

Villagers I have known

By Richard Cheetham

Estimated reading time: 35 minutes



The following memories and stories are about the various characters I have known from the local area since my family moved into Stinchcombe village in 1956. I hope you find them of interest and they draw a smile. As I re read what I have written, I realise I have been writing about a group of people who would probably have been looked on as old fashioned even among their own generation. They were the last vestiges of a by gone era. I also hope these tales may help some future person researching local village history to put flesh on the bones of these long past, much missed villagers and bring their memories back to life. Memories are precious, and they deserve not be forgotten.

We will make a start with Uncle Norman.

Uncle Norman Attwood

One of the main characters I remember from my childhood was Norman Attwood – to us known as Uncle Norman even though he was no relation. He lived at Quarry House on Tait's Hill road, and we were next door neighbours until he sold the rough land between us for 2 houses to be built. Before that happened, we made the best of the land.

Uncle Norman was working for the local council as a yard man – an out of use description of someone who kept a certain yardage of pavement etc. clear of undergrowth.

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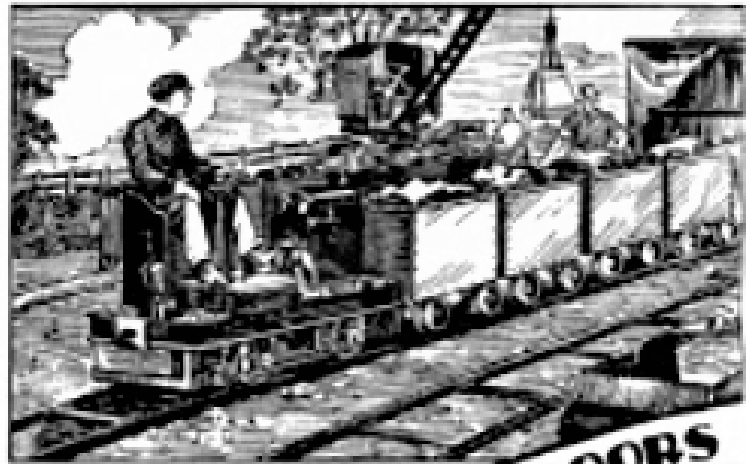
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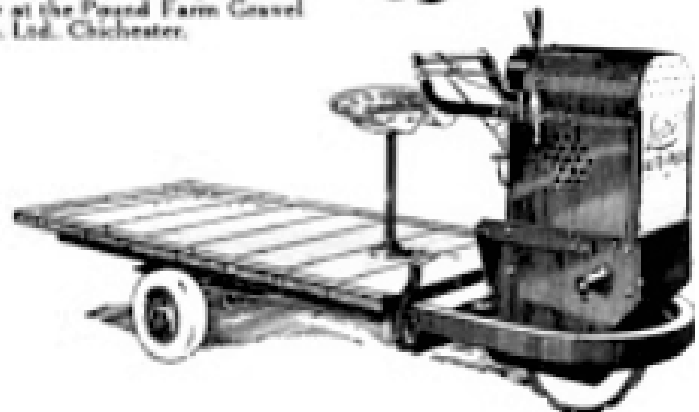
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He was well known all over the area for driving his distinctive [Lister's Auto Truck](#). and about August time, anything he cleared that would burn was brought back to this piece of previously mentioned rough land and kept for bonfire night

My abiding memory is of Uncle Norman sat on an old kitchen chair, in his vest, drinking glass after glass of my Mums

homemade wine (I think the Rhubarb wine was his favourite) having just thrown sacks full of discarded cats' eyes on to this massive bonfire.

Expelled

He had endless stories of his youth, one of which was getting expelled from Stinchcombe School. When I asked what he had done to merit this, he just smiled and said "I will tell you one day" but sadly he never did. Perhaps there are records of the reasons because I got the impression, he was not the only boy expelled at the same time.

The slow lane

He was a big man, always smoking a pipe and who never hurried for anyone, so when he told me that he had once driven an old traction engine from here to Liverpool Docks at an extremely sedate pace I believed him, and about the large number of motorists he upset, I can just imagine him, pipe in hand totally unconcerned.

