

WOODBURY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

2014 NEWSLETTER



Picture 1938 in France.



Picture taken 1999 - but still the same!

*Despite fears that there may not be enough content for this years newsletter, two stories came forward which shed a very good light on 'Day's of Old'.
The newsletter is now bigger than ever!*

Frank Authers BEM (left), now aged 94, who lives in Nutwell, served 30 years in the RAF from 1938 to 1968. Born in Tiverton, he tells of an earlier life in the Royal Devon Yeomanry, and also recalls his childhood days in Tiverton. This same type of story could equally have happened in Woodbury.

Reg Brown (right), came to Woodbury in 1939 as a seven-year-old evacuee, and his association with the area has subsequently spanned 75 years to date. He has always taken a great interest in the changes that have taken place in the Parish, and in it's wellbeing. He recounts his memories of the post war years in Woodbury.

Gillian Selley has written about Major Robert Masefield who was killed in WW1, and Nancy Grist has written about her family's war memories.

~ MEMORIES OF WOODBURY 1936-38 ~

Seeing the pictures of the horses of the Yeomanry on Woodbury Common reminds me of the times that I used to spend there whilst serving in The Royal Devon Yeomanry in 1936, 1937 and 1938.

The RDY was a territorial force, into which I was enlisted on the 11th September 1936 at the age of 16. My older brother, Ron, encouraged me to join, and put my age on by 2 years to do so, his reason being that anyone recruiting a new member was given a RDY silver spoon.

We were a Tiverton based unit, and some Sundays we were trucked down to Woodbury Common complete with our 18 pounder field guns and limbers, (the trailer carrying the shells), for exercises on the common. These were practice only, no live firing.

I remember a man, who I believe was a Woodbury baker, coming up on the common at lunch time, to supply us with a large, warm pastry and two small bottles of beer each. But the highlight of the day for me was, that at about 4-30 pm we finished the day's practice firing and were taken down into the Woodbury Village Hall where we were given a most scrumptious tea. It comprised of platefuls of sandwiches, with dozens of chudleighs and cream. There was also plenty of jelly and blancmange etc. This was all served up by several ladies who I presume were employed by this same local baker. It really was one of the best teas ever, and greatly appreciated by all of us.

I later got my younger brother Denis to enlist, by putting his age on a couple of years, so as to get my silver spoon, which I still have to this day. I think he had a problem trying to get my sister to join, and he was only in about 12 months when WW2 broke out. He was called up immediately, still only 16 and always joked afterwards about his brother selling him to the army for 6 years of war, just to get a silver spoon!

I left the RDY in August of 1938, as I enlisted as a regular in the RAF, to which I went on to serve a total of 30 years, retiring in 1968, to come here to live in Woodbury Parish. I have written a book of my 30 years service in the RAF and it is available from me for £8-00 on 01392 874171. Should anyone be interested, just give me a ring.

Frank Authers

~ THE EARLY LIFE OF FRANK AUTHERS ~

I was born in Tiverton Devon on July 1st 1920, my father was a Baker and Confectioner in the town, in business with his brother Fred. I was christened Bernard Frank, and was always called Bernard, but never really liked the name, so when I joined the RAF, I had the opportunity to use my second Christian name of Frank, except on official documents etc., and it has been that way ever since. I had an older brother Ron, a younger brother Dennis, and a younger sister Daphne. There was also an even younger sister Monica, who unfortunately died at about 4 years old, of what we now know as leukaemia. I would say we had a very happy childhood generally. The 20s and 30s were quite hard times to be brought up in, on reflection.

We went to the local schools, Heathcoat School for Boys for us boys, and Heathcoat School for Girls, for my sister. None of us had any academic ambitions, and couldn't wait to leave school at 14 to earn money, which was generally in short supply in those days. Heathcoat school was very good really for an elementary, as they were then called. It was quite strict, 9 till 4 with 12 to 1:30 for dinner, which we had to go home for, a distance of just over a mile, so no time to waste. Holidays were nowhere near what the kids have today, I think it was a week at Easter, 4 weeks in the summer, and a week at Xmas. Half terms were a Friday afternoon off. So although we left school at 14, it's possible that we had as much instruction as today's kids leaving at 16.

We had an ex WW1 Sgt. Major for PT and outdoor activities who was a strict disciplinarian. He also dealt with truants, so there wasn't many of those! The cane was used quite a lot, and also detention with line writing. One of the teachers also had a punishment of his own, of wrapping your finger knuckles with a pencil whilst still teaching the rest of the class. It could go on for some considerable time, so you didn't upset him too often. The only day, on occasion, that I didn't go home for dinner was a Tuesday. It was Tiverton market day and I would go up the market where I got to know a farmer who bought sheep there, and after school at 4 o'clock I would go back and assist him to drive the sheep out to his farm at Halberton. Sheep are inclined to follow a person, so I would have to walk in front of the flock, with him at the rear. There was very little motorised traffic about in those days to bother us, but sometimes it was not easy with them making a bolt

for an open gateway, or a side road. I would get 6d for this. The distance was about 3 miles each way. There was very little organised entertainment for youngsters, apart from the occasional visit to the "Pictures", as cinemas were then known as. On a Saturday afternoon it cost 2d, about 1p in today's money, with perhaps a half an old penny to spend on sweets, if we could afford it. This was very rare, and a real treat.

We three boys, well mostly Ron and I, as Dennis was considered the baby, spent most of our young days, even up to teenage, in the fields bordering the River Lowman, which was near our home.

