was always a wonderful aroma of 'baking' coming from it! Whilst we mostly bought bread from the Baker's, as an annual treat for both my sister and myself, Mum used to buy a Victoria sponge for our birthdays! We (i.e. my sister and myself) were popular with the Baker's wife because we were clean, tidy and well-mannered and she chose us to pick the blackberries for her homemade pies - this was a real honour!

The War started in 1939 and lasted until 1945. During these years, much of the flour we used for baking came from overseas, mostly Canada. However, we lost many of these ships as they were frequently sunk by German U-boats, crossing the Atlantic Ocean. We had to use this flour very economically and many farmers were asked to plough up more land to plant more cereal crops to help feed the nation. Halfway through the war in 1942, a new kind of loaf was introduced, called the 'national loaf'. The wheat was ground but the rough husks were included, not removed, as was usual practice. It was dull grey and most unappetising to look at and not very tasty! Many people complained (to no avail!) to the Food Ministry because this bread, when fresh, was inclined to crumble, making it much more wasteful and it could not be sold until it was a day old.



Hoe Farm from the Front

The Ironmongers/Haberdashery

Three maiden ladies ran the Ironmongers cum Haberdashery. This was a big, rambling store, stocking what to me seemed 'millions' of different items crowded on numerous shelves. These items included candles (that dropped wax everywhere) and paraffin for the smelly temperamental lamps that we had to use as we had no gas or electricity. They also sold seeds and I remember being sent with a note from Dad asking for mangold seeds and that he would pay as soon as possible. These seeds were needed for planting immediately as they needed sufficient time to mature as winter food for our cattle. The ladies refused to give me the seeds without payment, which made me really angry - we needed them for the cattle but as there was a slump in farming I realised later that they would not be selling enough items to enable them to give us 'credit'.

Linked to the Ironmongers was the Haberdashery - this sold needles, sewing cotton, household linen, underwear (ladies only!) and the essential garment for every housewife - the Pinafore!! The pinafore would often get filthy very quickly due to the dusty ashes from the coal fire and the black lead used to clean the stove. By being a 'wrap around' it could, however, be removed very swiftly revealing a clean dress or skirt/blouse should somebody call unexpectedly!

The Dairy / Green Grocery Store

Straight across the road was a store that sold dairy produce as well as fruit and veg, although there was little call for the latter as most villagers were keen gardeners with gardens of their own and many had allotments, growing fruit and veg more than sufficient for their needs. Lots of the home produce was made into jam, pickles or chutney. I remember that our runner beans were finely sliced and 'salted down' - when I look back, they were not very nice but perhaps better than nothing! I remember once, when Mum came home from the store, she held up a bunch of bananas! We hardly knew what they were as we had never tasted a banana before - they were usually too expensive as the ships had to make those dangerous journeys to deliver them.



Gran Nichols

The Bank / Chemist

The large detached house after the Dairy/Green Grocery Store appeared from the outside to be a private dwelling - not so! It contained the Bank and the Chemist. As you entered the building through its imposing doorway, you found yourself in a large oak panelled hallway, which always had a mysterious and foreboding air and the door on the left was the Bank. We were very respectful and rather fearful of the Bank and I remember Dad always looking worried when he visited that office wearing his best trilby! Across the hallway, was the equally mysterious Chemist. Villagers who were unwell went to the 'Chemist' for advice before visiting the only Doctor in the village. The Chemist was a very knowledgeable man and much cheaper than the Doctor... bearing in mind that there was no NHS at this time.

The Post Office

Similar to the Ironmongers/Haberdashery, the Post Office was also run by two 'maiden ladies'. I was curious at the time as to why there were so many women living alone and realised, later, that they hadn't found partners because so many men, in their age group, had been killed in the Great War. The Post Office, as well as selling the usual stamps and stationery, also sold knitting wool, needles, knitting and sewing patterns, cottons and embroidery items. This combination of Post Office and Haberdashery was frequently used and seemed to be very successful as most women would knit and sew for themselves and their families.

The Post Office also sent telegrams. Few 'ordinary' households had a telephone and telegrams were the quick and efficient way to send messages. For example, the death of a family member in WWI (1914-18) and WW2 (1939-45) was often conveyed in a telegram, delivered by the telegraph boy on a bicycle. Hence, people often feared seeing the telegraph boy....

My family used to tease me 'when I tried to post myself' ! I was out cycling one day, I was going too fast - I grabbed my brakes but I was going so fast that I ended up hitting the wall that hosted a letterbox! Hence the teasing!!

The Village Store

A short distance past 'The Stone' stood 'Bryant's General Grocery Store. This was where Mum would take her weekly home-made butter. When the weather was hot, the cream took a long time to 'turn' into butter. It was exhausting turning the churn handle round and round which sometimes took as long as half day. When the butter was ready, Mum would pack her half pound butter pats in grease proof paper and place them carefully in what we called 'tomato boxes' and covered them with wet rhubarb leaves to keep cool! Mum's butter would be exchanged for groceries - when I look back, this must have been exhausting for Mum as, not only had she had the tedious job of making the butter, but then had to carry it to the store and then carry heavy groceries back home.