The Yew Tree

Like so many men of that era, especially with manual jobs, he did enjoy a drink, this could sometimes get him into trouble, as happened when he was working for Mrs. Gadsden then of Piers Court.

He was working on the sloping fields on the other side of the road from the Yew Tree Inn and was supposed to be in charge of a much younger worker, but the proximity and lure of the Yew Tree pub I am afraid was too great. They returned to their respective tractors rather the worse for wear.

It seems the young worker turned his tractor over, amazingly without suffering serious injury, but the news got back to

Mrs. Gadsden and Uncle Norman was sacked on the spot.

When I said to him that must have been a great worry to you being sacked, all he said was “sacked on a Friday started somewhere else on a Monday”.



The Yew Tree c1950's

Donimoes

He was a regular at the Yew Tree pub but he said he only went for the chat and a game of “Donimoes” as he pronounced it! My father told me he had popped down to the Yew Tree one night when torrential rain had overwhelmed the drains.

The water was going in through the front door and out through the back but this had not displaced the regulars (of which Uncle Norman was a senior member) and who were happily sat on the bar carrying on with their “Donimoes” game.

Piers Court episode

He used use to tell of the time he worked for [Evelyn Waugh](#) at Piers Court and when the whole Waugh family packed their bags and set off for a long summer holiday in France. Uncle Norman among others drove the family and all their massive travel trunks to the railway station.

By the time Uncle Norm and the others had returned to Piers Court, his wife, sister, and other ladies who worked in the house had cooked a massive meal, visited the wine cellar, and laid out the best tableware etc. for their families and friends to enjoy the feast.

The evening was a great success until headlights appeared in the drive. The Waugh's had missed a connection somewhere on their journey and decided to return back home.

As you can imagine, Evelyn Waugh exploded with anger and sacked everyone on the spot. No doubt this would have been another moment for Uncle Normans general outlook on life "Sacked on a Friday start somewhere else on Monday".

Bringing home the bacon

I can't recall this story; I was too young, but my elder brother tells me that Uncle Norman kept a pig on the piece of rough ground in a shed next to our house.

My brother overheard Uncle Norm telling my dad to keep the boys away the following day as it was time for the Pig to be slaughtered. I knew nothing of this and perhaps at the age of 6 it was for the best, but my older brother, ever keen to know what was going on climbed on our shed roof and watched the whole episode, typical lad.

It was not at all unusual in those days for families to keep a pig for slaughter, but a lifetime away from our present-day

sanitised abattoirs and butcheries. Even decades ago, I can remember my father saying "if we had to kill our own meat there would be a lot more vegetarians".

Spinning a Yarn

Another story I have about Uncle Norm was at my brother's wedding in Liverpool to which he was determined to come along.

I happened to overhear him spinning an attractive young woman a yarn about farming a couple of thousand acres in Gloucestershire. He said he bred horses and ponies and sold them all over the world.

When I spoke to him later, I asked him what that was all about, he replied, "well, she had been boasting about her family farming in Norfolk growing massive amounts of sugar beet and I thought I would pass the time and join in".

He just used Mrs. Gadsden late of Piers Court and later I think of Southend Farm as an example. As you can tell from this and the other tales, he was a quite a rascal but not a bad bone in his body, it was a real joy to have known him.

The Latter Years

In their latter years Uncle Norman and his wife decided to move to a Bungalow just over the way at Stonelea.

I can see him now moving all his old framed photographs and other items important to him from one side of his shed to the other, not having room to take all his treasures with him and trying to decide which to keep.

After his wife died, which was not long after they moved, he used to come to us for Christmas, but my father always had to prise him out of the Yew Tree when Christmas dinner was ready.



One last memory, I once overheard someone ask Uncle Norman where he wanted to be buried, his reply was, "under the Yew Tree"

I knew he meant the tree in Stinchcombe Churchyard, but he never confirmed which, the pub or the church.

Miss Hooper

My mother loved telling the story of Miss Hooper's first meeting with Mr. McFadyen -Walsh when he bought [Melksham Court.](#)

Miss Hooper was quite a formidable character and after Mr. McFadyen – Walsh had moved in, she called round and presented him with a list of dates for various meetings and functions that needed to be held at his new home


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When Mr McFadyen – Walsh said that it was not going to happen while he lived there, Miss Hooper gave him a lecture on the responsibility that came with owning and living at Melksham Court, to which he replied, “the answer is still no and will you kindly -- off”

My Mum said Miss Hooper was so shocked that she often repeated the story much to my Mums amusement hearing such words come

out of the mouth of this very proper lady..