The Lowman is a tributary of the Exe, and joins the Exe at Tiverton. These fields were known to us as the "Hams". I have no idea where the name came from. The first field was of course, 1 Hams, and so on up to 5 Hams, where there was a wooded area, known to us as "Paradise". It was very beautiful around this area, all hilly with mini valleys and glens, with little streams running through them, and many local families would take picnics there, on sunny Sunday afternoons. All these fields were owned by local farmers, and were all meadows, with either cattle or sheep grazing them. We were never challenged regarding trespass, there was no vandalism and the country code was always respected. Beyond Paradise were about 3 more fields, they led to the source of the river. This was called "Head Weir". During the nesting season, I used to go along all these fields, following the river searching for moorhen nests, and depending how many eggs were in the nest and to what stage they were, I would relieve the nest of two or three. They would lay up to about 14, so it was of little or no consequence. I would take the eggs home, and make a large omelette for my tea, lovely! The moorhen was also known as a "Dabchick" or "Coot", and I got the nickname for a time as "Coot Authers". Thank goodness it didn't stick! Daphne, our sister was never ever included in our activities. I can't really explain why, probably she wasn't considered tough enough for our self made life style in the open.

For all the summer months, a gang of us boys would get an old Bell tent from the local scout group, pitch it in the field at 1st Hams, and live in it for several weeks, going home for odd meals, but cooking sausages etc. ourselves on an open fire. One of the gang of boys was the son of a butcher, and with the lack of refrigeration in those days, he would be given any left over sausages and other bits at the end of the day, Saturdays in particular, as there is no way it would be fit to sell on the Monday. This always made a good fry up.

For those not familiar with a Bell tent, it is a round tent with a centre pole only, in which everyone slept with their feet to the pole, and accommodated about twelve. We used to dam the river at this point to make it deep enough for swimming in, and we really did have a damn good time, with never any interference from the local farmer, families of us kids, or authorities. It was a good camp fire in the evenings with singing, at which we were sometimes joined by parents.

The river had quite a lot of brown trout in it, and we were always trying to catch them, by the "tickling" method. This was by finding one resting just under the bank by the edge of the river always pointing up stream, gently swimming against the current. The trick then was to quietly and stealthily lay on the bank and gently put your hand into the water to the rear of the fish, gently stroke its stomach with your finger. This seemed to mesmerise the trout, and then you put your hand underneath him, and quick as a flash whipped him out onto the bank. This only worked very occasionally, but I got better at it, and sometimes had a trout supper. The anglers used to chase us off if they found us doing it. We also used to put night lines down to catch eels. They would be hidden along the bank of the river, and checked the next morning. We caught quite a few, but I always gave mine away, as I didn't fancy them. We also used to set rabbit snares, and I was very good at this, and rabbit was often on our menu. I really loved this open air life, and was rarely indoors.

Also as young boys, we used to go up to these numerous fields that surrounded our home, at harvest time to watch the farmer mowing by horse. We noticed that he stopped occasionally, and took a swig from an earthenware jar, which was left at the edge of the field. We discovered that this jar contained cider, the real rough stuff that farmers made themselves, so we used to go to the other side of the hedge nearest where the jar was left, wait for the farmer to get to the other side of the field, then get through the hedge and have a swig of his "Scrumpy" as it was called. I think this was more bravado than anything else, as it was pretty horrible stuff, and to go home a bit tight at 9 or 10 years old wasn't very wise, as my Dad would have got his razor strop out, as he was a teetotaler. He did occasionally use this strap on us, when we deserved it. I think Ron got it most with me coming a close second. No real harm done though, perhaps it was a good thing.

We also used to assist local farmers when they were corn cutting. This was done by a horse drawn reaper and binder, it would cut the crop and bind it

with cord, which would get discharged onto the ground. We would follow, picking up these sheaves and stacking them in bundles of about 6 to 8 in stooks, with the ears of the corn to the top.

These would stay for several days before being picked up and thrashed, usually by a steam engine driving the thrashing machine, which sorted the grain from the chaff, (which was the seeds of weeds etc), that had grown in the crop, (hence the saying, sorting the wheat from the chaff).

The reaper always started on the outside of the field and went round in ever decreasing circles until it reached the centre. This meant that any rabbits that were in with the crop at the time, used to have to keep going inwards, until the point was reached that they had to make a run for it.

This was another "perk", as the rabbits could not run on the newly cut stubble, it was too sharp for their feet, so with a good stout stick with a knobbed end we could easily dispatch them. The ones that did get past us were usually shot by others standing at the edges of the field. Rabbit was a very popular food in those days, it was before the disease of myxomatosis was introduced into this country as a means of rabbit control. This put people off from eating them, but I used to love it, and some times on a Saturday evening, (that was the night that my Mum and Dad usually went to the cinema), I would make a stew of one, with veg, and eat it for my supper.

Another farming job I did was "dung spreading", not very often mind, as it was a winter job, and pretty horrible, but earned a shilling or two. The dung heaps were placed in the fields using a tipping cart pulled by a horse. They were positioned in even rows and so spaced as to be able to scatter the dung in all directions from where it was placed, so that the whole field would have an even coating of it. How labour intensive every job was in those days, no wonder we never had time for vandalism, mugging etc. Kids today don't know they've been born, and I'm sure we were a darn sight happier too. I went back to the area of my child hood some years ago, but it is mostly unrecognisable, built up with housing, and the river is not much more than a large stream. Funny how it is never the same when you grow up.

The bakers business folded during the hard times of the early 30s, and my father eventually got a fairly low paid job with Tiverton's main employer, the Heathcoat Lace factory, as did my 2 brothers and sister, on leaving school.

