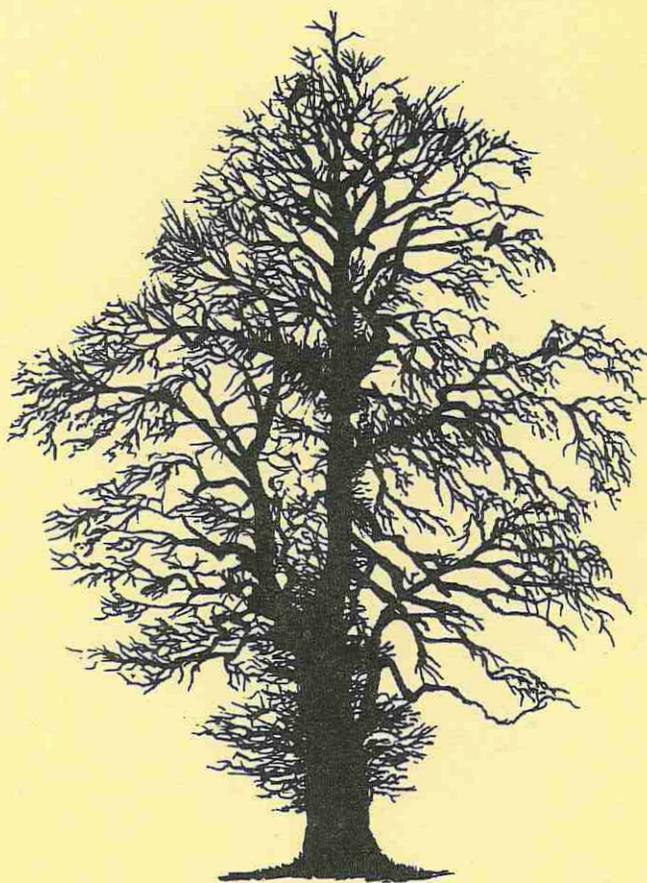


Memories of Village Life
1912-1945

Elsie M. Somerton



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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© Mrs E M Somerton, June 1995

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DEDICATION

This book is a celebration of village life in the first half of this century. I would like to dedicate it to the wonderful characters who lived in the village, and whose antics made sure there was never a dull moment, instead there was always something happening to interest and amuse us. As we celebrated VE Day on May 8th this year I would like to remember all the men of the village who went to the war, especially those who didn't return.

MEMORIES OF VILLAGE LIFE

1912-1945

VILLAGE AND PEOPLE



I was six months old when I came to live in Weston Village with my mother and father, Mr and Mrs Bray. I had three sisters and one brother who now lives in Canada. It was 1912 and we lived at No. 8 Lansdown Place, Crown Hill.

There was always great activity on Crown Hill. The village smithy was owned by Mr Charles Holcombe who worked there with his two sons, Jack and Alec. How busy they always were shoeing the farm horses and cart horses - it was all horses in those days. In the summer time when the stable doors were wide open Mr Holcombe would allow us children to watch. How fascinating it was with the bellows and roaring fire, with the red hot shoes being fitted and hammered into shape on the anvil and the smell from the horse's hoof when the shoe was fitted. Mr Holcombe was a big man with lots of white hair, a large moustache and a loud voice. His two sons were very tall and handsome. The smithy closed when the Second World War started because Jack and his brother were called up and Mr Holcombe retired, so the hill became very quiet.

There was a hardware shop owned by Mr Smith who sold galvanised buckets, baths and kettles, and he repaired them too. He sold string, nails of all sizes, also paraffin oil, and he repaired the harness for all the horses around. He had two daughters and a son called Lionel. Poor Lionel, when he was an adult he had the brain of a child of ten. It was very sad, and he was teased so much by other boys in the village that it



made him swear a lot, but he did manage to do a paper round. One of his sisters was a school teacher and the other, when her father died, carried on the business. She looked after her aged mother and Lionel, and gave music lessons. My mother had a piano so we all had lessons, which I enjoyed very much.

Nearby was the Old Crown pub where the bar was for "Men Only" - it was written on the door, there was a small room called "The Snug", a childrens' room and a large garden. In the summer on Sunday evenings, families from town would come out on top of the tramcars and spend a happy evening in the pub garden. It was quite a treat for them. Years later a well, 40ft deep, was found in the garden.

There was the cobbler, Mr Perry, and at the bottom of the hill lived two Edwardian ladies, Miss Williams and her cousin Martha. They had a little shop that sold almost everything - jars of lovely boiled sweets of all kinds, Blue Bird and Sharp's creamy toffees, and chocolate bars. They sold cotton, elastic, darning wool and needles. There was Nimble Dick tobacco and other brands of cigarettes and bottles of lemonade with a marble in the top. They sold firewood, Sunlight and Lifebuoy soap and washing soda.

Mr and Mrs Gregory lived at Prospect House. He was the undertaker and they had two sons and one daughter who was a Red Cross nurse at the War Hospital, Combe Park. The two sons went to Canada to work.

Twice a day, at milking time, the cows went up and down the hill from the Manor Farm to the fields where we played all summer. The cows didn't bother us as they always went to the top of the field to graze. One field was always a hay field and when it was cut the farmer would let us play in the hay. What a wonderful time we had until it was gathered in. It's all houses now - Lucklands and Purlawent Drive. The Manor Farm turned all their milk into butter which tasted wonderful.



It was lovely growing up in this village. Everyone was so friendly and had a good sense of humour. All the girls were pretty and had sweethearts. The boys were nice too, especially



A view of Weston High Street taken from outside the Crown and Anchor pub, looking along the brook wall where Brookside shops and flats are today.

the boys in the Church choir. Most everyone was related to - the Webbs, the Smiths, the Crosses, the Sheppards, the Pitmans, the Richards and the Ansteys. Mr Anstey and his son were plumbers and they walked everywhere to jobs. The Sartains, the Salmons, the Bonds and the Robinsons were all farmers.

We had some very good shops in the village. We bought things we needed every day and paid at the end of the week but all that stopped after the war. I always went shopping for Mum. I remember the different smells the shops had, like the draper's with the newness of linen and cotton. There was the smell of paraffin oil in the hardware shop and leather in the cobbler's. It was all very fascinating.

I loved Mr and Mrs Little's grocery shop on the corner of Manor Road. It was very old fashioned with lots of little drawers full of dried fruit and other things that were weighed out on scales. Sugar was put into blue bags, biscuits were in big tins and you bought them loose, and there was lovely crusty bread. Mrs Little had a beautiful black cat that was always in the shop, sitting on the counter or on a chair for you to make a fuss of. Mrs Little adored her cat. I loved the bacon slicing machine and

the wire they cut the cheese with. The cheeses always had a rind in those days and tasted much nicer than it does today.