Miss Bowlby

My only memory of Lady or Miss Bowlby, (I heard her called by both titles), who lived at [Combe House](#) was only ever seeing her with her pony and trap which she used to drive everywhere with her companion sat huddled in the back.

I also don't think I ever saw her in anything but a Bowler hat, hacking jacket etc. but then I would have been too busy playing cricket or football when I saw her trotting along past the Stragglers ground.

Ella Vizer



The Forge Tait's Hill Rd with Ella Vizer to the left and her sisters Dora centre and Ivy to the right, c1940's By kind

permission of Matt and Emma, current owners of The Forge Ella Vizer lived in the Forge on Tait's Hill Rd which was nearly opposite our house. Our family's first introduction to Ella was soon after moving in when my Mum met her in our garden picking mint and thyme.

My mum gently asked why she was picking the herbs and she replied "well, the previous owners had never minded" it seems she obviously thought it would be ok for her to carry on, knowing my Mum she would have been quite happy for her to do so.

Ella freely admitted she did not have much in the way of education and came to rely quite a lot on my mum..



Apart from her daily chores Ella's job was to ride horses back to their owners after her father had done his farriers work at

the forge

.

It is hard to imagine a young child on what is now the A38 (was the old Bristol Rd) riding working horses back to their owners then walking back home.

The local church [St Cyr's](#) was her main interest, and she was a very enthusiastic singer of all the popular hymns. Anyone who worked at [Listers](#) Dursley would have heard her joyfully belting out these hymns while she did her cleaning job there.

I expect we can all remember some hymns that required certain parts to be sung softly. Anyone who has had a long association with Stinchcombe Church will remember Ella was totally oblivious to this instruction and happily sang every part at full throttle



Ella also loved local weddings and would set off down to the church on her bike wearing her best bonnet in plenty of time to stand and watch all the proceedings.

Later life when she was too ill to go to church she became terribly upset and constantly asked any regular churchgoers in the road to ask the vicar to come to her house to give her holy communion.

Nothing seemed to happen so she let it be known that she was changing her will to cancel any legacy that would have gone to the church. Word has it that you could almost smell the burning tyre rubber as the vicar turned up to give her holy communion. I never did find out if she had changed her will or not.

Ella's trip to Bristol

Another memory of Ella is a story she delighted in telling of her trip to [Park Street](#) in Bristol to buy the most expensive fur coat they had. It seems it was her lifetimes dream to buy such a coat from the most up market shop she knew.

She said she knew the snobby staff were looking down their noses and that some of the sales staff were in a corner sniggering at her, let's face it, she was not your typical customer, and I wouldn't be surprised if Raymond her husband hadn't worn his wellington boots.

However, as she told it, when offered various credit arrangements to pay for the fur coat the staff were astounded when she took out wads of notes, enough to pay the bill several times over. I bet they were not laughing at Ella then.

Old ways

Most of these memories I have written about show how these characters were the last members of a way of life that was

changing very quickly.

One good example of this was when my maternal Grandmother died at our house after spending her last couple of years living there.

As soon as Ella heard the news, she came to our house dressed in black with a large hat on to pay her respects to my Gran.

She was horrified to hear that Gran was at the chapel of rest. I have never heard of anyone else expecting to do this – she just came from a different age when that was the thing to do.

Reggie Cook



Mr. Cook lived in the quarry and ran a newspaper delivery business from his bungalow. Countless youngsters over the years must have had their paper rounds set up by him. Once the young delivery boys and girls had been dealt with, he would start his own round on his trusty bike.

This round had a flexible timetable to it as it all depended on who he met to talk to on his way round.

I can remember that along Tait's Hill Rd where we lived, we didn't get our paper until after lunch much to the annoyance of a peppery old chap who lived on [Clingre](#).

He used to stride about waiting for Mr. Cook to eventually appear and then berate him saying "I want my paper earlier than this, I want to work out my horse racing bets for the day". this was like a red rag to a bull to Mr. Cook and they used to stand in the road hurling insults at each other.