We three boys had done milk rounds twice a day from the age of 12, in all weathers, to bring a few more shillings into the household. We kept nothing for ourselves, as it wasn't the done thing, and was never considered. I was doing my milk round one day when I was approached by a lady teacher I knew. She told me that her brother, who had a local butchers business, was looking for a good strong lad such as me, to work for him, (fancy being head-hunted at 12 years of age)! I went to see her brother, Ted Penny, at his shop in Westexe North, Tiverton, and was given the job, which was delivering meat orders in and around Tiverton, all day on Saturdays, and any other times out of school hours that I could. This led on to full time employment when I left school at 14, for a wage of 10 shillings a week, (50p), for about 50 to 60 hours work. Apart from doing the deliveries, I used to assist in the cutting up of carcases in the shop, making sausages, and with the slaughtering. As with most butchers businesses in those days, all the animals were bought on the "hoof", and we even had to collect them from the farms sometimes. If we had to collect one bullock, which was usually the case, we would have to drive 3 or 4 into the slaughterhouse, leave the one, then drive the other 2 or 3 back to the farm, as it is not possible to drive a single animal on its own. This could be a distance of several miles each way. They were then slaughtered by the butchers in their own slaughterhouses. Ours was a small one with a little paddock bordering on the river Lowman, and although it is difficult to believe in these days of strict hygiene, this slaughterhouse had neither electricity nor running water. Every drop of water used had to be dipped out of the river, mostly by me. This was in 1933/4. Things changed with the bringing in of humane killing, whereby all animals had to be shot, stunned or electrocuted. The place was modernised, enlarged, water and electricity connected, and was made into a public abattoir, which other Tiverton butchers were able to use. Their own, small and unhygienic slaughterhouses were then closed down. I learnt a lot in a short time, and when I left school at 14 years old, I carried on working for Ted Penny and his partner Jim Rawle. It was from Jim that I learnt most of the slaughtering, and I was actually killing sheep on my own before I was 15. My wages at this time were 10/- (50 p) a week plus a small joint of beef for my mum on the Saturday, usually something left over, that no one wanted. The value of the joint would be about 1/- to 1/3d. (5 to 7p).

I soon discovered a few other "perks" as time went by. One of them was that a lot of lambs and porkers were killed which went to Smithfield wholesale market in London. A lorry which had picked up bananas from the docks at Plymouth and had dropped them off at the wholesalers in Exeter, came on to our place to pick up the carcasses for London. The driver used to sweep all the straw out of the bottom of the lorry from where the bananas had been, and we used this straw for animal bedding. I found that there were quite a number of loose bananas in this straw, and although they were

small and very green, if I took them home and put them in the airing cupboard they soon ripened up. I did this quite regularly, gathering them up in a sack, mostly by feel, as it was generally dark by the time he got to us, not knowing that there were often Tarantulas in this straw that had been in the bunches of bananas. I got to be a bit careful after knowing this, and invested in a torch, (1/4d). Another perk that earned me 6d (2½p) a time was, I supplied a man who kept greyhounds with sheep's paunches (stomachs). These were a waste product in the butchering trade at that time. I just washed them out put them in a sack or basket and took them to his house in my own time. He then cooked them and fed them to his dogs, as tripe. The other little "earner", and I stress little was, I used to catch pigs blood, from the pigs as they were slaughtered, in a large tin with a wire handle, and take it to a lady who had a cooked meat shop in Bampton Street. She used it in the making of Black puddings, which were very sought after. Needless to say, I have never touched one in my life! I used to have to keep stirring it up on the way there to stop it from clotting. She either gave me 2d or 3d (1 or 2p), or sometimes a bar of chocolate that had been in stock for some time.

My brother Ron had joined the Royal Devon Yeomanry, which was a territorial force, and if a member got another recruit for the force they were given a silver regimental spoon, so he got me to join by putting my age on from 16 to 18. I enjoyed this, we had drill periods on Friday nights, odd Sundays on Woodbury Common and an annual fortnights camp on Salisbury plain, and we had 18 pounder field guns. Well, I fancied one of these spoons, so got my younger brother Dennis to join by putting his age on. I don't think he was even 16 when I gave his age as 18. There was never any check on this, I think if you looked the part, you were in. Anyway, I got my spoon, and still have to this day, and quite proud of it. I left Tiverton and butchering in August 1938 and joined the Royal Air Force.

The sequel to the episode of getting Dennis to join the R.D.Y. was that in just over 12 months, war had been declared on Germany, and poor Den was called up immediately to serve, and still only 16 years old. He often laughed about in later years with me, about how I had sold him to the army and 6 years of war for a silver spoon. He claims he had to stay 18 years old for a good 2 years for his age to catch up!

Ron had joined the Royal Engineers in 1936 and went out to Singapore in 1937. He was later captured there by the Japanese and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. Dennis served mostly in England until "D" day, when he went to France. He was later wounded in Holland, and claims his life was saved by Nuns who found him and took

him in to their Nunnery.

Before I close this chapter on our younger lives in Tiverton, I must tell you that Ron and I joined the Tiverton Boxing Club and used to quite enjoy the evenings spent up there, either training, beating somebody else up or getting a good hiding ourselves. We were taught mostly by a couple of local policemen. There was very little other entertainment in those days, and this was the done thing. I carried on boxing in the RAF for a while, when I joined up, but gave it up after getting knocked out of the ring by a foul blow. Ron, however, carried on, and made quite a name for himself as an army and inter- services boxer. Another highlight of the year was the annual Tiverton Carnival. It was a torch light procession all around the town, and we kids were the one's to carry the torches, which were, a canister on top of a pole. The canister was filled with oil, and a large wick protruding out of the top of it was lit which gave a large naked flame. There must have been at least a hundred of these torches lining the procession, and how there was never any accidents, I don't know. For this we were paid 1/- (5p) which was very good.

Whilst working as a butcher, I used to go out fairly regularly with Jim Rawle, rabbiting. Jim had a large old square tanker motor cycle, with a rather large pillion seat raised on four springs on the back mudguard. He often gave me a lift home on it, and on early closing days and some other times, he would take me to farms way out in the country, for a spot of rabbiting. We mostly used ferrets, but occasionally it would be 12 bore shotguns. With the ferrets and nets it was a matter of finding a burrow, and placing a net over all the holes in that burrow, which meant both sides of the hedge of course, then slipping the ferret into one of the holes. The rabbits would then bolt out of the holes and get tangled in the net. We had to be fairly quick to grab them, before they struggled free, and dispatch them with a quick, broken neck. With the guns it was much the same procedure, without the nets in place. The rabbits would bolt to open field to be shot at, much more sporting. I was too young to have a gun myself, but was given the opportunity to use one occasionally, to quite good effect, I might add. The first time was quite frightening though, as I thought I'd blown my shoulder off. I was generally the ferret boy and general dogsbody. If a ferret did not come out of a hole after a reasonable amount of time, he was considered to be "laid up". That means he had he had stayed in the burrow for some reason, maybe he had cornered a rabbit in a blind hole, (one with no escape), or perhaps he had killed a rabbit in there. There was no way a ferret would be left behind, so it had to be found. One way was to listen at the various holes, and if you thought it was quite near, dig in towards it, putting your arm down the hole to feel for it. It was known for me to be pushed down one of these dug out holes, head first, to retrieve a ferret on occasions. Not very nice, but done without question, no room for wimps in that business. An easier way, was to entice them out, by paunching, (gutting) a newly caught rabbit near the