Mr Tucker owned the main grocery shop and Post Office. It's different now to what it was but has the same entrance. Mr Tucker didn't like the Co-op shop coming to Weston and he tried to stop it as he also had another grocery shop at the end of The Batch called "the top shop". The Co-op came, but his customers didn't leave him. Next to the Post Office was the newsagent's shop which was very small but crammed full of everything, a little gold mine. It's much larger now as two houses next door were added on to it.

Along from the newsagents was a draper's shop. It was run by such a nice couple who had no children of their own. One Christmas they filled lots of black stockings with toys and sweets for the village children. We all gathered outside the shop after closing time, very excited, and they threw the stockings into the crowd. I don't remember catching one. Many other businesses have been run from that shop including a green grocers and a wool shop. It is now the Coffee Mill which is just what we needed in the village. That corner has never looked so charming and I do wish it every success.

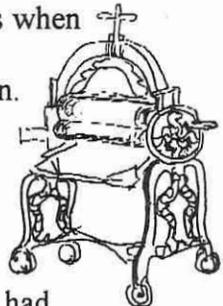


A view towards Weston All Saints Church; with the old school in the centre, the village green with its pump and Mrs Little's grocery shop on the corner of Manor Road.

I must not forget our very own barrow boy, dear old Mr Ballsom. He was quite old and blind and had a lovely guide dog called Lassie. We children would go to his house and buy oranges, we ate such a lot of fruit and vegetables in my young days as it was so cheap. Every Saturday he went round the village with his barrow laden with fruit and vegetables. All the ladies came out with their baskets and bought what they needed for the weekend. He sold everything and nice boys in the village helped him. You could hear him coming, shouting "Ripe bananas seven for sixpence, oranges two for a penny". I don't know how he did it, being blind, but people were so honest in those days. I was only a little girl but how I admired him. The rest of the week he sat at the top of Park Lane with his basket of oranges and his dog by his side, a lovely sight. Someone took him along there in the mornings and back home again at teatime. People walked a lot in those days and they always stopped to buy oranges from him, so that's how he made his living. I guess he liked being out in the fresh air, and the exercise for himself and his dog, walking along to Park Lane and back home every day. We used to see him sitting there, next to the milestone, when we went to play in the Park. Park Lane was very different from how it is today because it wasn't so wide. Where the new entrance is to the Park there was a large field with a stable and horses. In our school holidays, when we went to the Park to play, we loved sliding down the banks on our bottoms which made our knickers in an awful state.

Weston was once called "The City of Weston and Seven Springs" because there was such a lot of water from the springs of Lansdown. The hard working ladies certainly made use of that water and that's why there were so many laundries when the gentry came. Many houses had wells in their kitchens and we had one in ours but it was filled in. Some houses had a pump and a large stone sink. The streams and springs have vanished and all we have now is fast flowing traffic. It used to be nice to walk along the roads and have no fear of all the traffic.

The Grant's house at the top of Trafalgar Road had



so much character with the old ruined brewery at the back. The lane going to the Church was always called "The back of the brewery". Mr Carpenter reared pigs for market along there. He owned the field at the end by the Churchyard where he kept and trained a beautiful trotting horse which he took to shows and he also had a trap. The car park behind the Church was once the Vicarage kitchen garden. How changed it is along there - where it was all allotments is all houses now.

Mrs Grant had a large laundry and employed a lot of women who wore caps and clogs. I can still see Mrs Grant hanging out beautiful snow-white sheets in the yard at the back of the house, and the washroom full of huge wooden tubs. The washing was done in the basements. There were two more laundries in Trafalgar Road. Mrs Stagg was the woman who carried the water and she fetched it from the brook that ran through the Old Rec. close by. How hard they worked. There was Mrs Podger. Three of her five daughters worked in the laundry, Edith, Beatrice and Dolly. I knew them well as Gwen, the youngest, was one of my best friends.



Gwen and I loved the ironing room because it was so warm.



There was a round stove in the middle that heated the flat irons. How I loved watching Gwen's sisters ironing the laundry. They did it so perfectly, changing the irons constantly. I was always at their house as it was near the Rec. where we had a lovely time on the swings and paddling in the brook - lovely soft spring water from Lansdown. Gwen's father owned a large paddock next to the Rec. He had a lot of pigs which he fattened up for market, and the noise they made at feeding time! He had two sons and one helped with the pigs as they were fed twice a day and the swill had to be prepared and cooked. I must say that pork in those days had a lot more flavour than it has today. Everything has lost its flavour. Bacon is simply awful to what it used to be when the taste and smell of it frying was out of this world.

Everyone seems interested in Miss Grant. She married the son of Mr and Mrs Coles who owned the nursery in Weston Road.

There were lots of greenhouses and everyone went there for seeds, plants and flowers. They made beautiful wedding bouquets and supplied the Pump Room and the Guildhall with all the flowers, plants and palms they needed before the Council had their own greenhouses. It was a beautiful wedding and Miss Grant looked very lovely in her wedding dress with a veil on her dark curly hair. Ernie Coles was such a nice chap. I thought they would have been so happy but, after a while she was back with her mother in Trafalgar Road. I was so sorry. When her mother and father died she looked after her brother Edgar who had never married. When Edgar died she became a recluse. She knew a lot about the history of the village and she played the piano beautifully. Often as you passed by you would hear her playing her piano behind the very old lace curtains. It sounded so plaintive and the house looked so dilapidated. I felt very sorry, remembering her when she was so young and so pretty, but she was always rather reserved. The house is looking beautiful now and made into two, it being double fronted.



A scene from the village carnival, in fancy dress from left to right are: Mrs Bray, Mrs King, Miss Grant, Jo Webb, Miss Deacon, and Miss Webb.

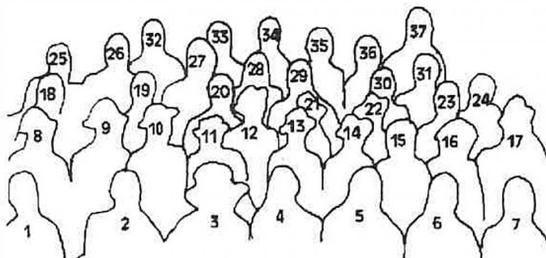
The old ruined brewery has gone and the pig sties. The village is just swallowed up into one big sprawl. Thank goodness we still have the lovely green hills around Beckford's

Monument and Kelston Roundhill with the trees, landmarks that can be seen from miles away.