I could never understand why, if it were so important to get the paper earlier, the chap from Clingre didn't walk to Banner's garage just round the corner at Woodfield's and get his own paper. I can only guess these regular feisty exchanges had become a way of life to them.

When Mr Cook gave up his business, the new delivery service raised the delivery price by several times the old price. It seemed sad to me that Mr Cook had done himself down for all those years but Mr. Cook did have another string to his bow in that he was the local grave digger.

Long after he had given up delivering newspapers, I met him and asked if he was still [grave digging](#), he replied that he was giving it up, he said he could still dig the graves, but could no longer get out of the hole.

For once my brain worked before my mouth because I was going to say, why don't you take a small set of steps with you but thinking about it, he was getting on in years and I expect he was maybe looking for an honourable excuse to give the job up.

Puggy Pick

I remember Mr. Pick or Puggy as everyone called him when he lived at the cottage on Tait's Hill just up the road from Vale Vets. He never had a car to my knowledge but drove everywhere on his old Massey Ferguson tractor.

He had a unit on the back of his tractor which was mostly used for milk churns but occasionally used to give my brother and I lifts home from primary school much to the anger of my mother.

I can see mum now telling Puggy off for racing along with us in the back. It was all water off a duck's back to him, he just replied "they be alright".



Photo and information by kind permission of Ava Walker

The above photo of Puggy was taken in 1937 driving past the Yew Tree with his horse Snowball.

Listers house can be seen in the background. The children on the back are, Back row Ken Hill, Norman Brooks, Derek Hill, Robert Heeps, Vera and Joan Kitchen, Raymond Summers and Percy Wyatt, in front are Barbara Pick, Betty Linnington, Nancy Hill, Edna Wyatt, Doreen Woodward and Margaret Pick.

While in conversation about Puggy with another local, I was

told he would regularly take his whole family to Dursley shopping in the back of this trailer and generally park it in the most awkward of places.

Puggy's way

One day when coming home from primary school, I saw he was he was dragging hay or straw into his cottage, I asked if it was for animals in his back garden. He laughed and said "come and see me babby".

I was amazed to see him ram the stuff up the chimney in his living room and set fire to it, "I don't pay no chimney sweeps" he said as you could hear the roaring in the chimney and see the soot falling into the grate. When I got home my mum was furious with me but if she had confronted Puggy later, I expect he would have just laughed it off.

Puggy's Fergie

My father often used to see Puggy racing around the lanes in his [Fergie](#) going from one pub to another.

Dad said he was always cautious when he saw this as it would not be long before Puggy's faithful dog would come flying round a corner to catch Puggy up, but as dad said, the dog probably knew which pub he was headed to anyway.

It was only quite recently that someone said to me the nickname for the Yew Tree used to be Fergie's because Puggy's Massey Ferguson tractor was almost a permanent feature there.

Puggy's dealings

When I mention the next tale, several people say I am wrong, but I can only repeat what Puggy said to my father.

Puggy said, at one time he owned a strip of land on Tait's Hill

Rd sandwiched between where houses were beginning to be built and the quarry rock face.

If Puggy had a bill to settle be it pub landlord or other, he would go to one of these houses beginning to front his strip of land and offer them the part of strip behind their property, If they said no , he would go to the next house and offer them the strip behind both houses, and that is his version of why some of the back gardens along that side of the road are larger than others.

Bob Smart



Another character from my childhood was the local farmer, Bob Smart.

At the time he lived in Quarry farmhouse, most of his land is now Orchard Leaze. With the farm being so close to our house, we could see the cows being milked from our kitchen window and it was natural we spent a lot of time in the fields and the farmyard.

Bob had a good sense of humour and kindly style of mischief. Whilst walking back from the paper shop one Sunday as a young boy, I wished him good morning and I asked him what he thought the weather was going to be that day.

After much sucking of teeth and searching of the sky he said "I reckon it be pouring with rain by 4 o'clock". Impressed, I asked what the clues to this were, he smiled and said "experience lad, I eard it on the early morning farming programme on the radio".

