

## CLIFTON 1910

My first look at the village was attending Sunday school. All movements were by shanks' pony. Mine was not a very good one, he didn't like trotting which affected me all my life. It still does as I am now housebound. Our Sunday school teacher was Mrs Boffin. She was a small women but very strict. We attended morning and afternoon and the llam church service. We joined the choir later on. Each year we had a tea and games on the lawn in front of Manor Farm house of Mr and Mrs Spencer, given us by the vicar of Deddington, Rev Thomas Boniface, which we all enjoyed very much.

The church is not old. It was built in 1853 (now closed since 1971). The Wesleyan Chapel is also closed. The church was paid for by the Rev John Risley. He was curate at Deddington but could not agree with the vicar and so he came here and built the church. He was the rector of it for fifteen years. The ground was given by Mr Wright, farmer, adjoining the church. The stone came from Aynho, It was roofed with Stonesfield slates. They were replaced in 1929 with tiles by John Hopcraft and Son of Deddington. The miller was Mr George Robinson (more of that later). Mr Will Woods was a casual worker. One gruesome job he did was when a cow died. He would bury it and have the skin for payment. He buried one on the farm I had just started to work on. I didn't know he was doing it until I saw it on its knees with no skin on. Mr Woods asked me to help him turn it over, but the sight of it scared me. I ran off. He scolded me when I next met him. I dreamed about it. I am an avid dreamer about all sorts of weird things. If they could be put on film they would be hilarious. As an example of them, I dreamed I was fishing and hooked a large fish, pulled it out and it shot up into the air to the length of the line, then whizzed round and round, me hanging on. Another one, I was driving a flock of sheep and when a big dog frightened them they all shot up a tree to get back to earth.

One well known family here was Mr and Mrs Alfred Sykes who had a large family including four sons who were all professional hedge layers. They worked piece work. It was a treat to see them, no hacking or chipping at it like we see some amateurs do today. Their tools were very sharp. One blow and down would come the part needed to be put in its proper place. They wore protective shields, heavy leather gloves, long cuffs of leather up the arms, apron and gauze goggles. Like all jobs in those days, it was poorly paid for the hedgers had varied prices depending on the size of the hedge. Prices ranged from 25p to 50p for a chain which is 22 yards. What price today - nearer £50. I did quite a lot of hedge laying, but not quite up to their standard. Some was piece work (in 1955, 90p a chain if the hedge was of average size). One had to work hard to cut and lay a chain a day. What the old hedgers would say to see the scruffy little things today, but it would be too costly to do it by hand today and our generation has seen more change than any other, most for the best but sadly some not.

The Cumberland Arms was kept by Mr Harris. He cooked people's Sunday dinners in a faggot heated oven. He was followed by Mr Webb, then Mr George Peachey. Now, like most pubs, it's modern, serving meals. There were two shops. Mr Woolgrove kept one two houses up from the church, just selling things people needed. No luxuries in those days - boiled sweets, herbal dabs, chocolate drops, sweets with a verse on them, mostly purchased in  $\frac{1}{2}$ d worth. Mr Woolgrove was elderly. He was organist. the church and choir master. The boys had to behave. He was very strict. He, like me, liked to talk of the old days, of when a club was held. It was the name for what we call a fete today. How a strong pig was let loose with its tail greased. It had to be held by the tail for a certain time. One raced across the fields and was caught at Adderbury, half way to Banbury. I wouldn't like to have been the referee.

## CLIFTON continued

The other shop was next door to where I now live, now occupied by Mr Stanley French. It was kept by Mrs Haines and her niece Miss Sarah Grantham. It was also the Post Office. When we earned a penny, perhaps holding someone's horse while they went into the Station, we would come straight up to her shop before it burnt a hole in our pocket and spent it.

The farmers were Mr Tom Wright next to the pub, John Fowler, farmer and cattle dealer which were driven along the roads, mostly going to Banbury. The next farm was Mr Francis Garrett, tragically killed in 1955 by an overturning tractor. His son John carried on the farm. It is now farmed by Mr George Fenemore. The next one was Mr John Spencer, then Mr Charles Gardner. Now the house is sold and the land is part of Mr Fenemore's farm. The other farm, Bolderdyke, was farmed by Mr John Welford, later his son William, now by Mr Donald Welford and his son Alistair.

Now we move to 1919 when I started work on this farm. I got the job myself. My parents didn't know until I had got it. The other men were Harry Shirley, carter, No. 1, Will Hawkins, 2. I made No. 3. Joe Pinfeld was herdsman. Jack Bowerman (no relation) and Jimmy Wheeler were day men. Jim Whitlock drove the portable steam engine that worked the barn machinery. I drove for two years after he died. Most of the men were near seventy. That was pension age at that time, 50p a week. My starting wage was 50p for fifty two hours. No half day. We were all skint before the weekend, or as one character here would put it in a more elegant way, saying he had a whiff of financial cramp. Yet we seemed happier than many today. There is a saying that money does not always bring happiness, but it enables one to be miserable in comfort.