hole you thought the ferret may be laid up in. The smell of the warm entrails would sometimes bring him out. At the end of the session we would paunch and string up the kill, usually about 8 to 12. The farmer would have 2 or 3, I would usually get 2 and Jim would have the majority. They sold in those days for about 1/- (5p) each. Mine went home, they made a really good stew. I was given an old 12 bore shotgun when I was a little over 16, and became a full member of the shooting party. A few wild pigeons, and even the odd pheasant and partridge started to find their way on to our menu, that is, if they got in the way of my shot.

It was about this time that I acquired my own motor cycle. My wages at the butchers had gone up to 12/ (60p) a week. And with my bit of rabbiting and the other small perks, I was able to buy a 1927 Matchless 250 cc, with carbide gas lighting, from a fellow I knew for £4. I had no idea how to ride, we were out on a country road, and he explained the controls to me. It was a hand gear change, and a hand lever throttle. I rode it up and down this deserted road a few times, then I was off home. I enjoyed that bike, and took my test on it in Exeter, within a short time, and passed. This was in 1936. I sold the bike then to another lad in Tiverton, for £5, and thought I'd made a small fortune.

There was an undertaker in the yard next to our butchers shop. He was called Walter Squires. He had not long been married, and had a motor cycle covered up in the yard. It was a 1932 Matchless 500 cc. I managed to buy this off him for £5. It was a beauty, nice chrome tank with a big black M on it. It was a large beast, with massive power, compared to my 250 model, and nearly ran away with me the first time I let the clutch out. I'm sure he thought he would soon be getting another customer! I enjoyed many trips out on this and even rode it to camp, on Salisbury Plain, with the Yeomanry, in the summer of 1937. Our uniform was, khaki, button up to the neck tunic, with highly polished brass buttons, riding breeches and puttees, highly polished boots and gleaming nickel plated, silver spurs, with a peaked cap, and a riding crop which was carried at all times. This was the gear I rode to camp in, with a kit-bag lashed on the pillion. I must have thought I was the "dogs wotsits"!

Happy days!....

Frank Authers

~ WOODBURY—THE EARLY POST WAR YEARS ~

In the five years which elapsed between 1945-1950, I made only short annual holiday visits to Woodbury; two of the early ones travelling by train from Waterloo to Woodbury Rd. station, as it was still called, and then walking from Exton following the well-used path alongside Gilbrook to Ham Lane. Later, using the same route, I used a `carrier bike` which proved to be a most flexible and practical means of carrying luggage and getting around the parish in those days. (That is apart from walking!)



Woodbury Road station in 1914.

But, generally speaking, from this limited experience, change was almost imperceptible – the most noticeable being people gradually getting older! The reason for this otherwise unhurried emergence into the post-war era in Woodbury, seemed to stem from a main pre-occupation with re-establishing pre-war conditions, usually described as getting back to normal.

A rural rhythm of life is always in sharp contrast to an urban pace, and, it struck me quite forcibly at the time, the purposeful determination of ex-servicemen re-engaged in their vocations, to make up for lost time, carried more urgency in towns and cities than it did in the country. However, in the social sphere things were different as each evening most working men, by tradition, energetically re-engaged in the local clubs and the lively `pub-life`!



Woodbury Football team.

Most of Woodbury's pre-war football team donned their old shorts, socks and shirt, cleaned pre-war mud from their boots, and turned out once again on Saturday afternoon on the old pitch on farmer Crabbe's almost invariably waterlogged field above Higher Venmore Farm. (I can remember

Michael and Frank Miller and Vernon Radford were three of the regulars).

Initially, there was no great incentive or even a desire to modernise in Woodbury; both the conviction to do so and the opportunity still lay a fair way ahead. Besides which, there were no influential external pressures at this time as there were later.

This was, after all, `Austerity Britain` with its shortages, its limited national resources, its restricted imports, petrol and food rationing, and a socialist government pre-occupied with establishing a Welfare State and public ownership and, surprising from to-day's perspective, maintaining huge armed services to meet both the so-called `Cold war` and commitments within our Empire.

At this stage, too, small villages like ours had few re-building priorities as war-damaged urban areas had. Exeter, for example, began planning its reconstruction in 1945 and Thomas Sharp's `Exeter Phoenix`, as his scheme was called, was published (though not fully adopted), in 1946. Exeter's first priority was, however, to re-generate the city's disrupted commercial interests. This, on the whole, was an imperative which did not affect most surrounding rural areas whose modest and largely traditional local economies (predominantly based as it was on farming), had remained fairly stable, as did the general conduct of life which at this time in Woodbury still proceeded in a fairly leisurely manner.

Thus, within a largely easy-paced environment at this time, changes in farming attitudes and practices and patterns of local employment were hardly discernible from my viewpoint.

In 1954, after completing `Regular` service in the RAF, I was determined to settle in Woodbury and returned to Higher Venmore. But, at this point, I must mention an interesting and, as things turned out, quite fateful experience. One of my RAF friends was a Frenchman, born in England and thereby qualified to become one of the King's servicemen (despite not being able to speak but a few words of English) – this in preference to compulsory enlistment in the Foreign Legion at five francs a week! (This was equivalent to 1/- sterling or 5p to-day.) In return for hospitality I extended to him, taking his leave periods at my home, plus some basic language coaching, he generously reciprocated, in kind, with visits to his parent's home in northern

France and to his Gran's flat in Paris.

