

**W**hen I was about five we moved to Pound Cottage in Wheatley, a village just outside Oxford. The village was small with a church, a manor house and old-fashioned shops and pubs. It was very pretty, sort of like a Hovis advert. Now, it's a rather desirable commuter area for people who work in Oxford.

Pound Cottage is on a corner as you enter the village opposite a field adjoining the "pound", a stone building in which local villains were put to cool off. The cottage is probably early 18th-century, the pound was built later.

My mother said Wheatley was the place where she was the happiest in her life. It was probably because my father had been away in the war and so she had him back and she had this red-headed kid (me) and we were very close. This was in 1946.

My father had been in the Royal Army Medical Corps working as a neurologist. There was a head injury hospital at Wheatley. It was there that my father met Roald Dahl, who had been shot down over the desert. Roald and my father got on like anything and corresponded. Later, Roald met Walt Disney in Hollywood and he sent me a signed sketch of Mickey Mouse.

The Wheatley cottage was almost two up, two down. There were steep stairs up to two, maximum three bedrooms. The bathroom was tacked on. There was a living room and the only entertainment was the radio.

My parents didn't have much money but that didn't really matter. I think they rented the cottage. The post-war years were pretty grim in England. My mother spent a lot of time in the kitchen. Everything was rationed. There were a lot of boiled potatoes and cabbages, although mother was a good cook because she was a trained caterer. It was a real post-war austerity diet.

We had a gardener, who probably got paid nothing, who used to bring my mother cress because she loved mustard and cress sandwiches, until she discovered that the cress was grown in the village cess pit,

At the end of the garden there was a curious folly. It must have been a Victorian wall with stained glass windows set in it. As a child, I thought that was odd. The cottage had a cellar you could look into from the street, but I was banned from it because the steps

were too steep.

I went to a school in Headington run by a lady called Miss Hamersley. She taught us everything and we all adored her. Years later, when I was on the Beeb, I mentioned her during Woman's Hour. I said: "We all remember one teacher when we were at primary school and I remember Miss Hamersley." She was listening and she wrote back, which was lovely.

I was taken to Miss Hamersley's by my mother on her bicycle. There weren't many cars around, so it was safe for a five-year-old to cycle with her parents along the lanes. I was a

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bit of a tomboy. I used to collect snails with the boys who lived in Wheatley manor house. It was a bit like Just William.

I remember the winter of 1947, which was England's worst winter in the 20th century. The pipes burst and the roads froze over, adding to the misery after the war. It was lovely for kids, but not much fun for families scraping to buy coal.

I went back to Pound Cottage a few years ago when it was up for sale. I'm afraid I posed as a potential buyer just to have a look. I think it was going for about £150,000, which seemed a huge amount to me. I thought it was like a dolls' house, compared with how I remember it, but that was inevitable, I suppose.

After Wheatley, we lived in Beaconsfield temporarily, before moving to South Africa. My father was fed up with the weather and he wanted a new start. We went out on a liner in 1949. My mother didn't really want to go. The funny thing was, the name of our new house in South Africa was Farthings.

I promised my mother I would scatter her ashes in a bluebell wood just outside Wheatley, which I did, so she ended up back where she wanted to be. *Sue MacGregor chairs a London Book Fair masterclass in television and film scriptwriting at Olympia on March 16. For details, call 020 8910 7914. Her autobiography, Woman of Today, is published by Headline in paperback next month at £7.99*

