

The following account of Wheatley as it was fifty or more years ago was written out for me by Miss Emily Gunn, of All Souls' Cottage, High St, Wheatley, where she has lived for over seventy years.

The population of Wheatley about seventy years ago was under 1000, not very select in my young life. We were told that Bull -baiting| and Cock-fighting took place in the so-called Parish Pit in those days; later it became a dump and is now converted into the Kin George VI playing field. Its surroundings were a working stone quarry owned by the late Mr Joseph Frampton. The stones were used for road mending. There were only two houses at the back of the Pit, The Mount and Mr Palmer's cottage. I remember all the others being built. No 4 was a Convalescent Home, Patron Miss Parker. There were sometimes 9 to 12 patients at St Mary's Church in Rev, Sturges' day; a very loved clergyman. The owner of Holton Park used to send her carriage and pair to take inmates for drives sometimes.

There were no houses beyond Station bridge 60 years ago. Wheatley House just below the Railway Hotel. I was taken over it before it was let. On part of the ground near the road stood a tiny Church House with lattice windows and a Church door — probably the Church House in those days for Wheatley Church situated in a corner of the old Churchyard. (I think Bob Key has a Photo of the old Church.) Cullum's workshop was opposite where wheelwrights had huge fires in the yard — part of the process to make wheels. We took a delight in watching the fires sometimes.

Avery's saw-mills were unknown in my schooldays — rough meadows for cattle there. Near the old Post Office were very picturesque thatched cottages; alongside Mrs Hazel's, one with an old seat where the tenant, a stout jolly looking gentleman used to sit, in a box hat, leaning on a stick. 5 old cottages were demolished near the Tavern, also two thatched cottages next to Hyde's bake house, side front to one in High Street in which a harness-maker came three times a week from Thame to repair and take orders. A fishmonger also came from Thame carrying his wares on a board on his head, rang a bell as also did Crumpet men from Crendon. I remember houses standing where the Merry Bells stables are in Church Road, a lovely walled-in garden where Mr Dodds and the late Miss Gale's houses now stand.

The sewer was put in about 50 years ago I should say: water, gas and electricity since.

Two-wheeled carrier carts with tilts made 2 weekly journeys to Oxford, followed a few years later by 4-wheeled vans. A huge shed for chopping wood and faggot-making was pulled down on the ground where Miss Cullum and neighbours live in Westfield Road. 4 more cottages built on the opposite of the road, near Rock House. Brickmaking kilns near the railway were owned by Mr Joseph Cooper, who lived in the Old House, so-called these days, at the end of Kiln Lane. He also worked a lime kiln, close by. All the houses and huts and the Secondary School on the road from Littleworth, Wheatley to Littleworth have been erected (comparatively recently).

The flood gate at The lasher burst about fifty years or more ago in a bad storm. Wheatley High Street was like a river and houses were flooded and chickens and pigs drowned. Dr Barnes rowed down the High-Street in a boat to help the distressed, gave good advice to help people dry their houses etc.

The first time electricity was brought to the village was by Bally and Wilson, with attractive amusements. It was erected on the rock where Mrs Sillar's and other houses stand. The whole village was under the Holton Park wall to see the lights. Later the houses were built as they now stand.

Over sixty years ago a wild beast show Bostock and Wombwell came to the village in the very field where your own house-now stands(i.e. Bryn). The late Dr William a very nice gentleman had a ride on a dromedary, called a thriller in those days. I was (then) at school, and one of the children that the late Mr John Casemore paid for all the school children to go to. The now Church allotments was a lovely field with trees etc. Mr Welby put his pony to pasture there. He was a grocer in late Costick's shop.

No means of getting to Oxford eye Hospital by 10 a.m. either by train or otherwise. I had to walk from Wheatley to get there for treatment, The first train down was too late. It used to be interesting to see women start off on Saturday mornings 7 a.m. or before with huge baskets to walk over the Plain to do their shopping returned, about noon. Milk carts brought the Chums from surrounding farms to be sent to London daily by rail.