Farming ways

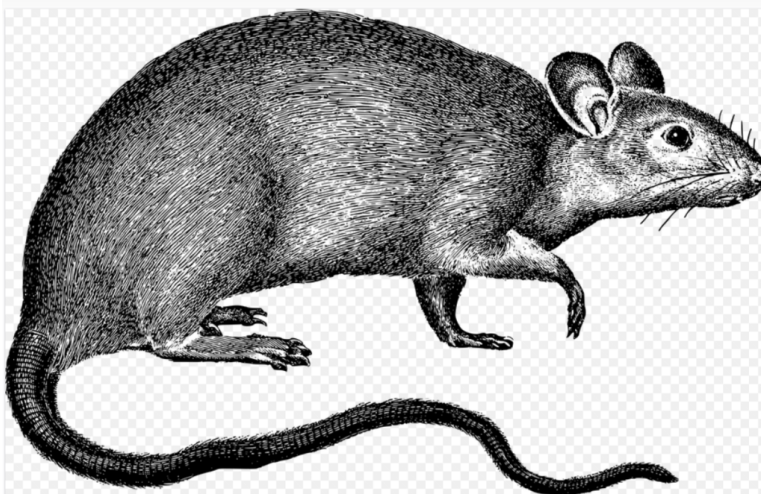
He didn't come from a family of farmers, and I asked him once how he knew when to do certain things, plant a crop, get the potatoes out etc. His reply was "farming was dead easy lad, I does everything the day after I see Joe Workman doing it",

Joe Workman was another local farmer whose family had farmed at Townsend farm for many years.

I think the thing that Mr.Smart said to me that summed up the more relaxed attitude to life in that era was when I said how I hated the clocks being altered twice a year, his reply was, I don't bother much about that, no one tells the cows, If I goes to get them for milking an hour earlier than usual, they would stand there and look quizzical at me and if an hour late they would soon tell me to get a move on.

I used to think how lovely not to be a slave to the clock.

The Cider rat



I can remember seeing Bob's farm dog coming out of the barn once with a large dead rat in its mouth, he called the dog over, took the rat out of its mouth and proceeded to put the rat in the rough cider press, he said it all helped to make better cider.

In fact, he used to buy what he called a [*Flitch of beef*](#) and put it in with the apples. I was not sure if I had remembered this incident correctly so I checked with my brother, and not only did he confirm the story but he added he was sure there was a Black Rat brand of rough cider so it can't have been all that unusual. (There is a modern day Black Rat Cider – extremely strong cider – as evidenced at many of the Rugby Club Beer Festivals!).

A gentler time

Compared to landowners who followed him he had an easy-going attitude. My friends and I would often play in his fields, and we used to love damming up the stream. All Mr Smart asked of us was to break it down when we had finished so that the cattle could have use of the stream water further down the farmland.

Such a different attitude to modern landowners who do everything in their power to discourage walking etc. even when there are long established footpaths and bridle paths.

Margaret Pearce

Another interesting character in Stinchcombe was Margaret Pearce nee Pick. Her family moved to [Woodlands farm](#) on Tait's Hill Rd in 1914. Oddly enough, the rented cottage they moved from in Cam was next occupied by my maternal grandparents.



Photograph courtesy of Tracy & Russell Legg

Margaret Pearce told me she was born at Woodlands farm, and she can remember her father and grandfather using horses and Oxen for farm work such as ploughing as well as for the haulage business they ran. She told me her family did a lot of work for the Listers which in those days it would have been [Sir Ashton Lister](#) who needed loads of rubble removed from the lister factory site.

The war years

She could remember the farmhouse being used not only for serving the military but adult evacuees and looking back, she could never work out where everyone slept but they must have coped as people did in those days.

It seemed there were gun emplacements and search lights in the area and the military had to be billeted nearby.

The catering job

In later life after losing her husband, Margaret took various jobs to keep her independence.

Even though she had no commercial training, she was not afraid of dealing with large numbers of people. One of her stories was when she was working for [Mrs. Gadsden](#) who was entertaining many top pony and horse buyers that had come to view and purchase from her [Bengad stud](#).

It seems Mrs. Gadsden's housekeeper had forgotten to get the required meat out of the freezer so Mrs. Gadsden sent her young relative round to Margaret to warn her of the situation and ask how they could get round it.

