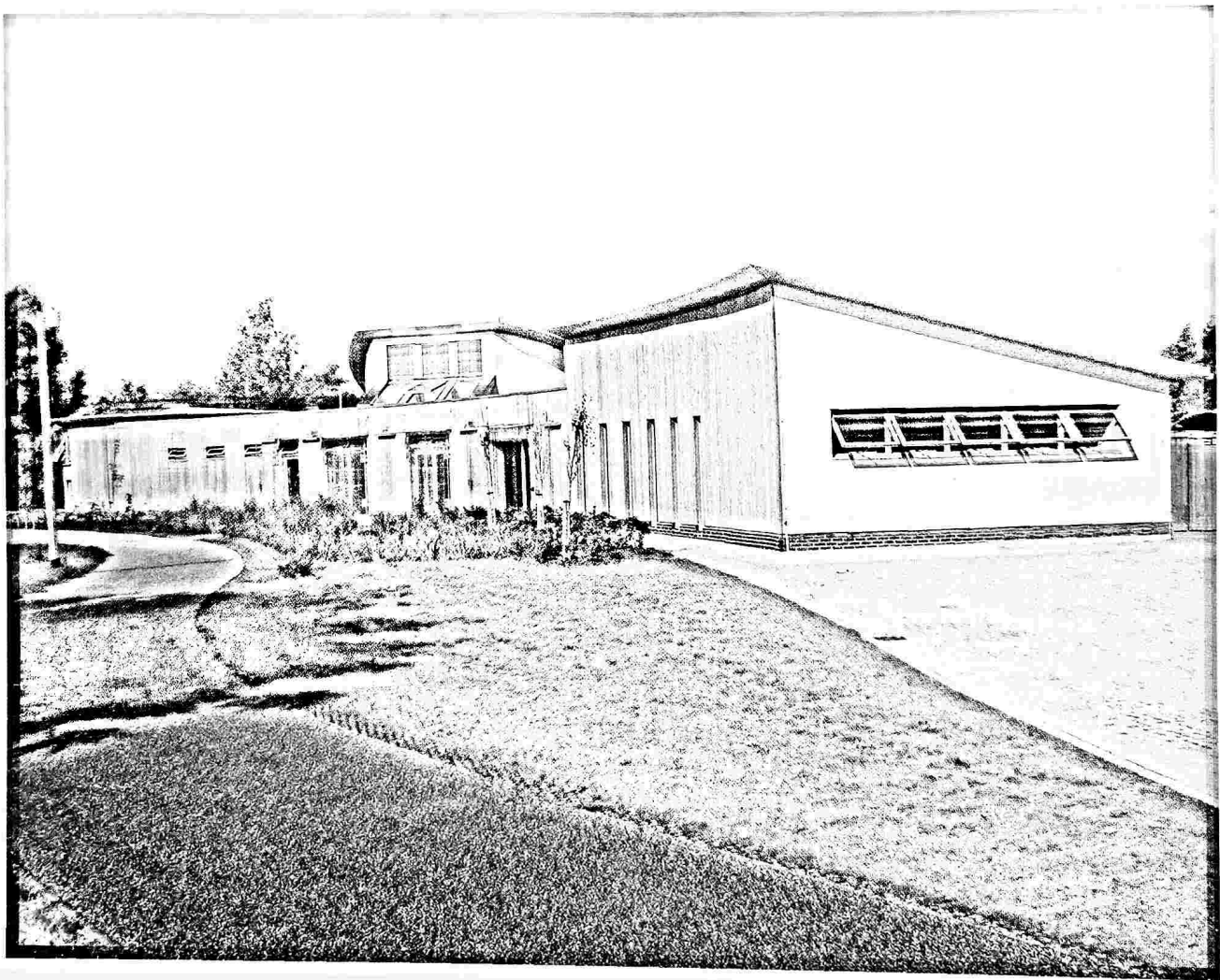


Memories of Chesterton



To commemorate the opening of
Brown's Field Youth and Community Centre

Compiled by Chesterton Local History Group
and Cambridge City Council

A History of the Brown's Field site by Derek Stubbings

In 1920, Green End Road linked Chesterton High Street to Milton Road, the road to Ely. Apart from a farm and a few houses at the High Street end, the road passed through open fields to the Milton Road junction where some more houses were situated.

Along Green End Road and the surrounding area, several sites were excavated for sand and gravel. One of these places was a field (the 'pit' now called 'Brown's Field'). This field was one of the largest in the vicinity and belonged to the family 'Brown', the most prominent family in the village of Chesterton at the time.

The 'pit' was shallow and when 'worked out' (dug up) was left to grow. The 'field' eventually became surrounded by housing development between Kendal Way and Green End Road - the two streets linked by a pathway through the site. Later, Scarsdale Close and Sherbourne Close were built. Eventually surrounded by resident homes, the field became an unofficial playground for local children - a place to play amongst natural vegetation.

In recent years a campaign for a Youth and Community Centre was headed by a local resident, Lil Speed. As a result, in 2005, a new building funded by The Cambridge City Council opened for business. The centre provides a wide range of facilities for every one of all ages in the community. Now set in new landscaped grounds, the bright and welcoming centre is already a great and necessary asset to the community. The building has been designed to be sympathetic to the wonderful and natural surroundings and is still a fantastic site for children, young people and their families to play and enjoy.

This book, a compilation of people's memories of the area has been compiled by The Local History Group and funded by Cambridge City Council.

Thanks to all who contributed their memories to this book, and particularly to Derek Stubbings who provided much information about the area.

*History is always on-going - yesterday only just happened. If you have any thoughts to add, or would like to share memories, please let us know.
Ring the 'Brown's Field' team on 01223 420309.*

In the meantime we do hope you enjoy the book.

Mitcham's Corner in the 1930s remembered by Pam Fry

Residents may remember the time when the housewife could buy nearly all her requirements from the Mitcham's corner shops. Charles Mitcham's drapery shop, converted from his father's house on the corner opened in 1909 selling dressmaking materials, wools and haberdashery, ladies underwear, children's wear, clothes and millinery. Later on menswear, household linens and carpets were sold from extended premises just round the corner in Victoria Avenue. Charles Mitcham died during World War Two and the business was sold to 'Dupont Bros' who concentrated mainly on ladies fashions, china and glassware. It closed in 1977 and has since become an outdoor sports shop, 'Two Seasons'. At one time part of the premises housed a boutique called 'Plumage,' and after standing empty and neglected for some time has now become a dental practice.

Next door was the Post Office. Stocking hardware and crockery it was presided over by Miss Oxberry and later by Mr Moore, and is still fortunately giving good service to the local community.

William Islip's shop was cluttered with gramophone records (ten inch 78 rpm) and needles, wireless sets, valves and batteries. Acid accumulators could be recharged for six pence. Arnold Lask the optician now occupies the premises, having moved from his earlier site near the old Tivoli cinema (the Tivoli Cinema is now 'The Graduate' opposite 'Staples').

'Freeman, Hardy and Willis' supplied all our footwear needs, from slippers and plimsolls to wellies and football boots. They have been succeeded by a branch of the 'Cambridge Building Society.'

Next in the row was 'Barker's' pharmacy, which later became 'Boots the Chemists' and is now the 'Wine Rack' off-licence. Tommy Westrope did clock and watch repairs in his tiny, old-fashioned shop. This was later to be transformed by 'S.F. Gautrey' and still operates under that name, although recently under a new proprietor.

'Ward's' sold prams, pushchairs and nursery supplies, but was replaced for a short time by 'Barries', a second-hand dealer, and currently the bookmaker.

'G. Prior', the pork butcher, was succeeded by Claude Wetherell and his son Brian. The shop became a greengrocers, and eventually the shoe repairer took over, and remains to this day.

LET US QUOTE
YOU FOR
LOOSE COVERS
AND
CURTAINS!



SKILLED WORK MODERATE CHARGE

MITCHAM'S
CHESTERTON ROAD
CAMBRIDGE

Advert for Mitcham's haberdashery and household goods on the corner of Victoria Avenue and Chesterton Road (Mitcham's Corner).

'Dye' the fishmonger was at some time part of Milton Road. His shop became part of the Midland Bank, now known as HSBC.

Crossing Trafalgar Road to Nelson Terrace, we come to 'G.P. Hawkins', selling bread and cakes of all descriptions. A penny or 'tuppence' would buy iced fancies, marzipan cauliflowers, coconut pyramids, chocolate éclairs, and much more - still fondly remembered. Now known as 'Barker's' bakery. Delicious snacks are still on offer.

Another butcher, 'Rook's', succeeded by A.A. Francis was situated on this street. This shop, was adjoining to 'Onyetts' Dairy' (later 'Hugh Calvert' grocer) now the Co-op.

Doris Arnold's hairdressing salon was continued as 'Ackroyd's,' but then became another butcher. 'The Hot Pot' restaurant is now in its place.

The 'Misses Fenton' shop sold confectionery and tobacco, and at one time children's clothes and toys. When the doorbell announced the arrival of a customer, one of them would emerge through the lace-curtained door to the back sitting-room, often accompanied by a little Pekinese dog. This shop became the pharmacy, first as 'Shimell' and now as 'Moss'.

The Finch family provided confectionery and tobacco, and then added greengrocery, for at least two generations, and were succeeded by the 'Fruit Bowl.' The closing of this business was much regretted by local residents. A coffee-bar/restaurant has very recently opened in its place.



'G P Hawkins Ltd', the well-known bakery and confectioners for many years, opened their shop in Chesterton Road in 1927. Although they no longer exist this shop is still a bakers.