Mr and Mrs Carr who lived in the Manor House were always interested in the village and its people. I remember they held a grand flower show there every year. They had the almshouses, Memorial Cottages, built for the elderly people who lived there rent free. At first the almshouses had stone tiled roofs like the Cotswold houses. Miss Carr, their daughter was a Sunday School teacher. She had a class of boys and, after class on Sunday afternoons, she took them all home to the Manor for tea.



This photo taken in the grounds of the Manor, is of the committee which organised Weston village shows. 1. Mr Morgan 2. Mr Blake 3. Miss Carr 4. Rev. Bromley 5. Mr Tucker 6. Mr Davis 7. Reg Bowden 11. Mrs Wadsworth 13. Mrs Merritt 14. Miss Yaxley 15. Mrs Mortimer 16. Mrs Jarvis 17. Mrs Edmonds 18. Mr Sutton 19. Mr Newman



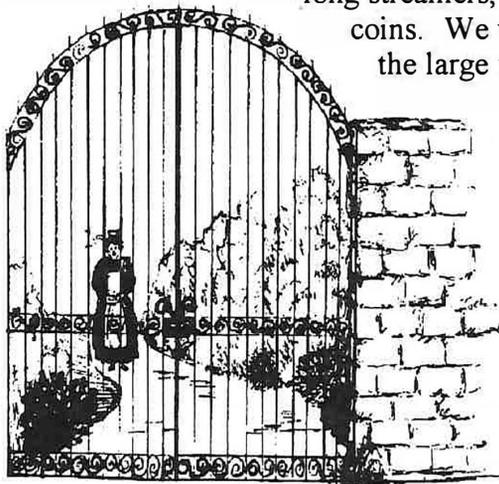
20. Mr E W Davis
 24. Mr Anstey 25. Mr Emms
 26. Mr Blake 28. Mr E W Mortimer 29. Mr Anstey
 30. Mr A Mortimer
 31. Mr Bray 32. Mr Dolman
 33. Mr Bullock
 34. Mr H Webb
 35. Mr Shergold.

It was lovely to see her coming through the village surrounded by a lot of chatting little boys. She was very good at archery and played at the Archery Field, Weston Park. Archery was very popular at that time. She also played the organ at the Church, and was a very active lady. Her father employed a lot of gardeners and the Head Gardener lived in the Lodge at the entrance. But, during the war, Miss Carr's mother and father died and Miss Carr became disabled. It was awful to see such a fine lady in a wheelchair. Miss Carr sold the Manor and went to live in a very grand house in Weston Road.

During the war the Admiralty moved from London to Bath and the Manor was ideal for them. When larger places were built for them on Lansdown and Foxhill they moved so the Manor became the College for Physiotherapy and still is today. During the war the American Hospital was built on some of the grounds and it is there as part of the R.U.H. now. There was also a school for disabled children, such a happy little school, I know because my granddaughter went there and really enjoyed it.

The Squire and his family lived in a very large house in the village and in the summer they played croquet on the large lawn. On a certain day of the year he gave all the children in the village a halfpenny. The maid would come down the drive in her long black dress with white accessories and a little white cap with

long streamers, and her two hands full of coins. We would be waiting outside the large wrought iron gates, all the



girls in their white pinafores. That was a very happy day and we were grateful. It was a sad day when they pulled that house down and put up what you see today. We had many heartaches at what they did to our village after the Second World War.



There was Madame Woodall the opera singer, and her daughter. She started a choir and lots of villagers joined. My sister, my cousin and I joined and had a wonderful time giving concerts in villages far and wide. We were really good. The girls wore orange coloured dresses and black waistcoats and the chaps wore evening dress if they could afford it. Madame Woodall was a great friend of Mr and Mrs Perry who owned the farm at the top of Lansdown Lane and the lovely old farmhouse tucked away on the hillside. I said 'choir', but we were called the Choral Society. Mr and Mrs Perry's daughter Dorothy was trained by Madame Woodall, and she had a beautiful voice. Sometimes in the summer we would all go up to the farm and sing to Mrs Perry who was an invalid. We sang outside in the lovely garden, looking down at the picturesque valley below. No houses then, just all the farm animals. How we enjoyed those afternoons, and I'm sure Mrs Perry did too.

There were hundreds of sheep that roamed the slopes of Lansdown and made all the landowners very rich from the wool. Then came the pigs and many men reared pigs for market. It was

their livelihood and a very rich one too. The farmers mostly just had milking cows and lots of hens and horses of course. We always went to the farm for our eggs but a lot of people kept their own hens and cockerels. That was a lovely sound in the morning, when they were crowing, something I haven't heard for years - a thing of the past I guess. The farmers grew fields of wheat and barley and the mowing grass which all had to be cut and gathered in. A lot of the farmers here had sons who helped them and became farmers too.



The Wiltshires were a lovely family and generations of them have always lived in Broadmoor Lane. They owned lots of land for market gardening and reared pigs for market. Mr William



Wiltshire his wife and family, still live along there. When his father died the land was sold for building houses. The Wiltshires were great Church people and bellringers. Broadmoor is not the same now. Once it was all countryside with farms, market gardens and lovely country walks but now it is all houses, roads and cars swallowing up the greenbelt. But the houses are pretty and the people take a pride in their gardens although I find it quite sad to walk along there now because it is so changed.

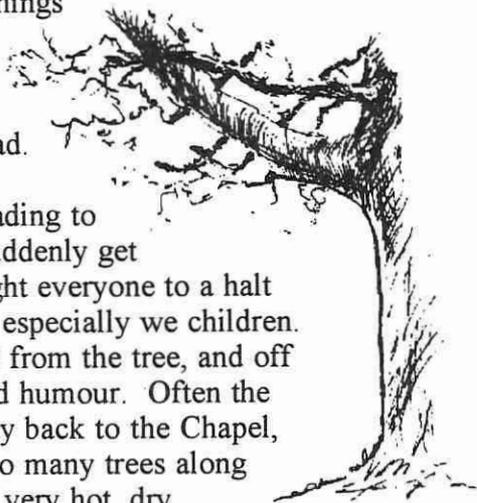
Mr Shergold lived in Pennhill Farm House. He owned all the land which is now Southlands and the recreation ground. As



Mr Shergold's cows in the High Street. This photo was taken from opposite the Crown and Anchor pub; in the background you can see Penn Hill Farm House and the old brook wall (now Brookside shops and flats).

well as being a farmer he had his own band called The Peoples' Mission. They marched his faithful flock to the chapel every Sunday evening, with Mr Oliver Sartain, (we all called him Ollie) proudly carrying the banner. Everyone

loved Ollie, he was such a jolly chap, one of the comics of the village - and there were quite a few. The chapel stood where Sheppards Gardens are now, and was surrounded by lots of little cottages. On lovely Sunday evenings during the summer outdoor services would be held on the bank under an oak tree in Mr Shergold's field called The Mead. As the band and congregation marched up the country lane leading to The Mead, the banner would suddenly get caught up in a tree which brought everyone to a halt in disarray. Everyone laughed, especially we children. The banner would be recovered from the tree, and off we would go again in very good humour. Often the same thing happened on the way back to the Chapel, but it couldn't be helped with so many trees along the way. Towards the end of a very hot, dry summer Mr Shergold would throw his arms in the air praying to God to send some rain on the parched earth. How we enjoyed those services, Mr Shergold was a great preacher and the congregation loved him. The oak tree is still there on the bank where he held the outdoor services.



