

Marston Green



A Village Community

Margaret Francis

**More stories of the folk of Marston Green
throughout the years.**

Marston Green



A Village Community

Margaret Francis

First Published 2001

Published by Merstone Publications

Copyright © Margaret Francis 2001

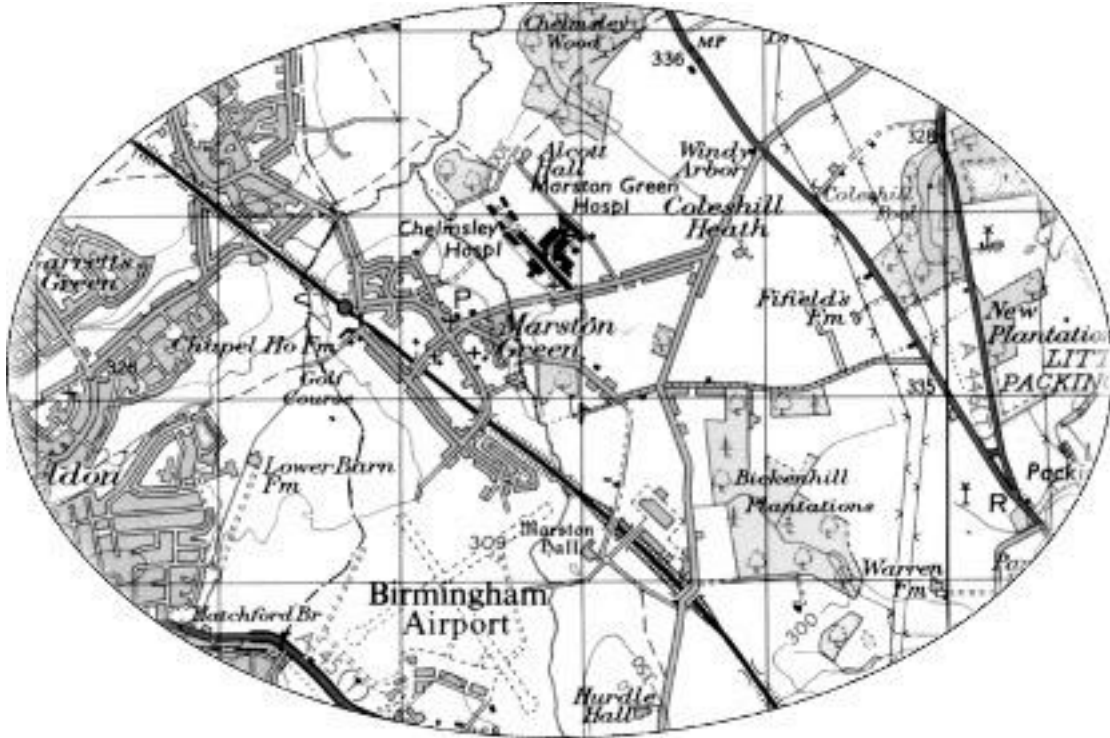
Printed and bound by:

**Windmill Press
01825 830319**

ISBN 0-9536920-1-9

As the 21st Century becomes a reality we look back at what it is that has contributed to the pride and togetherness of the

Community that is Marston Green.



The village of Marston Green situated alongside the Birmingham to London railway line, to the North East of Birmingham International Airport and the West of The National Exhibition Centre has evolved from early beginnings as a rural farming community. The community spirit of the folk within the village has always been strong and continues today, despite encroachment from these huge developments.

Even the map of 1962 (above) shows that forty years ago the area was largely undeveloped, the airport only took up a comparatively small area, there was no Exhibition Centre and Chelmsley Wood had not been built on the woodland area. Chelmsley Hospital and the Maternity Hospital were still up and running and the old school was just coming to the end of its useful life before the new one opened.

Amidst all the changes around the area, Marston Green remains as a village and the spirit of community within it, is still very much alive.

Dedicated to

John Musson
and
Audrey Wright

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	
Introduction	
Chapter 1	
The Original Settlement of Marston Green	1
Chapter 2	
Ordnance Survey Map of 1905	6
Chapter 3	
The Woods	14
The Destruction of Chelmsley Wood	15
Alcott Hall	16
Chapter 4	
The Original Village Centre	22
Chapter 5	
The Airport Land	32
Chapter 6	
Early 20 th Century People and Places	41
Marston Green Cottage Homes	42
The Bulpitt Story	47
Farming	54
Chapter 7	
Community Spirit	62
Local Issues	74
Chapter 8	
Personal Tales	79
Kitty Harrow's Tales	82
Jeffrey French's Story	86
Bob Moseley remembers	91
Molly Crook's Story	96
Peter Richard's Story	100

Chapter 9		
	Growing Up in Marston Green	103
	Derrick Hayes remembers	104
	Peter Jacobs recalls	107
	Margaret Birch's memoirs of 'Past Marston Green'	110
	Early Life in Elmdon Lane by John Gardiner Jnr.	115
	Wartime Memories	122
Chapter 10		
	The Church Communities	129
	Memories of Church by Margaret Birch	130
	Rev. Cuthbertson remembers	133
	Activities for youngsters	136
	Fellowship in Marston Green	141
	St Leonard's Men's Fellowship	141
	St Leonard's Ladies' Fellowship	142
	The Church Mouse Charity Shop	144
Chapter 11		
	Clubs and Activities	146
	First Marston Green Scout Group	147
	Marston Green Model Engineering Club	152
	Marston Green Players	160
	Marston Green Women's Institute	165
	Marston Green Floral Art Club	170
Chapter 12		
	Odds and Ends	172
Chapter 13		
	13 Letters and Testimonials	189
Appendix		197

Acknowledgements

This book has been written by request from folk who wanted to share tales of their families and friends associated with Marston Green over the years. I hope it will go some way towards producing a picture of the 'Community of Marston Green' from around the 1880's until about the mid 1960's and on to the present day.

