

## BITS AND PIECES

### Gleanings from the Past: Extracts from the *Parish and Deanery Magazines*, 1879–1900

In the summer of 1998, 14 carefully bound volumes of *Parish and Deanery Magazines*, 1879–1930, were discovered in SS Peter & Paul Church. With the permission of the churchwardens and PCC I shall select information from their yellowing pages which I hope will interest parishioners preparing for the millennium.

How did those who populated Deddington 100 and more years ago perceive the step into the 20th century? Did they prepare for and greet the year 1900 with enthusiasm? Only a potted version of what was written in an age before the rat race is possible but I'll try my hardest to catch the spirit of the times.

The *Deddington Parish Magazine* was started in 1879 by the Revd Thomas Boniface. He served the parish for nearly half a century (1878–1924) and resigned only owing to advanced old age. Until December 1892 Deddington went it alone with their monthly magazine which cost 2d. From January 1893 many local parishes pooled their news in a monthly *Deanery Magazine*. This the Revd Boniface introduces as having the advantages of: (1) showing the unity of faith and action between churches; (2) showing what goes on in other parishes; (3) costing only 1d and thereby increasing circulation (excellent sales talk even 100 years on).

1999

### Snippets

*Entertainment:* Deddington, then as now, excelled in providing splendid entertainment for the parishioners by the parishioners. Musical and dramatic events, always reported as being packed out, were favourites and performed in schoolroom, church or private residence. In 1886 the Deddington detachment of the 2nd Oxfordshire Rifles held a fête and dance on a grand scale in aid of funds for the provision of new targets. The company's own band played a selection of music for the dancing in the evening.

*Village outings* became a yearly event. Nobody seemed to mind catching a 4am train from Aynho Station, making for the sea, enjoying a boat trip and returning in the early hours of the next day. The formidable church choir attended the yearly Royal School of Church Music festivals, acquitting themselves very well. In 1899 the Castle Grounds site was taken over by an enterprising body of parishioners for a recreation ground and the Cricket Club was restarted. Fêtes and bazaars are recorded in great detail, with the proceeds going to the various good causes. (The Day School children subscribed 12s.10½d towards a children's cot in the Radcliffe Infirmary.)

1999

### Primary School



I wonder if today's primary school parents, when there are changes in the Education Act, are as bemused as our forebears must have been when they read the following instructions: 'During 1879 every child above five and under 10 must attend school regularly; and no one, not even father or mother, may employ him or her in any shop

or in any way whatsoever for the purpose of gain or wages. During 1879 every child above 10 and under 14 must attend school regularly unless (a) he or she has attended 250 times during each year or for three years in not more than two "Certified Efficient" schools and holds a certificate of having made such attendances, or (b) passed an examination before her Majesty's Inspector of Schools and holds a certificate stating such a fact – in which case the child may be employed. Parents should also remember that any child attending 350 times in a year (am and pm attendances clocked up separately) and passing the 4th standard before 11 years of age, will have the School Pence paid by Government for one year ... and so on for three years' (43 new pence in 1999 is equal to one old penny in 1880!)

Free education for scholars over three and under 15 years started on September 1st 1891, when our *Parish Magazine* airs 'the good plan' that the 'School Pence', hitherto spent by parents, should be deposited for the benefit of their children in a savings account (whatever happened to all those little capitalists?)

1999

### School Railings

Did the Queen Mother visit Deddington? I've been asked this question, presumably because I have access to old *Deddington Parish Magazines*. No visit of royalty is recorded between the dates of the Queen Mother's wedding in 1923 and 1930 when my supply of information ends.



Be that as it may. I nevertheless thought it would be exciting if I could find something in the parish news which happened during the month of her birth in August 1900. And by a most unexpected coincidence I found that 'something' in the following notice which appears in September 1900:

'Day School. This school will re-open on Monday, September 10th, by which time or soon after we hope the old wooden fence, which has been an eyesore for so long, will have been replaced by new unclimbable iron railings, with gates to match. The expense will amount to £35, and as no assistance can be obtained from the Aid Grant, it is hoped that subscribers and others will be disposed, when they see the improvement, to give something extra towards it.'