Further up the High Street was The Globe Inn which was run by Mr Smith. It was the smallest pub in the West Of England, and the beer was served from a big barrel. There was a garden in front where you could sit out in the summer, but Mr Smith would let us children go and sit out the back in the kitchen. There was



Regulars outside the Globe Inn, 1910. Standing l to r: Fred Coombs, Jack Webb, Edward Smith (landlord), Jack Harris. Sitting l to r: Jim Hand, Albert Sheppard, Dick Stiles, Tom Seager.

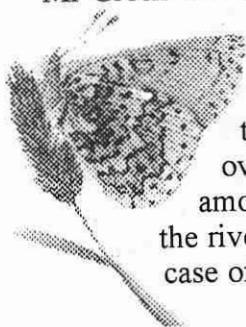
a huge kitchen table which was scrubbed white, and a cat always asleep on a corner of it. Mrs Smith would often be sitting there by the fire darning socks while we drank our lemonade, but she never spoke to us. During the Second World War the Americans in the village fell in love with the place.

I must mention Mr Bond who was the lamplighter. Every evening he would go round the village lighting the street lamps. He carried a long pole with a hook on one end that pulled the chain down that lit the gas lamp. Of course it was all gas in the village. The electric didn't come until after the war. Even the organ in the Church was hand pumped.

There was Mr Green who lived at that lovely house in Lucklands Road called Sabinal. He was a great friend of many village children and we all respected him. We loved to play in his garden in the summertime, but we had to be very well behaved as he was quite strict. Mr Green always gave the girls flowers on Sunday afternoons. In the summer he would come out with his secateurs and pick lovely roses for us and other flowers too. Roses grew all over the sunny side of his house, and it gave him such pleasure sharing them with us. I mustn't forget Mr Green's walnut tree, every year it would be loaded, it was a very tall tree and when the nuts were ready to be gathered in his old gardener would climb the tree with a bag tied around his waist. Of course a lot fell into the lane. We children would be there as we played a lot in the lane. Mr Green would be there too with a basket for the fallers, we helped him pick them up and every one had to go into the basket, not in our pockets - he would have no dishonesty. I expect he gave us some. I notice that only just recently the old tree has gone.

Mr Green was a botanist, and was very interested in nature.

There were lots of beautiful butterflies and moths about in those days and in the summer he loved to go off with the boys to catch them. They would set off with their nets up over the fields, my brother Jack was often amongst them. Sometimes he would take them on the river looking for rare plants along the banks. A case of the most beautiful butterflies adorned a wall





in my mother's sitting room for years. They were arranged and pinned onto cork by my brother, taught of course by Mr Green. They were much admired, and Jack was very proud of them. I wonder what became of them over the years, and whether such beauty will ever be seen again in our gardens and countryside. I have never forgotten Mr Green nor the lane going into the fields where we played all summer long.

There was Mr Bond who had his stables where the King's Head car park is now. Mr Bourne also had a stable and they both collected the laundry baskets and delivered them on their long carts. Jim Lye had a coal yard where the Co-op was, where there are flats now. Mr Bourne delivered coal around the village and we had our coal from him.

I must tell you about Mr Fletcher and his farm just above the riding school, which is closed now through the recession. It was very isolated before the last war but Mr Fletcher delivered milk twice a day with a yoke over his shoulders and a can hanging on each side, so we had fresh milk twice a day. He was a very jolly man. Eventually he had a horse and cart and, when his son Ernie was old enough, he delivered the milk - a nice boy, jolly just like his Dad. Lovely blackberries grew up around the farm, and mushrooms too.



Weston Village Football Team. Back Row (L to R): G Weston, G Curtis, R Curtis, G Shepherd, N Taylor, E Carey, N Warren, R Turnbull, R Powell, F Jones. Front Row (L to R): V Cross, J Podger, P Richards, V Rose, R Jarvis.

We had our own football team of which we were very proud. Our own Fire Brigade team were marvellous. The Fire Station was a red corrugated tin shed at the bottom of Manor Road. Inside it was kept the hand cart, and all the fire-fighting equipment, and on the roof was fixed a very long pole and a huge bell at the top. When the bell was rung it could be heard all over the village and the men would all come running. They practised on the White House or Weston Lodge using the water from the brook which was very exciting to watch. We had our own road-sweepers, Mr Raddle and Mr Sutton. We also had our very own Council. My father was always on the Council. We were quite separate from Bath in those days.

I must not forget Weston Garage which, to my mind, is as old as time. When we came to Weston in 1912 it was a coach house with horses and carriages owned by Mr Greening. He always wore a top hat and a frock tail coat. It was always a busy place. After the horses came the taxicabs and Mr Greening's two sons drove them. The house was very nice with a garden in front with railings all round and a garden gate. Next to the house was the entrance to Manor Farm with a slipway going through to the fields, where Crown Road is now. The Greenings had three daughters. Two were schoolteachers at the Infant school and one was a housekeeper, and they all lived in that house. I don't remember them leaving, but it's been a garage ever since. New people came and made changes like removing the garden to make room for cars and petrol pumps, but they still lived in the house. It was the only garage in Weston at one time and my son-in-law runs it now.

The trams came as far as the garage which was the terminus. The first tram to Weston was the six o'clock in the morning to take the early workers and the last one at night was the eleven o'clock from the GWR station to Weston. Before the electric tramcars there were horse-drawn buses from town, but that was before my time. They came as far as the Crown and Anchor and were pulled by two horses - a long journey for the poor things, from Bath to Weston and vice versa.

CHILDHOOD

I didn't like men with beards, they frightened me. There were a few like Mr Moon who lived in the house that had the Coffee Shop - where the Chemist's shop is now. He would stand at the gate, always wearing a bowler hat and he had a very long white beard. Mr Bowden and Mr Greenman had long beards too. Although they were nice old men they gave me the horrors.