It is impossible to thank every individual who has contributed towards it, but if you have added any thing at all - please accept my thanks. If you can't find your contribution here, it is only because I have run out of space. I have valued every tale, photograph or other articles....but I just cannot add absolutely everything.

I must though thank some individuals including Rob Smith, who despite his illness found the time to talk to me on more than one occasion and add a background to the Parish Council stories, as well as to show me the records. To John Stevens for access to the story of Fir Tree Cottage amongst other things and to Bob Moseley whose entertaining telephone calls from Tenbury Wells have kept the momentum going - especially at times when I felt like I was walking through treacle with it all. To Mary Bowen from Ludlow and Peter Richards in Coventry - linked through their parents being neighbours in Marston Green in the early part of the 20th Century - they have sent a wealth of original documentation through the post - as well as their personal tales. To John Gardiner - inspired by my first book to tell the tales of his youth and to Margaret Birch - who I was told I must contact, as someone with a wonderful memory for detail - how right that was, as you will see further on in the book.

Margaret Johnson has unfolded a delightful tale of her family - the Bulpitts, along with a most unusual artefact. John Musson was so pleased to show me around Chelmsley Farm despite his ailing health and when he and Midge proceeded to take down their pictures from the wall of the farm for me to take copies from them - I knew my quest for information was not in vain. Thank you Midge

To all the folk who have added their individual memories, Kitty Harrow, Jeffrey French, Mollie Crook, Derrick Hayes, Rev Cuthbertson, Audrey Wright and Peter Jacobs and everyone who has added a bit here and there relating to different aspects of the village community. Thanks to John Swindell and Chris French for tales of Scouting. To David Wright for the history of the Model Arts and Crafts Club, Vera Webb and Peggy Martin for allowing me to borrow the folders full of memorabilia from the Marston Green Players and to Mavis Cope for access to the wonderful pictures from the Floral Art Club - what talented groups. Thanks to Ray Hornsby and Shirley Evers who have shared the Church Fellowships and to the many people who contributed to tales of the WI.

When Mr and Mrs Burnand contacted me, they wanted to share the wonderful work that their daughter Elizabeth produced when she was at school. This has produced copies of several photographs which she took of places, long gone. Thanks to them the images of Moat House Farm and the stone sleepers at Chapelhouse Farm are not lost for ever.

My visits to the village during late 1999 and 2000 were quite an experience. Never have I received so much information in such a short space of time, I just hope I have done justice to it.

Thanks to the Evergreens who welcomed me to their meeting in February 2000 and lent me so many items. I must also mention and express my gratitude to Roberto and the staff at Bacco's restaurant without whose hospitality I would never have met so many people in one go. You missed an excellent gathering - if you were not there.....so many tales of village folk exchanged, some of which were never suitable for publication!

The wonderful sunny June day at the Scouts Gala also gave me an opportunity to share so many of the photographs I have managed to make copies of and to speak further to village folk. With luck my collection will be increased with inclusion of some of the images from this book.

I must not forget the stalwarts who have helped me 'backstage' with this project - to Ethel Morley, for constant support and encouragement....and yet more photographs from the archives, when I least expected them; to George Taplin for finding the major errors and to my family Norman and Jean Baugh in the village and those at home and of course to Ivor who doesn't get too annoyed, when things don't always work for me with the computer and he has to come to my rescue.

Thank you all.

Please enjoy the stories and remember that they are just that - stories - but with the added attraction that they are the tales of real people and their real lives. They have now become an oral history of the village of Marston Green.

Introduction

The village of '**Marston Green**' originally referred to as the two areas of Marston Culy and Wavers Marston, has existed since times before the Domesday Book recorded the properties and communities in England for taxation purposes in 1086.

Once a settlement or community was established it would seem reasonable to presume that the people within it - the Villagers - would interact for the common good or for support and help when it was needed. Throughout the generations this community spirit would no doubt have continued and the folk within the boundaries of the settlement would maintain this supportive bond.

The stories contained here show that the community spirit still exists, much as it would have done in the largely agricultural community of Marston Green, in the years between 1086 and the early part of the 20th Century.

With the wonderful collection of artefacts, anecdotes and tales shared with me during the latter part of 1999 and the year 2000, I hope I have been able to do justice to piecing together a part of the essence of the community which existed in the village of Marston Green over the years.

