

Yvonne Florescu (St. John Baptist OSB) in a letter to Dr W. O. Hassall, dated 5 August 1979 (Her family were Rumanian refugees during the war) (Acc 2596)

Miss Dale lived at The Old House. Her garden had a wonderful slightly quaint, and exotic, atmosphere about it, and the Chapel (*a room on the west of her house, forward and to the left of the front door*), where the Salesian priests from Cowley used to say Mass for us on Sundays, was quite unique. I remember the recollected patience with which we regularly had to wait for the priests arrival – half an hour usually, occasionally more. I had never seen the likes of this before – or after – nobody protested about it, or got excited or even annoyed. One just took it as if it belonged to the service.

I remember Miss Dale inviting me to tea, and trying to help thrash out my personal problems (I was a problem child at the time). Her charming hospitality and her stories about the antics of a pet monkey she had had.

What I remember very specially, of course, was the Father Christmas party at the Manor House. That was the event of the season and not to be missed, everyone's present so appropriately chosen, and Averil coming out of the chimney in her Santa Claus outfit.

There were three old spinsters living up Ladder Hill, called the Miss Briggs's. They used to invite us to tea, and they had very unusual fillings to their sandwiches which we loved. We would meet them every day on their walks with their dogs (2 outsize bitches). I remember they spent a lot of money dis-installing the central heating in their house (*New Place or Coombe House?*) because they only liked open chimneys.

Our walks were usually towards Cuddesdon a rather fascinating place – where a fellow student later went to study for the priesthood (he is now Dean of St. Albans).

And shops: there were Gosticks – which had a little bit of everything within a very reduced space – one didn't know where it was all stored but they always had everything one wanted. And Mr Harris's shop, on a grander scale, where one could also order a taxi. And the two butchers, Wests and Samuels. But, best of all, Mr and Mrs Hyde who were always so kind to us, and their daughter, Marjorie, who did my mother's hair.

As for the railway station – I don't remember anything special – except that it was like every other little railway station – but I remember the Railway Inn and the farm above it where we got our milk.

And of course the old windmill overlooking a deserted quarry (*actually claypit*) – and a quaint old lady who lived there (*Mrs Cripps*). I think she was partly gypsy (*actually not so*). And the Staniers (she was the sister of Major Alastair Miller) who lived in the house opposite (I think, in fact, a little higher up the hill and more set back) until they sold out and our good friend Barbara Miller (an eastern European specialist in the Foreign Office), daughter of Lord Buckmaster. (*No relation to the Millers at Shotover House*).