



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Memories of Growing Up in Cleeve Prior- Sue Taylor and Lin Hawkins

Sue and Lin Vickeridge's father and grandfather were born in Cleeve Prior. There have been Vickeridge's in the village from about 1730 when Richard Vickeridge was the parish clerk. After the Second World War, about 1946 when Sue was just a young girl, Sue and Lin's parents returned to Cleeve Prior, living first in The Old Cottage, Main Street, moving to Hoden Lane to the cottage known as "Tiltops End" in late 1949-50. Sue and her brother Rob had been born at Murcott, near Broadway, where her mother had been living whilst her father was away on war service. Lin was born at The Old Cottage not long after her parents moved back to Cleeve Prior. Sue left the village in 1962, returning in 2001, but Lin has lived here all her life.

Cleeve Prior Village

Field Barn:-

In the 1950s the Evesham Road, from Sun Court all the way into the Littleton's, was market garden strips on both sides of the road, which were rented to self-employed market gardeners. Sue and Lin's grandfather rented a market garden near Field Barn, on the opposite side of the road from what is now the drive to the Travellers Site, and Sue often used to play in the barn, which was used by many of the market gardeners for storage. A distant relative kept a horse in the stables where the kitchen is today, and the south wing was divided into rented units where the market gardeners would wash and tie onions.

Evesham Road:-

As you entered the village along the main road from Evesham was "Sunnyside" which was later changed to "Sun Court".



Gertrude Myers Home

Sue and Lin's grandmother, Kate Vickeridge (née Brooks) worked in service at Sunnyside at the time of the First World War. Then there was the Gertrude Myers nursing home, (originally named "Bentley"), which in the 1950s still had patients.

Mill Lane:-

Near the junction of Mill Lane with the main road was John Sheaf's farm "Baytree farm". Some of the houses in West End were originally farm buildings belonging to Baytree farm, and it remained a working farm up until the early 1990s, when it was sold for development and the new houses were built in 1994.

Mill Lane had 2 Victorian houses up on the right-hand side, then there was a cherry orchard and 2 white semi-detached houses, now called "White Gates" and "Feldon". The large detached property, known as The Harrison House (now "The Red House") was next and was built after the war, with nothing else until Mill Lane Nurseries.



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Along the ridge and bridle path towards Marlcliffe was an old tin bungalow and the large house "Brades". Coming back down Mill lane on the other side, at the top was "Priorsleigh" and a brick bungalow "Wendor" but nothing else until the Gertrude Myers gardens.

Near where Mill Lane Nurseries stands there used to be a gate across the lane, which was still there up to the late 1960s, but wasn't used since the war. This was a hangover from the 1920s and 30s when Cleeve Prior was known as the "Riviera of the Midlands".



The Mill had tea rooms and tourists came from all over the Midlands to relax and have picnics by the river. Those who came by car had to pay 1p to a young lad to open the gate. Sue does not remember the mill or the tearooms at the riverside and she understood that it was demolished about 1938/9 and much of the stone was reused to build the house known locally as "The Temple", which is now known as "Manor Cottage" on the road to Marlcliff.

Main Street: –

The road layout between Mill Lane junction and Froglands Lane was different than today, being more like an S curve which went close to the entrance of Archers Farm, (known locally as "Top Farm") and known today as Prior House. Before the First World War, Top Farm was owned by the Smithin family.

Opposite Prior House there used to stand an old stone-built house dating from 1600s, originally the home of the Charletts family, but known by the local children as the "Haunted House". The popular local anecdote that they were told as children, was that the occupants that lived there at some time in the distant past did a "moonlight flit" and left the house as if it was still occupied, with food in the larder and fully fitted with ornaments etc, reminiscent of the "Marie Celeste".



After this, the house was left empty and gradually fell into disrepair and as children they remember it being a ruin and overgrown. Charletts was knocked down during the 1960s, enabling the road layout to be changed. John Arkell's house, "Cleeve Barn", was a barn conversion from one of the barns of Top farm opposite, and the demolished old house stood in what is now the gardens of Cleeve Barn. The building complex at Tom Carr's house (now also known as "Top Farm") was also part of the farmyard of the original Top Farm, which incorporated all the land along Froglands Lane, including that which is now part of Claire Dyson's racing stables. The Smithin family also owned Kingsmoor farm in Hoden Lane.



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The former council houses in "The Close" started construction about 1947/8 and were built for returning servicemen. The Close took a long time to build because of the shortage of materials after the war. Shortly afterwards, in the early 1950s the council houses in Nightingale Lane were similarly built, and Sue remembers her schoolmistress, Ida Staff, lived in one of these houses, Number 6, from when it was new. However the main construction project at this time was the improvement of the sewage system and installation of the sewer drains into the whole of the village, which went on for months, if not years. This caused havoc for transport, particularly in Hoden Lane.

Further developments took place in the Close in the late 1960s when the Retirement bungalows were built, in two separate phases, which were followed in the 1980s with the new houses around to the hammer head. Further houses were built in 2000, extending the road as far as Quarry Lane, and the latest development in 2015 is the new houses currently being built behind the Retirement bungalows, towards the Millennium Green.

