

# NEWSLETTER

## JULY 2016

**Colwall Village Society**

Revealing Our Heritage

### REFLECTIONS *by Lorna Cook*

#### CHAPTER TWO: *Continued*

**The Racecourse** Three or four times a year the village was invaded by the horse racing fraternity. Colwall Park Racecourse, was, at the time, very important in the racing calendar and for us, as children, it was an exciting time! My parents sternly warned us to come straight home after school when the races were on, and would have been horrified if they knew that my brothers used to squeeze through the fences to get a better view! Not to be outdone, my sisters and I stood on the railway bridge pretending we could see the race, whilst the only thing we could see was the back of the crowd! During the 2nd World War the



racecourse was used for other purposes and sadly never regained its status. There were also significant racecourses at Hereford and Worcester 15 miles either side of Colwall - hence Colwall's racecourse was not financially viable.

**The Village Fete** Apart from Ledbury Fair, we had few other special 'days out' to look forward to but one key important annual event was our own village fete. At the fete there were swinging boats, roundabouts, coconut shies, roll the penny as well as races for children and grown-ups. These races, whilst deadly serious to the competitors, were hilarious to the spectators, especially the egg and spoon and the sack races! The men showed their masculinity by entering the tug of war and rivalry between villages was very

strong. I remember clearly once, after a great deal of tug-of-war male grunting, groaning and shouts of encouragement, a silence fell over the crowd, what had happened? Somebody seemed to be unconscious on the ground - I remember thinking 'was he dead?' Had he had a heart attack? NO! he was completely inebriated!!!!

The most important event of the fete was where the gardeners demonstrated their prowess - who had the biggest and best vegetables! The gardeners had been tending their produce with such loving care, feeding them with strictly secret ingredients! The flowers may have been even more difficult to show. There were strict rules here too. Some needed to be in bunches of six; others as single blooms. Each needed to be unblemished and matching in size and colour. For example, blooms such as chrysanthemums or dahlias, where there were many different species which had to be prepared individually. The petals had to be 'groomed' accordingly - some of them combed and curled upwards; some needed to be flattened to make for perfection. The cakes and jam arrangements were even worse - everyone was so competitive and family recipes were zealously guarded! Twice, in my young days, we had 'extra special' fetes - one to celebrate the Jubilee of King George the Sixth in 1945 and the other for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second, in 1953. We were all given china commemorative mugs as we left - I still have mine and the memories surrounding it.

#### **The British Legion**

The British Legion played a key role in my childhood. In particular, the British Legion Christmas Party was such an exciting event for us - very few of the children we knew went so we felt very proud and special! We were invited to the British Legion celebrations as Mum had been in the Land Army during the war and Dad had stayed at home looking after the farm doing an essential job that of feeding the people as well as the troops. The hall was decorated with homemade coloured streamers and balloons. We had sandwiches, jelly, tinned fruit and cream as well as fancy iced cakes, which were 'special' things we normally did not have. It was all so exciting - I think the fact that these parties so seldom occurred made us appreciate them even more. To get to my home, Hoe Farm, I had to leave Colwall village behind to walk the next mile, along Mathon Road, which had no street

lights - when there was no moon it would seem pitch black until your eyes adjusted to the darkness. From Mathon Road, you then had to cross a field to get to the farm.

### CHAPTER THREE: HOE FARM

Approaching our home on a summer's day, our square, stone built detached house looked very inviting. However, in winter, it had quite a different appearance - cold, dark, dreary and forbidding with a muddy land leading to the front door. This lane came off the field and when entering the lane from the field, there was, on your right, a Dutch barn.

**The Dutch Barn.** Our Dutch barn was, in actual fact, just a roof on very tall posts with no sides. In autumn, it was stacked with hay and sheaves of corn. Although open-sided, when expertly placed the crops would withstand normal storms. It was my sister who was the 'expert'! In fact, she was very experienced at this as she often helped on the farm (whilst I helped indoors!).