The cycle shop 'Isons' (now 'Townsend's') brings us to Ferry Path and the end of businesses that have evolved since the early 1900s to supply the needs of the expanding New Chesterton area. Old photographs seem to indicate that these properties were originally a terrace of bay-fronted Victorian houses. The front rooms were gradually adapted for trading, with shop-fronts only being added in the 1920s or later.

Memories of School Days from Frances Howe

In 1992 the Shirley School celebrated 60 years and former pupils recalled their early days.

Mrs Frances Howe (nee Rogers) attended the nursery the day the school opened in 1932. Such a lot of grass surprised her. Children lined up for a spoonful of malt every day and lunchtime was 12.00 - 2.00pm. In those days the school closed at lunch time and everyone went home to eat.

A special memory was going upstairs to do 'reading' because she was a good reader. Another was the Mothers Day play 'Mary had a little lamb'.

Memories of life in East Chesterton from Bernice K Wadsworth

I have lived in East Chesterton for 75 years. I still live in the house I was born in. I went to school at the Shrubbery, which at that time was in Hills Road on the corner of Harvey Road. I cycled there on a second hand bicycle bought from 'Ison's', (now 'Townsend's'). I later went to the Perse school for girls where I enjoyed school sports. We played on Parker's Piece and went swimming in the Cam. We used to have a skipping rope across our road with all the children joining in.



*Scotland Road - Union Lane end of the 1920s.
Local milkman thought to be Mr Gray. View looking towards Union Lane.*

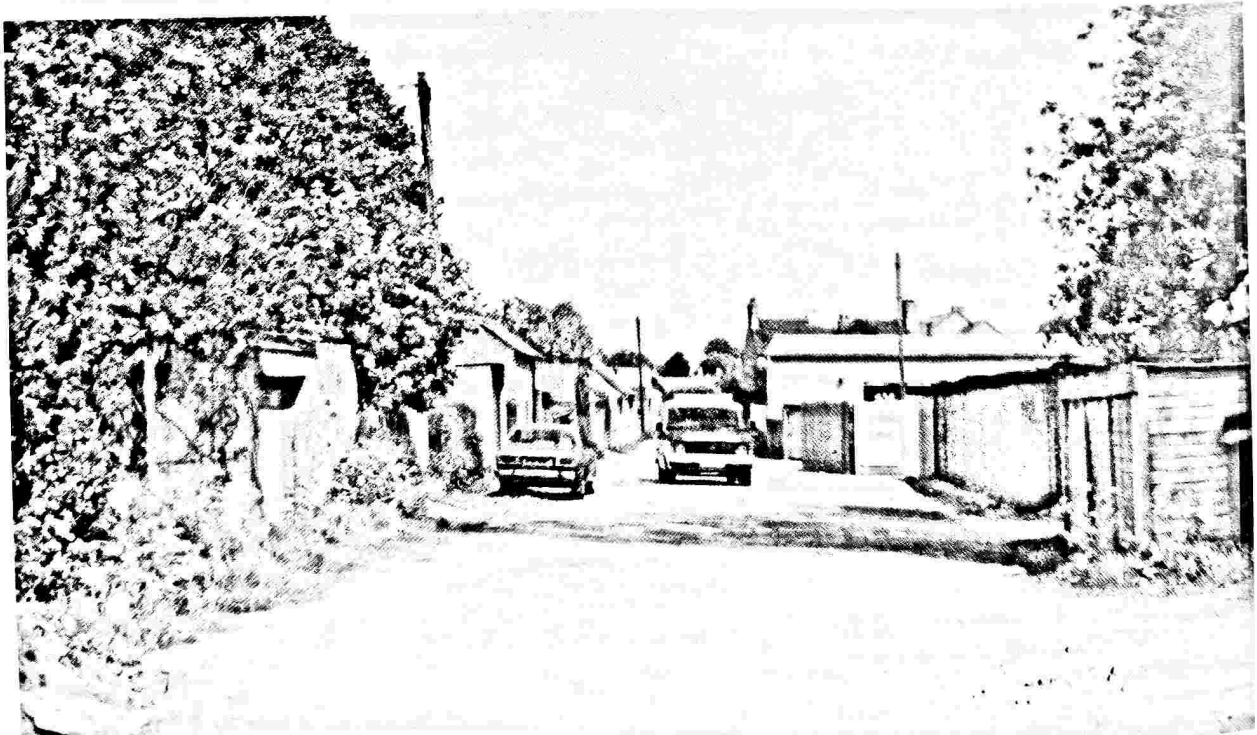
During the war many families had people lodge with them. We had two men who were working at 'Marshalls' on aeroplanes. We tried fairly successfully to grow some vegetables in our garden - but we were not self sufficient. For entertainment we were close to the 'Tivoli' Cinema on Chesterton Road. We also went to the 'Arts' Theatre and 'New' Theatre.

There were lots of shops in Chesterton Road. We got our fruit and vegetables from Miss Venner. There were two butchers; 'Prior's' and 'Marsh'. We went to 'Hawkins' for bread and cakes. We got sweets and ice cream cornets and wafers from 'Nuns'. An ice cream man on a tricycle came down the road calling out. So did the Rag and Bone man, and a man selling paraffin and hardware.

We also had various household goods delivered to us. 'Vinters' delivered coal and coke; 'Maskell's' Bakers delivered three times a week. Milk was delivered by a pony and cart. The milkman ladled the milk into a jug and left it on your doorstep. The Swiss Laundry collected and delivered once a week, and 'Matthews' in Trinity Street delivered groceries we had ordered the previous week.

We had a car, but used the No 101 Bus. It ran every seven minutes and cost 2½d (old pence) into town. I remember Ted Salisbury's garage, 'The Hole in the Wall' next to the 'Fleur de Lys' pub in Cam Road. His son David, when he was old enough, moved to 'The Bigger Hole' opposite and later expanded. 'King and Harper' were at No 1 and 3 Milton Road.

When I left school I went to work at the Public Library in Wheeler Street until 1947 when the new library was opened in the Lion Yard. I worked for them for 41 years.



Sandy Lane at the rear of Chesterton Road, linking Elizabeth Way to De Freville Avenue. This area was once shallow gravel pits around the 1920s. Now it is largely derelict, containing a number of concrete garages, many unused. The whole area awaits development.

Memories from Muriel Key

I have lived in Chesterton for 85 years. I went to Polly Wilson's school in De Freville Avenue, which was founded by Miss Katherine Wilson. I then went to the Perse School. I had a very happy time growing up in De Freville Avenue with lots of friends to play with.

I remember many of the local shops. There was 'Onyets' the dairy; Miss Fenton's sweet shop and Miss Venner sold vegetables. Bread, coal and milk were delivered. The muffin man used to come round with a tray on his head and call out. If you wanted 'Walls' Ice cream delivered you had to put a 'W' card in the window to request service.

My father, who was a commercial traveller, had a car. There weren't many cars around at that time. He kept the car in a garage at Sandy Lane and it was serviced by 'Salisbury's Garage' in Haig Road, now in Elizabeth Way. I went to school on my bike and there was a good bus service in those days.

I have very fond memories of street parties in Chesterton Hall Crescent.

Wash Day Blues - Mrs G Stearn

When I was a girl, washday was always on a Monday, wet or fine. In those days people had a real routine for housework. Ours was Monday for washing, Tuesday for cleaning out the sitting room and Wednesday meant baking, if you could afford it. Thursday was the day to do your bedrooms, and this routine seldom altered.

When I lived at home Mother used a wooden tub to do her chores. The clothes were boiled in an iron pan set in brick copper, with a fire under it, using coal and coke. Mother also had a copper, stick and a washboard.

Water came from the tap; soap was 'Sunlight' or 'Windsor', which cost about 6d. Soap powders were in the shops but too expensive for many people. We also used 'Robin' Starch, and a Dolly Blue Bag. An old wooden roller mangle in the shed outside was used to wring out most of the water, which was thrown onto the garden after use. It was thought to do the flowers and vegetables a bit of good. The copper was in the sitting room, in a corner and when not in use was covered with a pretty cloth and often a vase of flowers stood on it. I preferred ironing to washing, and often did the ironing for Mother, especially Dad's shirts. We had two of the old type irons, which we heated on the kitchen range, also in the sitting room, burning coal and coke. The side oven was to cook food in.

The clothes were aired on a clothes horse in front of the fire; we also had lines across the ceiling where Mother would hang the clothes over night to finish drying. The lines were not used during the day as it was thought to be unhealthy to have damp clothes in a room with people. When I married in 1936 our house had a gas copper in the outhouse, but I also used a zinc bath or our big sink. Soap flakes and powders (like 'Persil' or 'Rinso') were popular by then. An Acme wringer made that job a lot easier, and an electric iron was a wedding present. A lovely airing cupboard did the airing for me, but if clothes were still a bit damp they would be left in front of the fire.