This was in 1950. The small northern French village happened to be called 'Bretteville-Sur-Odon'! Incidentally, he later signed on for twenty-one years and rose to the rank of Station Warrant Officer; but in such circumstances, the 'Twinning' with Woodbury some years later has always struck me as a remarkable coincidence.

With a Conservative Government, rationing ended immediately upon their return to power, in 1954. After my four and a half year's absence, and with just one major exception, I was still not aware of many other material changes, apart from a few more motor cars (half a dozen or so), and the odd TV aerial making an appearance on a few more chimney's.

Indeed, the major change was in-fact more chimneys! These were attached to the new 'Parkway' council house development; low-rent properties, with their two inside toilets and a bathroom, which not only marked the start of Woodbury's post-war housing expansion, but, more significantly, a recognition by local government of the need to provide low-income

local families in rural areas with decent, well-designed, modern homes. (Would that central government allow Local Authorities to pursue this policy to-day!) What was not anticipated, however, was a future need for off-street parking!

Another change which might now be seen, in modest contrast, as the beginning of a mechanical transition in agriculture, was the emergence of the 'Ferguson' tractor; a comparatively small but extremely robust, versatile



The new Parkway, which suffered a water shortage in 1952.

machine which almost every smaller local farmer now possessed; an innovation which led to the fairly rapid decline of the shire-horse. Although Bill Havill at Higher Venmore was one who kept his horses because he believed the hoeing of mangolds and swedes couldn't be done properly by any other means. (But at his time of life there was also a slice of sentiment as well as a need to please his wife, which in his case provided good reason to retain his pair in semi-retirement after years of faithful service).

At this time, also, under new 'TT Attested' herd-regulations, I do not believe any farmer in the parish continued to milk by hand; a statutory obligation but which also gave herdsmen the opportunity for a later start to the day, (a much appreciated luxury, especially on Sundays!)

But tractors and milking machines were practical working necessities; farmers, like other villagers, were not yet inclined to indulge in domestic luxuries, such as motor cars for pleasure! Those few farmers who did, usually owned much-abused pre-war models, regularly used by roosting chickens and for transporting calves and pigs to market!

In fact, in Woodbury households (generally conforming to debt-free principles, paying cash for things when savings allowed – credit cards were a very long way off in the future), even washing machines were considered an excessive indulgence; the weekly laundry traditionally remained a 'boil up' (or wash or scrubbing-board in the sink), then a rinse, mangle and flat-iron-process. (Most households did not possess electric irons, heating their heavier iron ones on cast-iron stoves!)

Except for kitchens, linoleum or stained boards was the preferred floor surface; wall-to-wall carpeting lay in the future, and loose carpets were stiff-brushed or beaten on a line. Indeed, even in the average household in 1954, vacuum cleaners and domestic appliances, such as electric kettles, food mixers and toasters were almost a generation away, when, usually desire finally coincided with an acceptance of the hire-purchase system as the means to achieve it! I doubt if there were more than a dozen private phones in the whole parish, which in Woodbury placed a great dependence on the two public phone-boxes. Most of Woodbury was still not on mains sewerage or water.

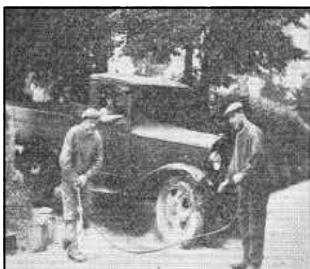
Succeeding the much venerated Dr. John Fulford, the Rev'd W N Williams

was vicar for just four years before Alec Osmond began his long tenure as vicar; he was to preside over Woodbury's most dramatic period of change.

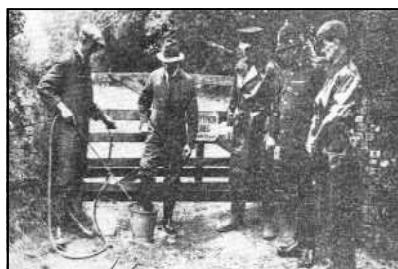
First, from the social-economic perspective: Agriculture had always exercised the strongest influence upon local life-styles, but between 1954 and 1962 changes in farming practices and patterns of employment were still gradual. The full impact of increased mechanisation was being suspended by the present generation of farmers whose numbers remained at a pre-war level, and who continued a predominately mixed-farming tradition, (many war-time subsidies remaining), and, for some, when it was still possible to earn a living from under fifty acres. Consequently, centuries-old cider orchards still flourished, field-patterns remained on the whole, the same as did the landscape, with pastures grazed by a wide variety of livestock, and the farming calendar continued to be punctuated by harvests familiar to generations before. It was still possible, for instance, to gather mushrooms at dawn from dewy meadows, wild strawberries from luxuriant unspoiled hedgerows, to encounter millions of grasshoppers making their noisy presence known in the long ripening grass, to experience hundreds of acres of spectacular springtime apple-blossom, to observe aerial displays of myriad butterflies in abundant clover meadows and enjoy the air-filled evening fragrance of wild honeysuckle!

Prominent among the modern innovators was Harry Stokes at 'Webbers' Farm, having pre-war established the first pedigree Friesian dairy-herd. An act of faith, despite previously losing his entire herd to Foot and Mouth disease in 1939 (believed to have been the only case in the country). With stringent bio-security, the slaughtered animals were buried in 'Path Fields'.

This tragedy serves as a reminder today of the precarious nature of dairy farming with the constant threat of Bovine TB. Harry was also the first local owner of a 'Combine' Harvester. After the war the nearest Friesian-herd rival were the Pynes at 'Postlake'.



Lorry being sprayed as precaution against spreading foot-and-mouth disease which has broken out on Webber's Farm (Mr. Harry Stokes) at Woodbury.



R.S.P.C.A. inspectors and the local police committee watch to see that the farm workers' boots are properly sprayed.
('E. & E.' D.)

Most smaller farmers still maintained mixed dairy herds, which might include Shorthorns, Guernseys, Jerseys, Herefords, Red-Pole, South-Devon, (which in pre-artificial insemination days, were either raised by themselves or acquired from market).