**Haymaking** At haymaking time, and for the harvest, we had more men working outside, which meant more mouths to feed! Haymaking was a crucial time - if it rained, gathering the hay could be delayed, even ruined. This would be disastrous for the farmer who would have to buy feed for his animals in winter, which because of scarcity became more expensive. I remember one time when my Dad would not gather his hay on the Sabbath because of his religious convictions - it then rained on the Monday, spoiling our crop - I can't imagine how Dad must have felt... To pull the mower and to haul the hay meant catching the horses! This was often a problem! Sometimes they would allow Dad or the boys to catch them, other times they decided they didn't fancy working" These magnificent heavy horses would romp around the meadow, flicking their tails and kicking their heels up. My Dad and brothers were exhausted and this was before they did any mowing! Once caught, the horses behaved impeccably - they just let us know who was boss! Watching 'man and beast' working in unison is just such a magnificent sight - there are still some heavy horses around mostly seen at shows. When the hay was ready, it would be gathered up by the use of pikes i.e. long two pronged forks, and then loaded onto a horse drawn wagon, then taken to the farm building to be unloaded into the Dutch barn.

**Threshing** There was a routine of 'bigger jobs' as well as everyday ones that took place in order each year. The first was the arrival of the 'threshing box' on the first Monday in the New Year. The visiting threshing box was a large smelly, dust-making contraption, which was owned by a local farmer. His two strong, noisy sons did the work. Sheaves with string removed, were thrown into the belly of the machine; threshed around vigorously, causing the grain to fall from the stems. Somehow, as if by magic, that grain arrived on the awaiting sack and the stems tied into bundles shot out the other end, ready to be stacked tidily back in the barn. This noisy, monstrous machine was driven by steam, making lots of vapour, smoke and noise. The dusty chaff, which was the casing of the grain, flew out of the threshing box making those nearby to cough, sneeze, splutter and rub their eyes!



This process lasted two exciting, scary, noisy days. It was very hard work! When it was over, my Dad, together with the other men, would closely inspect the grain, discussing quality and quantity, estimating if it would fetch a good price when sold; would it be financially worthwhile? The cycle from ploughing, planting, fertilising and caring for the crop, to harvesting and then to threshing the grain took about a year! A good yield was essentially to earn enough cash to buy seeds to plant later in the year. Small farmers (and there were many of them at the time) didn't usually make much money - they basically had a 'hand to mouth' existence. Whatever profit they made was ploughed back into the farm. How different harvesting is today! **Ditching** Ditches easily got blocked, which would often cause flooding of the land. Large animals going for a drink, could make the sides fall in. Clearing the ditches was a cold, miserable task but crucial to the running of the farm. The workers were glad to get back to the farm where they would be greeted by the aroma of a good rich stew with plenty of dumplings - a really warming meal! There was no 'dieting then - the men worked hard needing substantial meals to give them fuel to keep them warm and give them energy!

**Livestock farming** Stock had to be fed, watered and mucked out and the cows had to be milked each day. Most of the farm animals lived out in the field, even in winter, except for the pigs as they would root up the meadow spoiling it and their little piglets could easily escape through the hedges! There was no water in the cow sheds so they had to be herded outside each evening and fetched in again in the morning whatever the weather. Lambing in the springtime was another important event. At that time, ewes managed to give birth unaided, usually having a single lamb - now sheep are bred to have two or three lambs and frequently need assistance. At Easter time, the sheep were dipped to get rid of pests that might affect their health and to ensure a clean fleece and they were shorn around the spring bank holiday. For dipping the sheep my brothers damned the brook making it quite deep adding a small platform to stand on. Disinfectant was added to the water, the sheep were thrown in, pushed down with a pole to make sure their wool was completely saturated, then allowed to struggle out. Under the platform, when all the signs of the disinfectant had gone, trout would gather, hiding from predators. A couple of weeks after being dipped, the sheep were shorn by a contractor. Dad or the boys, sometimes my sister too, took turns to turn the handle creating power to work the shearing machine. It was important to employ a skilled man as someone less experienced could cut a sheep badly. The fleece

was scrutinised to ensure it was clean and undamaged then rolled, with leg inwards, into a neat bundle. Once again, quality and quality were important as this was one of the annual sources of income. We also had a hen house, which had a 'scratching pen' attached. This pen allowed the hens to be out scratching around in the soil, a natural activity for them. One day when my mum could hear my cries but couldn't find me, she asked my brother if he knew where I was. His reply - 'I've put her in the scratching pen because she scratched me'!!!! Across the yard were the rabbit hutches which held our pets.

**Arable farming** When the fields were not waterlogged, the spring ploughing began, ready to plant spring corn, beans, mangolds and potatoes. Often clover was an early crop that not only fed the stock but when the roots were ploughed into the land, it added nutrients to the soil. If we were lucky with the autumn weather, some fields would have been ploughed and planted in winter. Mowing started, generally, at the beginning of June, depending on the weather. Clover would be the first - once it was cut it needed to be put into small heaps to dry out.