It is important for the reader to remember that with all memories the actual detailed facts can often become rather lost, or somewhat altered, in the annals of time. I hope you will bear this thought in mind as you read the stories – it is the overview of the memories which I feel are really equally as important as the actual details. Please remember also that an event will never be reported in exactly the same way by more than one person - each individual views it and reports it differently

It was pointed out to me that there was an 'error' in my first book Marston Green - Down Memory Lane – it seems in fact that Dr Honigsberger was a white South African and not a German gentleman as I had been told. I apologise if this has offended anyone. I do ask you to remember that it is not possible to double-check every fact and that I feel it is more important to add the tales and anecdotes, rather than leave them out. The same goes for the photographs and documents that I have copied, some of which I know are not the best quality - but please remember some of the originals are quite old and not necessarily in pristine condition.

Surely it is better to add these less than perfect images - as a 'memory jerker' or to look at something which no longer exists, than to leave it out completely. This undertaking has been a voyage of discovery for me. Countless people have shared their homes, their memories, their stories, their photographs and often precious artefacts.

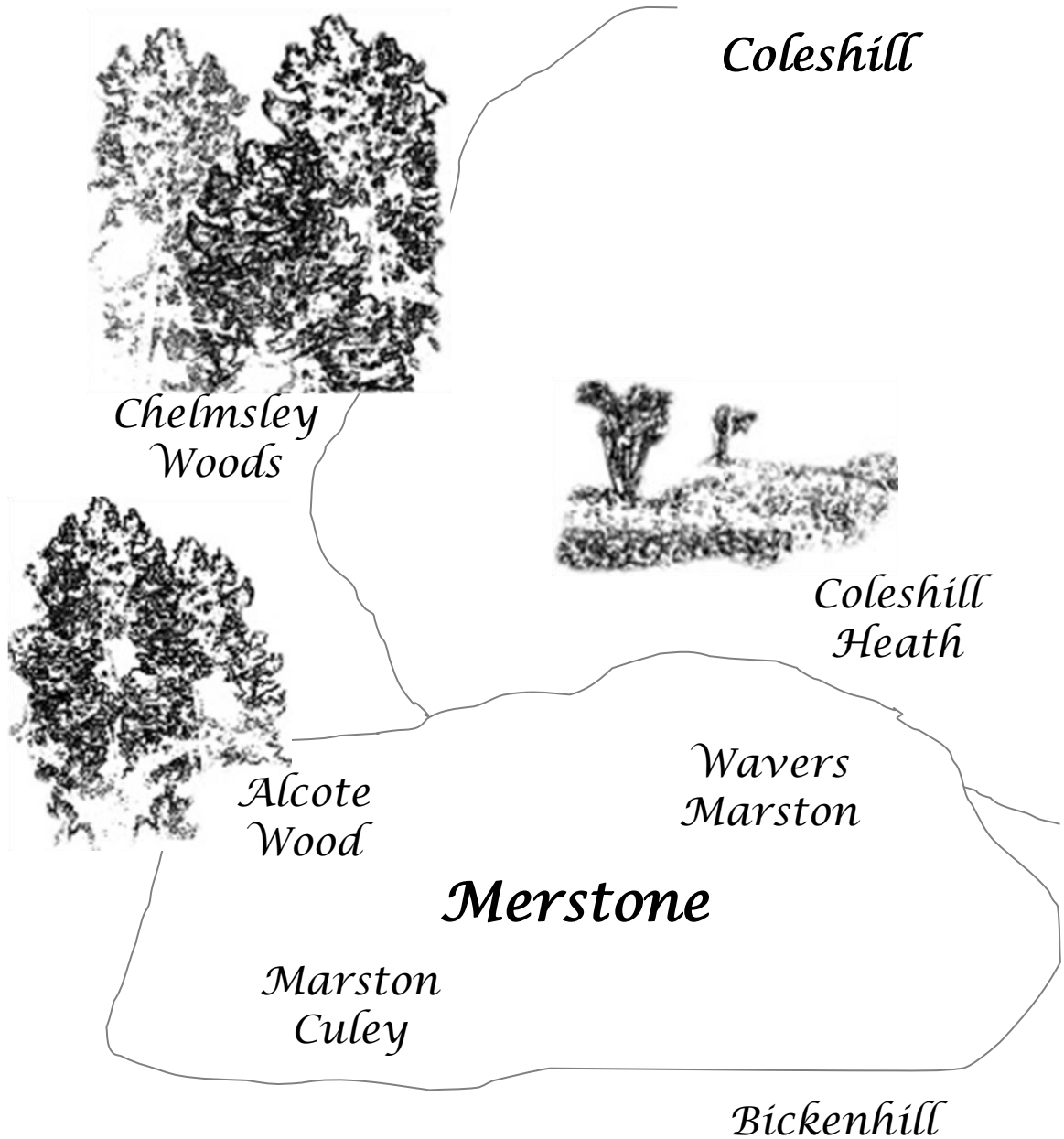
At the beginning and for some time during the slow and painstaking process of sorting out every piece, I felt that I had been put in charge of a giant jigsaw puzzle but as everything has taken shape I realise that it is more than just that. It is in fact as much an archaeological mosaic, a record of the fabric of a community, as important as any discovery from a Roman dig. More so really, because in this record real people spoke to me about other real people. Photographs underlined tales and proofs of vanished landmarks pointed the way into our past both accurately and with love.

I leave you with these thoughts, as you join me in another 'Journey from your Armchair' to visit the folk who have made up the 'Community of Marston Green' during the latter part of the 20th Century.

