

**Recollections of life in Quinton,  
dating from the 1940s**

Text of a conversation between  
Fran, Connie and Syd, with Phil and Lesley Rooks,  
on Saturday July 16th 2022.  
(Recorded by Graham Saunders with their permission)

With special thanks to Fran, Connie and Syd for  
sharing their unique views and memories of living in  
Quinton village.

“The Piercy family came to the village in Nov 1940 from East London, escaping the Blitz which had been horrific. They had lived down shelters. One Sunday morning they were dressed in their best outfits and put in the car, driven north, first to Stony Stratford where a relative lived already, Mum’s brother Uncle Wag.

They drove first down School Lane, and some of their furniture came up from London too. Personally they only had what they came in. The man who owned The Cottage where they would live resided at Foxfield, a Mr Gawthropp (Arthur), who is buried in the churchyard. Dad had a nickname for him - ‘coughdrop’! Their mum latterly put flowers on his grave as he had given them a home when they needed one. He was remembered as a grumpy old man.

The cottage was empty and the villagers put a few bits of furniture in it. They lived there through the rest of the war. Fran was 5 or 6, Connie 4, Syd 2, with a baby sister too. Their London-based family turned up every weekend for a break from the air raids.

There were two bedrooms in The Cottage, one big, one small. One room followed after the other with a low 4-foot door that Dad used to crack his head on. It was a shock to Mum as they’d come from a new modern London house with electricity, a bathroom, running water, and a garden – to a house with no running water and no electric. Some Quinton properties had wells in the garden, but no bathrooms.

Oil lamps were used up to the 1950s, paraffin lamps lit the house. Syd still has an old Lamp from The Cottage and has refurbished it. It’s a very dull light and even in a dark room you couldn’t read by it. In the church, the lights hanging over the aisle all used to be oil lamps.

Their house in Sidcup was new when they moved in, with a drive and a garage down the end of the garden. They’ve subsequently revisited there. It had been badly damaged in the bombings but has since been rebuilt.

School Lane existed but there were no houses after School House. Post Box cottage was there but was different to now. The gate was beside the Post Box and the house was occupied by a Mr and Mrs Goodman. There were no doors in the front of houses then, all were round the back and with just the one entry door only.

Water from the village pump was obtained by carrying buckets, Dad went every morning with 2 metal buckets, one silver and one white. It felt a long way to return to The Cottage when the buckets were full.

This photograph is taken in the late 1930s and shows Doreen Hambidge (nee Raine) on the left with her cousin at the Village Pump. Behind can be seen the home of Pete Collyer in School Lane Quinton. It was in this house that Doreen was born and lived there with her family until moving to Manor Cottages, Quinton while still a child.



The original pump was enclosed in a wooden casing. You were told off if you only got back with half a bucket left and wet socks! The wooden casing was painted occasionally. John Hankins, the Shepherd, lived in Appletree Cottage, as it was then - the end 'Bakehouse' Cottage - and he thatched the pump with straw each winter to prevent it freezing up. A well was behind the actual Bakehouse. There were 3 cottages there then (it may have been 4 way-back).

The pump went from wood to a metal one probably in the 1950s. One picture shows the pump with cousin Pauline stood beside it. In winter the leather washers inside the pump, which moved up and down within the pump body by moving the handle, deteriorated and needed replacing.

The pump fed off a well, related to Moat Pond opposite the far end of School Lane. Water came off the fields into the Moat Pond. The water then drained towards Lower Farm at the bottom of the track behind The Green. Mr Percival, who previously lived in Phil and Lesley's house, smashed a hole in the water drain to grow cress! The source of the new one is unknown.

The original pump gradually stopped being used when water was laid on to the village and water fed straight into the new houses in The Green in the 1950s. The Cottage never had running water whilst they lived in it. Most of the cottages were tied to the farms.

The pump was slightly to the left of where it is now. Latterly an excavator arrived there at one point to try and find the original pump position but flooded everywhere.

The current pump is not original. Syd was on military service when it was changed and it's not known what became of the original pump. Possibly the PC or someone were of a mind to put the original pump back at some point, and a hole was dug to try and locate the position, causing Nola Collyer to complain because of flooding resulting from their efforts. A JCB turned up and dug numerous holes - Derek Frost

and several others were present, all with other ideas. (From a picture of Pauline at the pump you could line things up using Charlie Tyson's new shed and the church to see the original pump position).