The Rev. Firmstone a very nice gentleman who lived in our nice old vicarage with 3 or 4 single sisters were nice days for Wheatley. And aged ladies used to attend services in cross-over shawls and bonnets: many men in smocks. A number of women went to field work in men's coats and essean (?Hessian) aprons and sunbonnets about 65 years ago, also went mushrooming 5 a.m. 3 or 4 Blacksmiths, Tinkers, Tinsmiths with a donkey and Clockmenders in the village, and fiddlers used to play in booths for dancing at Feasts and Fairs.

A Salvation Army band each Sunday in uniform and flag were playing Hymns Preaching etc, both men and women, before they held a service at or in our now proposed Church Hall.

Several dilapidated houses pulled down and 3 new ones erected in Kiln Lane and also one top of High Street occupied by Mrs Clark. The Old House had a bow pot over the door, a similar one on the Green, pulled down also 2 more where the Chapel Sunday School is now built. The late Mrs Miller of Shotover House went round in her Pony Carriage about the time the Merry Bells was built as a Temperance Hotel. I think one of the first motor cars that appeared in Wheatley was Dr Barns. The present Drs House was a P House called The Tap. I saw the old seats in the Taproom: It was 1st as a cottage when I was young. I expect you remember well the enlargement of our old School.

Parish relief was given once a week from R(elieving) Officer, 2/6 and a large loaf. Stocks used to be in the Round House; people locked up for the night before going to Oxford jail.

The two houses opposite Bax' shop called Oxford House where Mr Clements and Mr Ladbroke live were built on Stamp's store ground. 2 houses next White Hart Club Room where Mr Munt's house and woodyard site. Mr Washington's house built by Cullum Bros for Misses Greenwood on late Mr Lambert's building yard and Tinson's etc on Mr Davis' builder's yard and Carrier's Cart Shed.

Cripps' windmill used to work 60 years ago.

Cheapjacks used to sell their crockery in White Hart Yard and Peep Shows, Stalls, Waxworks and many amusements often came. So you see the great changes of the present day.

Many old village pumps now out of use, since main water was laid on: one opposite the Old George Hotel Coaching Inn. Houses nearly opposite the Old Manor House garden. The late Mr John Casemore gave 100 handles to the people to pump and take home not to waste water. The Crown was another Coaching Station, but long before my time.

2 bad fires in High Street one Barn burnt down opposite Manor House: set alight by fireworks and also a Bakehouse: very short of water pumped by a hand fire engine.

I remember all the Council end other Houses being built from Holywell Cottage round to present Vicarage.

(These notes were made for Miss Leyshon by Miss Ellen Gunn, of All Souls' Cottage, in 1854)

Notes made by Miss Leyshon

Miss Gunn's father was gardener to Dr Barns and stayed on with Miss Edith Barns after the doctor's death in 1929. For about twenty years Miss Gunn attended Miss Casemore, the invalid niece of Mr John Casemore, referred to in her account. They lived in the High Street.

Mr Joseph Frampton was a great favourite with the children in the 1890's, he usually wore a linen smock and a hard black hat. The little girls used to hang their hair (always long in those days) over the playground wall, so that he could pull it. This gave both sides much pleasure.

Miss Parker whose old home was at Long (?) Handborough and whose brother was a farmer there, was a very jolly person, much loved by her patients and friends. I was given my first copy of Hymns A. and M. by a ninety year old patient, Mrs Hewlett. I remember her always dressed in black and wearing a cap, I think of white lace. I first met Miss Parker when I was about two years old and we were great friends.

The Rev. Arthur John Sturges (Trin. Coll. Camb.) was Vicar of Wheatley when we came here in

September 1891. A very earnest, sincere and spiritually minded clergyman, a musician, a scholar and a gentleman, he was greatly respected and not much loved, not only by his own congregation but by all who knew him. (The village had about half its present population and the inhabitants all knew each other then though large, it had most of the essential characteristics of an English village of that date.)

The only adverse criticism I ever heard of Mr Sturges was that he was 'not a business man - which was not, to my mind, an adverse criticism at all.

The children who were taught by him (I can hear now 'Remember that if you live to be a hundred and one¹) were very fortunate. He always stressed essentials rather than details and his own life was a constant example of Christian behaviour. He would always respond to any request for help and sometimes unscrupulous people made of this characteristic. I think he knew this, but preferred it to happen than that it should, by being over-cautious, refuse help when it was really needed.