Margaret Francis

February 2001

Chapter 1 The Original Settlement of Marston Green.



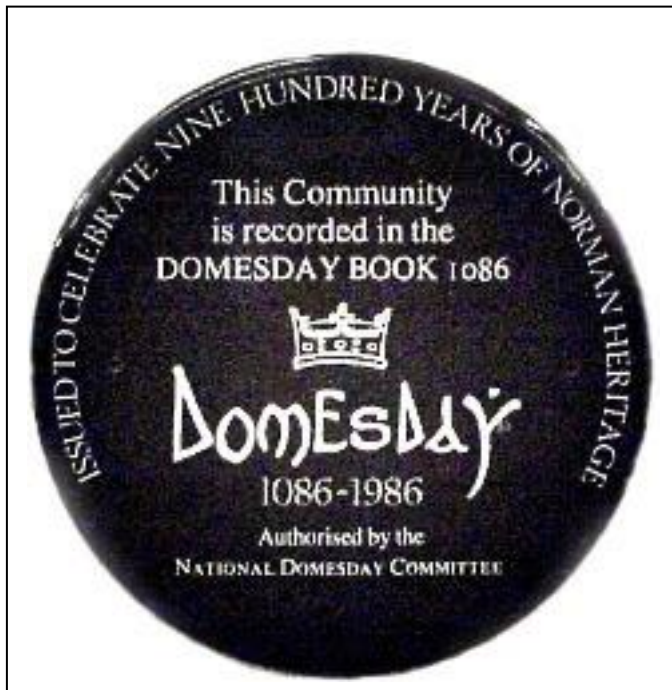
As a settlement in the Midlands, situated on a sandy ridge 300ft above sea level, the settlement of Marston Green or Merstone as it was known, has existed for hundreds of years.

Marston Green – A Village Community

When Elizabeth Burnand was a pupil at Coleshill School in the 1970's, a school project, which she undertook, traced the history and origins of Marston Green and followed it through to the 20th Century. Her parents have very kindly allowed me access to this delightful History of Marston Green. Her clear reporting of the hierarchy in the very early years helps to unravel the history of the area at the time. She explains:

“After the Norman Conquest all land was owned by the King and held in trust by faithful followers. If a Saxon turned traitor and swore allegiance to the King, he was similarly favoured and given land. One such man was Turchil – ‘Traitor Earl’ of Warwick. He was given control of 67 of the 297 Warwickshire Manors and made Tenant in Chief. He in turn gave control of some of these to others, including a Knight called Roger”.

The Domesday Book, compiled in 1086 under the orders of William the Conqueror surveyed property in England. This survey provided a basis for taxation in medieval times. It has an entry, which reads:



‘From (T)urchill, Roger holds MERSTONE. There are 3 hides*. There is land for 3 ploughs. In the demense is 1; and there are 4 villeins and 2 bordars with 3 ploughs. There are 2 acres of meadow. It was worth 20 shillings; now 30 shillings. Edwin the Sheriff held it freely.’**

Figure 1 The Domesday Plaque displayed in Marston Green Library

The average Domesday Family consisted of 5 people so the population of the economically ‘booming’ 360 acre, Merstone would have been about 35 in 1086.

* A hide was approximately 120 acres.

**A villein was a feudal tenant attached to a Lord or a Manor.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The predominantly rural area of Merstone existed for many years with little outside influence from town or country. The Forest of Arden covered large parts of the countryside in the Midlands and Marston Culy and Wavers Marston, the two manors within Merstone developed and existed happily alongside each other on a small sandy ridge within the forest.

The area known as Marston Culy was situated roughly where the village centre of Marston Green now exists and the centre of Wavers Marston would have been where the main terminal buildings of Birmingham International Airport stand in the year 2000.

Chelmsley Woods, which for many years were best known for their wonderful springtime glory, with rhododendrons and masses of bluebells attracting people from miles around, to come to visit, were originally part of the massive Forest of Arden which covered the Midlands.

In the 1400's the wealthy Mountford Family owned large amounts of land in Warwickshire, they lived at Kingshurst Hall and had inherited the Manor of Coleshill.

The Digby Family who were similar in status to the Mountfords, but in the East Midlands counties, were staunch supporters of the Crown. They fought for the King and showed allegiance to him in many battles. The seven Digby brothers of the time fought in Henry Tudor's Army at Bosworth and in return for their support, they received a variety of titles and lands. Sir Simon Mountford from Coleshill, was at this time in opposition to the King and he was 'hung, drawn and quartered' under instruction of Henry VII, who then gave the Mountford's Coleshill Estate to one of his more reliable supporters, Simon Digby, in 1495.

At this same time a survey was made of Coleshill, while it was still in Royal hands, prior to the estate being granted to the Digby family. The Market Town of Coleshill and the land and estate belonging to the Home Farm of the Lord extended well beyond the present town boundary with an open field system in place. To the south of the Parish there were large tracts of heathland, including Coleshill Heath, where animals were allowed to graze.*

There were four larger hamlets associated with the Parish of Coleshill, one of these was Alcott. This contained one large Hall - "Aldcotehall" which was recorded in 1247. In 1332 a William de Charneles and his wife Margaret settled there. It eventually passed to Sir Simon Mountford in 1492 along with woodland and pasture but by the 16th Century "Alcote Hall" was in the hands of the Bellars family. It would appear that despite all the name changes this was the original Alcott Hall site and presumably along with it went Alcott Wood.