Sourcing the current pump, Syd knew where there was one and acquired it. It wasn't complete, the top was also incorrect. A contact of Syd's in a garage in Finedon fixed it, improvising successfully with a machined-down car brake disc which was reduced to size and shrunk onto where the 2 surfaces came together. Then it was painted green. The first garage in School Lane was where the Maypole was kept, the new pump was put in there too, pending installation, and this is the current pump.

This new pump was installed around the 1980s, but not in the same spot as before. There was a bit of a fuss when the then resident of the Rectory wanted to use Back Lane as a drive into the Rectory, where the pump was positioned.

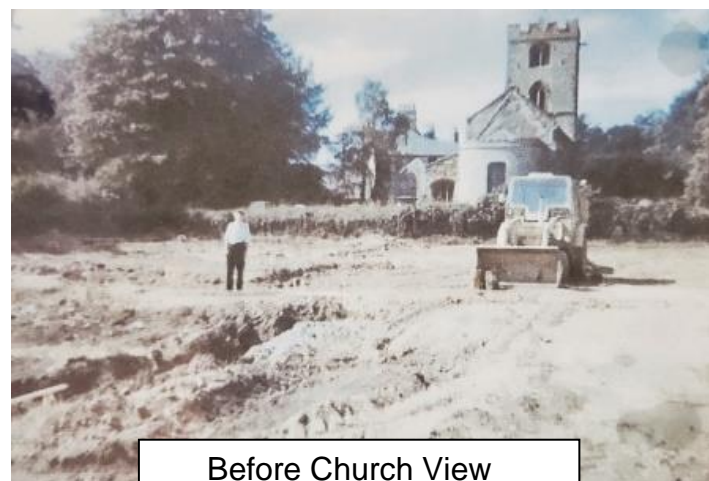
John Eden was one occupant of the cottages and lived in the middle Bakehouse cottage; he was only 57 when he died and is buried in the churchyard. He was always smiling. His fate was falling into the sheep dip. At his funeral, Fran, Connie and other children hid behind hedges to look at the proceedings. The Vicar was waiting at the church, the men were all dressed in their best suits to carry Mr Eden to the church, with the vicar shouting at them to hurry up! This was in the 1940s.

John Hankins the Shepherd lived in the end cottage, he had a long beard, and his trousers were tied up below the knee with string.

More bungalows were built latterly in the village and became Church View, where previously there were allotments. Charlie Tyson lived in the far cottage next to Pete Collyer. The Tysons were a farming family and notably he built himself a shed right in the middle of the allotments.



The cottages - Appletree is first on the right, Bakehouse at the far end



Before Church View



Going to Church (always in best clothes) our cousin Jenny who lived with us and helped our Mother. Her brother Terry (another cousin also lived with us through war and went Wootton School) is on the extreme right in photo. The bigger girl is me and the smaller one next to Jenny is Connie.



Syd with two other boys

The old Moat House was like a square, with a Moat pond next to it. It flooded in winter. The water continued down through another pond in Spring Rising, then down into the well, then underground and joined a spring in what is now Phil and Lesley's garden. A drain existed on the side of the road opposite Mr Goodman's. The drain top was just pebbles, no grate.

Mr Goodman (described as miserable but with a lovely wife!) lived in Post Box Cottage, He sat in their small room and would always check on the kids and shop them to their parents - he didn't like children! He had white hair and a 'tash. They were related to the Matthews Blacksmiths in Northampton. Peter Newcombe who used to live next door to Doreen Raine worked there; he carried on working and never retired and died at work.

The four Piercy children almost doubled the children in Quinton on their arrival. Other children included Doreen Raine and Marjorie Moore, who lived in School House, an only child. The Frosts were next to the Goodmans in School Lane and had older children. Ken was the oldest one, who was sent into the Navy. Derek was the last one to survive.

Fran went to school with Janet Grieves. Mrs Raine used to take/accompany the children to school in Wootton. Doreen's mum biked to school with them, she had a sit up and beg type with a basket. Her bike was called 'tick tock' as it made a noise like a clock which came from an improvised device on the rear mudguard to stop her coat getting caught in the wheels.