**The Garden** Leaving the house through the front door, which was at the back of the house, we were in the garden. Under the window were tall dark red button chrysanthemums, which were so lovely. Mum also grew pansies, marigolds, polyanthus as well as the prolific pink perennial sweet peas. At the bottom of the garden was a patch of delicious soft fruits - black and red currants, gooseberries, raspberries and rhubarb which grew well in the clay soil. It was Dad who mostly dug the garden. Mum planted it and we, children, when we were big enough, had to help. There was always plenty of vegetables, salad 'stuff', onions, potatoes, carrots and all kinds of greens - something edible was growing there throughout the year! Leaving the garden in springtime, you would be overwhelmed by the heady perfume from the pink lilac tree, tinged with the aroma of cider coming from the adjacent cellar!

**Cider Mill** In the corner of one of the outer buildings, was the cider mill, where, annually, my Dad made cider. Fortunately, we had a lot of cider apples and pears on the farm, which were too sour to eat. Many were sold to Bulmers, the local cider making factory. The large millstone, which was about a yard and a half in diameter, was pulled round and round by a horse - he would plod on and on obediently, crushing the fruit in the stone circular trough. This mash was then shovelled onto the press being layered between coconut mats - the weight above was wound down crushing the apple pulp, squeezing the juice out into the awaiting large bath. The juice was strained through muslin, poured into the appropriate barrels and then taken to the cellar to mature.

**To Be Continued...**

The Victoria County History Society has been busy researching Colwall history and they have kindly allowed me to reproduce the following article from their Newsletter [Series2, No.17] by Jonathon Comber.

### Reverend Arthur Cecil White (Vicar of Colwall) World War 2 Diary

In the course of our review of the Colwall material in Herefordshire Record Office, we found the diary of Reverend Arthur Cecil White covering the period 1941-45. He was vicar of the parish from 1937, and appears to have died in post on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1949. The diary throws light on life in Colwall during the Second World War. Before he came to Colwall, White was a chaplain in the Royal Navy from 1915 to 1934, serving on a number of ships. One was HMS Grafton, which was torpedoed by the German U Boat UB43 off Malta in June 1917; White may have been on board (Crockford's Clerical Directory only gives years not months for his service on the different ships), but if so, he was lucky as there were no casualties. He also served on the battleships HMS Ramilles (1917-1920), HMS Revenge (1924-27) and HMS Queen Elizabeth (1930-32). His final naval posting was at HMS Ganges, which was a training establishment at Shotley in Suffolk. From his diary it is clear that White continued to adopt a naval attitude to time, with regular references to dogwatches, although the juxtaposition of war news and domestic detail in many entries does not suggest a very neat and tidy, military, mind. It has not, so far, been possible to identify many of the people mentioned.

The following extracts illustrate life in Colwall during the war.

In September 1943, White referred to a "Holidays at Home" campaign at the Wyche; from October a 'drum school boy' attended at one church service a month.

On 6 April 1944 he referred to 'Boy Dudley' being before the juvenile court for breaking the face of Colwall church clock, and to soldiers helping to dig his allotment - presumably 'digging for victory'.

The diary entry for Tuesday 6 June 1944 contains a mix of national and personal events; The entry reads "D-Day Invasion of coast of Normandy by the Allies. Cool warm sun at times. Joan came over. Gardened in forenoon. Afternoon Mass and intercessions, with a little visiting. Did some pea staking in dogwatches". Were the Mass and intercessions for the success of the invasion? If so, not all his parishioners necessarily joined him, for he noted the following Sunday (18 June) "Poor number at 0800 Mass. To Hill Church [The church of the Good Shepherd, in Upper Colwall] 1000 & 1100. Very fair congregation. 1830 Parish Church, where the congregation was extremely small". The entry concludes with the news "Germany began using pilotless planes against Southern England a few days ago".

On 11 November 1944 White recorded "At 1430 we had a party of 4 British wounded soldiers for tea."

The entry for VE Day, Tuesday 8 May 1945, reads: "Mass 0730 A great day Victory in Europe Day (announced yesterday.) 1200 [outdoor] service at Stone which was stopped by rain. At 1500 Winston Churchill announced over the wireless the unconditional surrender of Germany to the Allies. Thanksgiving service parish church 1930. Fine evening, good service. 1430 Rural Diocesan conference at Ledbury. The following week White noted: "May 13 Sunday of the Ascension Thanksgiving Sunday for Victory in Europe Better numbers at mass Crowded church at 1100 Fair number at 1830 Fine day with occasional showers cooler."