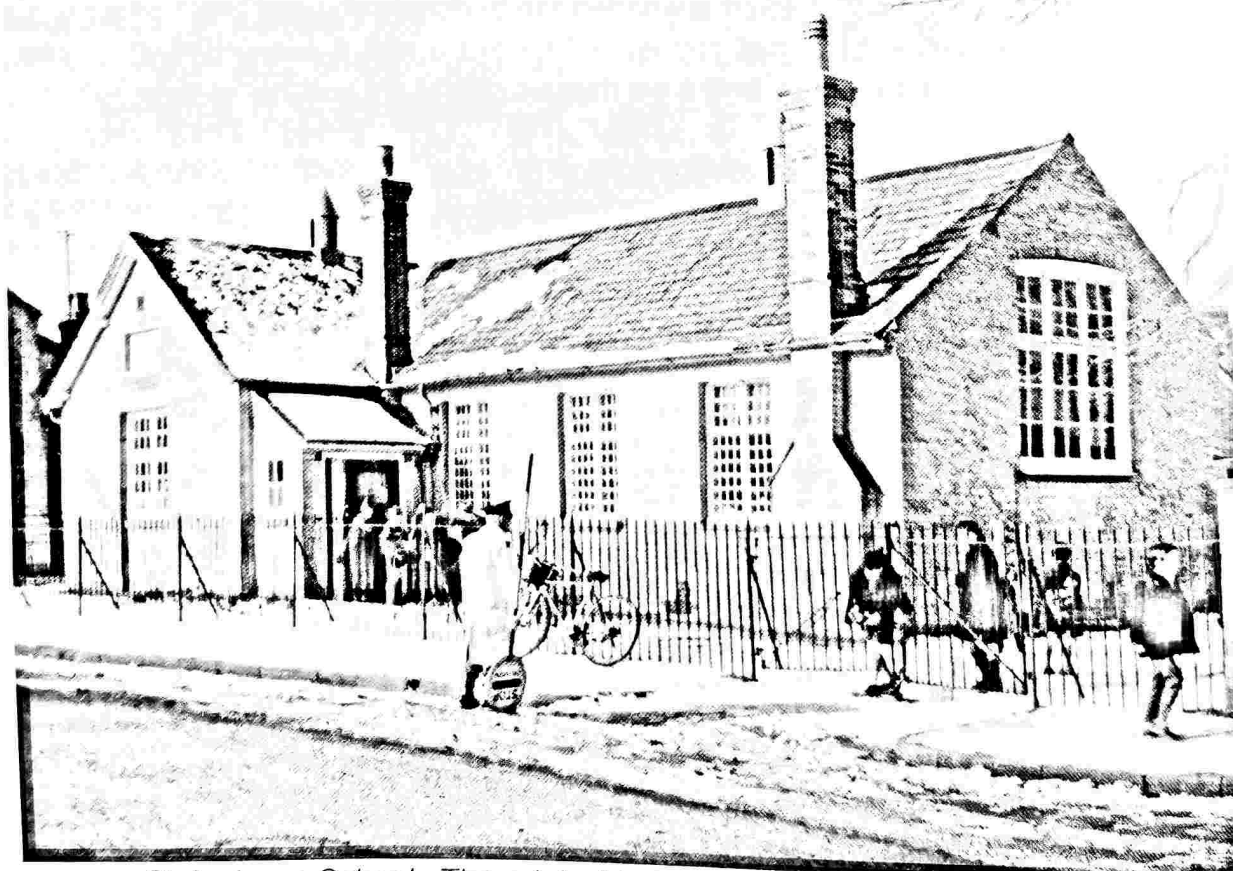
Before the war few women had washing machines. I never had one, preferring to hand wash, which I think is best. A lot of clothes these days are drip dry and need little ironing. They are also much stronger, so need less mending and darning.

Washday dinner was always cold meat, often with bubble and squeak, which as a child I liked very much. Nowadays I don't keep Monday for washday, but whatever day is washday today it is certainly much easier than the washdays I remember years ago.

Ann McCarthy (nee Martin) remembers

I lived in Chesterton from the age of five until I left home in 1963. I went to the Shirley Infants' School and then St Andrew's School. At the Shirley school we used to have a sleep in the afternoon on small camp style beds. I also remember having chocolate drinking powder that we were allowed to take home. I think it came from Canada. At St Andrew's I remember the large fires in the classrooms in winter and the teachers standing beside them. I also remember the large boxes we used to take into the playground for PE lessons. The PE boxes included our coloured bands for team sports, beanbags, balls etc. We had skipping ropes and hoops. At one PE class the teacher Miss Pearce walked backwards and fell over the box, which I remember as resembling a tea chest, and cut her head open.

My young sister and I used to walk to school from Kendal Way and we used to stop to buy freshly baked bread rolls from 'Boxes' the bakers. Everything was cooked on the premises in Green End Road. One day our father caught us and we were told never to eat in the street. Being quite ashamed we then bought our bread rolls from 'Impey's' Bakers, which was much nearer to the school, and then we would eat them in the playground.



St Andrews School. The original building of 1844 - now demolished. This building and the later larger 1870 school was built behind this building and remained until replaced by the modern school in Nuffield Road. Primary Court now occupies this site.

There were lots of local shops selling most things needed for day-to-day family living. 'Impey's' the Bakers were in the High Street not far from St Andrews School. At Christmas they would let people use their big ovens for the traditional turkey or large chicken, as most of the ovens in our houses could not cope with everything. My Aunt had a car and if she was at home for dinner she would collect the bird once it was cooked.

I also remember 'Taylors' in Green End Road; 'Pilsworth' Greengrocers; 'Parnell's' barbers and hairdressers, and opposite them on the corner of Water Lane there was a coal merchant. Milk was delivered by horse and cart and we took our jugs to the door to be filled from the churns. Coal was put through a small opening into a coalhole in the house. 'Corona' lemonade was bought at the door and the empties returned. Mr Windmill was the local chimney sweep. He lived on the corner of Kendal Way and used to put soot on his garden.

The 101 bus was used to service the Green End Road route to town, and the 115 along Milton Road. I do not remember many of my friends having cars. Most people cycled or walked.

'Hallens' had a motor shop on the corner of Union Lane, and one on Hawthorn Way. Clark's had second-hand cars in Scotland Road.

In those days more mothers stayed at home after their children were born and everyone knew everybody else in the area. When someone died there would be a street collection. More children attended Sunday School/Church than they do today. We were not allowed to play in the street on a Sunday. We went to Sunday school and had a family walk.



The purchase of the Premier Hall in Union Lane marked the beginning of 'Hallens Garages', the petrol station and car showrooms extending all around Union Lane and High Street corner. After clearance of the site archaeologists explored there and found evidence of occupation back to Roman times.

Memories from Christine Newman

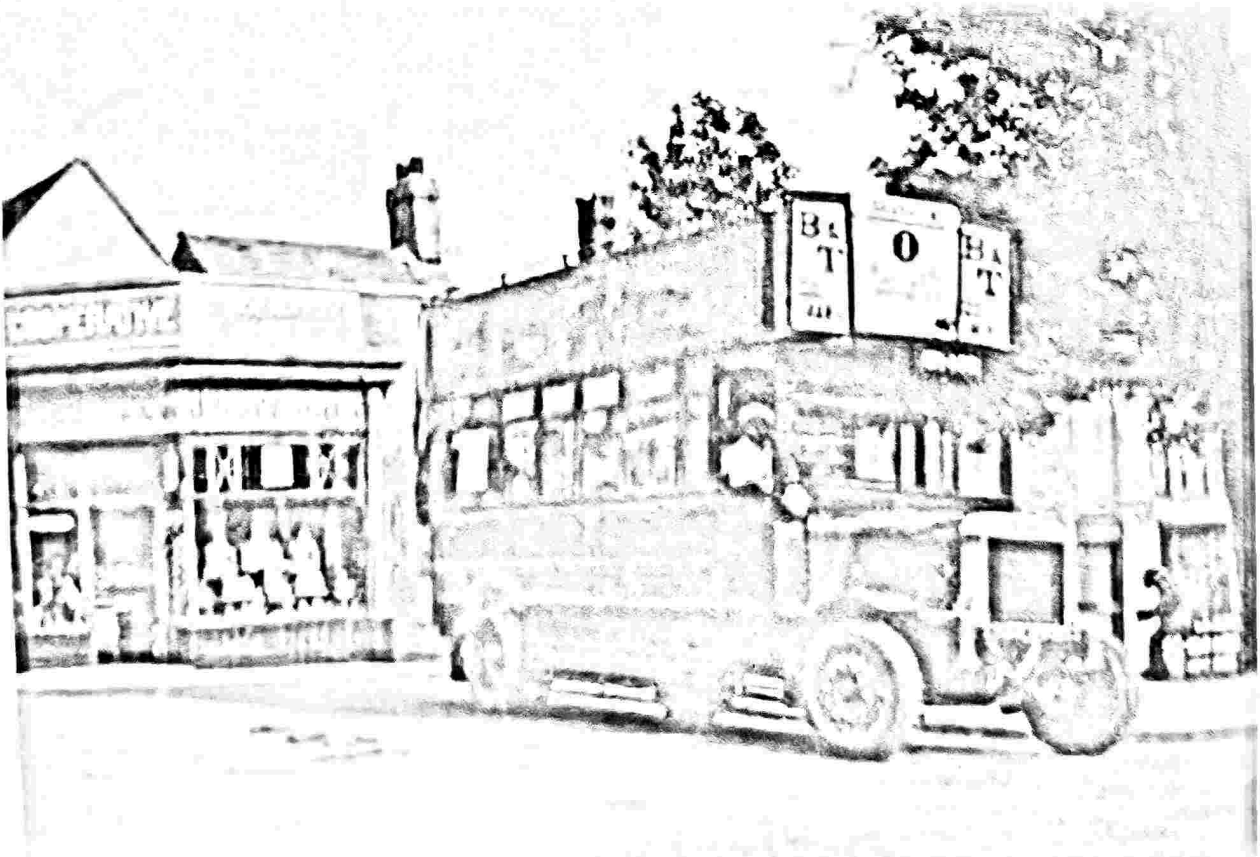
I was born in Corona Road off Victoria Road in 1915 and moved to Fallowfield in 1940. Until I was 10 years old I went to Milton Road School. After that I went to the Perse Girls School. At school I remember the visit of the dentist. He was (or seemed to be) often there, and we children told each other terrifying tales about what he did. We also had to have a spoonful of cod liver oil and malt every day. I was sick the first time I had a spoonful so I didn't have to have it any more.

Where the Football ground used to be in Milton Road it wasn't fenced in at all, just a big field and it was just like living in the country.

