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History Society from the website
compiled by the late Brian Joyce.

Memories (Tony Penny)

(Contributed November 2013)

Barbara once brought a mothering [nursing?] chair at a charity auction for 22½d which she had re-upholstered by Mr and Mrs Frost of Jessamine Cottage. Derek, their son, once formed a little choir made up of Congregational Church Sunday School children in which Barbara took part, practising in this same cottage. Unfortunately, the name of the choir escapes me. Although her father was a faithful Church of England man, Barbara preferred the Congregational church as it was less formal. Barbara was also a member of school teacher Mrs Fletcher's choir, 'The Golden Singers'.

Teddy Clarke was one of the village characters and lived at 36 Marford Road. His job was to deliver groceries in a hand cart for the Marford Stores [at the top of Necton Road] when the proprietor was Mr Bangs, as stated on the barrow. A Mr and Mrs Oldfield were the owners in Barbara's time, followed by Mr and Mrs Marshall and their son Don, who sold a complete range of fresh groceries, fruit and veg. Ham and bacon were cut to order, so beautifully fresh.

Brian Brandon lived with his aunt and Teddy Clarke. His mother Rose had a pet monkey which she would take for walks sitting on her shoulders to the delight of children. Brian's nickname was 'Oddy' as was his father's before him. Oddy senior used to play the piano in the Nelson public house for the good old sing-a-longs as were had in those days with everybody joining in with the singing (the equivalent of today's karaoke I suppose). Oddy's hands were huge, as were needed in his trade of builder/bricklayer.

Barbara was born in the half-timbered cottage next door but one to Mrs Thompson's grocery down in the Dell, Lower Gustard Wood. She went to a nursery school in High Ash Road run by Mrs Beadle of the Three Oaks public house. She had a daughter, Christine.

Anthony (Tony) Penny

Anthony lived at 3, Norfolk Cottages on the road between Bride Hall and Shaw's Corner until 1954. He particularly remembers the winter of 1947 when the well pump froze and they had to trudge across the fields with buckets to a standpipe by a cattle trough. A signal had to be given to a member of staff at Bride Hall who in turn would switch this standpipe on. They had paraffin lamps and candles for lighting, and the lavatory facilities were very primitive (no mains drainage). All this until they moved to Caesars Road in 1954. A Major Day was the landlord.

Barbara's father Mr R. de Mornay Davies (born 1879) lived for a while with his sister Mrs Evelyn Chamberlain (mother of film star Cyril Chamberlain) at Guelders Cottage Lower Gustard Wood before moving to The Dell. He had an office in a property adjoining Pearce's newsagent in the Wheathampstead high street. There was so little

work during these times for a solicitor that he would spend his time travelling to Somerset House in London paying 7/6 each visit to search out the family history.

The hairdresser's in Church Street was run by Bert Knight. Tony remembers Bert giving him a short back-and-sides prior to doing his national service in the RAF. Bert Knight was also hairdresser to George Bernard Shaw. In a small room at the back of Bert Knight's hairdressers was also the ladies. Barbara on one occasion plucked up courage to go for a hairdo. She dreaded the use of the frightening- looking hair driers. During her time under the said contraption she noticed steam coming from under her seat. On raising the alarm a very apologetic assistant came to her rescue explaining that it was only the kettle that had been switched on just before she was put under the drier.

Playtime on the Dump

One of Anthony's and his brothers' and friends' play areas were the dumps where in the moonlight they had great fun trying to kill rats. His Uncle Walter Drury drove a Rushton Bucyrus (R BIG) crane for Inns and Co. and Wally Overman (aptly named) was the supervisor. Wally's records of loads and weights are now at HALS. Brother Bob drove the ash tipping truck along the miniature railway line which ran along the top of the bank of the already covered rubbish. During this Bob found a puppy among the ash. This became a lovable pet named Monty after Field Marshal Montgomery. Also among the rubbish could be found 7 lb tins of plum jam that couldn't be sold as they had come from bombed-out factories. There was also a plentiful supply of bread to keep their chickens fed. Wheathampstead must have done quite well from these discoveries. Anthony also found among the rubbish parts of old radios from which he would make crystal sets, purchasing the actual crystals at 6p each from Charlie Cunnington. He would then take the finished article and sell it at school. Old wirelasses along with computers are still his hobby.

At Devils Dyke a favourite tree to hide in was the Salmon, so-called because it was hollow and the opening was in the shape of a fish. A photograph shows children standing in smoking straw in a field by the dyke.

The village policemen

PC Barker, who appears in the 1948 film standing on his doorstep at the top of the high street, is remembered as a strict PC. PC Woods and PC Darts were his successors. Anthony remembers a good telling off by PC Barker. Tony, brother Martin and friend, John Kingston who lived in Old Welwyn, were once caught by a farmer running up to the top of an elevator and jumping off on to a haystack. Great fun until the farmer caught them. On giving their names, John was quick-witted enough to give a false name, Tony Peters. The farmer reported these boys to the police who in turn a few days later visited 'Tony's' and Martin's home telling their mother what they had been up to, at the same time giving the boys a good telling off and warning them of the dangers of playing on such dangerous machinery. PC Dart was a lovely man and looked like the original laughing policeman (as seen in a Penny machine at fun fairs). He had smiley eyes and a ruddy complexion, but he would still say to miscreants, "Do that again and I'll clip you round your ears."