Some of these cast iron railings have – like the Queen Mother – withstood the ravishes of time for 101 years. They have fulfilled their duty to each new generation, have watched over their safety and enjoyed their merry games. They have seen the world change out of all recognition but have gladly kept up with the various trends. The Queen Mother's long life has now ended. The railings, a bit bent with age and the little gate between ornate posts, remain. Will they see the end of this decade?

2003

### What Went on in Victorian Deddington?

A few years ago I found the following snippet in the magazine *This England*: 'According to legend the churchwardens of Deddington once sold their own church bells in order to buy drink'. In the following issue of this publication came the reply: 'As a former churchwarden of that church, let me give you the true version. It was not the churchwardens who sold the bells but the Vicar,

[James Brogden] incumbent from 1848 to 64. He pledged the ropes for drink at the Unicorn Inn, and the bells were not allowed to be rung until the debt was paid. Hence the legend 'Drunken Deddington – where the Vicar pawned the bells'.

2002



*Cup unearthed in the 1960s by Len Plumbe (pic courtesy John Plumbe)*

### Coffee Tavern

Probably to counterbalance the soubriquet 'dirty drunken Deddington', the opening of a coffee tavern was newsworthy to be included in the Vicar's New Year address of 1881. He writes to his parishioners: 'A change which we hope this year will bring is a coffee tavern. This movement is owing in great measure to Capt. Dashwood (of Duns Tew) who has taken great interest in the matter. The tavern will probably open about Lady Day (Feast of the Annunciation, March 25th).

Later that year the tavern is reported as 'fairly supported' by the inhabitants and in September the tavern committee decided to purchase a bagatelle table which was placed in an upstairs room. News of the venture then peters out until a short paragraph in May 1883 states that 'the coffee tavern has been reopened under new management'. On January 18th 1884, Capt. Dashwood got up an excellent dramatic entertainment in aid of funds.

With that report, news of the tavern dries up but not my curiosity! Maybe a reader can throw light on the coffee tavern movement? Capt. Dashwood was a member of the family which, I'm told, owned land running from High Wycombe to Deddington at the turn of the 19th century. What was his interest in the coffee tavern movement? And does anyone know which house in Deddington accommodated the tavern?

*(1999, see also 'A Cup of Mysteries', DN, May 2013)*

### Library

The Deddington library at the end of the 19th century had its difficulties through which it was supported – need I say – by the villagers. Well before 1879 a library and reading room existed in the Town Hall. From 1879 to 1888 a local committee was in charge, held annual meetings, made public the accounts and planned to raise money to supplement members' subscriptions. By 1883 the library owned 700 books and it received 13 different newspapers and periodicals. Local unpaid 'librarians' supervised the lending and reading room which also boasted games. Non-members could borrow a book for ½d per volume.



In 1886 the closure of the institution, due to 'considerable dissatisfaction', was avoided when a brave committee tightened membership rules. Just reading these byelaws gives a clue to the troubles – 'No smoking on the premises until 9pm. All games excepting chess and drafts to be confined to the lower room and no new members under 16 years of age to be admitted.' Sadly, in spite of the changes, the library and reading room came to an end after 30 years due

to the opening of two similar institutions in the village. But Deddingtonians do not give up that easily! In February 1889 the library was reopened as a 'parochial library' and the Vicar, taking pity on the young, later instituted a library in the vicarage loft (the old vicarage), opening for half an hour on Saturdays in the winter months – very correctly – for girls at 4pm and boys at 7pm!

1999

## Clifton School

In the final years of the 19th century, the editor of the *Deanery Magazine* must have been of tolerant disposition because the Clifton report quite often runs to a full page. The yearly report issued to Clifton school by Her Majesty's Inspector was made known in full. Luckily children and teachers did not have to hang their heads. Words like 'Creditably taught in elementary subjects ... Grammar satisfactory. History is pretty well known ... Geography good in lower school but rather weak in upper ... Needlework (in some years) 'is carefully done' but (in others) is 'unsatisfactory'. Then came the Deanery Inspector to test the children in Scripture and Catechism, the knowledge of which is 'not large ... but the children answer with readiness'.