In 1940 we moved to Fallowfield and we had a large front garden, which was dug up and used to grow vegetables. We also grew vegetables in the back garden as well as keeping chickens.

When I was young I loved dancing and used to go to either the 'Dorothy' in the city centre or the 'Rex'. The 'Dorothy' used to have Dinner Dances, which we loved but as they cost about 6/- and we only earned 15/- a week it was not very often we were able to go. We had a canoe we used a lot when we were teenagers.

When I first had to register at a Grocers shop it was at 'Cherry's', on the corner of Arbury Road, then 'Margarets' in old Chesterton. We always used 'Marks & Spencers' and 'Woolworths', as well as 'Heffers'. I can remember 'Heffers' when it was in Fitzroy Street.



Corona bus service No. 1 at The Green in High Street in the 1920s. The 'Co-op' (now gone in road widening) and the iron seat round the tree on the island hold strong memories for older residents.

Everything used to be delivered. In 1915 - at least 1925, we had a man call every week with lovely fresh vegetables from Cottenham, with a large horse and cart. 'Maskells' also delivered bread. It was 'Dants' before 'Maskells'. Milk was delivered twice a day, and even paraffin.

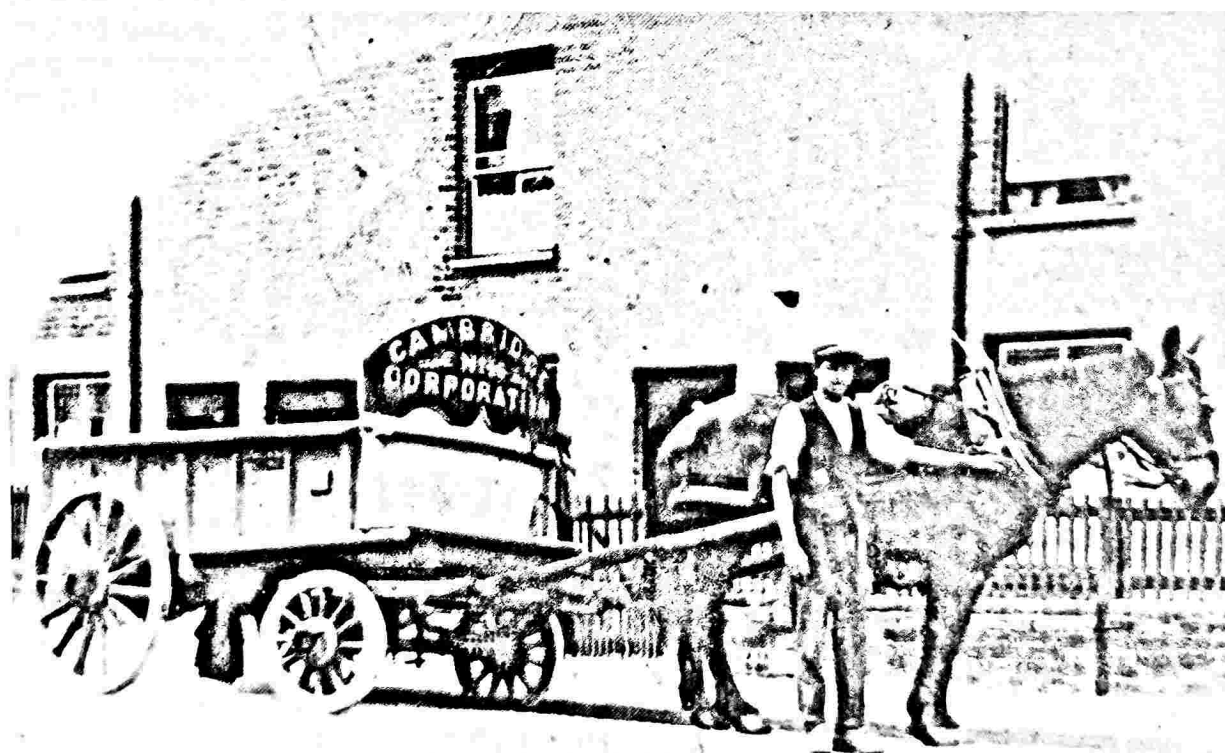
When I went to the Perse School at first I travelled on the No. 1 Ortona Bus. It cost 1d from Carlisle Road to the Catholic Church. There were very few people with cars, but many used bicycles, and I cycled from about twelve years old.

When I first went out to work I worked at NIAB as a Seed Analyst. But when I married in 1939 I had to leave, as they did not employ married women. I then went to work for 'Pye' as a comptometerist until I had my son. I also worked there during the war.

When I look back at how the area has changed I remember how few houses there were on Milton Road and that after Arbury Road it was all countryside. Old Chesterton was a proper village. The buses only went to 'De Freville' Avenue, and we only came into Old Chesterton for the May races. The centre of town had lots of shops, especially for food. There are hardly any now. It is not easy to shop without a car. No corner shops for food and hardly any greengrocers at all. Few deliveries happen now, except for the milkman who comes a few days a week. There are more buses and it is easier to get to places like Newmarket or St Ives, so transport is better.

A Day's Work by Mr Gawthorp

Mr. Gawthorp worked for Bill Pryke, haulage contractor of Chesterton. A typical day with horse and cart in the early 1920s is as follows:



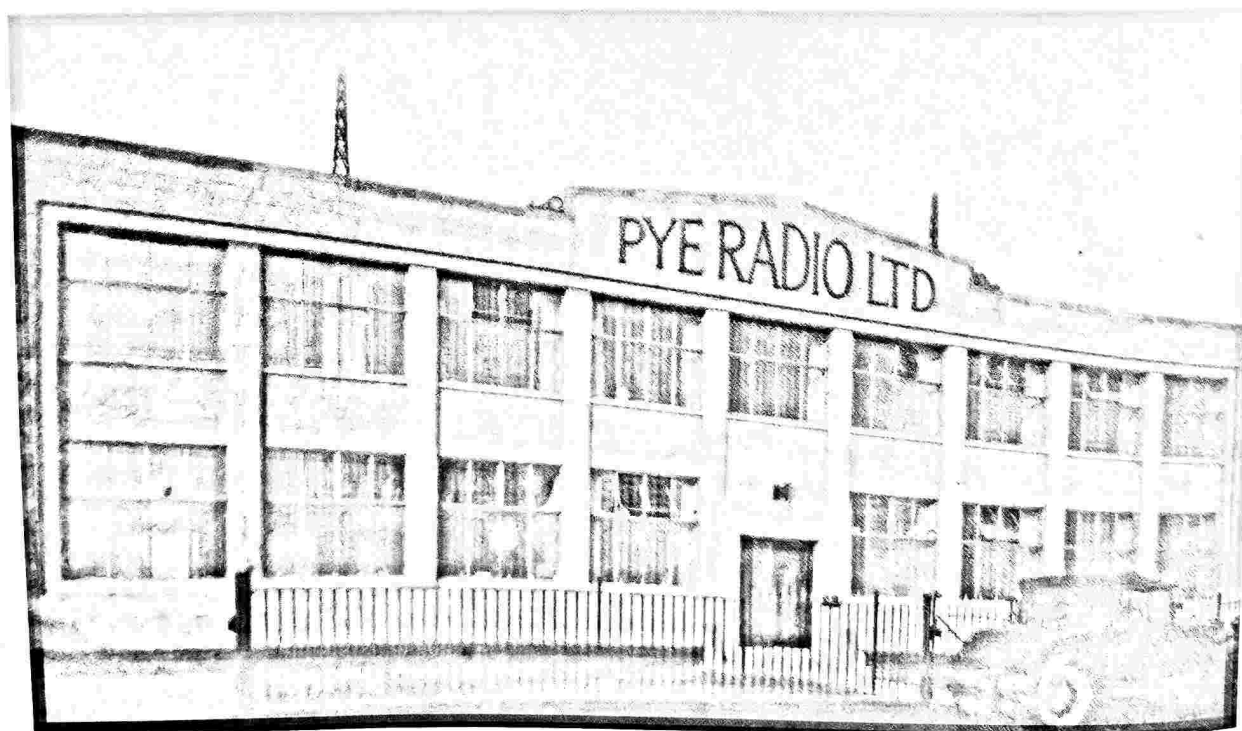
*A typical horse and cart in the 1920's.
This photo is of a Cambridge corporation dust cart.*

Get half a load of sand from six acre pits (where Fallowfield now is) bring it out and tip it on the ground. Get second half a load, get it out and reload first half. The pit was usually very wet and difficult to get a full load out unless the ground was very dry. We then took this load via Victoria Avenue bridge (as my employer would not pay the 6d charge on the ferry) via Ditton Lane to new council houses being build in Horningsea. It was usual to rest the horses at Ditton Railway Bridge, which was steep. I would then return to Barnwell Junction brickworks by the railway to load up bricks, 500 good ones or 600 over burnt and take to NIAB on Huntingdon Road. From there to gravel pits at Travellers rest for a load of sand to Trumpington. All loading was done by hand. Working hours were 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. for a wage of 35/- (£1.75) per week. This would include dressing and feeding your horse on Sunday.

Family memories from John Impey

The Impey family came up by horse and cart from South London in the 1920s. Mr and Mrs Impey and family took over the bakery in the High Street, Chesterton. St Andrew's School was located in the High Street not far from the bakery. Children would call on their way to school in the morning for a freshly baked cheese roll for a ½d. Hand made bread was made and delivered daily on a special bicycle. A ferry crossed the river in front of the Green Dragon public house. On one occasion a whole load was lost in the Cam when a bike fell over on the ferry. The shop often doubled as a community centre; 'How's Mrs so and so today, can I send her something?'