The boss, Mr John Welford, was a farmer, coal merchant and forage merchant, so we had quite a change of jobs. When I was fifteen he told me I was too slow for a funeral. Not a bad thing I would think anyway. I stayed with him for forty years. Some years later I had fifty percent pay rise as I could do several jobs such as driving horses, steam engine, tractor. For thirty years sheep shearing, hedge laying, ditching, draining, thatching and working a water mill. More of that later.

My first job was bringing the loads of sheaves to the rick. Sometimes one horse could pull it. Another field would take two. Then real manure from the 'muckel' was carted and spread out on the fields, then ploughed and planted. Three horses pulled the plough single file. I was the plough boy looking after the horses. The carters called me 'Giles'. In the first two years at spring time we broke in four of our colts which had never been handled. It was a real wild west job. For the first two days we had them on a long line. I had a whip and clanged it just like a ring master. We had plenty of bumps and bruises. Then the harness was put on the third day and put in between two old horses. It would take around two weeks to get them used to work like humans. They were all different. They all turned out good workers during the winter. We were on the roads coal carting to the villagers or loading hay from farms onto the railway. It was tied by hay tiers who had a press to make light trusses half hundredweight each. As a boy I could pick them up on a fork and pitch them on the waggon. Fifty-four to a load, two loads filled the railway truck. The trusses above the truck sides had to be stacked a certain way. The load had to pass clear under a gauge. If it touched, the guard would not take it. The hay was bought from the farmers, either by the lump, that is by the rick as it stood or by the ton. I used to take the hay presses to the farms. Up to ten miles we travelled. Many miles there were only a few cars and lorries. The cars were mostly T Fords or bull nose Morrises.

CLIFTON continued

Another job I did was taking the food for the horses at the coal depots at Brackley, Fimere, Bloxham and Banbury. There were ten horses in the stables, three of them were ex-army horses, one of them was a big sleepy head. He would sleep standing up. One day the carter left him in a loaded water cart at dinner time. When he came back Jumbo was lying down asleep, both shafts of the cart were broken. One day I was in the station goods yard when some officer cadets came off a train. One blew a bugle and I just managed to stop the horse bolting. It must have reminded him of some incident.

The forage business gradually petered out as horses were replaced by motor transport. The coal business was taken over by other members of the family. A poultry section was started in 1920 and built up to around three thousand hens. One third of them were trap nested. They had small nest boxes for laying. As they went in they moved two wires hanging from the top and so released a sliding door from the top and dropped down and shut them in. Each bird had a numbered ring. Each bird had to be caught, the number put on the egg. It was a din when they had all layed. There was a hole in the top of the lid to put their heads through. I did the job as a stop gap sometimes. A herd of fifty Red Poll milking cows was then built up. The milk was put on the 9.15 am train for London in a special van at the back of local trains. The churns held seventeen gallons. Later it was picked up by United Dairies carrier using smaller churns. The herdsmen were Bob Vincent and Harold Whitlock. He retired in 1987 after fifty three years on the farm.

In 1922 the first tractor in these parts came on the farm. A small Fordson made in Cork, Ireland. It had a T Ford engine, a much larger model than the cars. It had no coverings or guards on the wheels, no brakes and no governors but it was a powerful little machine. It only did ploughing and reaping for the first six years with several non farming drivers. I started driving it in 1928 where it did all the jobs so much easier and faster than horses. It was a treat to ride at work, albeit a rough, dirty one. It was a revelation in farm working. The tractor ran on ordinary paraffin, just a dash of petrol to start it. There was no repair service. The T Ford engine is a kind of Heath Robinson invention but very ingenious. I stripped it down every autumn, decarbonizing it, grinding the valves in, replacing the exhaust valves. They were always one third burnt away. It did most of its work on full throttle, extremely noisy as the exhaust had fallen off. I replaced it with a length of stack pipe, no baffle plates. It was underneath It worked twelve years, never out of work. The next one worked for nineteen years. Two tractors in thirty one years, not bad. The farm now is corn growing with one man on it.

I left the farm in 1959 after forty years and spent my last eleven years of my working life with British Waterways on the Oxford Canal. There was one other job we did. The miller at the old mill retired. He was Mr Welford's father in law so he took it over. It had four sets of stones. We used two of them grinding cattle food for the farm and a few local farmers. The corn to grind is pulled up to the top of the mill and tipped into a chute, then regulated to trickle into a hole in the middle of the stones. The top stone can be lifted or lowered to grind the corn as fine as required. It's a rather slow process. The stones are not smooth. They have a special pattern of channels cut in them by a skilled millwright. He was Mr Walter Course of Deddington. The top floor of the mill has two rows of large wooden bins to store grains. We stored hundreds of sacks of wheat during the war for Clarks of Banbury. the corn was drawn out of the bins through a hole in the floor of it, to which a canvas sleeve was attached, the end tied with string to keep it in so it was quite simple to fill the sacks. In our school days the miller employed two men and three horses with a large waggon and cart. The mill has been silent since the end of the war. The house is now occupied by another Mr Welford.

Now we go up the road one and a quarter miles to DEDDINGTON.