Mr, Mrs and Miss Nevell lived at The Lawn, now called Wheatley House, in the 1890¹s. Mr Nevell was a churchwarden and was for some years Chairman of the Wheatley Urban District Council. The screen at the west end of the Church was erected in his memory (I was very devoted to Miss Nevell as a child: once when returning some books she had lent to my mother I waited for what seemed hours hoping that she would ask me to tea with her. Finally, in desperation, I said 'Mother said I may stay to tea with you if you ask me which she most kindly did'.

The Old Post Office is now the Wheatley branch of Barclay's Bank. Mrs Russell was the postmistress in the years before the first World War. Like other ladies of her time, she modelled her general appearance and deportment on that of Queen Victoria. She sold children's books - of smaller size than those of grown-ups which we bought for about threepence each. I was often privileged to be invited into her sitting room, into which one sterner straight from the shop, and regaled with slices of cold sausage and bread-and-butter, which I thought the most delectable of foods*

Miss Maule, Mrs and Miss Way lived at Rock House in my early youth: Miss Maule was very old-fashioned; she used the old pronunciation of humour (umour), hotel (an otel) and laundry (lahndry)...When she and her relations left the house Mr John Rose went to live there. His sister Miss Rose lived at Jessamine Cottage and was as old-fashioned as Miss Maule. Mr Rose was a Sunday School teacher and very Puritanical. A Jesuit priest was to him and to the children she taught the very acme of wickedness*

There was a large family of young Coopers in what is now called Old House in my young days. Miss Gunn and I counted eleven that we remembered by name.

Dr Barns came to Wheatley in 1888. He lived with three unmarried sisters (Misses Ruth, Jenny and Edith) at the Elms, now called Mulberry Court. His brother, Mr Amos Barns, married one of the Misses Tyndale (relations of the Tyndale-Briscoes of Holton Park) who lived in the house on Park Hill now owned by the Misses Savill.

He was a Guy's man and a much respected person. He practised here until a short time before his death in 1929. His manner was sometimes brusque, even gruff and sharp in his manner which many people did not like, but he took the greatest interest in his patients, and he was a good doctor I probably owe my life to his care in childhood illness.

Dr Barns most kindly lent me his microscope when I needed one for some experimental work during the summer vacation of 1922-3. He liked to tell stories of his student days - how he lived in luxury while funds lasted but sometimes they didn't and then he dined on penny buns and glasses of milk until his finances were sound once more.

Wild Beast Show A number of old coins were found when the garden of Bryn was being made in 1925: some are dated 1799, one 1807 and another 1863. It seems likely that the field had been used as a fair ground (or for wild beast shows like that mentioned by Miss Gunn) for many years.

Sunbonnets were still worn in the village in the 1890's. They were close-fitting with frills round the bonnet framing the face. The bonnets were always carefully washed and ironed and the frills usually 'goffered'.

The cottage called The Tap was enlarged into the Doctor's house by Dr McCausland, who succeeded Dr Barns, about 1926. The old cattle-market, now part of Dr Orchard's garden, was in use in the

1890's. It was paved and there was a right-of-way through it and the Crown yard from Church Rd to Crown Rd.

The windmill was still working, I believe, during the 1914-1918 war.

From the general document:

Miss Christian, the infant schoolmistress, had short grey hair, cut like a man's, and was paralysed in her left arm. She was an excellent teacher and had quite advanced ideas. She had water, soap and towels to wash any who came to school dirty, and when the little ones grew tired and sleepy, she put them to bed. She organised a May Day procession with a May Queen.

It was because my mother knew Miss Christian that my father (Rees Leyshon) applied for the post of headmaster of the school in September 1891, to which he was appointed. He was a welsh-speaking Welshman and he and the Rev. Thomas of Garsington used to talk lengthily in that tongue. He was organist and choirmaster. All the pupils were fond of him and, when he came into a class, there was dead silence. Mrs Life, herself a school teacher, wonders how he managed to teach arithmetic to a whole class of very medium scholars. Perhaps it was because he used to read advance mathematics for pleasure.

Mrs Leyshon impressed her girl pupils very much by her success in needlework and, each year, garments were made for exhibition at the Arts and Crafts in Oxford, and many won prize money. Mrs Life remembers that Mrs Letshon once carried off 70 prizes from a similar number of entries.