On Christmas day, travellers from the Fen Road, en route to local hostleries would bring their large turkeys to be cooked in the bread ovens. Mr Impey was asked to pour over the Yorkshire pudding mix at a certain time. Bearing in mind the merriment involved it was often wondered about the turkey's safe return.



*'Pye's factory' faced the river.
Now demolished and replaced by St Andrews Park,
they were a major employer in Cambridge making radios and TVs.*

Flour was delivered to the bakery by the 'J. Arthur Rank' firm who in later years went into film production (the man with the gong). Representatives would bring complimentary cinema tickets.

Mr Impey's main hobby was keeping racing pigeons in lofts next to the Men's Club. On a race day all eyes had to be on the lofts. The ring the bird carried had to be rushed to an official of the club to confirm it's time of arrival. Dad won quite a lot of cups.

Uncle Frank Radford, sang as a boy chorister and was a life time member of St Andrew's church choir. The Rev. B. R. Buchanan was the vicar for a long period. Big-time entertainment on a Saturday evening was a concert in the Church Hall. The programme was either a conjuror or a series of acts that local people could perform. A Bible class was held each Sunday in the Chesterton Men's Club, organised by Mr Squires. John remembers attending with his Uncle, moving the snooker tables to one side.

At that time employment at 'Pye's Factory' was the norm. Sets changed from the wooden cut out of the rising sun, to present day models. 'Pye's' sports day was a big event in the calendar, often finishing with fireworks. The Second World War created a line in producing walkie-talkie sets for the troops. Often seen as big haver sacks in films such as 'Ice Cold in Alex.' The girls proudly did their bit, perfecting telecommunications for the army. The end of the war saw 'Pye' well placed to bring out radios for Cambridge taxis and the police - some of the first in the country.

Mr Gray kept cows in a yard behind his house where the High Street joins Chapel Street. Delivery was by horse and cart. Everyone had to keep their eyes open and cross the road with an empty jug. This was light years before the idea of food hygiene regulations. A ladle was dipped into an open churn and your jug filled, all for a few of the old pence.



High Street, Old Chesterton.

A view of Chesterton High Street.

Prior to 1945 the High Street in the Thrifts Walk area was narrower than today. This allowed the construction of two surface air raid shelters on a strip of gravel in front of houses running east from the public house 'The Dog and Pheasant'. As a schoolboy many nights were disturbed either by enemy planes or bomber command preparing for their raids at RAF Waterbeach. On their return many gardens were often strewn with antiradar strips of foil.

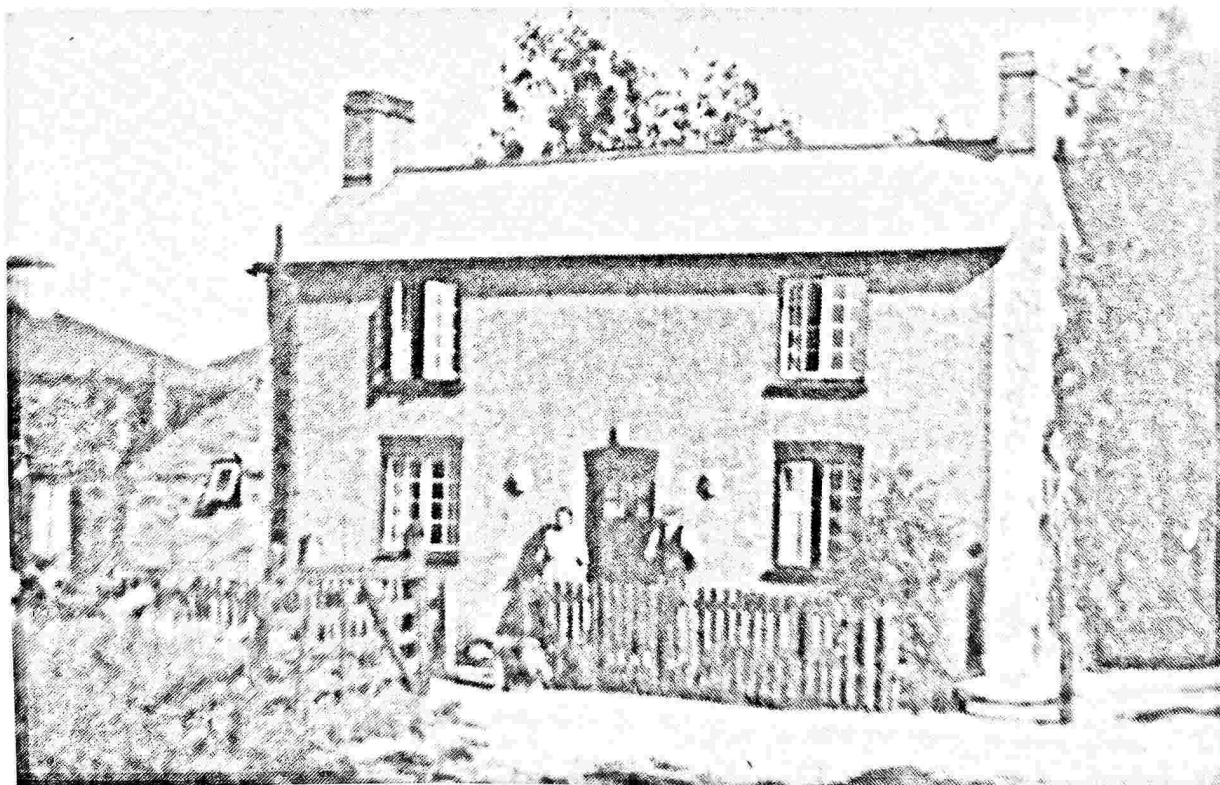
Refugee children from London were billeted in the village and attended local schools. The 12th Cambridge Scout Group formed a special refugee Cub Pack in addition to the local pack.

As a schoolboy John had to cycle from the High Street to Chesterton Boys School complete with ID card and gas mask. Air raid shelters were built on the playing fields and drills had to be carried out. Children from the nearby Milton Road School were provided with a special bridge to share the school's facilities (crossing the City Football ground).

Two elderly ladies kept 'Byes' sweet shop in the High Street. Word would go round; 'supplies have come in'. If nothing was available it was a worry as the meagre coupons would be stretched.

The post war general election saw a socialist returned; a Mr Symons, living in Scotland Road, Chesterton.

A search light battery was located on allotment land at the end of Nuffield Road. One famous night, Cambridge had air raid wardens on the roof of the Guildhall who said they could see the fires over London.



*A Victorian Cottage in Scotland Road, now replaced.
Dalton Square council houses can be seen to the left of the photograph.*

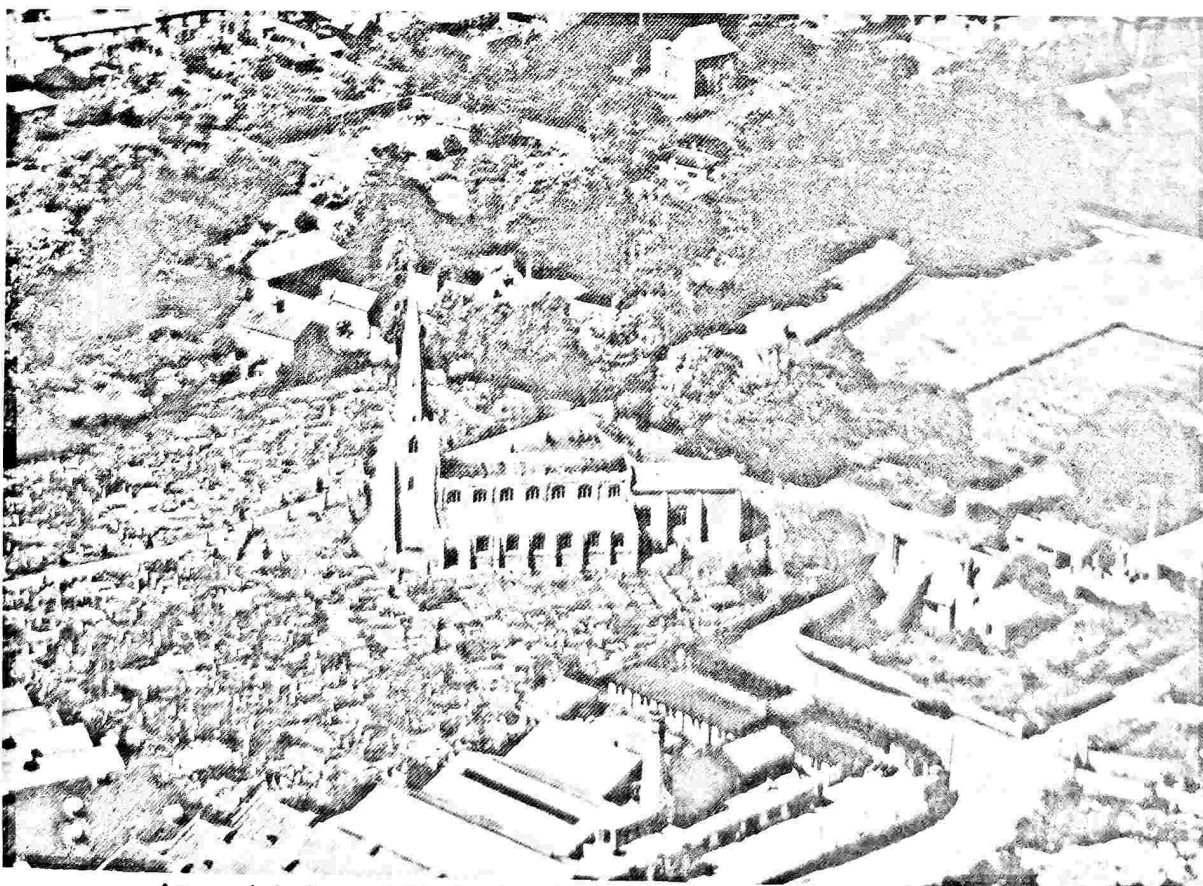
During one air raid over London, the crew of a German bomber had taken enough flak and bailed out. The plane on automatic pilot, pointing north came all the way to Cambridge. Skimming the roofs of houses in Union Lane, it belly-flopped onto the allotments near Warren Road. The next day RAF Police were there and the Red Cross had a collecting box for anyone wanting to see it!