Apart from these, no doubt dreaded examinations, parents and children must have had a lot of fun – cricket and football matches on fields generously lent by local farmers. Sunday School Christmas parties with games, teas and magic lantern, an annual Christmas supper for the 'men and lads' of the Clifton church choir. In the winter there was entertainment by the local glee and madrigal choir and a real knees-up for everybody after the Patronal Festival (on or near St James' Day, July 25th).

Clifton's Church of St James was consecrated by Samuel Wilberforce (son of William Wilberforce) during his time as Bishop of Oxford (1845–69).

2000

## Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, 1887

Royal celebrations were much in the news in August this year – as in June 1887 when Deddington celebrated 'the Jubilee or 50th year of our good Queen Victoria's reign'.

'The celebrations commenced in the Parish Church on the Sunday previous to the Jubilee Day when a large number of people, including public bodies, the Volunteers, Fire Brigade, Benefit Society, Police, Sunday and Day Schools and Church of England Temperance Society, attended a special service.



A procession was formed at the Schools which, headed by Banbury Rifle Brigade, paraded through the town which was already decorated with flags and mottoes for the event. The service commenced with the singing of the National Anthem followed by the Te Deum, prayers and hymns. The sermon was preached by the Vicar from the text 'A Jubilee shall that 50th year be unto you' (Leviticus, xxv, 11). At the conclusion of the Service the Band, who sat under the tower, played in excellent style the 'Hallelujah Chorus'. The spacious church was filled to overflowing.

'The Jubilee Day itself (June 20th) was ushered in by a peal about 5 o'clock. After another special service in the Parish Church, the festivities began at 1 o'clock when, in the large school room and in a spacious tent erected in the school yard, some hundreds of parishioners sat down to an excellent dinner – to which ample justice was done. It was a pleasing sight – on the Jubilee of the sovereign – to see all classes uniting together and old and young sitting down to one repast. After dinner the large company adjourned to a field where sports of an amusing character were held. The bell rang out merrily at intervals and there was a band to enliven that scene. The happy day was brought to a close by fireworks and a bonfire in a field on the Banbury Road.'

2000

### **The Poor in Winter, 1890**

'Christmas this year, as far as the weather was concerned, was an old-fashioned one – the ground being covered with snow and a severe frost having set in.' So we read in a report about Christmas 1890. We can well imagine the scene having just experienced the like at the end of the year 2000.

But can anyone remember hearing of the many village charities which helped Deddingtonians through the cold winter months back in the past? Is the name of Miss Churchill still familiar to anyone now living in the village? For over 20 years she represented a charity through which the elderly and needy were able to have (probably borrow) blankets for the duration of the winter months. She also supervised a clothing club, giving villagers the chance to put by a very small sum each week to make possible the purchase of something extra before Christmas.

The Coal Charity, supported every year by the Feoffees, the Parish Church, Congregational Chapel, Wesleyan Reform Chapel and local individuals, kept the fires of the poor burning. A soup kitchen opened in 1881 and provided soup at 1d a quart once a week during the winter. The soup was served from Mrs Bliss's kitchen in Philcote Street on average 17 times per season and detailed accounts are available. Expenditure for use of copper, meat and vegetables came to £12 9s.5d in one winter.

Year after year these charities were run by the village for the village and well deserved the then Vicar's yearly response: 'I desire to thank all who have by their purse, or time, or ability, or in any other way, contributed to their maintenance!'

2001

### **Census**

A census is scheduled for March 2001 which is a good enough reason to delve into the *Parish Magazines* and find census results from 100 years and more ago. Luckily the Revd Thomas Boniface delighted in statistics and never missed an opportunity to pass on interesting equations to his parishioners. How he would have loved Deddington Online, both as a viewer and contributor.