But, ultimately, Friesians, with very few exceptions, would re-place just about everything, including the traditional Red-Devon which almost exclusively had grazed the rich natural pastures of Woodbury for centuries, providing, arguably, a superior dairy and quality-meat combination. Bowles at Woodmanton and Crabb at Venmore both ran `Devon` bulls during this period.

So, for the time being, Woodbury's main occupational activity was still agricultural-based, with some thirty-odd farms, supporting both its `tied` and free-lance labour-force, together with a long tradition of building trades and several shops naturally flourishing in the village at this time.

But.....looking back, it is now possible to realise the conditions for more substantial cultural changes were gradually evolving: National Service and post-war Education reform being primary examples. National Service gave young men (mostly young men), with rural backgrounds, the opportunity to broaden their horizons, and in many cases develop vocational skills and crafts beyond their previous expectations.

When entering the services, many of those who were previously serving apprenticeships (building trades, engineering, etc.), or other occupations including farming, if offered the choice, could either pursue their trade or try something else.

Young girls, for their part, were acquiring broader occupational ambitions, too. This arose partly from an expanded school curriculum (Woodbury pupils now experiencing secondary education at Exmouth and Exeter with the opportunity to take General Certificates of Education), and partly influenced by their urban counterparts already established in more broadly based employment, and their equality-consciences inspired by their mothers' war-time work experiences.

Many of these late teenagers wishing to shed their domestic family ties but, unlike their mothers at the same age, not yet seeking the marriage solution,

turned to the armed services or service support-work such as the 'NAFFI', for example – both offering a measure of independence with security.

Others, having completed their secondary education, were qualified for more varied and better-paid work outside the village in expanding urban areas beyond. (Shop-staff, secretarial and office work were comparatively new occupations for Woodbury village girls.)

The younger generation was also now experiencing mobility to a greater extent than their more parish-based predecessors. Improved public transport during normal working hours provided four double-decker buses each peak-hour to Exmouth and Exeter (with single-deckers at other times); either via Topsham or Clyst St. Mary. (But, on the social side, I remember the last bus from Exeter's Paul Street depot, left at 10-30 pm, which meant that it wasn't possible to see the end of the day's final film performance.)

As an overall consequence, the combined impact of improved opportunities in education and career-prospects, and National Service, along with increased mobility and travel, stimulated a range of new interests that led to relationships outside the parish. This gradually resulted in fewer marriages among local couples; a trend that foreshadowed the demise of successive generations of families living within the community.

This was a familiar social pattern in most rural areas throughout the fifties. But Woodbury, slowly emerging from its traditional past, for the time being maintained a fairly balanced local economy because diminishing opportunities for farm-work and domestic service coincided with the younger generation's declining interest in both occupations as they sought career-prospects elsewhere.

By the end of the decade, the post-war transition was further advanced when the older work-force, including a substantial pool of free-lance labour, had either retired or expired. Of course, with the passing of the older generation, sadly, also went their now increasingly redundant centuries-old skills, and would usher in the demise of the true born-and-bred countryman. Thus, by the beginning of the sixties, Woodbury's distinctive character and traditional personality, once embodied in its indigenous residents and their way of life, almost exclusively engaged within the local economy was drawing to a close.

Turning now to physical influences of change, with one exception, the single factor carrying by far the greatest impact was and, perhaps still is, new housing development followed closely by increased car ownership. This, too, happened over a period of about twenty years and with far-reaching implications – but, once again, the ‘seeds’ were sown during the late fifties and throughout the sixties. To begin with, the County and District Councils, largely pre-occupied with urban priorities, neglected to consider the importance of its rural heritage. Consequently, Devon was slow to adopt conservation policies concerned with the preservation and restoration of its historic buildings. Political indifference in this sphere coincided with similar attitudes shared by the land and property owners, and Woodbury was no exception. There were several repercussions, all influenced in one form or another by commercial expediency.

In some cases, many low-rent and in-need-of-repair vernacular properties were demolished and replaced mostly by modern out-of-character private dwellings in a middle-class price range. These included former ‘tied cottages’, their tenants having left agricultural employment or were laid to rest in the churchyard. In other cases, sites occupied by single dwellings and traditional labourers’ terraces, such as those extending from the former Parish Room downwards towards ‘Haydons’ in ‘Bonfire Lane’, gave way to modern development – an ill-judged decision by the Parochial Church Council, which resulted in a substantial loss of curtilage for the Parish Rooms, referred to below. But there were some exceptions where commercial interests were more sensitively applied towards retaining local character.



*'Govett's' - one of
the village
'casualties'.*

Gilbrook Cottages` are a rare example of a high-quality renovation inspired by their new owner, Ursula Brighouse, who restored traditional features and remain today a valuable illustration of our local heritage while, at the same time, providing a sombre reminder of what was lost elsewhere can only be realised now from old photographs! Incidentally, with practical foresight, `Gilbrook Cottages` also incorporated a detached garage provision, a facility

not generally considered essential by Local Authority planners (or for that matter, our Parish Council), at this point in time.

But the subsequent market price of these properties was mostly beyond the average young villager's

budget or mortgage-worthiness during this period. However, and as a matter of fact, house-ownership, like hire-purchase mentioned earlier, was not yet a concept fully embraced as a principle by many local families, whatever the financial constraints.

Such attitudes occasionally resulted in missed opportunities when a rare bargain (even by past standards), was offered – for example, just after the war, property and land from 'Haydons' to the Parish Rooms (now unfortunately, in my view, re-named Church Rooms), sold for the highest offer at £450.00 to 'Haydons' owner, 'Trixie' Sellick! Later, I remember in 1957 the four-cottage-terrace opposite the post-office was put on the market for £300 each and I, like other local young persons resisted in favour of owning a motor-car, then usually costing much more! An independent means of mobility was now a higher priority.