Long before the Science Park was built, the site was occupied by tanks of the U.S. Army. Members of the U.S. Military also occupied the dance halls and cinemas. Gum and nylon stockings appeared from nowhere.

Memories by Neville Farnsworth

I came to live in Cambridge in 1936. My father purchased land from St John's College on the corner of Gilbert Road/Stretten Avenue. P J King, who was also a Gilbert Road resident, built a house and detached garage later that year. My father built an air-raid shelter in the garden. Other neighbours included Jack Kidman, Arthur Leverington, who was the Registrar of Births and Deaths, Mr Craft the painter, and the Garners. Maurice Garner and his brother provided some form of entertainment at the local camps during the war and Maurice became City Mayor later on.

We lived opposite Hall Farm. The track, opposite Stretten Avenue, which ran along the side of the farmhouse and farm buildings on the left and past the pond on the right, continued through the fields and allotments on to Arbury Road. I had school friends living in Arbury Road and used this track frequently during the last years of the war. This track was to become Carlton Way.



*An aerial view of St. Andrew's Church and the surrounding area.
You can see Chesterton Towers in the picture.*

I attended Milton Road infant and junior schools and remember the head master, Mr Varley. During the winter months he encouraged us to slide along the iced surface water gully in the playground. The air raid shelters were to the left of the junior school, alongside the Town Football ground (Cambridge City). While at the junior school we had to share classrooms with evacuees and some mornings we were taught at the New Chesterton Institute in Holland Street.

I was a member of the 12th Cambridge Scout troop and we met in a two-storey building behind the Portland Arms public house.

I remember playing for a football team called Chesterton Wanderers about 1947-1948. Our home ground was Chesterton recreation ground and we used No 25 High Street as the team meeting place. One of our members, Philip Yeomans, lived there and an elder brother, an ex Para', managed the team. St Andrew's Church also put out a very good soccer team for a number of years.

Mick Speed's memories

I was born at 182 Kendal Way in 1939. My mother told me that we were the second family to move into the newly built Kendal Way. When I was a boy we had great fun playing in the many fields that surrounded Chesterton. We used to climb trees, play football and make dens. We played in Brown's Field. It was much bigger then. People used it to dump their rubbish. It was full of things like old bicycles and prams. We used to use the rubbish to make go-karts, and play there for hours. Brown's Field used to be gravel and sand pits.



One of the butchers on the High Street.

Franks Lane wasn't built up, and went down to the river and had a ditch running along one side of it. There were allotments in Nuffield Road. People kept pigs and chickens on their allotments. Residents usually sold them to make some money, but most families killed one at Christmas. In 1961 everyone who had an allotment was asked to leave to make way for the building of the new St Andrew's School, although in the end it wasn't built until much later. Originally the school was going to be much bigger with large playing fields. Also in Nuffield Road were some prefab houses, used to house people after the war. There was an army camp there during the war. On the site of the Science Park there was an American army camp. There was an air raid shelter in the grounds of the Shirley School.

When I was younger I remember that there were three fish and chip shops, two butchers and two bakeries in the village. We used to stop off at one of the bakers, and for a halfpenny we could get a hot roll to eat on the way to school. There was a baker where 'CamSight' is now. It was called 'Box's'. It had a bus stop outside it. Everyone knew it as 'Box's Corner' bus stop. The head teacher at the Shirley School was called Miss Hehir. If you weren't at school she would walk round to your house and find out why, and sometimes she would bring you round some school work to do. She was strict but fair. On your birthday she would bring down her large jar of sweets and let you choose one. This was quite a treat. The school wasn't as big then, but there was a dining hall, and children from St Andrew's used to walk to us daily for their dinner.

As I got older and wanted money for myself I had to earn it. I did many things. When it was the boat races I used to sell programmes. I went fruit picking and helped with the harvest, I also used to make up bundles of firewood and seed trays. A man on the allotments used to collect used card and fruit boxes from 'Marks and Spencer' and 'Woolworths'. It was my job to cut this up into firewood or make into seed boxes to sell to local people.

I used to go off with my friends and camp at a farm in Milton - now part of the Country Park. We would go off on a Friday and return on the Sunday; during the school holidays we would spend a week there. We used to fish in the lakes then cook the fish on our camp fire. We also gathered duck and moorhen eggs to cook. I tried some fresh cow's milk but I didn't like it as it was warm and very rich.

Nowadays there is not so much for children to do, or places for them to go and play. Although many of the things we used to do would now be considered 'unsafe', none of us ever got badly hurt and we learnt to be creative with what we had.



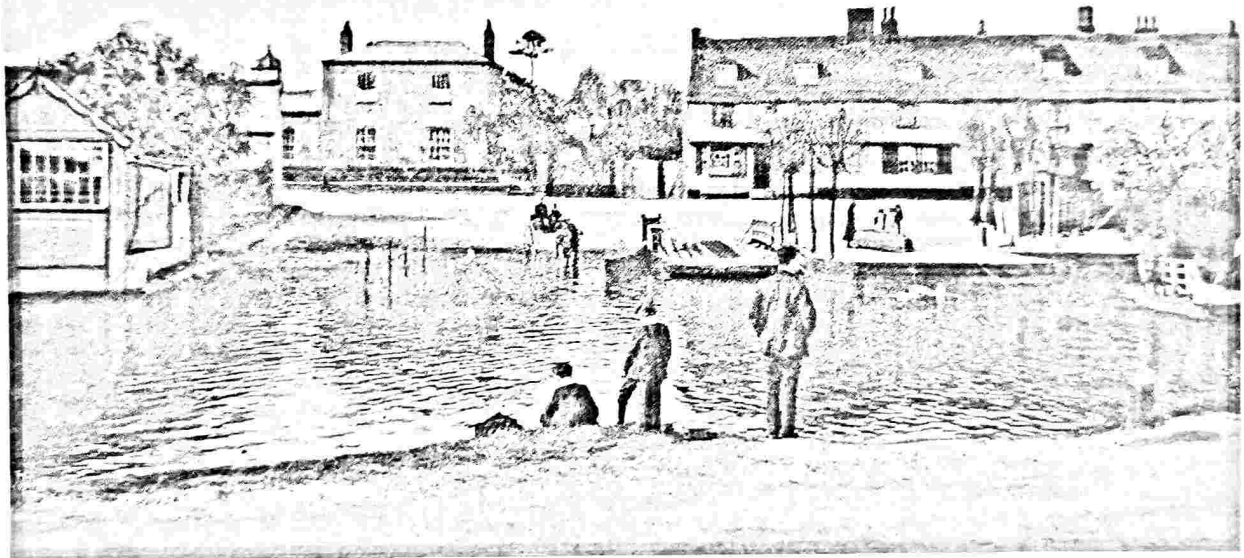
'Green Dragon' Passenger Ferry next to Stourbridge Common.

The Green Dragon Ferry - Nora Lumb

As a girl I lived near the 'Green Dragon' ferry and used to take a mug of tea to Alf Ford who ran the ferry for the people that lived in the 'Green Dragon' public house. The ferry was busy in those days as many young girls worked at Chivers and would come from Newmarket Road. I remember the charge to come over on the ferry. It would be a penny a day or four pence a week. I can well remember one day I took a mug of tea to Alf Ford and he said "you take the ferry over whilst I drink my tea". I did this and while I was coming back the chain broke and down the river I went. I was worried stiff as I was all alone. I called out to Alf who got the pole from the big ferry and pulled it into the bank. I never took on that job again.

More memories of the Ferries from Percy Anderson

The Green Dragon Ferry, along with the one next to it for horses and carts, plied between Stourbridge Common and the Green Dragon. In about 1935 a bridge replaced it.



The Chesterton Ferry was very busy in its time.



'The Green Dragon' public house in Water Street.