His research covered census figures for Deddington, Clifton and Hempton from 1801 to 1891 where, in the latter year the count recorded 880 males, 897 females, 403 inhabited houses, 32 uninhabited houses, 6 buildings and 221 tenements of less than five rooms. In his annual church records he regularly adds the full names of parishioners who have reached 'threescore years and ten upwards'. In 1883, for example, he worked out that the combined ages of the 20 qualifying men and women came to 1,569 years, not bad going for a parish in the 19th century.

What will the 2001 count reveal and what conclusions or plans for the future would the Rev Boniface draw from them? Speaking for myself, I now have to admit to being an 'old woman', qualifying for the Revd Boniface's list. A very rude Swiss Railway official told me so on a recent holiday. Worse signs of old age followed my return home. I had left my *DN* duplicating colleagues with an insufficient stock of printing paper, causing everybody including the editor a lot of hassle. Apologies to you all except the Swiss Railway official!

2001



## Fire Service

Feeling very privileged to be a part-time reporter on past times, I endeavour wherever possible to marry the past and present or vice versa. Reading of Albert Humphries' retirement in last month's *DN* sent me flying to the gilded pages of the old magazines in search of news about the Fire Service between 1879 and 1930. The old

adage 'no news is good news' makes me think that the parish must have been well-guarded by its early fire crews and engines. In 1886 the charge for calling out the fire engine was £1 and work to be done was charged at 10 shillings an hour. By 1890 the call-out rate had risen to 2 guineas and, no doubt, has kept on going up ever since! The only exception to 'no news' is the following item in November 1925:

'Castle House Fire. It is not easy to write coherently about the horrible disaster that has befallen Mr and Mrs Long. To say that they have the sympathy of the whole parish, and of all their many friends outside, is but an inadequate expression of the thoughts in the minds of all. The feeling of comparative helplessness oppressed even the most willing helpers – and there were many – and even now the actual horror is over there is still the sense of powerlessness to do anything of real use. We can but be thankful there was no loss of life and hope that ere long we may be better equipped as a parish for fighting fire.'

Mr Humphries, after his many years in the Fire Service, will have faced the sorrow and misery described above many times. Thanks to him and his brilliant fire crew, we know that in 2001 'the powerlessness to do anything of real use' need no longer be an issue, providing that we take heed all the sensible fire prevention advice they advocate.

2001

## Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers are seldom out of the news at the present time. Wars, civil wars and oppression force unbelievable numbers of people to migrate in search of a better life in a better country. The constant stream of these refugees, whom communities either welcome or do their best to keep at a distance, create a picture of an impersonal mass of humanity catered for by somebody, but not me directly.

Much different it was in February 1915 when news of refugees was brought right into the midst of Deddington, and I quote from the *Deanery Magazine* 1915:

'We were pleased to welcome on January 18th, two families of Belgian refugees of the working class both by the name of Vandendries, from Antwerp. Two mothers, whose husbands are at the war, with five children. They will be supported by the weekly subscriptions of the parishioners and are located in

a house kindly placed at the disposal of the Belgian Refugee Committee at a reduced rent by Mr Painter.'

At an even earlier date in the 1890s, children from London 'had the pleasure of spending a fortnight in the country at Deddington'. The following notice appears in the *Magazine*, 1891:

'It is proposed, as last year, to give some children from the Walworth District of London an opportunity of spending a week or two in the country here. The cost of maintaining a child is 5/- per week. Some money has already been contributed. Any wishing to assist towards this object are requested to forward their contributions to Mrs Kinch, by whom they will be gratefully received. We need hardly add, that it is a great boon to London children to spend a short time during the summer in the country.'