The post-war disposal of property reflects yet another feature of the economics associated with local rural housing. Building repair costs, now influenced by new 'Building Regulations', were rising more than average wages were, and therefore landlords were faced with an outlay greater than could be recuperated through rent at this time – yet another reason for disposing of former assets which had become liabilities. This reduced further the availability of local low-cost rented property with an increasing impact upon young married couples and provision for elderly persons. District housing policy resulted in a modest increase in local council-house building, such as reflected in 'Parkway' and Park Close. This met some small family and elderly needs, but there was still insufficient provision to meet the needs of local young newly-weds. This was yet another reason to leave the parish in order to seek accommodation elsewhere. Moving away also led to the break-up of the three generation family unit, which for



Gilbrook Cottages after renovation in 1965.

centuries had characterised an integrated social structure in rural communities, such as Woodbury.

So, these five factors: Local employment patterns and work opportunities, National Service, improved Education opportunities, improved mobility, and an affordable housing deficit, were the main influences which combined to change attitudes and to stimulate, with increasing pace, the migratory trend of the younger, indigenous, generation throughout the fifties and early sixties. In a wider context, other social influences such as `The Kinsey Report` and liberalising attitudes (largely influenced by increased television ownership and influential TV advertising) were slowly filtering through traditional rural cultures.

The period between the early sixties and the early nineties represents the most dramatic transformation of the village, with almost all the major changes with which we are now familiar occurring during these years; this included new private-house development and modernised character properties, which provided the opportunity for people and families from all walks of life and professions to settle here; re-energising the social, recreational and economic aspects of our community.

New arrivals with fresh ideas, talents and expertise injected a fresh stimulus into a wide variety of village activities; the likes of Valentine Dubuisson, Nigel Tucker, Gillian Selly, David Keep, Pippa Thomson (who produced our Parish Map). This, plus an enlarged School and modern Surgery, formed the basis for the vibrant sustainable village, we have enjoyed since.

This period also coincided with local government changes, which saw the demise of the old St.Thomas Rural District Council, based in Exeter (the old Victorian offices can still be identified in Cowick Street), and replaced by the new East Devon District Council at `Knowle House` in Sidmouth. Parish boundary changes resulted in Woodbury's Parish's loss of Ebford.

An extract from Reg Brown's personal account

Articles are now required for the next newsletter.

PLEASE PUT YOUR PENS TO PAPER NOW!

~ MAJOR ROBERT MASEFIELD ~
1st Battalion King's Shropshire Light Infantry
1872-1914



Robert Masefield was born on 24th May 1872 in Akaroa, near Christchurch in New Zealand, the son of Valentine Vickers Masefield and Isabel. The family was a large one of English origins. His grandparents, Robert and Martha lived in Ellerton Hall, a large Victorian house in the parish of Cheshwardine in Shropshire. Robert farmed about 450 acres and employed 24 farm labourers, six of whom lived on the premises. In 1851 his grandfather, Robert, was living at the Hall with six of his children, including his uncle Robert and his father Valentine, together with a governess and five servants.

Grandfather Robert's oldest son, also Robert, born in 1839, gained a commission in the 31st Regiment of Foot. When his father died in 1880 he had left the army and moved into Ellerton Hall. He almost certainly joined the newly formed Shropshire Light Infantry in 1881.



Ellerton Hall in Shropshire

Young Robert Masefield was educated in New Zealand from 1884-90 and then moved to England where he attended the Royal Military College at Sandhurst from 1891-92, joining his uncle's old regiment of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry in 1892. In 1901, promoted to captain, he joined the 2nd Battalion in South Africa, and was present at operations in the Transvaal receiving the Queen's medal with two clasps

At some point he was adopted by his uncle, Colonel Robert Taylor Masefield C.B., who had bought Springhayes in Town Lane in Woodbury in the early 1900s, and to whom he was as ‘a dearly loved only son’.



Springhayes in Town Lane

On 2nd July in 1908 he married Mary Esme Spencer Wheatley, the 24 year old daughter of Harry Spencer Wheatley (ex-Indian Army). In the 1911 census Robert was recorded as serving with his regiment in India, but he was actually on leave staying in Woodbury with his uncle and aunt and his wife.

He returned to India with the 2nd Battalion, and was promoted Major in September, 1912, when at Secunderabad.

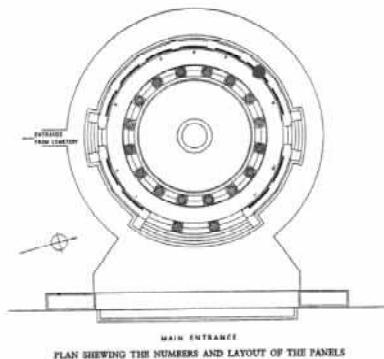
He was home on leave when the war with Germany broke out and was ordered to join the 1st Battalion for France in September, and was in the trenches on the Aisne. The battalion was then moved up into the firing line between Lille and Armentieres and helped to repel the Germans' first great rush for Calais. On the 24th October, 1914, Major Masefield was left Second in Command of his battalion, as well as in command of his own Company. His Captain wrote of his death on that day: “It was in the trenches of ‘A’ Company. We had been fighting hard for five days, and ‘D’ Company had lost all their officers except one, so at 12 o'clock I was taken from ‘A’ to go to ‘D’ Company trenches. I said good-bye, and he took my seat. It was there at about 4.30 p.m. that he was killed instantaneously by shrapnel shell in the back”. A Sergeant of his battalion wrote: ‘It was a critical time, as another strong attack was expected from the enemy. He himself was watching the front, cheering his men and preventing any unnecessary risk at a most nerve-trying time. He died as he had lived, a most gallant gentleman. Still under heavy fire he was buried at dawn next morning, Sunday, October 25th, between two haystacks in a little farm just behind the trenches, Le Quesne, near Bois Grenier’.

A Private of his Company wrote: ‘He was such a fine officer, always with his men. We would all have gone with him anywhere. He came right along our trenches to see how all his Company was not half an hour before the Germans started to attack again - *it is the best that go first.*’

Another Private wrote: ‘His last thoughts were with his men, telling us to keep our heads down as much as possible.’ His former Colour Sgt on hearing of his death said that every one of us would have given our lives gladly for the sake of our Major.