We always had lovely summers from May to September and it



Elsie's brother Jack sitting in a plane he made with his friend Kenny Turner in June 1925, aged 14. The photo is taken in Manor Road and shows a tram arriving at the terminus.

was very hot so of course we had many thunderstorms (that was the only time it rained) and we always had snow in winter, with very severe frosts. We didn't have heat in our bedrooms so the windows would be covered in ice ferns which looked very pretty. We would dress downstairs in front of the lovely kitchen coal fire. My Mum put hot bricks, warmed in the oven and covered with a flannel, into our beds and they warmed up the beds lovely.

Our bath night was wonderful, always on a Saturday. Nobody had bathrooms like they have today but it was nicer in the old fashioned way, far nicer than in cold bathrooms. Sometimes it would be in the wash-house. Mum would fill up the copper with water and light a fire under it. The water would be boiling hot with steam rising when you lifted the wooden lid. It was lovely sitting in the bath in the candle-light and gazing at the red hot fire. Once the coal man came when I was in the bath. I was about twelve and, as the coal house was in the wash house, he had to come in. I was so embarrassed I got right under the water. I could never face that coal man afterwards if I saw him in the village. Another time we would have our baths in the kitchen in

front of a lovely coal fire. Bath night and washing hair was a big event once a week in our house.

We started school at three years old and left at fourteen, going straight out to work. The Church Centre was the girls' school and the infant school. The middle part were the two school houses. Miss Shaul, the Infants Head Teacher and Miss Turner, the Girls' Head Mistress lived in them. They were very strict and the cane was used quite a lot. I loved sewing lessons and learning poetry. I can still remember some of the poems and I liked all the lessons



Gwen Podger and Elsie Bray, in 1925 aged 14.

really. I had lots of lovely school friends, Gwen Podger, Queenie Snell, Ethel Bond, Elsie Lye, Kathleen Herfert, Kath Newman, Clara Sheppard, Rose Deacon, Phyllis Fletcher, Nora Turner, and Barbara Ellie. My sister Nell was so clever. She was good at every subject and I did envy her. She wanted to

be a stewardess on a big liner that sailed the seas in those days, but of course Mum and Dad wouldn't hear of it. She could have had a wonderful life. I missed school very much at first. They say they're the best days of your life but I never believed it until I left. I often think about those school days. Happy days.

All summer when we were not in school we played in the fields, climbing trees, swinging on the branches and paddling in the village brook where Brookside is now, getting all our clothes wet. A special place to play was The Firs. It was an enchanting Jacobean house which stood next to Weston Lodge, with lattice windows, a beautiful walled garden, an apple orchard and stables. The garden, orchard and the house were lovely to explore. It was Miss Appleyard who used to live at The Firs. I was too young to know much about her except that she was a recluse, and very rich as she owned lots of property. I have a faint idea that I saw her once, coming out of the double doors that led into the garden, I

was always playing up around that way. She walked out of that beautifully furnished house one day, never to return. The dining room table was all laid up for afternoon tea, so she must have intended coming back. After a while the Corporation removed all the furniture and slowly that lovely house crumbled away.

She was found years later in a hotel far from Weston, lying dead on her bed dressed in rags, while in her wardrobe hung beautiful clothes. What a sad affair, I would love to know why she left. After the war The Fir's land became allotments, my husband had one and he grew lovely stuff. It's all houses now and the school with its games field.



We played with whips and tops and with skipping ropes. "Sunlight soap is the Best in the World" - that was a good game. We could play in the road, no cars in those days. We had fun with wooden hoops. My three sisters, my brother and I would bowl them along Weston Park (in the road of course) round the two turnings and down over Dannymore Hill which is called Weston Lane now. It was lovely in both winter and summer. Hopscotch was another good game that children don't play today. My daughter Jean loved playing with two balls up against the house - give her two balls to play with and she was as happy as a sandboy.

I never remember being bored even in winter. If we stayed indoors we played cards or made paper spills for my father to light his pipe from the coal fire. Christmas was a magical time of year. We enjoyed making the pretty coloured paper chains and helping Mum to make the Christmas puddings which tasted wonderful. Threepenny bits and sixpenny pieces were put into them and there was excitement if you found one. There was chocolate and sugar mice on the Christmas tree and other nice things, especially the fairy doll. These simple things gave us so much pleasure. Mum made homemade wines, dandelion, elderberry and rhubarb, and she made jam from the gooseberry and blackcurrant bushes which grew in the garden.

We would go carol singing a week before Christmas. I remember frosty nights and very cold feet. There were masses of stars in the sky. I always went along with my sister Nell and her friend and people were very kind because they always came to the door and gave us coppers. We would sing very nicely and I think they enjoyed it. When Nell gave up carol-singing I went with Gwen Podger. We really enjoyed it until one night we were singing outside Mr and Mrs Cross's house up around Wellington Buildings. Their young son Harry went upstairs, opened the bedroom window and threw water down over us. We both screamed as we were wet through and suffering from the shock. Out came Mrs Cross, and being such a kind lady she took us in and gave us hot mince pies to eat while we dried off in front of her lovely coal fire. She was very upset and gave her son a jolly good scolding – he looked so guilty. When Harry grew up he became a builder, and built many of the new houses in Weston after the Second World War, including some at Purlewent Drive.

We didn't have television or radio but we had a lot of entertainment with concerts and dances in the Church Room. We danced in the street or on the Old Rec. with the All Saint's Village Band which was formed by my Uncle Walter and my father. Lots of the young lads joined and it gave the villagers a great deal of pleasure. After a



All Saint's Village Band, led by Walter Bray c. 1935 before they had their uniforms. They are marching past Elm Place in the High Street. The sign for The Globe pub can be seen on the left of the picture.

while, when they could afford it, they had uniforms and had many engagements to lots of places because they were so good. On Christmas morning at six o'clock the band would play carols outside the Vicarage starting with "Christians Awake, Salute the Happy Morn". It sounded wonderful and really made my Christmas. Afterwards the bells would ring out for seven o'clock Communion. But my Uncle Walter died during the war and that was the end of the band. Someone tried to keep it going but it didn't work out which was sad as it was such a good band.

We belonged to the King's Messengers group and enjoyed the meetings on Tuesday evenings. They were run by Miss Stallard who lived at Combe Park and we loved her very much. She had been a missionary for many years in Africa so she would tell us stories about the little black boys and girls and show us slides of the peoples and countries she had seen. We made raffia mats in pretty colours and a very nice lady from Weston Road would read us stories like "Alice in Wonderland". We always ended with prayers and a hymn. There was also the Girls' Friendly Society which held meetings in the Reading Room, which is now the Library. For the boys there was the Scouts and my brother belonged to that. There was billiards for the older boys too. My brother belonged to the Church choir and later on my son did too.