2002

## **Holiday in the Country**

From an entry in the *Parish Magazine*, 1891, I recalled that some local families opened their homes to children from the Walworth District of London. The Walworth Children Holiday project was, over the years, repeated many times and was still in progress in the late 1930s. Imagine my surprise when, through the good offices of Sue Goddard and her son Giles, Rector of St Peter's Walworth, I was shown a letter from Betty Cotter, née Norwood, a long-term Walworth resident. She vividly recalls her 'holiday in the country' in the summer of either 1937 or '38. With her permission I quote some of her recollections of over 60 years ago:

'Sometime before the 1939 war there was a scheme "The Country Holiday Fund" designed to give London children a week in the country's fresh air. Living as we did in Walworth and my parents being unable to afford holidays, they thought this a good thing and I was enrolled. I believe my mother paid a nominal sum towards the cost. When the time came to go, I was told I was going to the country near Banbury to see "the Cross".

I remember my first impression which was arriving at a wide open space in front of a row of houses and the sun being very bright. I stayed with a young couple, but I spent a lot of time wandering about and playing with the local children. I also remember quite plainly objecting strongly about the "privy" which was out of the house over a path and definitely had no chain! I was also told very firmly not to go into the field behind the privy because of the snakes. I naturally spent sometime there looking for the snakes until the local children explained just what a cess pit was! All in all it seemed to be a happy time, and when it was time to go home the lady very kindly gave me a bag of Banbury cakes for my mother. As an extra thought, when the time came for me to be evacuated, I was told I was going into the country for a little while and assumed that too was a holiday. How dreadfully wrong a child can be!

2003

## **The National Anthem**

Sometimes like ever increasing circles, researching a specific subject in these magazines leads to quite unexpected discoveries.

Take the National Anthem, for instance. While composing the history of Deddington Church Choir I got chatting to Topper Davis, who was a local choirboy in the 1930s. He let me peruse his most precious book *British Songs for British Boys* by Sydney H Nicholson under whom he remembers enjoying training days for choirs (Sir Sydney Nicholson was founder of the School of

Church Music). I was immediately very interested in notes by Sir Sydney footing the National Anthem.

As we have just entered the year of the Queen's Golden Jubilee and will no doubt hear and sing this anthem many times, I would like to share Sir Sydney's annotation in *British Songs for British Boys* published in 1903, and I quote: 'The question of the authorship of the National Anthem is a one which has yet to be settled. The tune, as we now have it, has generally been attributed to Henry Carey (1692-1743), but probably without much foundation. Strong claims are advanced, however, in recent works, in favour of James Oswald, an Edinburgh musician, on the one hand, and Dr John Bull, the famous composer, on the other. 'God save the King' first appeared, words and music, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for October, 1745, and had been performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in September of that year, on reception of the news of the defeat of Sir John Cope's army at Prestonpans.

The claim of Oswald is based on the following, amongst other facts:

1. 'God save the King' is named, in 1769, on the dial-plate of the chimes of Windsor Church, as 'Oswald's Are'.
2. In 1761 Oswald was appointed chamber composer to George III, over the heads of better known musicians.
3. The numerous fictitious names under which Oswald published, prove that he was not anxious to make public claim to much excellent work.
4. 'God save the King' was published (anonymously) by John Simpson, about 1745, in a work called *Harmonia Anglicana*. Oswald was doing a great deal of work for Simpson, at the time of its publication. These facts undoubtedly make out a very strong claim for Oswald.'

\* \* \* \* \*

'The claims of Dr John Bull (1563-1628) are advanced in a work on the subject by Dr W.H. Cummings, and the author is of the opinion that the tune, as we now have it, is derived from an air by Bull, contained in a manuscript dated 1619; and that the original Latin words were used in the Catholic Church Service'. He adds, 'of course, in the lapse of years. Bull's tune has been altered and improved by the *vox populi*, an inevitable and desirable process in the formation of a national melody.'

The claim of James Oswald's authorship, and that of John Bull are the two most modern theories (in 1903), and though the question will probably be never definitely settled, they are at least interesting as throwing some light on an hitherto obscure subject. Beethoven, referring to the introduction of the air into his Battle Symphony, said, 'I must show the English a little, what a blessing they have in "God save the King", and it is universally admitted to be one of the very finest National Anthems in existence.'