Finally, on 20 June, there was a "Welcome Home Fete on Cricket ground. In spite of unsettled weather well attended." White was on leave on VJ Day in August, so there is no record of Colwall celebrations in the diary. Another national event recorded as

the election on 5 July 1945, "Polling Day" when, after the "usual services at Boys' School", White "voted for Baldwin (Conservative candidate Leominster division). About 66% of the Colwall Electorate voted."

Not all other work stopped during the war. On 18 June 1943 the vicar mentioned the building of agricultural workers' cottages, and on 28 February the Housing Sub Committee met at Evendine Court to view a possible building site, presumably for Council Housing. On 1 November 1944 there was a meeting about a proposed community centre for Colwall. The vicar was directly involved in some administration: on 28 April 1944 White was elected to the parish church association for Hereford, and on May 10 he was elected vice chairman of parish council instead of Colonel Scott Bowden.

The village schools occupied quite a lot of the vicar's time. In February 1944 he recorded that it was proposed to transfer a junior class from the Girls' school to the woodwork room in Boys' school. Had numbers been swollen by evacuees? On the afternoon of 30 October there was a "presentation to P E B Smith headmaster (leaving tomorrow for Burton-on-Trent) £25 in all from School Managers, PCC, Parents, boys, staff of Girls' School". On 11 November White note: "Girls School closed all the week - no boiler". On 13 December he "went to Queenswood to say goodbye to the girls, the School closing. Miss Peplow going to Cheltenham Junior Girls College." On Monday 8 January 1945 he recorded that the "new headmaster, Jones, took up duty at Boys' School"

All this extra work took its toll on the vicar. His birthday, on Wednesday 6 September 1944, prompted the following reflections: "63 today and my life seems to be more and more "bits and pieces", I do little reading - concentration I find difficult. I have too many varied activities which make any settled time for serious reading difficult. My prayer life is poor in the extreme." The anniversary of his ordination on Monday 11 June produced rather similar thoughts, "Mass at 0730 36 years since I was ordained priest in the chapel of St Aidan's College Birkenhead. What I might have been & what I am. My work as a parish priest is being submerged in my efforts to keep garden and allotment going. Received a charming note with flowers from Miss Bartlett. Dinner at Evendine 1930."

*Jonathan Comber*

## Chairman's Report to AGM 18th April 2016

I am very pleased to report on another successful year for the Society, whose membership remains constant at about 200.

We held three public meetings (the one on Herefordshire Folklore being cancelled)

- (1) **20th April 2015:** Natural History in Colwall - This talk by Tim Dixon concentrated on the history of orchards in Colwall.
- (2) **15th November 2015:** Auden/Britten evening - This successful evening was a departure from our normal talks and comprised music by Benjamin Britten, poems by W H Alden and a film 'The Night Mail' - all ably brought together by narrator Steve Hockett.
- (3) **25th January 2016:** History of Malvern Water - For her third talk to the Society, well-known local historian, Cora Weaver, took us on a 'guided tour' of the sources of Malvern Water in our area.

We mounted another 'then and now' exhibition for both the Horticultural Show and Save the Children Summer Fun Day, and put up our fourth plaque at The Winnings in honour of Stephen Ballard.

The Society does its best to flourish but we find it difficult to attract new Committee members. Fortunately, Mary Clayburn and Dennis Porter joined us in the Autumn to bring a welcome injection of new ideas.

To our Committee, I express my appreciation for its dedication and hard work, including John Atkin our Secretary, Derek Rees our Newsletter Editor, Susan Bond in charge of our archives and Barbara Miller. My especial thanks go to Margaret Matthews who, for the past seven years, has fulfilled two roles in an exemplary manner - that of Treasurer and Membership Secretary. Margaret has now decided that it is time to retire but she will still remain a Committee member. Fortunately, Mary Clayburn has agreed to be our Membership Secretary and John Mills our temporary Treasurer, until we can find a permanent replacement. Thanks also go to Penny and her band of merry helpers in the refreshment department.

Finally, I thank all of our Members for their continuing support - please let us know of any suggestions for talks, speakers etc.

*Michael Milne*

### Future Talks

#### **20th June 2016**

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

#### **19th September 2016**

Edward Nash - 'Malvern Water Site Development'

#### **23rd January 2017**

Peter Sutton - 'William Langland; Poet of the Malvern Hills'

#### **24th April 2017 [AGM]**

Penny Platt - 'The History of Cider'

### From the Editor

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

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