Lots of men kept racing pigeons in the village. That was a great hobby. It was lovely to see them flying around every evening. I don't know of anyone keeping pigeons out here now, but we still have the offspring of the old racing pigeons at Sheppards Gardens. I love them they are beautiful birds and I feed them every morning. When my brother was about ten years old he thought he would like a pigeon and worried my father for one. Of course Dad said no, but in the end he gave in. Jack made the hutch and really enjoyed letting him out, watching him fly around calling him back by shaking the tin of corn, and then the novelty wore off. My father took over and really loved the little bird until one day meddlesome Matty, that was me, came along and let the bird out, thinking he would come back, which he didn't. My father was very upset, and so was I for being naughty, and that was the end of our pigeon.

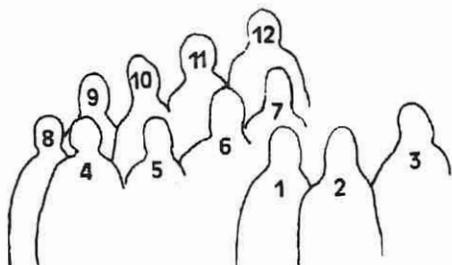
CHURCH



Life in the village revolved around Church. The two chapels, the Peoples Mission and the Countess of Huntingdon Chapel were well attended as was Weston All Saints Parish Church. Sunday was a very enjoyable day. We all had Sunday clothes and went to Sunday School morning and afternoon and to Church for the morning and evening services. The Church bells rang out for morning and evening service, I do love Church bells. When anyone died in the village a Church bell was tolled by Mr Salmon and if anyone of great importance died the Muffle Peal was rung on the bells.

The Reverend Bromley was the Vicar. He came to Weston, with his wife and three children in 1912 and he stayed for 34 years so we all grew up with him. Mrs Bromley was a lovely lady who wore large hats with ostrich feathers. She was head of the Mothers' Union and was Sunday School teacher for the Infants. Every Sunday morning we always sang "Loving Shepherd of thy Sheep". In the summer Mrs Bromley would be in her drawing room with the windows wide open playing the piano and singing at the top of her voice "My Little Grey Home in the West", her favourite I think. She was a very fine, stately lady. Every day she would walk with her little white dog and her young son Christopher to the top of the village where the brook was such an attraction for her little son. Coming down the steps from Church Road she would always say to Christopher "Take care darling".

In summer, on our way home from school, we always went up the slope from The Batch to the Church where we had lovely times swinging on the hand rails. We could do all sorts on them, especially Gwen Podger. She would sit on the rail, swinging backwards and forwards and all sorts of tricks. The Vicar didn't like us swinging on them as sometimes we damaged them. Sometimes Mrs Bromley would look over the garden wall and tell us off very severely, but it didn't stop us, and we twisted on those rails until we left school at fourteen and went to work. Children today don't seem to have the same sort of fun that we had.



Weston All Saint's Church Choir
 c. 1950. 1. Nigel Hunt 2. John Payne
 3. Peter Drake 4. Mervyn Woodburn
 5. Royston Davey 6. Maurice Somerton
 7. John Davis 8. Peter Gillard (Dawson)
 9. John Burroughs 10. Barry Bray
 11. Terry Hurfurt 12. Gorden Dyer.

The gentry were very generous to the Church which helped the poor in the village. If anyone needed help they went to the Church and at Christmas the old people were given free coal and blankets. The gentry filled the Church on Sunday mornings, lots of them arriving in their carriages and horses. It was like a fashion parade, with the ladies in their fine clothes and large brimmed hats with feathers and the men in top hats and bowlers. We Sunday School girls sat in the gallery so we could see it all. There were two sisters from Combe Park who were our teachers and how well behaved we had to be, and no talking. I well remember how noisy the boys were when they came into Church with Mr Dawe their teacher. They sat in the pews under the gallery. Mr Dawe was very good for the village. He was Head Teacher at the Boys' School and they all respected him. On Empire Day all the school children assembled in the old recreation field around the flag staff. The flag would be hoisted and we would all sing Empire songs conducted by Mr Dawe.

After the Sunday afternoon service once a month the Vicar would let us stay behind to watch the babies being Christened in the beautiful font that is never used now. The babies were dressed in their long gowns and beautiful shawls. The Vicar always came to our concerts and dances in the Church Room. He always sang his favourite song "My Darling Clemantine" and we all joined in the chorus. Good times they were, with free refreshments, and we would dress up to the nines to attract the boys, but they were always a bit shy.

The Sunday School outing at Weston-Super-Mare was simply wonderful. We talked about it weeks and weeks before the day arrived and knitted



Donkey rides on the beach at Weston-Super-Mare; Viv Wilkins, Nell Bray and Ruth Wilkins.

little purses to put our pennies in, the big old pennies that we had saved up. Everything cost a penny, a stick of rock, a piece of nougat or a bar of Nestles chocolate out of the machine. It was always a beautiful sunny day in July. The tide would be in, or coming in when we arrived - no pollution, not like today. Off came our shoes and socks, dresses tucked into our knickers, and straight into the sea. What fun we had the whole day long. The ride in the charabanc was great and we sang all the way there and all the way back, in fact a good day was had by all.

How we enjoyed being confirmed. We all wore white dresses and veils. That year we were confirmed in Bath Abbey and on one side were all the girls in white, with the boys on the other side. I must say all the girls from all over looked beautiful. The boys and girls from Weston All Saints Church were in the pews towards the back so we had a quite a long walk down the aisle to the Bishop sitting on his throne. It was a wonderful feeling when he placed his hands upon our heads to bless us and I kept that feeling for the rest of the day. I loved that white dress that my Mum made for me. She dyed it blue and I wore it a lot. My sister Nell was confirmed with her friend but I always went to Communion with my elder sister Iris and our cousin Vera.

Mrs Bromley died at the outbreak of the Second World War but the Vicar stayed on for some time after it ended. When he retired we were sorry to see him go because he had been with us for so long. After the Bromleys came Rev. Rowe with his wife and daughter. They were very nice and were here for twenty three years. He started a youth club for all the teenagers. After Sunday Evensong they all went to the Church Room for a social evening and dance and my eldest daughter Val enjoyed it very much. A lot of the boys and girls paired up and married.