May I just add, very humbly, that I heartily agree with Sir Sydney's last statement. I felt very sad when this melody, which I sang 'with heart and voice' during my childhood in Switzerland to the words of the Swiss National Anthem, had to give way to an admittedly equally fine and very solemn melody by A. Zwyssig. However, being 'the Subject of a British Subject', it is my fortune and pleasure to sing that beloved melody again and again, and in particular in this year of the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

(2002, with many thanks to Topper Davis)



## The District Nurse

Residing in the parish of Duns Tew I just occasionally feel a 'foreigner' in the parish of Deddington. To describe a bit more clearly how I feel let me give this example. The other day I asked an acquaintance to tell me who had bought a particular house (not in Deddington) and she replied, 'a foreigner'. As soon as she had spoken she looked at me, caught her breath and said 'no offence meant'. Of course not! In this context I am delighted that even after living over half a century in dear old England my friends remember my country of birth and I am proud to belong, so to speak, to two nations.

But, coming back to feeling less than 100% Deddingtonian, it pleased me no end to read the following in the *Parish Magazine*, December 1880, under the title 'District Nurse: Through the kind exertions of Lady Dashwood, of Duns Tew, Deddington parish with the parishes of Duns Tew and North Aston, is to have a district nurse. The person engaged has been duly qualified for her work at a Dublin Hospital, where she obtained her certificate. She will reside in Deddington, at Mrs Frank Berry's. Philcock Street, and will come on December 1st for three months on trial. Her work will be among the poor, to nurse the sick – and for a small payment to attend poor women in their confinements.'

One hundred years ago Deddington was always referred to as a town and Philcote Street was known as Philcock Street. But how nice, that somebody from my village of residence instigated the wonderful service of District Nursing in the town of Deddington.

2002

## Tucker's Stores

It befits the rather mysterious picture of Tuckers Stores in September's *DN*, that I should add, with Frank Steiner's consent, a few owner/occupiers of the stores and the house: three of those who served us well in the past now sleep peacefully in our churchyard. They will be pleased that they have not been forgotten.

Mr Robert Tucker who gave the shop its name, is vividly remembered by José Stevens. On his shop counter lay a big pile of white paper squares which Mr Tucker magically twisted into cones to fill with broken biscuits for any child who had a ha'penny to spend. (In 2003 Robert's granddaughter, Pat Colgrave, again gives excellent service to Deddingtonians from her Farmers' Market stall.) On his retirement before WW2 Robert sold the shop and house to Mr and Mrs Boone who eventually left business and house to their son, Raymond. He, in turn, sold it to Mr Ted Moseley.



*Which year was this, and what was the occasion?*

On my arrival in 1958 and living outside the parish boundary, I was a stranger to the villagers only until I began to shop in Tucker's Stores. Shining old stone floor, shelves full of assorted goods, large leg of ham invitingly ready to be sliced by Ted who, in his white coat, wielded his razor-sharp knife like the best surgeon while customers engaged in friendly talk. In winter a huge Calor gas fire spluttered, its flickering flames lashing up every time the door opened.

On his retirement Ted Moseley sold the business and house to Mr Mervyn Wynne who in the late 1960s, I believe, completely modernised the shop



*Framed woodcut of Tucker's Stores*

Mr Cannell, fondly known as 'the Colonel'.

and attracted friendly comment by fixing a steel ring outside, under the notice, 'Put Doggy Here'. In spite of modernisation, he kept up full customer service with his staff, occasionally helped by his wife. He was a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and a formidable businessman, very knowledgeable on many subjects. He gave George Palmer, the Vicar, a Mezuzah (parchment inscribed with a religious text in a case and attached to the door-post of a Jewish house). The Vicar proudly displayed this on the door-post of the Vicarage. I also remember that the two younger Wynne daughters sang for a while in the church choir. And so we move to

2003

## Post Office

'Post Early for Christmas' is probably the only instruction we get from the PO at this time of year and probably we forget it!

