

DIARY OF WHEATLEY

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I have been asked by a Friend -to recall some History of Wheatley over the past years. As I am a native of the Village, she thought I could supply a few details so I will try and do as requested.

First, I will state my date of birth - 29th October, 1899, making my age 75 years and I have lived in Church Road in the same cottage up to the present day. I will start off by my entry to the Infant School in Bell Lane and the Head Mistress, Miss Christian who was a good and kindly woman, strict but always fair, and I can still remember the useful things we were taught, such as lacing up our shoes. We were given two bits of leather with eyelets exactly like the top- of a shoe and a piece of shoe lace and shown how to lace it up. Another task was French Knitting. This consisted of wooden reel with four small nails in the top and then with a length of wool on the top, you manipulated with a small bodkin to produce a knitted kind of rope of various colours. Miss Christian was a lady of manly appearance because she had to have her hair cut short owing to a paralysed arm which was practically useless, but this did not deter her other activities unduly. The other two teachers were Miss Janie East and Miss Lizzie Allen, both good with children and I think most children did not want to leave when they were transferred to the Church of England School in Wheatley.

Now, as I became old enough to be sent up to the Church of England School in Church Road to Standard One, Mr. Rees Leyshon being Head Master and Mrs. Leyshon Second-in-Command with Miss Enser and Miss Ellison as teachers in the other classes. I remained in the School until I was years old, not doing too badly as an ordinary scholar and I won a Proficiency Book Prize in Standard Five and finished up in Standard Seven. On leaving school, I obtained my first job at a Grocer's Shop owned by a Mr. J. N. Hughes at the magnificent sum of 2/6d per week. From there I went to work as Under-Chauffeur to the Bishop of Oxford at Cuddesdon - the Bishop then was Bishop Gore. This was without doubt the best and happiest job I ever had. Everyone was always sociable and friendly and a pleasure to work with. I stayed there from 1915 to 1919, the Bishop moving to a higher position and the Staff being shifted to other jobs. During my time at Cuddesdon Palace, they used to have a big Conference once a year which was called The Festival which took place in June and Clergy from all over the Diocese used to visit the College and the Palace and hold a Conference all day. We were kept busy driving the Visitors from Wheatley Station and surrounding Villages and then I would not be surprised if the now retired Archbishop was not among them at that time and, of course, he is now living at the old Vicarage at Cuddesdon.

Incidents that have happened in Wheatley during my lifetime -

1. 'Misses Avery's Sawmill has been burnt down twice due to overheated sawdust.
2. The Crown Hotel was in business and popular for the people living at the lower end of the Village, It was very exciting when the Fair Ground Showmen brought the Switchbacks and other Sideshows on the scene causing much excitement. Doctor Barnes who lived opposite the Crow, smoking his favourite cigar, would gather several children round him and pay for their rides after he had had a late Dinner.
5. Another event was the Cattle, Pig and Sheep Market held once a month in the Crown Yard on a Tuesday,

I can recall on special occasions when the then Prince of Wales used to visit the Crown Hotel and bring the College Beagles, which were owned by a few College Students, and have a day's hunting across the fields at Waterperry and other Villages returning at teatime, putting the Beagle Dogs back in the van and taking them back to their kennels, enjoying their visit and the hospitality of Mr. William Tombs who was Landlord at that time.

Another interesting item about the Crown, it had history of the coaching days where they used to change horses at the stables, in the yard below. Under the archway facing the road, there are four pullies in the roof which were used to pull up heavy trunks on to the top of the coach.

I can also remember when Wheatley had no water supply, gas or electricity. For water some cottages had a Pump to supply six houses. Then there were four Parish Pumps. Number 1 by the Chapel, Number 2 Bell Lane by the Infants School, Number 3 by the Manor House in the High Street, Number 4 Blenheim Lane and for Street Lighting and House Lighting, Paraffin lamps and candles. The Lamp Lighter was Mr. James Munt appointed by the Parish Council who had to go round the Village with a gallon of oil and small ladder, trim the street lamps, light them at a certain time and extinguish them at 10 o'clock each night.

I can also remember when there was a Farm House and buildings and yard opposite the Chapel owned by a Mr. Thomas Robins. My special memory of Mrs. Robins was the expert way in which she could handle a cleaning mop when wanting to rinse it dry. She would spin it round like a propellor and she always wore a Granny Bonnet with the back hanging over her shoulders looking like a witch. Next to the Farm Yard was a Cottage and adjacent premises which was then the Chequers Public House. The Landlord was Mr. Charles Bizell. Next to the Crown Hotel was another Farm owned by Mr. Michael Rogers. The house that went with the Farm is the one now occupied by Doctor Flury.

Another memory I recall is when pig killing was permitted anywhere. Any Cottager who could afford to keep a pig, usually in the back garden, would call in a man by the name of Charles Hayward and he would come and slaughter the animal in the Street in Bell Lane which attracted many young spectators.

Another incident which happened in my younger days was a terrific thunder storm in mid-June 1911 which started at 12 o'clock mid-day and continued until 4 p.m. which meant no School that afternoon. It flooded the High Street from the Red Lion at the top to the bottom by the Chapel. All sorts of things came floating down - wood faggots, dog kennels, water butts, etc. The most amusing thing however, was when Doctor Barnes came speeding down Littleworth Road not heeding the warning shouts from the Villagers - being a very determined man, he thought his old Daimler car would get him through the flood but alas, the water splashed into the engine and he got stuck in the middle of the flood much to his embarrassment. So the only thing to do was to get one of Mr. Joseph Shepherd's trace horses and pull him out. Motor cars at that time were few in Wheatley. The Doctor had one car and a horse carriage and Squire Biscoe at Holton Park was the proud owner of the other car.

Squire Stafford Biscoe was at that time owner of Holton Park and lived in the Mansion on the Estate. He had great ambitions and ideas for inventing mechanical things, mostly engineering works. One thing he perfected was a two Cylinder water pump used in case of a fire breaking out on the Estate. This machine could be operated by four men, two each side with an up-and-down motion with a wooden bar each side, which cranked the two pistons up and down. Quite a good machine at that time, mounted on four wooden wheels for mobility and named a Manuel Two-Cylinder pump or Miniature Fire Engine. He spent quite a lot of money on other ideas but these did not work out very well, so he then switched to Dairy Farming building a model Dairy consisting of a lovely stone Building with a thatched roof, quite picturesque in appearance and construction and the cheese room (or one could call it now a type of early refrigerator). This consisted of a deep trench dug in the ground quite roomy and bricked up like a tunnelled archway and to enter, you went down a few steps like going into a cellar. The idea was to keep the right temperature for cheese and butter at all times.