From the age of 5 they all cycled to school. Doreen had a 3-wheeler, Connie had a 2-wheeler which had solid tyres. One day a couple of

them chose to walk, and Derek said once they had got half-way near to the current Grange Park entrance, they would sit in the field for the day and so avoid school. Misjudging the time, they came home but it was still only lunchtime and much too early, earning themselves a telling off!

Phil went to Wootton school but by then they travelled in buses. Between using their bikes and the much later introduction of school buses, Douglas Taxis from Collingtree operated a school taxi service. It was just one car to start, then two once the Cores joined from Quinton Green. Spen was the driver/son of the taxi proprietor. One taxi sometimes had 10 kids in it, three in the front with the driver and no seat belts!

It was a very snowy winter in 1947. Snow was deep at the pump and lay as high as the bedroom windows of The Cottage. Men dug a trench through the snow in the village and the Frosts helped to get access to the pump across from their house. The snow was 5 or 6 foot high. There was no school for a while too!

The Piercy's always had people residing with them such as cousins; Jen lived with them most of the war and helped mum, and Terry also went to school at Wootton. There was always a houseful of people, with Aunty Emmy coming up from London with most of her family at weekends to escape the raids.

September Cottage is now the name of what was The Cottage. The old census reports showed very few names for the cottages in Quinton. The village always flooded in the winter. The family stopped living in The Cottage once the houses around The Green were built. They moved house one night; Dad just said to the children 'we're moving tonight'. They used an old, steered trolley to help make the move into number 19 The Green; the suite even made the move on the trolley.

The children often played on the building site of the new houses, collecting cigarette cards left each night by the workmen. It took ages to build all the houses. Wooden scaffolding was used then which was simply tied together! Underwood and Weston were the builders, the last plots being built up towards the Wootton Road. The houses generally had big gardens.

The chapel was at the top by the Wootton Road.

Mike Crouch's garden was recently thought to be part of the Rectory up to 1963, this was queried as the Rectory garden was the other side of the Rectory with tennis courts and other land. The land in School Lane was actually part of the Spinney, where the Pound was. The Rectory garden was where the property Stonehouse now is.

The Pound was the village tip and was also an area for holding any loose animals from the fields. It was also used as a playground by the local children. The Spinney went from the church gate into School Lane and got wider as it went up to past halfway up School Lane. There's possibly a tie to that land on what is on Alan Ratcliffe's garden. The area looks better there now! The rubbish there was because there was no bin service then.

Auntie Davis lived in what is now Pete Collyer's house, and the POWs occupied this property during the war. Auntie Davis lived next to them in Sidcup and had followed them up. She was actually 'Mrs Davis' but was affectionately called Auntie.

Their daughter Peggy was Syd's godmother. Peggy married Bill in Quinton church. Fran and Connie were bridesmaids but Mum could only get hold of one pair of white shoes, which were too big for both. Fran wore the shoes with paper shoved inside to take up the slack and Dad painted some sandals white for Connie. The paint came off in the church! They both carried baskets with primroses that the POWs had picked the morning of the wedding in Salcey Forest. The baskets were made from reeds from Moat Pond.

The Italians POWs, Giovanni and Pasquale, lived in School Lane. The POWs' presence in Quinton was accepted and they were just called 'the prisoners'. Other POWs were here too; Christian and 'Lightening' were two such POWs, one of which moved to Hornsby's Farm (the current residence of the Bentleys). Lightening was German but never spoke.

At harvest if you were quick, you could get a ride on an empty hay cart going back to the fields. The girls were stood once at the gates of Manor Farm, Doreen successfully got a lift but Fran got stranded. Lightening came past with another empty cart, stopped the cart, picked Fran up and threw her onto the cart! The ride up to Preston Deanery went across the fields from opposite the Manor.

Doreen's father worked at the farm, doing milking. Lots of farm workers worked in the village. The Brightwells didn't live in Quinton but at East Lodge Farm. They were chapel people.

Pete Collyer's cottage [3 School Lane] had a very different look to how it is now; Pete virtually rebuilt it in the 80s with his dad. The Tysons (next door to what is now Pete's house) kept ferrets in the bath! The bath was downstairs in the scullery, the room which contained both bath and boiler. The bath had a wooden top and was used as a table too. There were always pots of honey on their shelves and jars of sweets were sold there.