They chased round to find what they could, and as I remember from that time, shops did not stay open as late as they do now so they returned with a mixture of meats and fish that could be cooked quickly.

I can visualise Margaret entering the grand dining room, explaining to the assembled guests the situation, and announcing what the various menu options would be.

What could have been a disastrous business and social meal was greeted with much friendly amusement. It must have been memorable because Margaret said quite often at future dinners

for the pony and horse buyers they would ask, “are we having one of Margaret’s pick and mix meals today”?

Margaret’s D.I.Y.

One day I got a call for help from Mrs. Pearce. I had no idea what to expect, but when I reached her gate, I could see sawdust blowing out of her front door.

That day she had decided to get rid of her large old-fashioned three-piece suite and being unable to get it outside due to its size, she decided to saw it up into pieces in the living room. She had got herself into a right old pickle, virtually trapping herself in the room with her efforts.

When I managed to push myself through the doorway I saw a large collection of saws, axes, chisels, and a hammer and Margaret was a sight to behold.

She was red faced and overheated from her efforts and covered from head to foot in sawdust and wood chippings.

We did eventually succeed in getting the dismembered suite outside much to Margaret’s relief. As mentioned previously, she was a very independent lady and always tried to sort things herself but when incidents like this occurred, she could always see the funny side and very happy to have good old laugh at herself.

More D.I.Y.

She gave Dr Frankau a shock one day, he was driving along and saw Margaret flat out face down on the grass verge by her front hedge.

Stopping his car and running over to her thinking it was a heart attack or a fall, he found when he got there, she had got her arm down a very deep stop tap chamber dragging out the

mud and silt that had accumulated in there.

She had a right old chuckle, there will never be another Margaret.

Margaret's way

Margaret didn't give a darn about what people thought of her, for example, after a profoundly serious fall in the garden when she nearly lost her foot and ankle, she had to attend hospital via the sitting ambulance for several months.

She was a tall woman and didn't think much of the walking stick she was given by the hospital, she said even at maximum height she felt stooped over. She asked me to cut out a rough thumb stick like the ones I used to cut out for my father that would be tall enough for her to stand upright.

These thumb sticks might have been alright for walking around the woods and fields but not de rigueur for hospitals.

The hospital staff chuckled at her for stomping around the hospital with this tall thumb stick, but she had the last laugh by pointing out that other patients were all bent over with hospital supply short sticks, and she was stood bolt upright.



She carried the convalescence of this injury forward by often using a full-length broom to help her up and down the road with the broom head as under arm support.

She also used to hold the broom out in front of her when she needed to cross the road to stop the traffic, I expect it gave quite a few motorists a shock.

Margaret did many things in a very individualistic way. I can

remember going to her back door and being met by a strong chemical smell.

When I asked if everything was ok, she said she had used some strong oven cleaner and experience had shown her that it worked better with the oven on. She then thought it was a waste of electric not to cook something at the same time.

I can only guess what chemical concoction she cooked up that day, but she lived to tell the tale.

I thought it worthwhile to spend some time on her story as Margaret was born and lived all her life in Tait's Hill Rd. She was immensely proud of being the longest living resident and then the oldest person in the road. Being of farming stock, just in her lifetime she saw so many changes to farming life going from the gentle way the land was worked by horse and oxen to the use of huge modern machinery that dispensed with the use of traditional ways and also the the loss of many ancient hedgerows.

Burt & Leah Burcombe

I expect some older residents can remember Burt and Leah Burcombe. They were the backbone of most of the groups in the village and the wider area. They were either Chair, secretary, or Treasurer of many organisations.



The story I always remember is Mrs. Burcombe grumbling to my mother that she had to remind the local vicar on more than one occasion not to overrun giving the sermon because she had her Sunday joint already in the oven.

She claimed that if the sermon did drag on, she would catch the vicar's eye and make a great show of tapping on her watch.

Even at my young age I can remember how surprised I was to hear this story from my mum.

It seems my mum was told by Leah Burcombe that her husband Burt was suffering from failing eyesight and she would need to give him directions, left / right and other general instruction from the passenger seat of the car!

