

Tiffield in the 1930's

Map and list of residents of Tiffield as remembered by Cyril Whitehead who was born at 6 High Street South and was a child growing up in the village at this time. He had spent some time remembering this information and writing it down and handed it to me on 30th May 2011.

One story he recalled was being at the school during WW2 when the schoolmistress had a pistol which had a disappointing sound when fired to break up a dog fight.

Steve Jowers
20.06.2011

I was born in the village in 1931, in the house opposite the Church (No. 6?). At that time there was no electricity, gas, mains water or sewerage.

Pigeon Hill was an orchard, Meadow Rise was a meadow and there were no houses between the Rectory and the Church and the Church and Frank Eydon's house, (W F Eydon's yard). Manor Farm was still a farm, with the yard where houses now stand. There was just one more farm on the right hand side of the road going north, and no more houses on the left hand side of Blisworth road, after the four council houses, then known as Harewood Terrace.

There was not much in the way of transport, so people worked in the village, or within cycling distance of places of employment. Several worked for W. F Eydon doing building maintenance and alterations, coffin making and undertaking of funerals, forge work, etc. I can just remember one or two horses being shod at the blacksmiths shop. The saw shop is now converted to a house. The carpentry and woodworking skills were excellent, carts, floats, cart wheels, etc were made from scratch.

There were only three cars in the village, my brother and I used to run out to see them go by. My father worked on the railway, so we had free passes and cheap fares and used the train, travelling to the station at Towcester by brougham, which was operated by Jack Kingston Senior.

Villagers also worked on the local farms, then much more labour intensive of course, or at Groom & Tattersalls foundry at Towcester. A few travelled to Northampton by bus. We had a bus through the village on Wednesday and Saturday, operated by F Belgrove of Cold Higham. He started a service in the 1920's with an ex-service ambulance which was underpowered with a full load, so some passengers had to get out and walk up Hunsbury Hill and re-board the bus at the hill top.

Horses played quite a large part of village life, being used for the bakers delivery, milk round and delivery from Towcester Railway Station. The Grafton Hunt used to meet outside the Rectory every autumn.

Fossett's Circus used the field behind our house to keep ponies; they were all unbroken and a bit wild. Several foals were born each year and a round up took place occasionally to sort out a few useful ponies. This caused me great excitement, to see the herd of ponies stampeding around the field and through the brook. Just like the Wild West!

Fossett's used the farm on the Blisworth Road as their winter quarters and also spent much of the war there. We used to go up to see the elephants; they were used to clear overgrown areas of bushes on the farm and also did a bit of ploughing during the war.

The railway was also of interest, the village being on the line to Banbury or Stratford-on-Avon. There was a Halt on the embankment where Meadow Rise now is, approached via a footpath next to the cottages just before the pub. The footpath, known as the Jetty, ran to some wooden steps, up the embankment to a small raised area of sleepers, much lower than a normal platform. The Halt was used by railway staff, platelayers, etc. The plate laying gang was based at Towcester, headed by

Jimmy Campion, the ganger. They travelled on a trolley on the track, probably diesel, and there was a small siding on the Towcester side of Caldecote Road bridge, so they could let the train pass when necessary.

An item of interest was the Ro-Railer. This was a vehicle about the size of a bus, which could travel on the rails or the road. It could collect passengers in the town, travel to the station and run onto the railway line to Stratford-on-Avon, run off the track at the end of the line and go on the road again. It had double sets of wheels, railway track steels, and rubber tyred road wheels. I don't know how difficult it was to change over, nor do I know of any other Ro-Railers on the railway. I believe it was an experimental vehicle really, used as a test bed, although it was used in service. I was very interested to come across an article about it, a few years ago, which said the project was abandoned in 1933 but I remember my father taking me up to the Caldecote Road bridge to see the last run of the Ro-Railer, so I must have been more than 2 years old, so it could have been in a siding at Towcester or Stratford-on-Avon for a few years and was on the way to the scrap yard when I saw it.