* Information compiled from 'Coleshill and the Digbys' by Colin Hayfield and Andrew Watkins 1995

It seems that the Digby family did not acquire this along with the rest of the Coleshill Estate from Sir Simon Mountford's possessions.

In 1540, John Bellars (and his wife Eleanor) of 'Alcote Hall' was recorded as a wealthy man. His inventory of the time was valued at £65 and at his farm in Bacon's End he had horses, pigs and other small livestock as well as a flock of 200 sheep. Most individuals in those days would have had just a few animals and a flock of this size would probably have been one of the largest, with the exception of the Digby's.

John and Eleanor were still in residence at Alcote Hall in 1593 but by 1610 another John Bellars - probably their son - and his wife Helen and their son Henry were still living there. By 1618 there were several other freeholders who had property and land in the surrounding Alcote Green area.

In Tudor times the Digby family did have parts of Chelmsley Wood within their land. Even in those far off days they realised the importance of preserving the woodland for future generations, although it would have generated revenue to the family if the timber had been sold, they appear to have largely resisted the temptation.

During this period the Digby Family started to buy up land from some of the smaller freeholders and extend their ownership within the area. They then began exchanging land, in order to enlarge their parkland area around Coleshill Hall. Often they gave back a larger area elsewhere in exchange for what they required. By 1586 they had managed to acquire the land they desired in that area around Coleshill Hall. By the 1660s the Digbys were purchasing land all around the area and renting it back to the previous owners. They did not have a great deal of the land around the Alcote area and much of the land around Marston Green was also outside the control of the Digby family at this time. Eventually though the area became absorbed into the Digby estates. **

By the later part of the 1700's the Digby family were not so 'visible' in Coleshill life and it appeared they were gradually withdrawing from life in and around the area, but nevertheless by that time, they had become major benefactors in the town. They were instrumental in establishing schools, taking responsibility for the Church and becoming beneficiaries to the town and estate in many ways.

In 1856, Edward the eighth Lord Digby died, but being unmarried he had no heir. His lands passed to the sons of his sister Charlotte – George and John Wingfield. They were both granted the name and arms of Digby by Royal Licence in that year and became the first Wingfield Digby owners of the estate. At this time, the estates went into trust and one of the first acts of the trustees was to set up an 'improvement fund', to finance capital works on the estates.

** Victoria County History of Warwickshire Vol. 4, 1947.

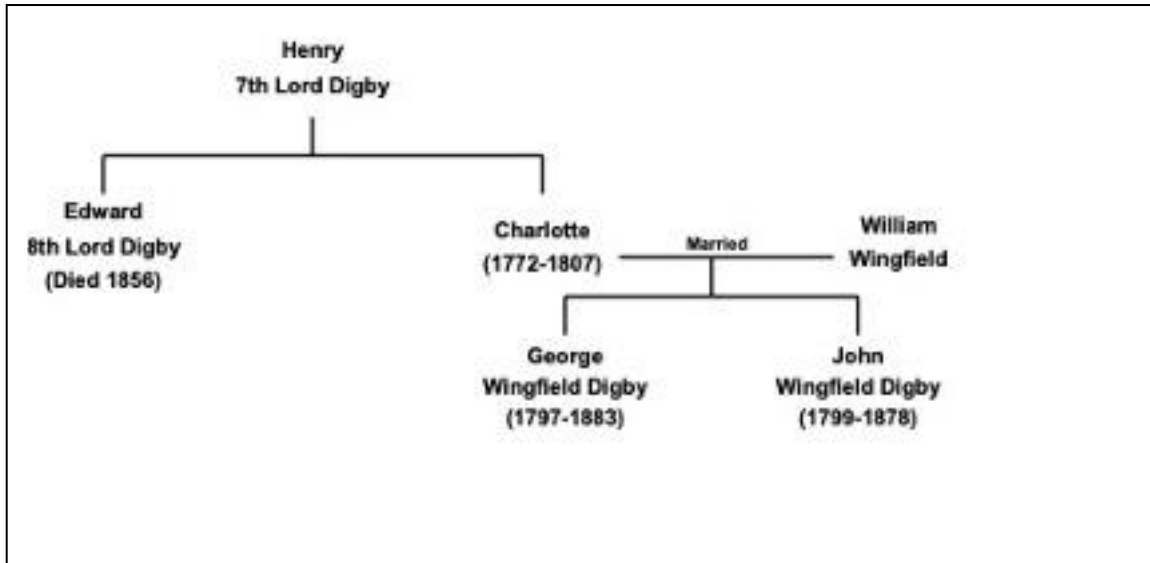


Figure 2 Development of the Digby to Wingfield Digby Family Tree

This then became a time of renewed interest by the now, **Wingfield Digbys**, to further their ownership of property and land in the area and as late as the 1870s they were still purchasing properties. Their interests by this period, it seems, had spread more widely and several of the farms and properties in Marston Green, which were actually in Bickenhill Parish, were now owned by the Wingfield Digby family and had become part of the vast Coleshill Estate. In 1862 they had 'acquired' the Wesleyan Chapel in Station Road, Marston Green but they did not wish to worship close to an Inn. As their chapel was opposite to Ash Tree Cottage (the Inn at that time) they gave land further along Station Road, next to a cottage that they already owned, for the 'new' Tavern. This gives an indication of the desire to have things their way they wanted. John Wingfield Digby, who was the Squire at that time just happened to also be a parson! – once again 'swapping' took place to 'improve their lot'.