Even 60 years ago with much less traffic on the road this must have made for a very hazardous journey, but I think this came to an end when he had a crash on Kingshill road.

I don't know if this incident led to him having his cataracts done but I can remember him saying after he had them done that his head was put in a metal frame for days to stop him moving his head suddenly. What a difference to today when people are out same day.

Last character story (well, for now anyway)

There was also the case of a very overweight friend of my mothers who was told in no uncertain terms to lose a lot of weight or face the fact that she would never get a much needed operation.

The GP involved was Dr Sykes who at the time lived in Stinchcombe in a house near to the Manor. He gave her an extremely strict diet sheet and told her to come back in three months.

When she went back after three months and was weighed again, Dr Sykes was baffled to see she had put on weight and asked her why this was the case, she replied "I had a problem sticking to the diet doctor, it was near impossible to fit the meals on the diet sheet between my other meals".

I expect even Dr Sykes was lost for words.

Tales from my father.

These snippets of social history I can't verify but were told to me by my father.

Evelyn Waugh

He used to recall seeing [Evelyn Waugh](#) stomping round his hated "Stinkers" (Stinchcombe) carrying a large ear trumpet which he employed if any of the peasants spoke to him while he was out walking.

My father said he would often say good afternoon to him just to get the reaction of the ear trumpet lifted to his ear followed by a bellowed "What?".

Obviously Mr. Waugh's way of avoiding conversation with the everyday people.

Sir Percy Lister

My father loved telling the story of the winter of 47/48. He said they were still digging snow out of Dursley in April.

In those days, I don't think many locals would have known much about skiing but one day during this winter he saw all the local children using tin trays etc. hurtling down the fields where Leaf and Ground now resides.

The children were shouting at this lone skier to get out of the way. Little did they know the skier was [Sir Percy Lister](#) who most probably employed most of their parents and other relatives.

On Sir Percy reaching the bottom of the field, his driver and Rolls Royce were waiting for him. His skis were taken off and put on the top of the Rolls and he was driven back up the hill to start again,

The Old London Road

My father also told me a great deal of local history, some of which has been disputed over the years. I am repeating what hid grandfather told him.

One of these items tells of a slip route known locally as the [Ox bow](#) that once formed part of the old London road. This old road goes up to the top of Stinchcombe Hill from The Street. This was at one time the main route from Berkeley to London.

My Great Grandfather worked with the coach and horses that used to ply their trade on this Berkeley to London route. He said it was not unusual for a horse pulling up the hill to burst a blood vessel or suffer some other fatality straining to reach the top. The horse was then just cut out of the [traces](#) and left for someone from Berkeley Hunt to come and take the carcass to be fed to the hounds.

My father always said if he were a horse, he would much prefer the second leg of this journey to London. It might be much longer but by and large it was predominately downhill. He also said most of the changing of the horses took place at Hunters Hall coaching Inn. I understand that my Great Grandfather, Sam Miles, enjoyed many a drink there while the horses were being swapped and watered

The purpose of this Ox Bow was for the horses to be led along its gentler incline after being unhitched from their load, they would then be reunited with their coach or wagon at the top which which would have been hauled up the straight of the road by the heavy duty Oxen.

These Oxen would have been kept in the field just alongside where the Ox Bow began and I seem to remember there was an attempt in recent years to re-create a dew pond in the field which was used to serve the Oxen that were kept there.

Just at the top of the hill on the right there still remains the stepping stone to assist passengers and riders in re boarding the coaches.



Map c 1830's

Much has changed with this old Berkeley to London road over the years.

In recent times it was thought that the Ox Bow was to the right of the main route going up the hill as there is an obvious gouge in the land on that side of the road. However, research has turned up this section of an old map c1830's which shows the Ox bow to be on the left of the track.

The land where this map shows the bow to lie was long ago divided up into separate fields with different ownerships, hedgerows added and stone quarried from to top end, all of which now makes it difficult to try and re trace its exact route..

Older residents recall the time many Elm Trees on the hill had to be taken out when Dutch Elm disease struck in the late 60's

early 70's. A good deal of earth was moved about during this time to enable extraction of the resulting logs and debris.

