

FRED. NAISH'S STORY (born c. 1900)

The Old Fire-Station buildings.

“In the old days it was stables belonging to Mr Joe Shepherd. He was a haulage contractor and he had four horses and a pony. Instead of using a lorry, in those days you had to have a horse. He hauled timber mostly for the saw mills. He lived where Morland House flats are now. I was at school then. I'm 81 now, and that was about 1910, I should say. I was at school when I was 6 until about 13. We were always playing about there with his sons and daughters. We used to go and play and, if we behaved ourselves, he used to take us out in a trap and he had a 'tub' to take his wife out in. Tom, the horse, was a light coloured chestnut.

Then it was turned into a gymnasium by the Rev. Curry, the vicar at that time. He used to get target boxing going. It was the start of the boys' Club, rough & tumbles, boxing and parallel bars. It took on very well.

(Mrs Allen says they had Bible classes there as well.) Mr Curry lived at the Vicarage, that's Morland House now. When he was at college at Oxford, he was interested in boxing. He was the man for the job, too, a big strong man. He got us boys on the same as him. We used to 'cut some stuff in there, I can tell you.'”

After that, it was turned into a garage by Mr Percy Bates. He had it for quite a time. He had the first petrol pump in Wheatley on that corner there. He kept the Railway Hotel and he did that as a side-line. It was a garage called 'The Firs' because there were two fir trees in the front. He had a mechanic there. It went on for a long time in the early days of the First World War.

Then he wanted to make the roof higher to take a lorry. He went to Weston-on-the-Green when they had an auction. They were disposing of some old buildings, which they were clearing away to build a new hangar. He bought some timbers all assembled to drop on the walls. When he got them back, they were too wide, wider than the eaves. But he didn't cut them off, he just dropped them on and clamped them down. If you were out the back now, you'd see them sticking out. Then he put some new galvanised sheets on. He bought the windows from there too, and they are there to this day. They went to sales in those days and he bought a lot of stuff.

There was a well in the back that supplied all these six cottages (*Mr Naish lived in one of the six terraced cottages at the west end of Church Road*) and never dried up. It was good water, too, but if you forgot to cover the pump up on a cold night, it would be frozen and you'd have to get a kettle of boiling water on it.

Later, Bates let the garage off to Teddy Turner's father and he ran it as a garage.

A Mr Arkle, he was at the paper shop, not a Wheatley man, he came to live here. He was very interested in forming a Fire-Brigade. He got in touch with some of the officials and recruited some of the local chaps to make a team. They started down at Mulberry Court. That was war time, Second War. It was First Aid and Fire Brigade as well, in the bam there. When the A.R.P. went there to practise, they went into the Crown yard and lit those incendiaries and practised putting them out. I joined that lot. I was over age for the military, I was in the First War, but we all joined something to help the war effort.

And from that it all (*the Fire Service*) started.”