The family fortunes turned in the early part of the 20th Century. As a result of double death duties, it became necessary for the Wingfield Digby family to sell off some of their land and properties. In July 1919 and again in July 1921, large outlying portions of the Coleshill Estate were sold at Auctions in Birmingham. Much of the land owned by the family in Marston Green was sold and the start of development in the area began to take place.

Chapter 2 Ordnance Survey Map of 1905

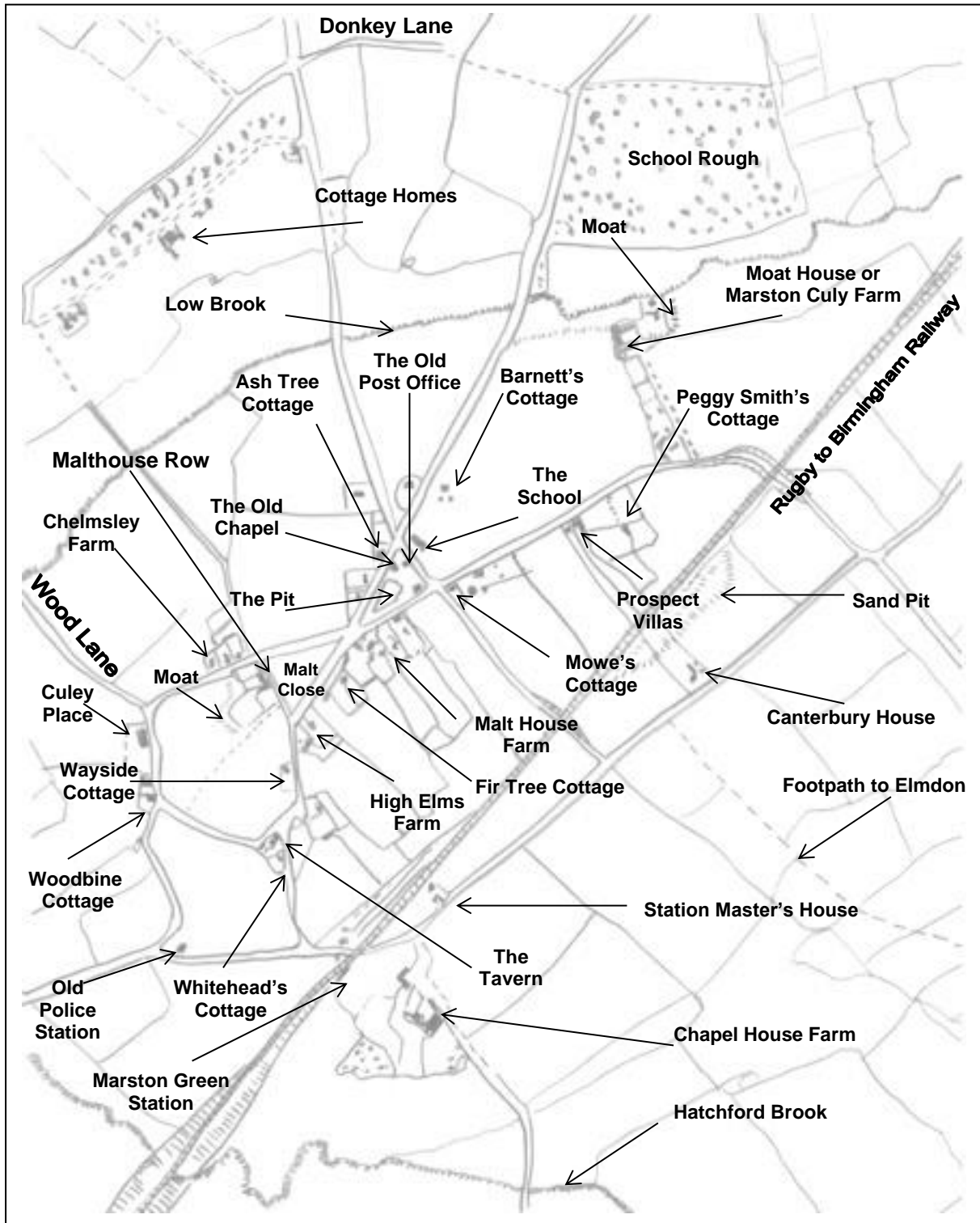
The six-inch to one-mile Ordnance Survey Map of the area, published in 1905 was surveyed in 1886 and revised in 1902. The map of Marston Green and the surrounding area shows that it was largely agricultural at the turn of the 20th Century.

I have compiled a map of the village centre, based on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map. I have named the cottages and farms as far as I can and I have added a short précis of those about which I have tales.

The people named at the various cottages were not necessarily the residents in 1905, but have at some time been associated with the buildings.

Few of the places marked on the map still exist at the beginning of the 21st Century, although the road layout is basically the same.