After starting school, one of my first memories is of going to the churchyard for the planting of a copper beech tree to commemorate the Coronation of King George VI in 1937. Every child put in a shovel full of soil. We must have planted it well, judging by the present size of the tree. When I became a bit older, one job I did was to tend the church fires. There was a fire in the belfry, with a chimney the full height of the tower to provide draught for the under floor flues from four under floor fireplaces. Coke was placed in first, then sticks for kindling, then paper, as the draught pulled downwards to the tower. Fires were lit on Saturday afternoons, to warm the church for Sunday. The problem was, if the wind increased or dropped during the night the fires would either burn out with too much draught, or go out with not enough.

I also pumped the organ in the church, at times, on Sunday. The skill required was to keep the bellows full, without making a slapping noise, which could be quite loud, if you were not careful. A prized job was to pump at weddings, for which I received payment of one shilling. Unfortunately, weddings were few and far between.

The Rector in the early thirties was the Rev. Pritchatt-Shaw. He had spent a lot of time in India and must have been relatively well off, as he and his wife employed a gardener, housekeeper and maid. The Rectory grounds were very well kept, with immaculate dwarf box hedges around the various plots. The Rector used to come to the school, about one morning a week, to take prayers. He was quite old, seemed very old to us, and not easy to understand. We were all afraid of him. The School Teacher was Miss Allen, she lived in the school house and always brought her dog into school. During the war she decided she needed protection, when taking her dog for a walk way across the fields, so she bought a little revolver. She wore it in a holster, under a selection of warm and waterproof clothing, plus a huge scarf, and would have needed a good five minutes notice to get her gun out, if she had been confronted by an attacker.

One day, her dog, accompanying us in the playground, was challenged by another dog outside and the two of them were trying to fight each other, through the gate. In order to increase the excitement, one pupil opened the gate and the dogs fought in the playground. Miss Allen came out from her house, waving her revolver, and to our

delight actually fired it, scaring off the other dog. We found it a bit of an anticlimax, the gun did not make much noise and the intruder dog was not shot.

In the farm across the Green, lived Tom Beech and his sister. Tom was walking around the farm, with a loaded shot gun, and used it to push some bushes into a gap in a hedge. The gun went off, and as he had his hand over the end of the barrel, it was blown to pieces. He continued to farm, with a hook, but must have been a bit accident prone as he had an incident with his wagon and a train.

There was a level crossing over the railway, between fields on the Towcester side of Caldecote road, with notices saying 'open the far gate first', so that horses and implements cross over quickly, but he opened the near gate first and left his wagon on the track whilst he opened the far gate. He opened it in time, but not soon enough for the wagon to clear the track and it was smashed up by the train. The horses were clear of danger and bolted across the field with the two front wheels, shafts and turntable of the wagon. I remember the wreckage remained in the field for some considerable time after the incident.

Another character was George Chambers, always known as 'Blind George'. He lived on his own, in one of the cottages near the pub. He had been blind since childhood and was most remarkable in what he could do. He walked every evening, through the churchyard, across the fields to the road. At that time the field was divided into two by iron railings and a clap-gate in the middle, which he managed to find. He went on to St. Johns School to collect a bundle of evening papers, delivered by bus (at that time it would have been the Northampton Mercury, before the Chronicle and Echo began) and delivered them on his way home. I remember when my twin brothers were babies and the nurse was at our house, someone called for her to attend Blind George as he had been knocked down by a cow. He carried on, just the same, with his papers – what a remarkable man!

In more modern times, one of my brothers was very keen on archaeology and belonged to Towcester Archaeology Society. Just before he died, he did some research in Tiffield and became interested in the earthworks near to the brook in the field behind our old house (opposite the Church). He believed it to be the site of a mill. I do not know what evidence he had but I passed all his notes, etc. to Towcester Archaeology Society, if anyone is interested in investigating it further.

When I was a boy there was more water in the brook than at present, so a water mill may be feasible. During the war, the brook was dammed up in two places to provide water for the Auxiliary Fire Service, who used to come and practice on the green occasionally. The water accumulated to a fair depth, as my brother disappeared completely underwater when he fell in.