Ploegsteert memorial - Panel 8



One of his brother officers wrote: ‘You know we all loved him, from the Colonel down to the latest recruit. And we all said that the Regiment would be alright as long as Masefield was with it.’ A colleague wrote: ‘Major Bob was a fine sportsman and his loss will be felt by officers and men. He loved all outdoor pursuits, fishing, big and small game shooting, pig-sticking etc. Excelling in all games, he was chiefly interested in those in which his men

could share, and had played for the Regiment in most. Always cheery and ready for work under all conditions, utterly unselfish and thoughtful for others, and thoroughly efficient – he was just one of that fine type, the British Regimental Officer. Adored by his men, and looked up to by them in work, play and sport. His feeling for them may best be expressed in his own words: *The men are splendid, always cheery, full of thrust, and ready for anything. We cannot do enough for them.*



After Robert's death his widow, Mary Esme, returned to live with her father and family in Farnham, whilst Colonel Masefield and his wife continued to live at Springhayes. Colonel Robert died in 1922 and his wife six years later. The property appears to have been left to his adopted son's widow. Mary never re-married, and she moved down to Woodbury, with her father, Colonel Harry Wheatley (who died in 1932), and lived at Springhayes until her death at the age of 72, in 1955. She, her father and several relatives are all buried in St Swithuns churchyard on the left of the path leading towards Church Stile Cottages.

Gillian Selley

War memories
~ ECHOES AND REVERBERATIONS ~

My son Peter, who served in the Royal Corps of Signals for 37 years and is now working for NATO in Mons, Belgium, took his grandsons Peter and Charlie recently to visit the St. Symphorien Cemetery in August. There he showed them the grave of Private John Parr, who in August 1914 was shot near the canal at Obourg, on the outskirts of Mons, the first British Expeditionary Force casualty of the First World War. John Parr had been a schoolboy at Barnet School, near London, where Peter and Charlie are pupils, so it had a special significance for them. This cemetery was where the special remembrance service was held on 4th August, attended by members of our Royal Family and leaders from many countries overseas.

There are not many villages in England or in Belgium which lost no casualties at all in either World War. They are known as “twice blessed”, for, as we know all too well in Woodbury, the death toll affected some small villages extremely severely.

Peter and Charlie’s great-great-grandfather, Roy Grist, served through the whole of World War I, in the UK, Ireland, India and Belgium. He was in the trenches there when the Armistice was signed in November 1918, having escaped death by an inch when a bullet cut across the top of his scalp, leaving a permanent scar. He never forgot that, the day Armistice was declared, one of his men was shot by a German sniper who had not heard of the cease-fire. He did not say much about his time in Belgium because of his bad experiences, but would talk occasionally about the times that they had a chance for a game of football when things were quieter behind the lines.

His son (my husband, Bob Grist) served from 1939, having put his age up a bit in order to join the South Staffs Regiment, was posted to Northern Ireland, and later after officer training, transferred to the Indian Army, where he saw service in Tibet; and then to the newly-formed Pakistan Army until he returned to UK in 1949.

Three of my brothers served in the Army during the Second World War – one died during his training with the Royal Westminster Dragoons at Aldershot, the second was in the Signals Corps attached to the Buffs, and

was on duty in Northern Ireland and on coastal defences around the south-west of England. When he came home on leave to us in Dartford, on the outskirts of London, he used to joke that he would be glad to get back to a safer place, as we were subjected to bombing from 1940-45, everything from high explosive and phosphorous bombs, aerial torpedoes, incendiary bombs, V1s (pilotless plane bombs) and V2s (rockets which travelled faster than sound – no warning of them!) I was lucky that when an incendiary bomb hit my bed I was under the dining table downstairs doing my homework! My youngest brother was in the Royal Engineers and spent most his service at the end of the war and afterwards, in the precarious business of Bomb Disposal, and later clearing the beaches of the south-west of mines.

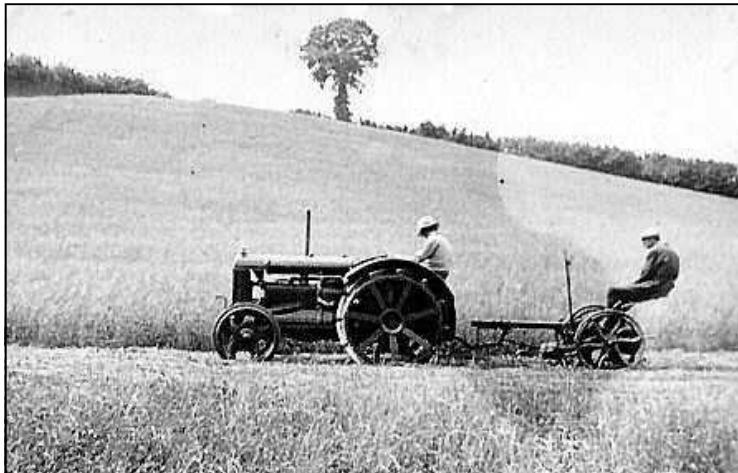
We hope and pray that Peter and Charlie will grow up into a more peaceful world than their forebears.



Nancy Grist

Woodbury Local History Society Programme 2015

- Feb. 5th** **Annual General Meeting & Society Party.**
- March 5th** **The Sharland family of Woodbury**
 by Tony & Carol Sharland.
- May 7th** **Shipping on the Exe from Roman Times**
 by David Clements (in Exton Village Hall).
- June/July** **Annual outing** - to be arranged.
- Sept. 3rd** **Joint meeting with Branscombe, to discuss the HEAP project and it's findings.**
- Nov. 5th** **The East Devon Pebblebeds** - by Nicky Hewitt.
- Feb. 4th 2016 Annual General Meeting & Society Party.**



*A pastoral scene from day's gone by, when the pace of life was much slower.
Mowing the grass crop for hay in the Pathfields c.1940.
(Strangely enough, I have been there and done that! (Ed.)*