Marston Green – A Village Community



Map 1 Map adapted from the 1905 Ordnance Survey Map.

The features marked on the map do not all exist any longer. Wood Lane and Malthouse Row were more important as routeways than they are nowadays. Likewise Donkey Lane would have been used more than it is now by the farmers and other local residents as a route to get around the area.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Come on a tour of Marston Green village centre as it existed around 1900.

We begin at:

Marston Green Railway Station which was built to serve the line from Rugby to Birmingham when it was opened in 1838. The line remains today as part of the mainline West Coast Railway beginning at London Euston.

The Station Masters House was where James Smith lived in 1881 with his family as reported in the census at that time.
(Kitty Harrow's great grandparents and their family)

The Sand Pit further along the railway track behind Canterbury House in Elmdon Lane was created when additional sand was dug out from there to build embankments for the railway. The original calculations of the amount needed were found to be incorrect and local resources were necessary.
(John Gardiner)

Chapel House Farm was one of the principle farms in the area and during the 2nd World War became the headquarters for the local Home Guard. The old stone sleepers from the railway were used for a wall around the farmyard. The final destiny of the farmhouse, before demolition due to the runway extension at the airport, was as the Club House at the Marston Green Golf Course.
(Ethel Morley, Peter Richards, John Gardiner, Mrs Wright)



Photograph 1

Stone Sleepers at Chapel House Farm.

(photograph - Elizabeth Burnand)

The Footpaths to Elmdon There were two or three footpaths across the fields to the Coventry Road at Elmdon. Elmdon Lane itself continued across to the present A45. The coming of the airport created the need for the footpaths to be closed, although there had been a discussion in 1934 by the Parish Council suggesting the closure of footpaths may not be necessary, when the aerodrome was finally built.

(Parish Council Records)

Canterbury House was in Elmdon Lane and the post box in the gateposts, which belonged to the house, still remains. During the 1920's the headmaster of King Edward's School Birmingham, Cary Gilson lived at Canterbury House. 109 Elmdon Lane, which was built on the site became the Manse for the Free Church for many years.

(John Gardiner, Rev Cuthbertson)

Hatchford Brook and Low Brook both ran around the village and were both liable to flood on a regular basis. They merged just to the north of Alcott Wood and continued to become the River Cole.

Moat House or Marston Culy Farm was built on an old moated site towards the Wavers Marston end of the old Merstone settlement. 'Shanty Israel' lived in an old hut at the Bickenhill Road end of the farm.

(Rev Cuthbertson, Derrick Hayes, Peter Jacobs)

School Rough is the woodland area which still exists in Bickenhill Road belonging to the Bulpitt Estate.

(Margaret Johnson)

Peggy Smith's Cottage was on land opposite to where the old Village Hall was built in Elmdon Road.

(Derrick Hayes)

Prospect Villas in Elmdon Road were built in the 1870s. During the First World War it became a VAD Hospital for wounded soldiers.

(Mary Bowen)

Mowe's Cottage on the corner of Land Lane and Elmdon Road still stands today. John Mowe, a signalman at the Station, lived there in 1891. The Mowe family continued to live there for many years. (1891 Census)



Photograph 2

Mowe's Cottage

Marston Green – A Village Community

The Old School built in 1875 stood at the junction of Land Lane with Bickenhill Road. Over the years it developed and extended across to Elmdon Road. During WW2 half of the school field was dug up and consigned to vegetable production as part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

(Peter Richards, Derrick Hayes)

Barnett's Cottage behind the school in Bickenhill Road was very old according to Mrs Barnett in the 1940's.

(Margaret Birch's church memories)

The Old Post Office and General Stores which still stands today was run by the Knibbs family who also started the cobbler's shop just around the corner in the building which has become The Church Mouse charity shop.

(Shirley Evers, Molly Crook, Bob Moseley)

The Old Chapel was acquired by the Wingfield Digby family for worship in 1862. When the new church was built in Elmdon Road, the old chapel was used for many social and village events.

(Ethel Morley, Stella Reece, Jeffrey Holt, Vera Webb)

Ash Tree Cottage which still stands today on the corner of Station Road and Coleshill Road was built as the original Tavern. It was one of three identical cottages built at the same time, probably around 1760, in the village centre.

(Letter from Thomas Onley 1960)



Photograph 3

Ash Tree Cottage

The Pit in the village centre was used to supply gravel to keep the local roads in good repair. It later became a pond and finally the Garden of Memory.

Malthouse Farm, the village centre farm would have been the hub of activity. The Hall family who farmed Alcott Hall Farm for many years were also tenants of the Digby family at Malthouse Farm.

(Bob Moseley)

Fir Tree Cottage which is still standing was built at the same time as Ash Tree Cottage. It was at one time a Dame School run by the Benbow family. Frederick Benbow was a school master at the Cottage Homes.

(John Stevens, Peter Richards)

Malt Close the triangular field where the shops now stand was farmed by a couple called Southam. They lived in the last cottage on Malthouse Row next to the Cottage Homes Farm.

(Thomas Onley letter 1960)

Malthouse Row was a row of six cottages built for the local farm workers. Only one of the original cottages remains today. The lane was marked on old maps as a route towards Birmingham.