FIRST WORLD WAR 1914-1918

My dad went to the First World War. I remember him in his uniform and he had a large black moustache. I went to the station (the L. M. S.) with Mum to see him off. I was about four years old. He went to Swanage for training, twisted his knee jumping hurdles, and was unable to go with his regiment, the Somerset Light Infantry, to France. When he recovered he was sent out to Mesopotamia to fight the Turks - he was very lucky to get home again. My husband's father was in the Glorious Gloucesters and he was very badly wounded by the Turks in the Battle of the Dardanelles.

My sister Nell and I had to go to Lower Weston to the Co-op



shop to buy the sugar which was rationed. I guess we were allowed more there than in the village. The Co-op was near the gas works and we had to walk there and back. On the way back we would sit on the seat outside Locksbrook Cemetary for a rest and we used to open one of the blue bags of sugar, wet our fingers to dip into the sugar and eat it - it tasted lovely. We didn't take much or Mum would have been very cross with us.

While we sat there, two little girls, there would sometimes be a military funeral from the War Hospital. The War Hospital was where the Royal United Hospital is today. There would be a horse-drawn gun carriage with the coffin draped in the Union Jack. They would stop outside the gates, with lots of army people there, and a bugler would sound the Last Post. I would

get very upset and cry. I was only about five and my sister was two years older. There are lots of war graves in the Cemetery and a War Memorial with their names on. They were buried with great honours, poor lads.

I remember seeing a German zeppelin fly over Weston Village. Everyone was out of doors looking up and we were all very frightened, but they didn't drop any bombs, thank goodness. A lady whose husband was wounded and in the War Hospital came to stay with us and, when she visited him, she always took me with her. Mum would make me look all pretty, a proper little dolly with dark curly hair, and all the soldiers made a fuss of me. I would have to sit on their beds in turn so they could cuddle me and I would be so shy.

Once King George V and Queen Mary came to Weston (1917) to visit all the wounded soldiers in the War Hospital, and there were a lot I can tell you, many of them dying from their wounds. When King George and Queen Mary came, the school children from the village went to Combe Park to wave flags and cheer as they drove past. They had to come up Weston Lane to get into Combe Park and, as it was winter, they went in a closed car. It seemed we waited for hours, some of us were crying with the cold, and I well remember how cold my feet were. When they did come the chauffeur drove past very slowly, so we did get a glimpse of them.

On Saturdays Mum would take my younger sister Evelyn and me to town shopping and, coming home, the tramcar would be full of soldiers going back to the Hospital. They were recovering from their wounds and were allowed out for so many hours. Of course we had to sit on their knees in the crowded tram, and how Evelyn laughed. Well, poor things, they had been through so much in that dreadful war and they were so happy and just glad to be alive.

I remember when Dad came home how shy we were of him until we got used to having a dad again. Then it was all loving and kissing from we four girls and our brother who was the youngest in the family.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-1945

That Sunday morning when Mr. Chamberlain told us that we were at war with Germany, it was ghastly. My husband had already gone with the Royal Engineers on their way to Southampton and I was left in tears with three tiny children. The Engineers had to lay all the mine-fields on the South East coast in case of invasion.

After Dunkirk, that's when the air raids started and all the disturbed nights. There were black-out curtains, no street lights and we had double summer time all the year round. The Air Raid Wardens were kept very busy and the Blitz on Bath was like hell let loose. How Weston wasn't wiped out I'll never know, the bombs were so close, and I'll never forget how terrifying it was. We had no air raid shelter so we all just huddled under the table.

At the time my husband was on a troop ship on the high seas, going to an unknown destination and having an awful time dodging U-boats.

Bombs fell in Combe Park near the hospital and Weston Park. There were two craters in the Archery Field and on Primrose Hill. The noise was deafening and how glad we were when daylight came and we were still alive. It was April and the dawn chorus was simply wonderful - I was overjoyed and thanked God for it - but whatever did those little birds think of that bedlam all through that dreadful night! We had no gas for two weeks because the gas works was hit. The bombers were after Stothert and Pitt's, the engineering firm, and also the railway. The gas man who came to turn our gas off was very glum and he said "They haven't finished with us yet". They did drop stray bombs on their way back from other raids, one of which fell in the Meads field, which is the recreation ground now, and also just below Beckford's Monument. They said the crater was so deep you could have put a double-decker bus in it.

Everyone thought the German bombers would come again and finish Bath off so lots of people, if they had cars, would go out into the countryside and sleep in their vans and cars. The people next door to us even slept in a hearse. People would say to me

"You should get away from Bath with those children" and it was a worrying time. We were up all night when they bombed Bristol. We were up all night when they bombed Coventry because the bombers passed over Bath each time and each way.

Thank goodness we had the wireless then. The programmes certainly kept our spirits up - Vera Lynn, Arthur Askey, Tommy Handley, "Music While You Work" - such good songs came out during the war. They had such a lot of feeling in them and the dance bands were great too. The wireless certainly did a lot for our morale.

Everyone liked the American boys when they came to the American War Hospital at Combe Park. We got used to seeing them driving their jeeps about the village. The children loved them because they gave them chewing gum. Sweets and chocolate were rationed and almost vanished and so did bananas. Everything was rationed. I remember queueing for biscuits from Woolworths - it was only once a week so if you happened to be in town you were lucky. The biscuits were in tins with a girl serving behind each tin and you could have so many from each tin, which were all different, so you can imagine the queue. How the children and I enjoyed those biscuits! There were doughnuts too, but only once a week, at the Co-op in the village so there was a long queue before the shop opened at nine o'clock because there was never enough to go round. There were sausages and sometimes tripe at the butcher's but, if you wanted some for your mother or a friend, you had to go back to the end of the queue again because you couldn't have two lots at once. You dare not go out without your ration books. Sugar and tea was very short and dried egg powder from America was awful stuff. Everything was in short supply but we managed and kept cheerful as we were all in the same boat.

