

Roy Beadle

Roy was born at West End Farm on 2 February 1929, the youngest in a family of five. The family moved to Bury Farm when he was two years old. They lived by the light of oil lamps and there was no running water and no electricity. The privy was at the end of the garden.

His father, George Beadle, worked for the farmer (Throssell and Parkins). Roy had very happy memories of his youth there. The family left when Roy was 17 or 18 and his father had to retire due to ill health. He spoke with pride about his father's country skills in all seasons – getting the proportions exactly right for building and thatching a stack from the quantities of wheat seen in the field in the summer, and in cutting and laying hedgerows in winter. It was organic farming then at Bury Farm. River water was used to flush out the barns, then emptied over gardens, as were the contents of the privies. During the war they dined on muntjac liver and one of Roy's jobs was skinning chickens. The horses' names in the photo of his father harvesting were Boxer, Kitty and Prince.

Family

Roy's father's brothers were farmers at Watton-at-Stone and Benington. His mother's father was chef at Haileybury College. His brother Bob Beadle took over the blacksmith's business from Jim Matthews. Bob was a registered shoeing smith and an Associated Farrier to the City of London. If a vet wanted a special set of shoes to correct a lame horse he'd go to a registered shoeing smith. At this time Simons used a pony and trap to deliver meat to his customers, and greengrocer Len Rowe also delivered by horse. Hawkins the coal merchant had two heavy horses and farmers used horses for milk delivery. They had to have studs on their shoes in icy weather. A drill would screw in the studs before the winter.

Childhood

Roy was in the church choir and specially remembered the Sunday School outings to Felixstowe and Great Yarmouth all the way on one train direct from Wheathampstead. In the winter he would go with Charlie Collins on his toboggan sliding down Ash Grove. One of his regular Sunday jobs was to fetch a bottle of beer and 1 oz of tobacco from The Walnut Tree for a shilling for his dad. He would also chop the wood for his mum to be able to do the washing on a Monday. He was free to wander round the village from the age of 7 or 8 and sometimes got half a bar of toffee from the Elephant and Castle. He attended St Helen's School when Johnny Housden was headmaster. During the war he remembered, aged ten, being let off school for a day in October to help the war effort by picking potatoes. "It was a day off school!" Types of potato included Majestics, King Edwards. They were packed up into sacks and sent off by cart. "I used to love it". "We worked in the corn fields in the summer holidays picking up great sheaves of corn standing in shocks. There's a photo taken in 1938 on the front page of the Luton News. My mother bought a copy."

He recalled some of the bombs that had fallen locally, particularly those dropped at Amwell and in the churchyard, also the Heinkel plane that was shot down on Gustard Wood Common. He did a regular newspaper round on his bicycle starting at 5.23 every morning when the train brought the papers to the station.

School days

Johnny Housden ruled with a rod of iron and was very well respected. "I had the cane. Didn't do me any harm. I wouldn't tell me parents. We all had garden plots at school. Two boys to

each plot. We learnt crop rotation. Very practical. His way of teaching was to fend for yourself. The Practical Centre was built when I was at school. Half for carpentry and metal work, half for cookery and needlework. Mr Hodgson took carpentry classes. I learnt how to plane wood up square, how to saw cuts and make a stool. I used a lathe and did turning. I still have candlesticks made when I was at school with a copper ring for the candle."

On leaving school at 14 in 1943 he gained an indentured apprenticeship as carpenter and joiner through the James Marshall Foundation and started work for T.A. Bickerton in St Albans. James Marshall paid £40 a year to his employer plus £10 for tools. He cycled to work as much as possible, to Luton Hoo or the Queen Mother's home at St Paul's Walden, refurbishing and renovating as required. He was there 6 years learning his trade. This delayed his call up for National Service. His brother Bob took over Jim Matthews' blacksmith's business in the Swan Yard. In 1949 at the age of 20 he joined the RAF where he served for 5 years and spent time in Malaya and Ceylon. This was the only time he was away from Wheathampstead.

He married in St Helen's church in 1951. His first son was born in Negombo in Ceylon where the international airport is now. He left the RAF in August 1954 and went to work as a carpenter and site manager for Miskin. He was foreman in charge working with Les Arnold at the Quadrant in 1957 where, in less than a whole year (51 weeks), they built 31 shops and 27 maisonettes valued in 1957 at £150,000. He also worked on local schools, remembering Roundwood School in particular. The job he took most pride in was the Roman Catholic Church at Gerrards Cross. It was completed in 1962/3.

Roy died in January 2004.