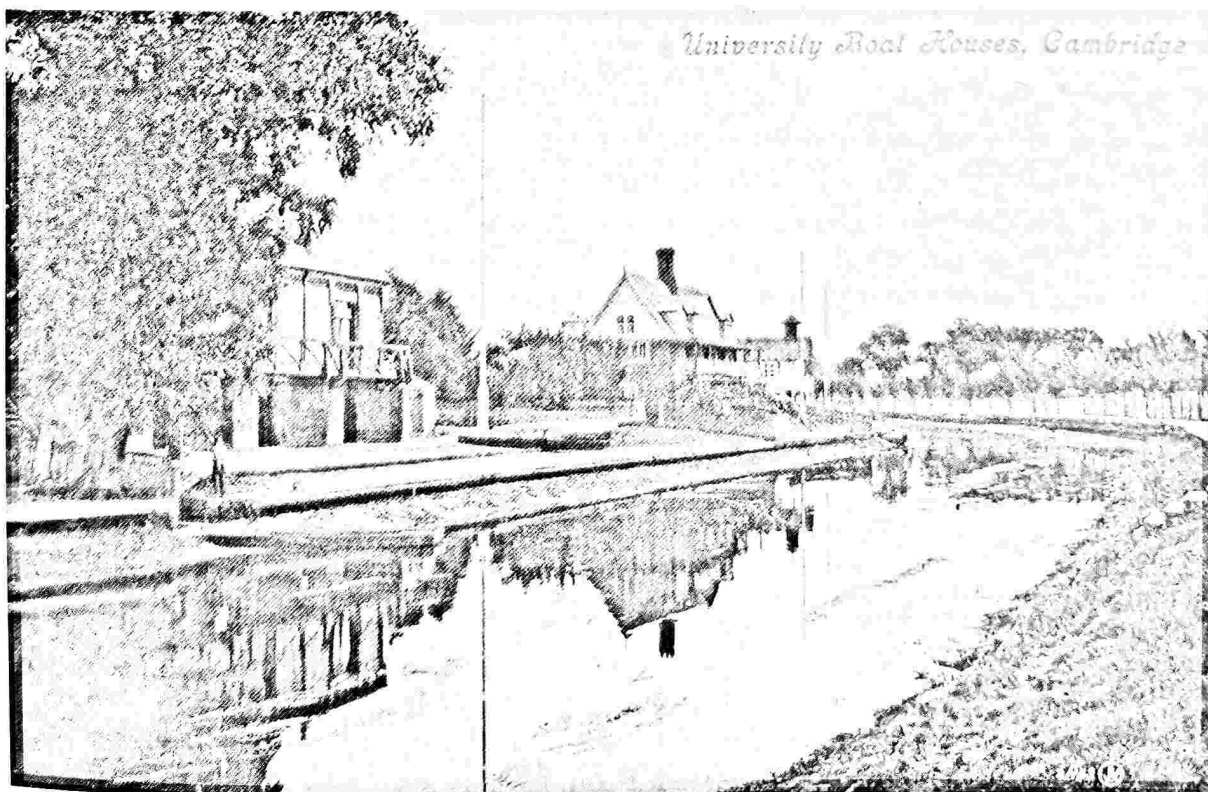
This ferry was a boon to my father as it was to all his fellow workers at 'Pye'. An old gentleman operated the ferry by cranking a wheel, and what a slow job it was! I can't remember what his name was, but I am sure someone will as he was quite a character.

He had a hut on the Chesterton side of the river and in the winter months he would have a fire going in a brazier while he waited for customers. Sometimes he must have dozed off in his hut because you had to shout very hard if you wanted to call the ferry from the Stourbridge Common side before he would hear you. He used to be there well into the evening, but if you arrived to find his hut locked and the ferry chained up, you would have to go all the way to Midsummer Common to the nearest bridge before you could cross the river.

Recollections of a lifetime on the river by Mike Petty

Ernie Tyler lived, ate and slept on boats all his life. It was his job, hobby and his enjoyment for more than 75 years. He started on the river when a lad in Fen Ditton. His mother worked as a cook for the vicar whose daughters wanted a new boat. She scraped together £7.00 to buy an old boat, on condition that Ernie, then ten years old, was given lessons on how to sail it.

Fen Ditton was a great place to be a boat boy, especially during the Bumping Races. People in punts four-deep lined the riverbanks to watch the races. Others made the journey in one of the party boats such as the 'Enterprise', 'Glenrosa' or 'Viscountess Bury'. However, many people went to the races on the 'Viscountess'. Even more returned with her. After the day was done and she cruised sedately up the river, dozens of punters would hook their punts on to the boat and be towed back to Cambridge in splendour. When they were half way there the Vi's skipper would pass his hat back to collect the fares!



A view of the Cam.

Ernie went to Bottisham Village College on the day it opened and left as soon as he could. One Monday morning he announced he was leaving the next day, Tuesday, because he had a job. That job was at Banham's boat yard. Mr H C Banham took one lad a year. Sometimes if there were two promising candidates, he took both but then missed a year's recruitment. Some of the lads had the necessary skills, some did not, and were put back on the job Ernie started with: sweeping up the wood shavings. He progressed to pumping out bilge water from old boats and other mundane tasks. It took two years for a lad to learn his tools and his trade. Ernie was put with some good tradesmen like old Mr Harris. If you showed an interest in the work, he would show an interest in you. If you fooled around you had no chance. Ernie worked hard. After two years, he was summoned to see the governor. "Go upstairs", he was told, "and build some clinker pram dinghies".

From pram dinghies - which sold in the show room for £8.10. - he went on to stem dinghies and then it was downstairs to where the craftsmen were making motor cruisers. He joined a team of four - two men and two boys - who hand-made the boat: any more and they would get in each other's way. If it sold, well and good, if it did not, it was added to Banham's hire fleet until somebody took a shine to it.

The boatyard built boats to order. One 'mad professor' came in with a model of a boat carved from a bar of soap. It looked hideous to Ernie but they built it. Then the war began. 'Banhams' switched to war-work building lifeboats for minesweepers and fast runabouts to take navy officers to shore. Wooden frames for the first radio location devices were built by 'Pye' of Cambridge and an eighty foot high wooden mast for Duxford airfield was erected.

One of Banham's boats was a casualty of the war. The prospect of air raids forced the authorities to plan for the possibility of fire in the colleges alongside the river. They would need a fire-fighting boat. Mr Banham offered the 'Duchess' but it was too high to get under the bridges so Ernie cut it down to fit. Banham's workmen joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and trained to use it. In the event, the fireboat was never needed.

When the war was over and Ernie had been demobbed from the Merchant Navy he wandered back to Banham's. "What are you doing Ernie? You can start back here Monday," he was told. There was another lad starting at the same time. Mo Tyrrell (his recollections are to follow) was soon building racing eights. The two of them came together for the first time in 1963, building the 'Jasmine', an African mahogany cabin cruiser. The pay was not of the best but it was a family firm and the atmosphere was great. You were never told what to do; you were asked if you'd do it.

The world was changing. Wooden boats were giving way to new material, fibreglass, and the 'Banham' family firm became part of the 'Pye' group. Mo used to sing on his way to work. Now he sang only on the way home.

In 1969, the two boatmen left 'Banhams' with no idea what lay before them. Ernie thought about a job with 'Grays', making cricket bats. Mo contemplated a building job. Then Brian Lister, the engineering industrialist, offered them an opportunity to resurrect an old neglected, run-down boatyard in Chesterton. He asked if they'd like a chance to start on their own. 'We nearly tore his arm out', says Mo. Thus 'Two Tees Boatyard' was born.



Two Tees Boatyard in Water Street as seen here from Stourbridge Common has been a boat yard for many years and is still very active.

For thirty years wooden buildings had rotted, trees had grown up and slipways deteriorated. There were piles of junk to be thrown out. Underneath it all, Ernie found a little notebook dating back to the 1890s. It had been kept by Ted Mathie, who had worked for 'Banhams' way before Ernie started there. It contained his dimensions for Canadian canoes, for whiffs and skiffs, the prices he charged and the people he built for. Ernie treasured it, together with another kept by his old boss, recording the boats he built and the prices he charged.

Mo and Ernie continued to work on those same boats, many of which are still cruising up and down the Fenland Rivers, purchasing some of them to start a hire fleet business. They continued until Ernie finally got too old to go chasing boats that always broke down in the most inhospitable places in the fens - even though, for some holidaymakers, the prospect of helping him to strip down and repair a venerable piece of machinery was the highlight of their voyage.

The original transcript was written by Mike Petty in May 2000. Sadly Ernie died in June 2005.

Two Tees Boat Yard - Mo Tyrell

Mo Tyrell started his working life as an apprentice boat builder with 'Banhams', then joined as a conscript in the RAF. After two years he returned to 'Banhams' completing a City and Guilds in carpentry at the old Cambridge Technical College - now Anglia Ruskin University. He loved working on boats and being on the river. He describes boat building as being "a wonderful life." Mo was in charge of the 'Discovery' class when he left 'Banhams' in 1969, where he had met Ernie Tyler some years ago.

The two men were offered land in Water Street previously belonging to 'Lister Engineering'. There had been a boatyard on the site for many years, but it had fallen into disrepair. It took Ernie and Mo a year to sort it out and with the purchase of some of Banham's old holiday hire cruisers, as a sideline, they were able to make a success of the business.

Between 1972 and 1992 'Two Tees' had five boats for hire, but from 1992 they began to run down that side of the business. Mo and Ernie felt that they had had enough of going out at all hours to find and fix broken down boat engines. Also the river was beginning to change. There was an increase in people using the river for rowing and the mooring up of boats.

The yard is still operating today and is a wonderful place to visit with a combination of the old and the new as Mo continues to tinker with the boats that he has always loved.



Water Street - thatched and tiled cottages 1929 looking towards the 'Penny Ferry' public house (formerly the 'Pike and Eel').

The Cambridge Regatta, remembered by Marion Colthorpe

The largest one-day rowing Regatta in Great Britain used to take place in Chesterton on the River Cam beside Stourbridge Common.

I came to live in Cambridge in 1963, and in 1964 was very fortunate to move to a riverside house in Water Street, opposite the Common, and beside the course of the Lent and May 'Bumps'. I soon learnt that I was also directly opposite the finish of the annual Cambridge Regatta, on Whit Sunday, at the end of May.

Large numbers of crews entered for the Regatta, organised by the Cambridgeshire Rowing Association. Preparations for the event began on Stourbridge Common several days in advance. After the Common was mown a fence was built to keep the cows and horses which grazed there apart from the rowers and the expected crowds of spectators. Several marquees were put up, and a stand for the judges was built over the river to give them a good view down the course. Tarpaulins divided the Members' Enclosure from the General Enclosure, for which there was a small admission charge. Swans and cygnets were collected up and moved away from the course. The finish was marked by bunting stretched from a tall tree on the Common to another tall tree - in my garden. Each year I was asked to give permission for a finishing-post to be placed on or beside my land.

Since my garden was to be so much in the public eye I did my best to plant flowers and shrubs to make a colourful display. Every year I invited a swarm of friends and relatives to come and enjoy a grandstand view of the Regatta.