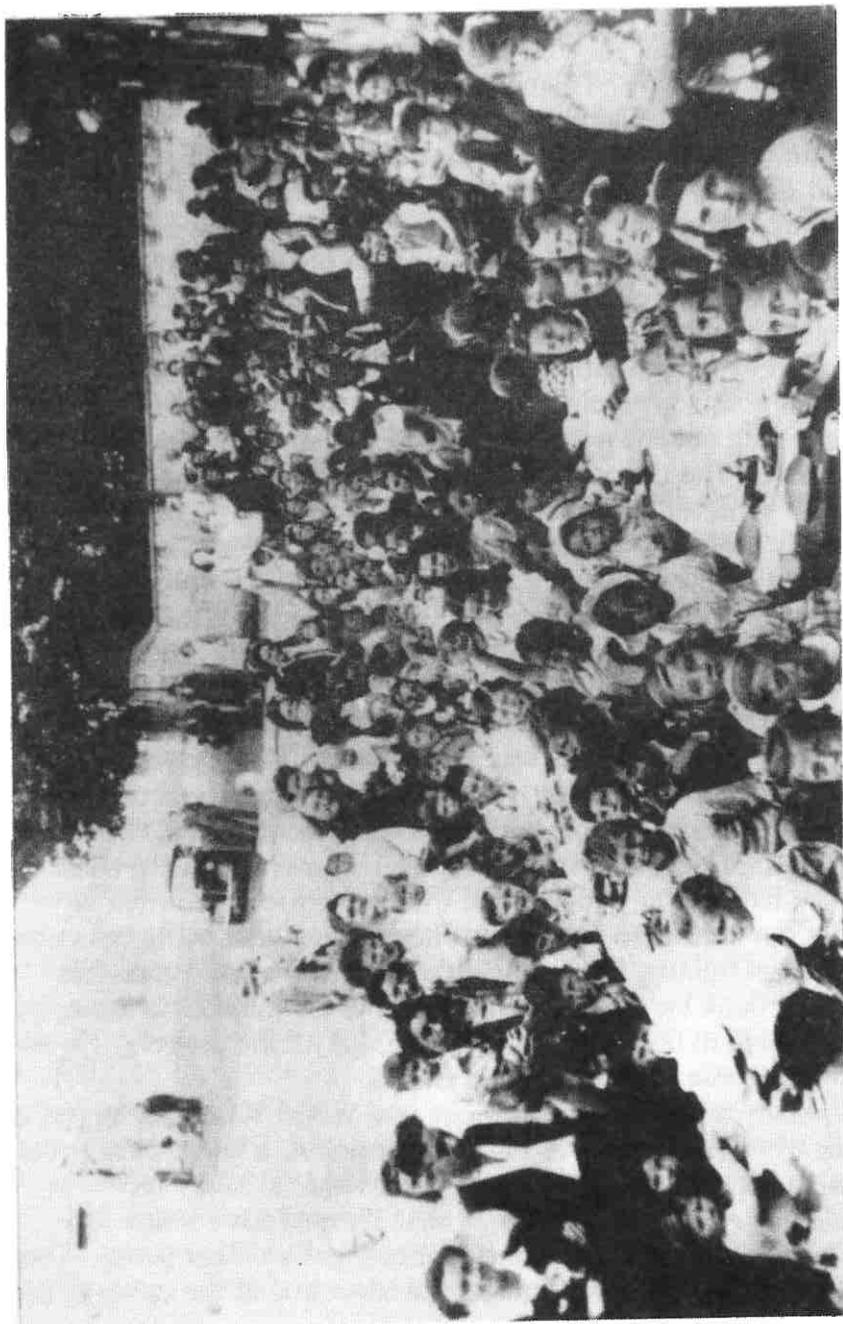
It was five long years and it's no wonder we all went crazy when the war ended. I'll never forget that night when the news came through that the war had ended. They sounded the last "All Clear" and the train drivers sounded all the train whistles. You should have heard the din - it was wonderful and went on for ages. We couldn't believe it. No more disturbed nights, the end of blackout curtains and the street lights all lit up again.



Next day the Church bells rang out after being silent for so many years and we were all so happy. There were street parties for the children and in the evening everyone came out in the village to dance outside the Crown and Anchor. Mr. Mortimer provided the music and the Hokey-Cokey was all the rage, so you can imagine everyone, old and young, all dancing. The American boys joined in too. The third night two effigies of Hitler and Mussolini were tied to long poles and marched to the top of the street where a large bonfire was lit by people carrying torches and, when the effigies were put on the fire, a great cheer went up. On the Sunday the Church bells rang out and everyone went to Church for a Thanksgiving Service. The Church was full to the brim and the singing was like I've never heard before or since.

My husband was out in Burma, ill with beri beri disease and he, with other army men, had to be flown to a hospital in Calcutta. Some poor men died of this dreadful disease caused through lack of food. The Fourteenth Army was called "The Forgotten Army". It was wonderful when my Ernest came home. The postman brought a telegram and when I told him it said that my husband was on his way home, he was so delighted for me. When he arrived a large Union Jack was hanging out of the bedroom windows and, because it was practice night, the Church bells were ringing - wasn't that nice! It was wonderful and I must tell you the children and I were overjoyed. He was very thin but he was so lucky to get home again after being out in the Far East fighting the Japanese for three and a half years. He didn't think he would ever get home to his loved ones again, but he trusted in the Lord and came through all the dangers. He later told us some very hair-raising stories.

Many of our boys went to the two World Wars and, as you can see from their names on the War Memorial, a lot of them never came home again. I think our War Memorial looks very dilapidated and uncared for. I wish it could have a face lift. There was a pretty green there before, and a village pump. I wish they had left the green and put the Memorial in the centre of it.



Villagers celebrate VE Day in 1945 with a street party outside the Crown & Anchor pub.

FAREWELL

The war ended and that was the end of our pretty village. The Old Rec. went first. That had been given to the children of Weston by Mrs Carr who lived in the Manor. We had lovely times on that Rec., it was so central. There were fetes and carnivals there every year. Lots of things changed. The Peoples' Mission Chapel was pulled down and all the cottages round that part including Mr Young's workshop - he was the carpenter. Mr Mortimer wanted all that land for a builder's yard as he had a lot of building to do.

The Brook vanished into pipes, lovely old cottages were pulled down for flats to be built - and you never see any life in them. I remember when people were always at their front doors or at their garden gates when their work was done, having a chat with passers by. It was very friendly and nice. The men would be working on their allotments and were very proud of their produce.

A lot of people here think that the house opposite to the entrance of Sheppards Gardens was once a farm house. I tell them "No, it was once one of the grand houses in Weston." The Old Manor Farm house was taken down for a new estate (Greenbank) and Crown Road. Mr Chubb was the last farmer there. The garden of that house came right down to the old road with a row trees for privacy. Rich people lived there and owned a horse and carriage, like many others in Weston Park. All the coach houses and stables are turned into beautiful houses now.

There is a tree in the village that I can see from my window at Sheppards Gardens. There was a row of them at the back of Monument View houses in Farmer Shergold's field that came down to the brook. When they took the houses down the trees came down too, all but one. The flats are there now, Brookside shops and flats. I'm so glad they left that one tree. In winter when the branches are bare and, in summer when it is full of foliage, I watch all the flocks of starlings and rooks flying in and out - how I love that tree - a bit of old Weston. Well, I love all trees very much, but this one is special to me.