Once the children took eggs to John Hankins and mum said not to ask for a sweet. One of the children instead just held out a hand for a sweet! Syd took one egg up to him from Mum, and held Ann's hand in case the egg was dropped - a valuable item as they only had four chickens. There was still rationing and they largely lived on rabbits.

Dad was in the Home Guard. A conversation of dad's was once overheard suggesting their old Enfield rifles got thrown into the Moat Pond once no longer needed. Why did they throw kit in the pond? They decided to do it as they otherwise didn't know what to do with it. This was not the same pond as the one in Spring Rising's garden where the recent grenade discovery was made but was the natural pond on the other side of the road.



This photo is taken looking up school lane (note no bungalows on the right, and the grass triangle in the middle of the road).

It shows Mr Piercy with his children (from top-left to right: Syd, Fran, Ann and Connie) in his uniform after a Home Guard Exercise.





This photograph is from pre-1914 and shows young men of Quinton, mostly farm labourers.

Those known to be in the photo include: Wilf Allen and Freddie Newcombe (first two from the left in the front) also Walter Tyson and Walter Matthew (both killed in WW1) Walter Mills and ? Botterill (2<sup>nd</sup> from right at the back) (We remember Freddie Newcombe, Wilf Allen and Walter Mills as elderly men!)

(This photograph came from Mrs Florence Mills who was married to Sydney Mills from Post Box Cottage – a childhood and diphtheria survivor. Florence came to Quinton as a young girl to be in Service at Quinton Rectory – she never left Quinton.)



Home Guard meeting at Wootton (in front of school wall)  
Walter Frost and Sydney Piercy 8<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> from back right

A barrier was to be built near Salcey to stop the Germans if needed. They only had one gun at one stage and shared it as they didn't get equipment very quickly. They were all uniformed volunteers and included those too old to enlist and/or were in protected jobs.

A conscientious objector lived next door to the family, who was a lodger in the first house where Mrs Grieves lived. They were not well received by others because they wouldn't fight. Some objectors were sent down mines or into other jobs. Many in the Home Guard had already served in WW1 like both their dad and Doreen's dad had done. Doreen was born in Pete Collyer's house.

Next to Moat Pond was a square pond which filled up in the winter. It's still a pond. Children were not meant to play there...but did and came back smelling of stagnant water. It has since been excavated as there was a Roman site there.

The children were excited about the Home Guard's grenades, which dad had brought one home to show them! They were made of green glass and just like those recently unearthed in Spring Rising's garden after being buried there after WW2. Another incident with Grenades was when a grenade was found in Bob O'Neil's barn in 2010 when being cleared out after he died. It was still live and was blown up on The Green. Everyone had to shut their windows.

There was an army camp created on the village field on what is now The Green. There were tanks and a lot of metal 4-gallon cans there which had been used for storing petrol. When empty the children built them up into rooms/dens. The soldiers were not there too long but had a lot of vehicles. This was during the war. Wootton Brook bridge on the road to Wootton was then a small bridge like at Preston Deanery, but a tank was too heavy for it one day and demolished it. It was then rebuilt as the wider bridge that it now is.

The army had turned up unannounced and stayed for just a few months, certainly not years. They may have been en-route to the south coast but weren't connected to the RAF at Salcey. The RAF unit there was named 72MU. Dad used to work at Salcey. The proposed barricade considered by the Home Guard near to Salcey Forest never got done and no Germans came except for the POWs.

The Italian POWs spoke and were more friendly. In 1945 most of the POWs went home but some stayed, like one at Hornsby's Farm - it might have been Christian. He lived to the left of the house in a 'wooden' shed, which was quite cosy when you went in. They used to get some milk from the farm.

Mr Hornsby there was grumpy and often told the children off (it wasn't mentioned what the children might have been doing though!). He had a butcher's shop in Hardingstone where he came from, and had an abattoir there. The Maceys actually lived at Hornsby's Farm, now Glebe, then the Shorts - Mr Hornsby never actually lived there. There is a picture from this time in the Village Hall.

There was a row of cottages where Margaret Dix's house now is, called The Lane. Margaret's house was built by the Devereux family who lived at White Gables where Kathey and Andy Bailey now live. The cottages were all thatched. Mr and Mrs Mills also lived there and old Mrs Newcombe lived in the bottom one.