Moving east along Main Street, the land next to The Laurels was developed as a new build complex in the mid-1980s. (Albert Leese's house). Sue remembers the building now known as "Shearwood" as a warehouse, where downstairs they made boxes for fruit-picking, and upstairs was an egg collection station. Attached to Shearwood, next to the Old Post Office, there used to be an old corrugated iron shed which, formally before the war, housed the fire station, but the apparatus was simply a hand pump. This lean-to remained until the late 1960's when it was demolished as part of the re-development of Shearwood.

Hoden Lane: –

In the 1950s, Hoden Lane was largely undeveloped, with Mill House on the junction with Main Street, leading to Cleeve Prior Garage, the old thatched barn known as "Fred Cook's Hovel" (now the Coach House) immediately next to the two cottages just before Kingsmoor farm, and the village ended at the house now known as Meadow View. In the 1920s, Fred Cook's hovel housed the village coffin-maker.

About 1960, whilst still at school, Lin had a weekend job at the Mill House Tearooms as a waitress. Mill House Tearooms started after the Second World War and was very popular during the 1950s. After the Gertrude Myers Home closed in 1964, the customer numbers reduced, and Mill House was sold. The tearooms were taken over but eventually closed in the late 1960s, and Mill House was divided into 2 dwellings.





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What is now the playing fields next to the school used to be allotments and orchards and the playing fields were not developed until the mid-1950s, thought to be by using funds from the Queen's Coronation celebrations? The bungalows next to Kingsmoor farm were built in the late 1960's on the farm's apple orchard. Shortly afterwards, Sue and Lin's father, who owned the land on the opposite side of Hoden Lane from the farm, (ie between their cottage "Tiltops End" up to the driveway to Kingsmoor farm), sold the land for development and the detached houses were built during the mid-1970s.

In the early 1960s Mr Priest had a bungalow built which was knocked down to build Long Acre in 2002. Cyril Jinks sold the land to Barry Banner to build Pear Tree Cottage, possibly in the 1970s.

Travelling further along the lane the agriculture was mainly market gardening up to Greenhill; Greenhill was built about 1948/9 for Jenny and Cecil Stock (Cecil was always known as "Joe"). At the very end of the lane was Hoden farm and "Far Hoden", where there were two old workmen's cottages, which were knocked down when the farm was sold in 1960's and where the new farmhouse now stands.

The Bidford Road:-

Opposite the Kings Arms pub was Home Farm which is now owned by the Hadrill family. As children, Lin remembers the maiden sisters, Misses Stock, living there. Home farm's barns have now being converted to residential use, but the original pigsties have been retained as part of the re-development.



Next to the Kings Arms and the row of cottages was Lynwood, Sharrow and The Den, with The Vicarage opposite and then nothing until The Manor House.

The Manor complex was redeveloped in 1989, but many of the original farm buildings were retained as barn conversions. Manor Court was built shortly before this.



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Farms: –

There were five farms in Cleeve Prior when they were children:

- 1) Bay Tree Farm
- 2) Archers Farm, also known as Top Farm
- 3) Home Farm (by the church)
- 4) The Manor
- 5) Kingsmoor Farm.



Jack Ankers

During the 1950s Jack Ankers, (who lived in the Council Houses on Evesham Road, opposite Field Barn, and whose mother lived at "Lynwood" near the Kings Arms), had a smallholding along Hoden Lane towards Greenhill. He kept a small herd of milking cows which were milked at cow sheds behind "Sharrow". Every morning and again in the evening, he would bring the cows down Hoden Lane and along the main road past the pub to the milking sheds, and Sue and Lin can remember watching the cows pass by in front of their cottage. It was also common for local farmers to move their herds of sheep to new pastures through the village along Main Street.

Shops: –

There were five shops in Cleeve Prior:

- 1) The Post Office, which also did postcards, knitting wool, and ladies accessories. This closed in the mid-1970s, at which time the PO counter business was transferred to Hillcrest Stores.
- 2) Hillcrest Stores, also known as "Top Shop", was a general stores, mainly selling groceries but also a few sweets. This was located in Hillcrest Cottage, opposite Kemises House, which together with "Weavers Barn" originally formed one property, of which Hillcrest was the shop and "Weavers" was the storeroom and, for some time, a tearooms. The Tearooms was regularly used as a refreshment-stop by Cycle clubs during the 1950s and groups of cyclists were often seen there. The Post Office Counter was transferred to Hillcrest Stores when the PO closed, and it continued to operate the Post Office business until the late 1980's.
The property had previously been bought by Mr and Mrs Garrett and it was they who converted the storeroom/barn into a residential house, Weavers Barn, for their retirement whilst they continued to run the shop. The shop finally closed in the 1990's.
- 3) Squirrel cottage was a shop run by Mr and Mrs Stevens who also kept a herd of goats. Mrs Stevens made ice cream, which before the war, she used to sell down at the



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riverside. In the early 1950s, Sue and Lin remember taking their sweet coupons there, because Mrs Stephens was their family grocer.