At a slightly later date a gas main was laid all the way to the top and over the hill using this old roadway as its route. Both of these disturbances would have changed the original lie of the land and muddled the true layout as it was in the days of coach and horse.

There was also at some time in the past a water mains laid through this same area. Indeed Combe House, where Lady Maria Bowbly lived during and after the 2nd World War, was visited in 2000 by one of her Granddaughters who talked about the water pipe coming over the Hill and mentioned that Combe House often ran out of water as most of it was taken by the residents of the Village on top of Stinchcombe Hill – Combe House was at the end of the line!!

These disturbances of the land may go some way to explaining the gouge in the land on the right side of the road.

How Tait's Hill Road has changed

I thought I would finish with my memories of how Tait's Hill Road has changed since we moved there in 1956. Back then it was no more than a minor road.

I can remember my mother saying that so long as she kept our dog inside until Neal's coaches had firstly bought the workers from Berkeley and Sharpness to Listers and then did the same with the children to secondary school she could let the dog wander. It seemed our dog Topsy's favourite position on a warm day was in the middle of the road.

When I have told people this, I can see the doubt in their faces, but it was backed up by the previously mentioned Ella Vizor saying, some days the farmer drove down the road and some days he didn't, If he came across Topsy, he just drove round her, she wouldn't move for anyone.

This slow lane life lasted for only a few years until the road was widened, initially to accommodate the endless flow of lorries associated with the construction of [Berkeley power](#) station but of course it is now it accommodates the ever-increasing volume of everyday traffic.

Two and a half million a year

Writing about how quiet Tait's Hill Road used to be and seeing how busy it is now, I wonder if this is what they call progress, going from next to nothing to 88,908 vehicles a fortnight (according to the automatic traffic count that was done in 2019).

When you turn that into a yearly figure that is heading toward the two and a half million mark of vehicles going past my door every year, most of them seemingly when I am trying to cross the road.

Present and future generations may well accept it as normal because they don't know any different, but I do.

Now I understand the anger and the worry of my parents because this road widening which had brought the road almost to our front windows, our house was blighted by this with a fall in value and its ability to sell.

We lost a lot of land on our side of the road including a game of [clock golf](#) laid out outside our hedge

We were promised we would have the new footpath on our side but that was changed when a local family with good connections got it moved over the road, so she did not have to cross the road when walking her dog, at least that was what the planners told my father when he asked about the change.

They also changed their mind about knocking down part of The Forge cottage, it seems the experts thought leaving a bend in the road would slow the traffic, how wrong they were.

What goes around comes around

It interests me to see history repeating itself. We are using food deliveries on a large scale now. For many years of my youth home deliveries of food were commonplace but slowly died a death when supermarkets lured people through their doors.

We had a Baxter's Butchers van come round once a week, the butcher was a lovely chap, always ready for a chat with his customers. I can remember one week he was very apologetic because he did not have his false teeth in. He was very embarrassed to say that the previous evening he had got over involved with the televised boxing match and whilst on his feet throwing air punches, he had bitten down too hard and broke his dentures.

We also had the Sunday papers delivered by a Mr Fryer from Berkeley. The delivery did not turn up until the afternoon, but we children were more interested in the sweets and ice cream he had in the boot of his Morris Minor. This was another reminder of how quiet the road was as we could wander around his car parked on the other side of the road with no worries at all.

We had a Co-Op van once a week. This was a vehicle large enough to carry a good selection of groceries and could also hold several customers at the same time. I think it became quite a social gathering. And of course people had their milk and bread delivered on a regular basis, something else that is making a comeback with the coming of Covid.

These delivery men spent years on the same round, I can remember the baker one day coming to my rescue when an overly aggressive husky type dog had me pinned to a wall, several blows with his wicker breadbasket soon drove it off.

What a different world now when children are warned not to talk to adult strangers when we were told to go and get a

grown up if there was a problem, but I suppose everybody knew everybody then., the one problem with everybody knowing everybody was if you got up to no good, your mother most probably heard about it even before you got home.

Continuation

When talking to someone about this little project to write about Stinchcombe village characters, they said “when are you going to write about yourself, you are a modern-day oddball character” my reply, “I think I will leave that to someone else and hope they have as fond a memory of me as I have of the characters and times I have just written about”.