

Dear Editor

Having lived in Marcham as a young person I thought it would be of interest to you to write a few lines.

My parents and 4 of us children moved to there in 1916 from Limpley Stoke near Bath. My father as Head Gardener at what was then known as Marcham Park and we lived in the inner one of the two thatched houses at the outer end of North Street and the Estate, and District Nurse in the other one. My Dad was called up and spent a short time in what was known then as the Royal Flying Corps.

I had been to Linley Stoke school for a while but had to start again in the infant room at Marcham and went through school being amongst the top four in most examinations. There were lady teachers during the war, but later two schoolmasters took their places. One being a Mr Teal (sp?). I can well remember the Anson Institute with its two rampant lions outside. A young man used to cycle out from Abingdon to teach us young people to dance there. I kept in touch by writing with Florrie Stone until she died who with brother Jack and sister lived nearly opposite the stone steps.

The front row of choir boys at Marcham Church was kept going by boys whose dads were employed by the well-to-do people of the village. A Miss Ann Anlow (sp?) was organist and choir mistress and was helped at times by a Miss Pantin who lived at the Gap. At Choir Practice we boys had to sing the first few items with a cork held between our teeth to show us how wide open our lips should be when singing and the choirmaster came in for the second half so that we then had four parts.

There were times when two of us boys used to be allowed to go to the home of Elwes Duffield to play with him when he was home from College and at that time Meccano had come about and it was so good to be able to play with it. Also they had an old hip bath in which we used to take turns and float down their section of the stream. The blacksmith used to make thin iron hoops with a metal guide wire attached for the girls. Our school boots were fitted with metal studs, a triangular one at the back of each heel, so that you could cut sparks in dry weather.

There was a milkman Bill Slot who lived at the bottom of New Road who used to walk round carrying a large container of milk and a dipper, which he used to fill the milk jugs outside people's homes. I can remember the names of some of my school mates, one Rufus Church, who later married my sister Joyce. She is 90-odd and still living in Cornwall. There were Mary and Phelise (sp?) Lloyd, Nancy Olive, Chris Bolton,

and Arthur Pointer - always know as Rod. His father was a timber merchant and small bundles of kindling wood could be seen in the yard window. Also Stella Steptoe and Hilda Woodley.

At school leaving age my mother found me a job at Wootton Bakehouse near Boars Hill which I did for about 3 years till I had skin trouble by handling the dough. So I left and started private gardening under my father at Marcham Park for what was to be my job there and several other places including Guinness Younger Ales and Stouts and the best of all at Sir Eric and Lady Bowater's estate at West Horsley. I was full-time greenhouse man there. After Sir Eric died I moved on to New Arlesford working as gardener for one of the four doctors there, and last of all to Twyford Moors Estate about ½ a mile above here until I reached a state when I couldn't stand safely.

I was a church chorister wherever we lived for about 53 years altogether. During the war I was coalmining at Betterhanger Colliery near Deal, Kent, not as a Bevan Boy. Looking back, on night shift which was 10 minutes longer food break, if there were at least 10 Welshmen they were allowed to sing during the break and how lovely it was to hear them. When fit enough to go, I am taken by car to our Church and at time to Garden Club and Friendship Club meetings.

Wishing you all the best

H HALLETT,

Colden Common, near Winchester

ED VAIZEY WRITES...

We now have a new prime minister: Gordon Brown. Brown's first announcement to the House of Commons was a number of proposals to change the constitution. I was in the Chamber for the statement, and the place was packed out. It is an exciting time in politics. Changes to our constitution don't necessarily get everyone's juices going, and they don't help pay the mortgage, something which is becoming increasingly difficult as interest rates rise. But they are important in a country where so much power is vested in the prime minister.

I support a lot of what Brown proposed. I like the idea of Parliament having a say in major public appointments. I agree that parliament should vote on whether we send our troops to war. I also think the PM should give up the power to appoint bishops and judges.

But I also think Brown should go further. I would like to see fixed-term parliaments, with a fixed date for the general election, so that we can remove the uncertainty that currently prevails. I also think we need a fully-elected House of Lords. And, with a devolved Scotland, I think Scottish MPs should lose the power to vote on English domestic issues like health and education.

Flood Extra

Like many of you, I was caught in the floods that hit Oxfordshire. I had to abandon my car in Longcot at about 3pm, and got a lift home to Sparsholt in a 4x4. My own home was saved from flooding by a quick-thinking neighbour, who dug a trench at the end of the road to allow water a foot deep to drain away. I spent the rest of Friday visiting villages nearby with County Councillor Iain Brown in his jeep. On the Sunday, I was able to get to most places to see what had happened, and spent the afternoon filling sand bags with other volunteers at the Regis Depot in Challow. We probably filled a thousand sand bags between us.

I saw Hanney at its worst on Friday, looking much better on Sunday. When I got to Marcham on Sunday, most of the water had drained away, but I know a few houses were badly hit. Lyford was devastated. The Ladygrove in Didcot suffered terrible problems, mainly because of the poor drainage, which I am taking up urgently with Thames Water. Certain parts of Grove were badly hit, particularly Kingfishers, Vale Avenue and the houses by the Barley Mow. Steventon was also hit badly. I never made it to Stanford, or the other villages near Faringdon.

It is perhaps too soon to draw conclusions, but here are three thoughts. Although the rain and the consequent flooding is the worst we have seen for fifty years, we cannot assume it won't happen again for fifty years. Events like this are likely to become more frequent. Secondly, increased housing development must be a factor. It prevents water draining away, and many of the drainage systems themselves are very poor quality. This must cause real doubts about whether developments east of Swindon, in Grove and Didcot, not to mention the reservoir, can go ahead. Thirdly, and related, the local councils and the Environment Agency must sit down and analyse the worst affected areas and ask themselves what we can do to defend ourselves in the future, and whether, in that context, these developments should be allowed. I am pleased the Government has said they will reimburse councils for the flood damage and I will be supporting the councils in their dealings with Government.

ED VAIZEY, MP Wantage (Con)

For Surgery and contact details see page 15.

Dear Editor

So sorry to disturb you ! I have lost touch with a friend Hilary Kay, of Sheepstead Road. She used to be part of the Antique Road Show ... any tel number or email address would help.

EDWARD IONS

Please contact the Editor if you have any information.

Write to MADNews and let others know what you think about current events