- 4) Noakes and Crofts. They were Grocers in Bidford who also had a branch in Cleeve, housed in the building that eventually became the bungalow opposite the War Memorial Hall where Sue lived on her return to the village. The shop in CP was open during the 1930s but closed before the war. During the war the building (then called Sunnymead) was used to billet Officers.
- 5) The Mill House Tea Rooms (Main St). The Mill House Tearooms started after the Second World War and finished in the late 1960s.

Historical Note: during the First World War and 1920s, there was a cigarette and sweet shop in West End near Back Lane. This had closed by the 1940s.

[The Chronicler confirms this was in Priors Close & was run by a Mrs Howe]

The Village School:-



Both Sue and Lin attended the village school until the age of 11. It consisted of one room divided by a curtain, to separate the Infant School pupils from the Junior School pupils. Originally, around the back of the building there were outdoor toilets, which Sue remembers, but when Lin started in 1951, indoor toilets had been constructed. Heating was provided by a coke fuelled stove in the centre of the back wall, which must have been adequate because they don't remember ever feeling cold while at school.

There were approx. 12-15 infants, and 20 juniors, who included pupils not only from Cleeve Prior but also from Barton, Marlcliff and Bickmarsh.

School dinners were transported from Blackminster School and were taken in the Memorial Hall. The Infants schoolteacher, Mrs Smithin, taught the children the proper etiquette of how to use a knife, fork and spoon properly:

"You don't work for the council, so don't use your fork as a shovel".

Mrs Smithin lived at The Old Thatch, which in those days, was a traditional thatched cottage.

The school was a Church of England school and therefore had a lot of connection with St Andrews Church, including routinely attending Church services for religious celebrations such as Harvest Festival etc. All the pupils went to church on Maundy Thursday and then were given the rest of the day off which formed the start of their Easter holidays. The vicar of St Andrew's led morning assembly at school once a week.



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Cleeve Prior trip to Wixstead Park Probably 1953/54

In addition to the normal academic lessons, part of the curriculum was practical instruction such as craft lessons, and the pupils also looked after the school garden. Lin helped plant some small saplings, which now have grown into the large trees that can be found along the Main Street boundary of the playing fields.

At the age of 11 all the pupils took the 11+ examination, and then went on to secondary school at either: –

Blackminster secondary modern
Evesham County secondary modern,
Prince Henry Grammar School

Transport to secondary school was by the public bus services – 148 bus to and from Evesham. School hours were 9 AM to 3:45 PM, so they caught the 8:10 AM bus to Evesham and the 4:20 PM or 4:45 PM bus back home.

Other village institutions:-

The Church:-

The Church was very important to village life in the 1950s. It organised many social activities in addition to the normal religious services. There was the choir and the bell ringers, Sunday school, the youth club, and the mothers union. The bell ringers travelled widely to both perform and practice. A big part of village life for the younger residents was the youth club which was held in a building belonging to the Vicarage, which is now "Curates Cottage".

The vicar would visit everyone in the village especially when somebody was ill, irrespective of whether or not they attended church services.

The War Memorial Hall:-

The War Memorial Hall was the social hub of the village. There were regular socials and dances which were attended by all age groups; whist drives were held regularly and the WI was well attended.

The Queen's Coronation was a big celebration in 1953 and Lin performed at the Memorial Hall as part of the occasion, singing "How much is that doggy in the window?" accompanied by Mike Selby playing piano.

Sue used to go to the country dancing club which was held in the Memorial Hall



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Village people:-

General:-

During the extremely severe winter of 1947 the village was cut off and no-one could get in or out. The men of the village dug a path through the thick snow by hand, all the way to Bidford on Avon, and the snow stayed around for weeks.

Mr and Mrs Wellon

Mr Wellon lived at Honeysuckle Cottage, Hoden Lane, next door to Sue and Lin. He seemed very ancient to 2 young girls, and he was always taking snuff. He was the chauffeur at Gertrude Myers nursing home, and drove the home's ambulance. When he retired he had a job mending boxes at the warehouse which is now "Shearwood". He was the church verger, and also the gravedigger.



Other duties were pumping the church organ, and he muffled and tolled the bell when people died. Mrs Wellon laid the bodies out ready for the funeral.

Mr Wellon always used to sit on the wall outside his cottage.

Tommy Sparrow

Tommy Sparrow was old man who lived at Lilac Cottage on Main Street. He always seemed to be sat on his bench outside the front of his cottage, smoking his pipe, watching the world go by. He was usually with Elsie Mumford who would be dressed in her apron.

Isabel Mumford

On the opposite side of the road, at Kemises Cottage, lived Isabel Mumford who was always smoking a cigarette, and kept numerous Persian cats.

Mr and Mrs Sheldon

Mr Roberts, the village blacksmith, used to live at Blacksmiths Cottage on Main Street, which was a workers cottage owned by The Manor. After the war in 1947, his widow moved into one of the council houses, and Blacksmiths Cottage was then assigned to Mr and Mrs Sheldon who were an elderly couple who also worked for The Manor, looking after the poultry. They would often ask local children to run errands for them because they had difficulty walking. Sue and Lin used to try and creep past without being seen so as to avoid being collared to go to the shops for them.

A Bourne

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