People who lived in the village all knew each other then, whereby people don't know each other so well now. Mum never got used to people just calling in.

Mr Gawthrop the landlord never knocked and would walk unannounced straight into what was The Cottage. He did it once and he straight off just asked Mum if the children were all vaccinated (diphtheria) She said 'of course' and he just left. The reason for the enquiry was thought to be related to the Mills who lived in Post Box cottage; around 1913 they had 11 children, sadly losing some of their children to diphtheria. There are entries of their deaths in the school register of the time, eg Mary Mills and Harold Mills. Their graves are in the churchyard.

The Cottage had lots of tenants after the family moved out and had been a chapel before the family moved in.

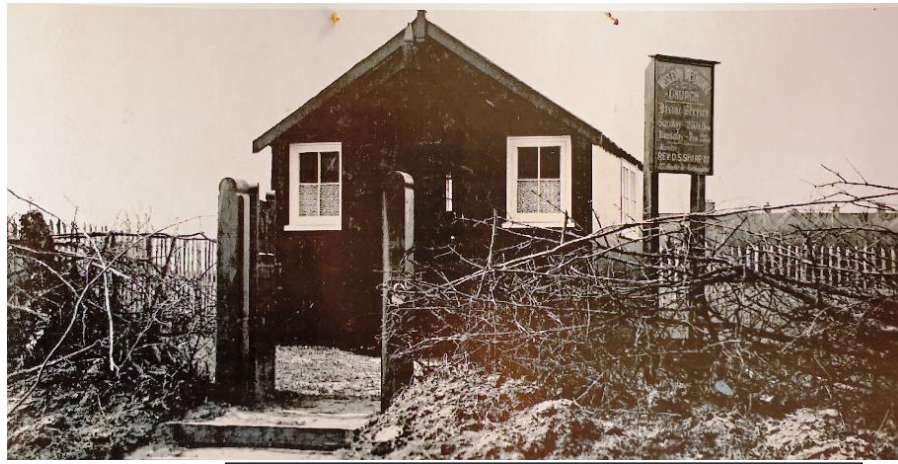
Worship in the village aside of the church was first just a tent in the field off Wootton Road (possibly only put up for the service). The tent caught fire one day and the burning ropes left marks on the benches.

The free church also met in the cottage, now called September Cottage, and Mrs Sharp who lived in post box cottage had lots of memories of that. One was of Harold Mills aged about five standing on one of the benches and singing loudly in a service there. Harold was one of the children who died of diphtheria about 1913. I think the chapel met in this cottage after the tent burnt. The chicken shed came later.

The shed was then extended – there were four or five benches and it became narrower at one end, with two seats instead of three. There was a harmonium, pulpit, bookshelf, and large photo of Walter Matthews killed in war. There was a heater run on oil and coathangers at the back - there were curtains at the windows and it was very cosy in winter.



Syd took the register. Uncle Vernon helped run the Sunday school and he was a chemist from St Leonard's Road in Far Cotton. He would bike to the village on a small Velo Solex (a French motorised bike) which had an engine on the front wheel. He was remembered as a nice chap.



The Chapel on the Wootton Road

After the service on a Sunday he would go along to Moat Pond to catch water fleas in a net for his own fish. The pond there was from the original Manor House and was full of water fleas, easily caught in a net.

Sunday school was also run by Mr & Mrs Sharp. They lived then at Quinton Green, and when they retired lived at Post Box Cottage. He worked on the farm, his birthday is remembered as it fell on Bonfire Night. He was farm foreman at Turneys.

Phil's dad said don't go to the pond but he did and he and other children made rafts there. The children were often told by Doreen's dad that there was a dead cow in Moat Pond, probably just to deter them from playing there. There were also memories of a big hollow tree.

Lots of vegetables were grown in the village as rationing was still on. There were regular socials too held in the Village Hall/School Room. The desks were moved out into the yard. The hall had a big coke stove for heating. They'd play games, sing and hold whist drives.

Mrs Cook played the piano, she lived at Quinton Green. Hilary and Geoffrey were among their four children. Harry Cook was her father, who worked at Turneys. He was in charge of the chickens and could sex them at a day old, which not many people could do. It was a valuable skill."

The conversations concluded at this point after an hour and a half. It was a really nice event for everyone, thanks to all for their participation.