Sometimes, as children, we would meet up with Mum at the store and if we were lucky we would have a 'ha'p'orth' (amount bought for a halfpenny!) of sweets. These were served in plain white triangular bags. What a problem it was to select something from the five or six colourful jars on display! I usually chose humbugs or winter mixtures as I enjoyed the strong minty flavours.

Other Village Amenities

The Garage

There were few cars around in the early 30s/40s - therefore there were seldom new cars to service! So the Colwall garage was mostly involved with old 'bangers' that would frequently be in need of repair. Most of their regular custom came from charging accumulator batteries that we used to run our radios! The accumulator, or wet battery, was similar to today's car battery in that it had electrode plates in acid. I remember having to carry them a mile and a half to the garage, having to take care that there was no 'acid spillage'! We owned



Grandad Nichols

two of these accumulators, both for use with our radio - one in use; the other at the garage charging. Woe betides us if the power ran out! I remember, vividly, being awakened when the British heavy weight boxer, Tommy Farr, was about to fight the American champion, Joe Louis, in the U.S.A. There was shouting, swearing and banging of doors - my Dad and my brother had stayed up to listen to this important match which was to be broadcast at 3am, our time. Of course, radio reception was not good - in fact it was diabolical - only a crackling buzz! Next day, everyone was pretty grumpy due to the frustration at the lack of a result and also to their lack of sleep - finding out from the newspapers the next day that Tommy Farr had lost felt like the end of the world for many!!

The School

The classroom at Infant School seemed very large to me. There were two sets of tables - one for 5-6 year olds and one for 6-7 year olds. Sometimes we had two teachers but more often than not, only one to look after 21 pupils. 'Order' in the classroom was never a problem as we were all too scared of the teacher to be disobedient!

I can't actually remember learning to read or write but I do remember we used a small blackboard and chalk to do our writing and sums. It wasn't until Junior class that we used pen and ink - the ink was in a little china pot, about the size of an egg cup, which was sunk into the desk top. The pen consisted of a rough wooden handle with a removable nib attached. Woe betide you if you pressed too hard or dropped your pen and buckled the nib, making it useless for writing. Mid-morning we had a small bottle of milk with a straw - we took sandwiches for mid-day (there were no cooked meals at school those days).

When I was 7, I moved to the Junior classroom which adjoined the Infants One. This was for girls only - the boys went to a separate school a ½ mile up the road. From the Junior School, I then went to Ledbury Grammar School. On looking back, I realised we were told what to think and what to believe. We had quite a lot of homework - trying to do this in winter in the only heated room in the house shared by the activities of the family of six was difficult, if not impossible. Often, especially in the summer, I would be needed to do jobs on the farm, or help my mother to do extra work indoors when there were seasonal workers to be fed - understandably my homework suffered and was often rushed....

Looking back I think the advantage of strict schooling and upbringing was that I didn't dare slack or skive so I always gave 100% to anything I took on... the disadvantage was that I wasn't encouraged to have opinions of my own which took me a long time to address.

The Pubs/Hotels

The village boasted five very small pubs, visited weekdays by a few regular 'locals' with more on Friday and Saturday evenings. Interesting to note that women were 'frowned upon' in those days if they even entered a pub never mind had a drink. The now popular 'pub grub' did not exist then - you might have been lucky to have got a packet of Smiths crisps (the only make at the time!) which were plain with a twist of salt in a blue bag so you could add salt according to your taste! You might sometimes 'get lucky' and be offered a bit of bread and cheese - the forerunner of today's popular Ploughman's Lunch. As there was little 'spare cash' about, people tended not to eat out and there would be serious ructions if a husband preferred pub food to his wife's cooking!

As well as the pubs, there were two hotels. One, in particular, was near to the station, which was really convenient as few people had cars. This was the mock Georgian country house style Colwall Park Hotel, purpose built in 1905 to serve Colwall horse racecourse, which is now sadly defunct. It had the most fantastic views of the beautiful Malvern Hills.

To be continued...

Notice from the Society's Secretary

Would any member wishing to table an item for consideration at the AGM and/or who wishes to nominate someone either to serve on the committee or as one of the Society's officers, please contact the Secretary [REDACTED] by 4th April 2016.

As previously mentioned, new members of the committee would be very welcome.

Future Talks

18th April 2016 [AGM] followed by a talk from Ron Shoemsmith on 'Alfred Watkin'.

20th June 2016

Gary Butler on 'The Restoration of the Ledbury Master's House'.

September 2016 – To Be Decided

January 2017 - To Be Decided

24th April 2017 – [Provisional Date]
[AGM]

From the Editor

If you are prepared to receive your newsletters by electronic means, please register with the email address below.

Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are **CONTRIBUTIONS!**

Newsletter Editor: Derek Rees, [REDACTED]

email: cvnewsletter@colwall.info

or hardcopy c/o Colwall Library