The Bull Hotel

Tony remembers Mac the landlord who would shuffle around in his slippers, but no messing about in his presence. Though he was a very serious man when it came to Tony's time to do his national service in July 1956 Mac gave him a 10/- note. When Mac retired the Kent's took over. Another period in time for the jolly Bull. Anyone entering without wearing a tie would be turned away. Needless to say he did not last long, and after

him along came Mr and Mrs Rose (Phyllis and Norman). Norman was a crew member in one of the Lancaster bombers. Barbara worked here from 1971/4. One night at Christmas time after closing Mr and Mrs Rose retired to their beds leaving, after locking up, their Alsatian dog to roam the premises at will downstairs. What they did not know was that Anthony who had come to pick Barbara up after her duties in the bar, and had fallen asleep in the gents after too many celebratory drinks. He woke to find everything locked up including himself. Outside he could hear the patter of the dog roaming about the pub. Somehow Tony managed to befriend the dog and exchange places. Dog now in the gents, Tony made his getaway through an open window overlooking the river. Barbara, thinking he had left earlier, was taken home by one of the regulars, a CID officer who had to break into her house using his ID card since Tony had the keys.

CID officers regularly used to drink at The Bull, especially if they spotted Maureen (Molly) Bishop's Daimler sitting outside the post office opposite. Maureen was a flamboyant lady. Her habit on arriving in the bar was to take out of her handbag her little hook which she would hook on to the bar and in turn hook on to this her hand bag after taking out her silver swizzle stick, this being a very minute whisker. Her next habit was to fill her cigarette holder and light up, only then after a lecherous smile at Norman she would order her tippie, brandy and moused. Needless to say she would attract a good audience. After several of her favourite tipples she would leave, driving herself home to Blackmore End.

Many personalities frequented the Bull, Eric Bartholomew (Morecambe) and his entourage; Reginald Bosanquet; Peter Haigh, who later came to live in the village, and many more. We, the bar staff, were kept too busy to chat to these people. That was the Rose's treat, entertaining in the cocktail bar.

Barbara also worked for a very interesting lady at Mackery End Farm house, Mrs Mary Page. Mary showed Barbara her cellar with a crown post that rose from the floor of the cellar to the top of the roof. Mary also told of the preparation of cows for market and shows. Omo detergent apparently was best because it would give the cow's hide a good shine. She also told how she looked after Magdalene girls who arrived from Ireland expecting illegitimate babies. Such an interesting lady.

Ernie Ibbetson

Ernie was a great local naturalist and brother-in-law to Tony. Ernie bred frogs at his home in Caesars Road. His transparent frogs, among others, were used by biologists at Bristol University. Their transparent qualities saved them from being dissected. Barbara also remembers a deep purple frog. Ernie was once interviewed by John Noakes for TV, with the location being kept very hush-hush. During the war Ernie was stationed in Iceland. Later he was transferred to the Frythe in Old Welwyn. During the war it was known as Station IX, a Special Operations Executive (SOE) base manufacturing commando equipment. His job there was to care for cages of rats. The Frythe was one of the wartime X stations where various types of hardware, miniature submarines and delayed action fuses, were developed for the armed forces. Ernie married Tony's sister Beatrice and they had two children, Margaret and James.

Tony also remembers Richard Wattis the actor visiting Wheathampstead on a Corgi (well bike). On VE Day Ernie celebrated with a Very light pistol (usually used in signalling anti-aircraft during the war). Ernie also had a stash of gunpowder.

Anthony had brothers. George the eldest was killed in Arnheim, but it was after the death of his father that two of Tony's brothers, Don (7 years old) and Bob (10 years old), decided to play at funerals. When their mother called

them in for their tea only Bob arrived at the door. When Mother asked where Don was he admitted, "I've buried him. He's in the garden". Don had been well and truly buried in an orange box. Thus did children cope with death.

Dr Parkinson

The first surgery we remember was in a barn at the top of a drive between Inez cottage and the White House which was Dr Parkinson's home. He later moved to The Laurels 7, at The Hill and once again the surgery was in another barn, this time at Town Farm. When Town Farm was demolished (big media story) in the early 1970s, Dr Parkinson had an extension built to his home at no.7 which served as his surgery. Following this it was down to the high street next door to Blackford's hardware shop, which is now the WI shop.

Murphy Chemicals

Barbara worked for a time on the switchboard in MCC's offices in Garden House opposite Station yard. She remembers organising long-distance telephone calls all over the world. One she remembers well was to an entomologist, at the time in Tanganyika, and it was the clarity of these calls that was so unbelievable, as clear as an internal call. These calls abroad had to be booked several days in advance. A footbridge used to go across the road from Garden House to Wheathampstead House, used at this time by Murphy and Son. Apparently a story has it that this bridge and garden house were used by the overspill of parties in Lord Cavan's time. A dear old Mr Fisher would keep these gardens immaculate. In the 1960s Barbara and Tony's two daughters and friends would climb over a gate in Lamer Lane to explore what they called their secret garden. (I heard the bridge was used by one of the daughters to escape life in the big house and read her books in a tree on the other side of the road, also that Inez Cottage was built for an old nurse of the Cavans in retirement) this could well be true.

A photograph taken in 1938 at the then Park Hotel (now The Wicked Lady gastro pub) I will send with the consent form for you to pass on to Brian Joyce and if it is of interest he may add it to the Wheathampstead web site. I can identify three people in this photograph, right hand corner we believe to be Geoffrey de Havilland, third gentleman from right John (cat's eyes) Cunningham and the white-haired gentleman fourth from left is Mr R de Mornay Davies. This could be a party of employees of De Havilland, as Mr Davies was for a short period around this time worked there in the offices.

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