Cyril E. Whitehead
11.10.2011

↑ UPPER FARM
FOSSETTED CURCUS

1 2 3 4

PUMP 5

PUB 6

7

8

9

10

23

24

GETTY

CHURCH 12

SHOP 13

14

15

16

PUMP 17

25

26

27

28

PUMP 29

RE-TOUCH

17

18

19

20

PUMP

CHURCH 30

FOOT PATH

21

PUMP

31

34 35

22

VILLAGE GREEN

32

33

36

37

38

PUMP 39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

PUMP 51

52

FOOT PATH

ORCHARD

Block

TO CALDEOTE

RAILWAY

TO TOWSTER

FARM LEVEL CROSSING

- 34 MR MRS W. WHITEHEAD - BOB. *not there now*
35 MISS EYDON. SISTER OF W. EYDON. *not there now*
36 SCHOOL HOUSE MISS L. ALLEN. *not there now*
37 SCHOOL
38 MR MRS WATTS. *not there now*
39 MR MRS PINNARD
40 MR MRS WILLIAMS, CLAUDE. CORNA.
41 MRS HANCOCK DEMOLISHED
42 MR MRS C. ROBINS DEMOLISHED
43 MRS HEBBES EXTENDED
44 FARM BUILDINGS NOW DEMOLISHED
45 MR MRS JACK KINGSTON SNA & JACK,
46 NOW DEMOLISHED ?
47 MR MRS G. NOBLE. GERARDE, DOLIS ARTHUR, KATHLEEN
48 MR MRS BURT
49
50 MR MRS G. GEORGE, HARRY NOEL RONNIE ROY. NOW EXTENDED
51 MR MRS CAPEL HAZEL - GRAND DAUGHTER

40 HOUSES

JUST OVER 100 INHABITANTS

NO ELECTRICITY

NO GAS

NO MAINS WATER

NO MAINS DRAINAGE.

JETTY - PATHWAY TO HALT ON RAILWAY. LITTLE USED

TIFFIELD RESIDENTS EARLY 1930'S

- 1 MR. & MRS VICKERS
- 2 MR MRS G. NURSER
- 3 MR & MRS J. DUNKLEY, AUDREY & CONNIE
- 4 MR & MRS W. GOSTLOW. NANCY, VIOLET. JACK MARY
- 5 PUMP.
- 6 GEORGE PUBLIC HOUSE. MR & MRS HANLEY OLIVE. JOHN. ENA DAVIES Niece.
- 7 MR & MRS G. BODSWORTH SNR. HARRY.
- 8 MR MRS M. WOOTTON.
- 9 MR BILL WOOTTON.
- 10 MR GEORGE CHAMBERS (BORN GEORGE.)
- 11 MR & MRS JACK CHAMBERS
- 12 CHAPEL.
- 13 SHOP MR & MRS THOMPSON
- 14 MR & MRS BEN KINGSTON - FRED
- 15 MR MRS NURSER SNR.
- 16 MR MRS PAYLER. ALSO POST OFFICE.
- 17 READING ROOM.
- 18 MRS HARRISON.
- 19 MR MRS G. BODSWORTH JNR.
- 20 MR MRS A.E. WHITEHEAD. CYRIL ALAN & RAY.
- 21 MR MRS GOODRIDGE.
- 22 MR TOM BEECH. MISS E. BEECH. BERTHA WOODS (Niece.)
- 23 BARN.
- 24 MR MRS H. PINKARD. ANNIE & UNCLE - PINKARD.
- 25 MR & MRS BOB WOOD. BINK CORA FRANK. MICKY DUNNE - (FOSTERED)
- 26 BARN
- 27
- 28 COACH HOUSE, STABLES, HARNESS ROOM, HORSE BOX.
- 29 RECTORY Rev & MRS PRITCHATT - SHAW.
- 30 CHURCH
- 31 MR W. LITTON. FLORENCE CONNIE FRANK
- 32 FORGE.
- 33 SAW SHOP NOW CONVERTED