Our predecessors received a whole page of regulations. From the *Parish Magazine* of October 1883, I quote: 'No parcel must weigh more than 7lbs and it may not exceed 3'6" in length and girth. (The most convenient mode of measuring will be by means of a tape 6 feet long, having the length of 3'6" marked thereon. So much of the tape as is not used in measuring the length will be the measure of the greatest girth permissible.) Parcels containing gunpowder, cartridges, Lucifer matches, explosives (or anything likely to injure), live animals or bladders containing liquids, are prohibited. Powders must be so packed that they cannot escape. Parcels, the contents of which emit strong odour such as fish, game camphor, pepper, coffee etc. must be packed with particular care, in order to guard against their causing damage to the Parcels Mails. Parcels known to contain a letter, packet or parcel intended for delivery at an address other than that borne on the parcel itself, are prohibited. Parcels can be received at the Deddington Post Office daily up to 8.20pm.'

That was then so don't confuse the 8.20pm closing time with current times, think of our kind staff at the Post Office and 'Post Early for Christmas'.

1999

## Farewell to the 'Old' Post Office

The address of the new and the old remains the same: Market Place, Deddington. Already Sheena, Ron and Ann look cosy in their brand new surroundings and are the first team to begin a new era, lasting hopefully as long as that of the Post Office in the old premises. But for how many years were we served from the old premises? Opinions vary amongst the older folk in Deddington, so please correct me if I get it wrong.

I've unearthed an advert dating back to 1879. The advert reads: 'John Whetton, General Printer, Stationer, Bookseller, Linen & Woollen Draper, supplier of Newspapers and periodicals, Agent for the Oxfordshire Chronicle, Glass & Earthenware and Deddington Post Office'. What a boon this business must have been to the village, but did he trade from the premises of the now old Post Office? What is certain is that Mr Charlie West (José Stevens' father) bought the business in those premises in the 1920s from a Mr Whetton,

thought to be the son of the above John, and thus became the youngest Postmaster in Oxfordshire.



*Post Office, 1935*

He in turn sold the shop and the Post Office to Mr Bolton in the late 1930s or early 40s. When Mr Bolton died his second wife, Lucy, became Postmistress. She is still well remembered by many for her helpful service. In the 1960s Mr Ken Garrett became our new Postmaster, ran the shop and Post Office with the help

of his wife. She made sure, with her helpers, that our mail, parcels and the many other services offered by the Post Office were diligently carried out until their retirement in 1985.



Mrs Jill Smith then became Postmistress and she in turn handed over to Mr Bernard Hughes who, as appointed Postmaster, placed the postal, pension and all other services in the capable hands of his wife Sheena. Quite naturally we think of her as our Postmistress and I for one admit to having been rather disappointed when she told me that the Co-operative Society has worn the hat of Postmaster since it bought the business from Mr Hughes. But then I am of that certain age, when one thinks that Postmasters and Mistresses should have a human form and be in the singular! And so we take leave from our many past Postmasters and Mistresses and their helpers who served us so well for over 80 years from the old premises. We thank them all, and thank Sheena, Ann and Ron for guiding us step by step through the maze of the 21st century postal services.

May the beautiful, spacious new premises make work a little lighter for them, and may their clientele be served from the new Post Office in Deddington for another 80 years and more.

2004

### **'The Lord Chamberlain is Commanded by Her Majesty to Invite ...'**

It is rather awesome when a buff envelope is delivered with the morning post, the address in beautiful handwriting, postmarked Buckingham Palace. Inside, a gold-embossed invitation to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, a yellow admission card, a sheet of general information covering do's and don'ts, time schedule, dress code and history and plan of the garden.

Dress code presented few problems. Ted, the old soldier, would attend his Sovereign's parade in regulation mufti right down to black shoes he had bought after World War II, which, held together by spit and polish, would defy any Quartermaster's muster. Deddington saw to it that we had all the proper accessories. A black rolled umbrella from John Lee for Ted and a beautiful black straw hat for me from José Stevens, who also gladdened Ted's heart on the great day by looking after his best friend Lucy, the rescue dog. It occurred to me that Lucy should really have partnered him, because it was by kind consideration of the RSPCA that our names had been forwarded to the Lord Chamberlain. I was, of course, delighted to be invited, and duly stood in for Lucy on the day.