On Whit Saturday part of Stourbridge Common near the Green Dragon Bridge was covered with cars and coaches. These vehicles had brought crews and their supporters, boats and oars. They had arrived from all around southern and eastern England; from clubs, colleges, and schools, including numerous crews from such rowing schools as Eton and Radley. Crews occasionally came from as far afield as Holland. Sometimes there were so many entries that local crews took part in heats on the Friday evening. In 1976 over 1500 oarsmen entered for 26 categories of races, including Elite, Senior, Junior and Novice.

On the Saturday, racing began at about 9 a.m. and continued throughout the day until 7.30 p.m. The course was from the Ditton end of Long Reach to the finish beside the Common - about 1300 yards (later changed to 1300 metres). The races were for eights and fours, and exclusively for men and boys until the final years of the Regatta.

Large crowds of spectators came to cheer on the crews, and to enjoy additional entertainment such as displays of vintage cars, donkey-rides and Punch and Judy shows to amuse the children. The biggest crowds - some 4000 - gathered over two years in the mid-1970s to watch free-fall parachutists landing on the Common. Each year the Mayor of Cambridge processed down the course in a steamboat. A band, usually the 'City of Cambridge Band', played throughout the afternoon and evening. On one occasion the band struck up the 'Eton Boating Song' as Eton College came home as winners of the last races of the day. Another memorable race saw Trinity College narrowly defeating the University Boat Race crew, amid tremendous excitement.



*Boats on the river by the 'Pike and Eel' public house,
now known as 'The Penny Ferry'.*

At the end of the racing the prize giving took place with speeches and the presentation of cups, and of tankards for individual members of winning crews.

Gradually however, the Regatta began to attract fewer entries, partly because crews preferred the multi-lane races held at competing Regattas such as Nottingham. Also, fewer volunteers came forward to administer the event, and by 1979 there were already prophecies that it might have to end.

in 1980 a new and very successful event began, held on the day after the Regatta, whilst the marquees and judges' stand were still in place. This was the Sprint Regatta, run by the City of Cambridge Rowing Club attracting mainly local crews, and open to pairs and single sculls as well as to eights and fours.

In the Sprint Regatta, as its name implies, the crews raced over a short course - 500 metres. The Regatta had an informal air with no admission fees, and with an interval for lunch. During these breaks small rowing boats 'toy-boats' were provided for races for children, over a very short course.

By 1985 entries for the Cambridge Regatta were continuing to decline, and the dates of the Regattas were brought forward to the middle of May to try to avoid clashing with school and University examinations. However a gradual decline continued, and by 1996 the Cambridge Regatta was little more than an afternoon event. That Regatta sadly turned out to be the last.

The Sprint Regatta had always attracted plenty of entries, but in 1997, since there were no longer any marquees on Stourbridge Common for the crews and spectators to use, that Regatta was moved to beside Midsummer Common, close to the boat-houses. It was moved again after a few years to the Long Reach.

The Sprint Regatta survived, but all that remains of the Cambridge Regatta are memories of a once great event.

The Railway - Derek Stubbings

The railway did not feature in the daily life of most Chesterton people.

Having moved to the outer ring of Fallowfield in the early 1950s my house overlooked fields towards Fen Ditton.

The Fen Estates were not built then and our garden bordered a running stream, which was in fact a public drain. Beyond the stream the field had been used as allotments during the war so we had a clear view across to the railway. Much of the view was of the railway houses between the main line and the St Ives branch. To the right was the bridge over the river and the Chesterton Junction signal box.

At night from the bedroom the lights of cars along Fen Road could be seen approaching the level crossing; the red lights on the gates as they opened, then the lights of the car as it crossed the rails.

The railway developed Chesterton Junction sidings to produce long length rails; the big portal cranes and very tall clusters of lights dominated the scene. At busy times work continued through the darkness.

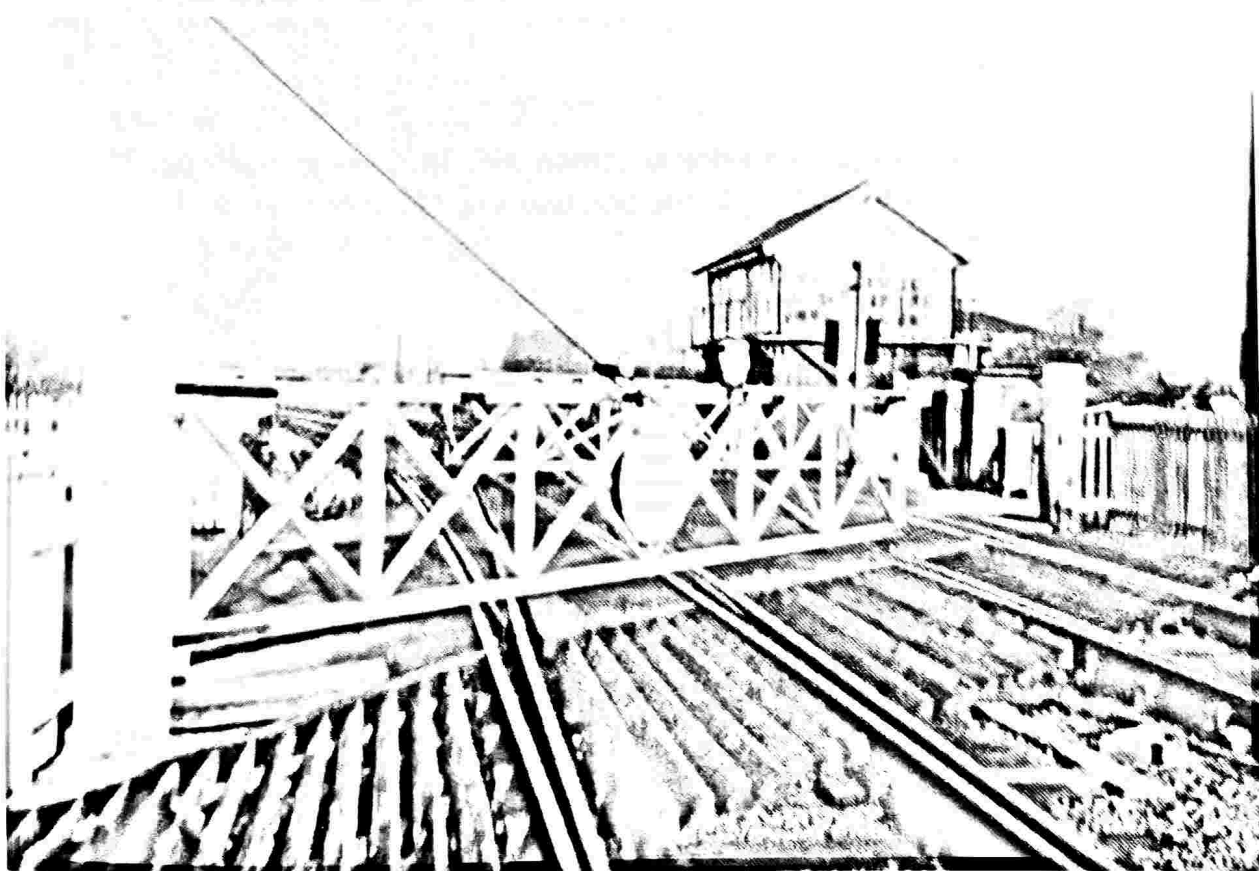
In the summer months long hours of daylight enabled rail track work to be carried out; usually at weekends. Very early on Saturday or Sunday mornings, you could hear the long trains of rails leaving the junction - the steam engines working hard to get the great weight moving and slowly crossing the points onto the main line.

The empty trains of special wagons would return later in the afternoon; the train easing slowly from the main line, across the points into the junction. It was not unusual to wait up to twenty minutes before any road traffic could cross the rails.

John Norman's memories

I used to enjoy watching the trains at the Junction on Fen Road. Where the Science Park is now was the railhead for Americans. Prisoners of War, supervised by black Americans worked there. King's Hedges Road was all countryside at that time. The Home Guard were based in St Kilda's Avenue. I joined up in 1942.

One of the biggest changes that I have seen over the years is the frequent demolition and rebuilding, which started in the 1970s. There is also an absence of seasonal foods such as peas and beans.



*The level crossing at Fen Road on the last day of operation in 1974
before being fitted with barriers.*

Local Street Names - why they are called what they are

The origin of local street names is not always obvious and Chesterton is no exception.

Thrift's Walk

Charles Thrift was awarded land near the river in the 1840 Enclosures Award. This lane was the approach.

Barley Corn Lane (now gone) and Maltster's Way

The titles recall the large numbers of breweries and public houses for which Chesterton was well known.

Scotland Road

In the middle ages large herds of cattle were driven down from Scotland and Northern England to supply the London markets with meat. The journey took many weeks. Stops for rest and feeding were necessary at farms on the route, and many became known as Scotland Farm; hence 'Scotland Road'.

Union Lane

Named after the Chesterton Union (workhouse) which opened in 1840, having previously been known as Mill Lane, it was the route to the local windmill, which stood in what is now Hurst Park Avenue.

Green End Road

Many villages had a road of this name, which usually ended in open fields. In Chesterton it connected to Milton Road and until the 1920s was still largely open fields on from the High Street.

Water Street

When the river traffic was important to Cambridge, Water Street was probably the main street in the village. The present High Street was called 'Back Street' and Scotland Road was 'Back Lane'.

Ferry Lane

Ferry Lane was the way to the ferry at the 'Green Dragon' in Water Street. The most important ferry on the river at the time provided means for horse and cart crossing to Barnwell instead of the long trek to the Town bridge at Bridge Street.