We travelled to London, Victoria Station, by bus, risking life and limb crossing and recrossing a network of inner city roads muddled by roadworks, dust and grime and a never ending stream of traffic to walk to the Grosvenor Gate entrance to Buckingham Palace Gardens where we joined a queue of smartly dressed fellow guests. There was just time to take José's hat out of the plastic carrier bag and clap it on my head before police at the gate scrutinised photographic identity and collected the yellow entry admission card.

The gardens, covering nearly 40 acres, are not at all ostentatious. Woodland, a huge lake, gravel paths, lawns, wildlife, we might have been anywhere in the country. The broad stretch of well-trodden lawn at the back of the Palace was already crowded with a multitude of happily promenading guests in all colours of dress – including national costumes from post-imperial countries. Skirting the lawn were the main Tea Tent, our port of sustenance throughout the afternoon, the Diplomatic Tea Tent, already filling with guests in exotic silks, and the Royal Tea Tent awaiting the party most of us hoped to see sometime during the afternoon. The Bands of the Prince of Wales's Division and the Irish Guards played selections of music during the afternoon. The two bandstands were far apart, needing to semaphore to each other by lowering a pennant when at rest and flying it when at play. In this manner there was never a break throughout the afternoon, heightening the festive atmosphere of a wonderful Party.

At 4pm the National Anthem stopped the guests in their tracks. The Queen, dressed in brilliant yellow, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Prince of Wales, Prince Edward and the Countess of Wessex stepped from the terrace. Her Majesty's Gentlemen at Arms then formed lanes for the Royal Party to move through the guests. At that moment it was a joy to watch the well-rehearsed ceremonial of propelling Royals through a lovingly curious mass of people. A Company of Yeoman of the Guard in their ancient dress, carrying equally ancient lances kept order, following their Sovereign from corner to corner of the field surrounding the chosen guests in whose midst she and members of her party had stopped to talk. Ted and I were so interested watching the Yeomen in their onerous task that we never got within chatting distance of the Queen.

Finding myself standing beside a red cassocked cleric I couldn't help remarking how well he fitted into this picture of pageantry and why was he wearing pillbox red – Ted at that moment wished he had brought Lucy instead of his nosy wife! Not at all offended by my direct questioning, he introduced himself as a Chaplain to the Queen, and in conversation we were able to explain to him the history of our equally red robed choir in Deddington church. And talking of the church, the churches were very well represented. The élite of Rome in their bright purple sashes and skullcaps and that of England in more subdued purple robes. Colour matching between the purple of one cleric and his wife's long dress was so striking that in that kaleidoscopic sea of humanity they became, for me, almost a reference point!

With the Royal Party making their way slowly to their tea tent, we too went back to the main tent for a second cuppa and some more of the delicious fare on offer. The seating along the open-sided tent was always taken up, but with many others we carried our tea to the edge of the lake for a peaceful picnic before we went to explore the gardens. We returned just in time to see the Queen chat to a group of guests in wheelchairs before she took her leave.

The sound of the National Anthem at 6pm was a gentle hint for us guests to go home, but friendly members of staff in the main tea tent were still smiling from behind plates full of very inviting cakes. We thought of the long trek home, as did many others, and settled down for yet another little feast.

The caterers and their staff, quite a few of them foreign students, surpassed themselves. It was a pleasure to hear from one beaming little Asian girl who poured my tea that the Queen had passed by and all of them had seen her at close quarters. Our Royal host had certainly been most generous and deserves our heartfelt thanks for a wonderful afternoon.

Sadly we have been advised to desist from sending the customary 'bread & butter' letter. I suppose mail from 3000 grateful guests would overwhelm the Buckingham Palace postal services. Think of the trees we've saved by sparing the paper. The Prince of Wales, and no less a man than the *Deddington News* Editor, should be pleased!

2004

*The complete collection of Ruth Johnson's writings, which originally appeared in Deddington News between 1990 and 2010, can be found [here](#)*