(Bob Moseley)



Photograph 4

Malthouse Row Cottages

Chelmsley Farm still standing in Chelmsley Lane was the farm associated with the Cottage Homes. The original Farm Bailiff there was Charles Allwood.

(Molly Crook)

The Marston Green Cottage Homes were built on 43 acres of land in the countryside and first opened in 1880 as a Children's Home. In the 1930s they were closed and the buildings used as Chelmsley Hospital. By 2000 the site had been cleared and replaced by a housing development.

Donkey Lane was the boundary of the site which was to become the Recreation Ground. It is often referred to as The Donkey Path.

(Parish Council 1934/5)

Marston Green – A Village Community

Wood Lane led down to Meadow Brook and into Chelmsley Woods, where picnickers visited to come to pick the Springtime bluebells. The original bridge was a wooden structure but replaced by a concrete bridge with metal railings. (Peter Richards, Kitty Harrow)



Photograph 5

Meadow Brook

The bridge crosses over Low Brook.

Culey Place on the corner of Wood Lane and Chelmsley Lane was where Kitty Harrow's aunt, Emily Smith, lived. She was one of the local postwomen during the First World War.

(Kitty Harrow)

Woodbine Cottage was demolished when Moarend Avenue was put in to Chelmsley Lane to open up access to the Chelmsley Wood development in the 1960's.

(Molly Crook, Peter Richards, Bob Moseley)

The Old Police House was the original Police House which still stands on the corner of Holly Lane and Chelmsley Lane.



Photograph 6

The Old Police House

Marston Green – A Village Community

Wayside Cottage stood where Wayside cul de sac is now built.
(Kitty & Bill Harrow)

High Elms Farm was demolished and Elm Farm Avenue built on the site. The Infant School was built on the land towards the railway line in the late 1960s.

The Tavern moved to its existing site in 1862 to replace Ash Tree Cottage which was the original Village Tavern. The 'new' Tavern was built in the early 1960s.

Whitehead's Cottage Ethel Morley's great grandparents lived in this cottage next door to the Tavern. Subsequently members of the Whitehead family lived there until the demolition of the Cottage along with the Tavern in the 1960s.



Photograph 7

The old Tavern and neighbouring cottage

Chapter 3 The Woods

The whole of the area was originally part of the Forest of Arden, with the village of Marston Green being situated on a sandstone ridge 300 ft above sea level. The surrounding woodland, Chelmsley and Alcott Woods, which existed until the 1960's featured in the lives of the local population.



Photograph 8

Alcote Wood.

Alcote or Alcott Wood was the woodland area associated with Alcott Hall. This is the small wooded area which still stands alongside Moorend Avenue on the Chelmsley Wood Estate. Alcott Hall stands on the opposite side of the road.

Chelmsley Woods

Chelmsley Woods are fondly remembered by so many people and provided a delightful day out for folk from throughout the City of Birmingham as well as locally.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Kitty Harrow remembers.

“Chelmsley Woods was a great source of delight with its streams (watercress grew in one of them) and the bluebells and rhododendrons and, of course, the ferns and bracken. Folks would come by train from town in their droves to picnic at Chelmsley Woods on Bank Holidays and often left a trail of bluebells picked and then discarded along the lanes leading up to Marston Green Station. The two tearooms at Marston Green did a roaring trade at these times and Alcott Hall Farm folk used to sell pots of tea.

Before Lowbrook became polluted with waste oil from the airport, one could see kingfishers and fish. They are sadly missing today”.

The Destruction of Chelmsley Wood

by R. Wiltshire

Hissing of steam and slamming of doors;
Carriages of people arriving by rail.
Brummigem dwellers of two World Wars –
Minds set on walking the ‘bluebell trail’.

From foundries they’ve come – mills and factories,
Smiths of nuts, washers, bolts, screws, pen nibs and pins.
Liberated for a day to bring their families
To Marston Green crossing where the trail begins.

It’s Spring, bees are humming, birds are singing,
Singing Ceolmund’s song – ‘come to Chelmsley, come to Chelmsley’
And in the forks and on branches nests are building
Above the bluebell ‘sea’.

And when the latter day pilgrims are beneath the green canopy
Of this ancient wood
The bread, cheese and hard-boiled eggs are out and rapturously
The picnic is eaten where Anglo-Saxon dwellings once stood.

Then the moment of picking endymion*
Lest this day the memory shall not fail.
Symbol of a divine communion
To hold on, walk back along the ‘bluebell trail’.

*Endymion – bluebell

First published in ‘A sense of place’.

Alcott Hall

Alcott Hall, the old Georgian style house which stands alongside Moored Avenue at Chelmsley Wood was a farm in the area for many years. It is now a Grade II listed building.

Mrs Mary Bowen who now lives in Shropshire recalls memories of her childhood and tales of her mother and grandmother and the time they spent in Marston Green, including years at Alcott Hall.

“My grandmother was Elizabeth Hall (nee Brown) and she lived at Alcott Hall in Chelmsley Woods. My earliest memories of going there were in blue-bell time when the woods were a mass of blooms. People used to cycle or walk or come by train or bus to go out into the woods to pick the bluebells. My grandmother used to make home made little cup cakes and lemonade and cups of tea to sell to all the visitors”.

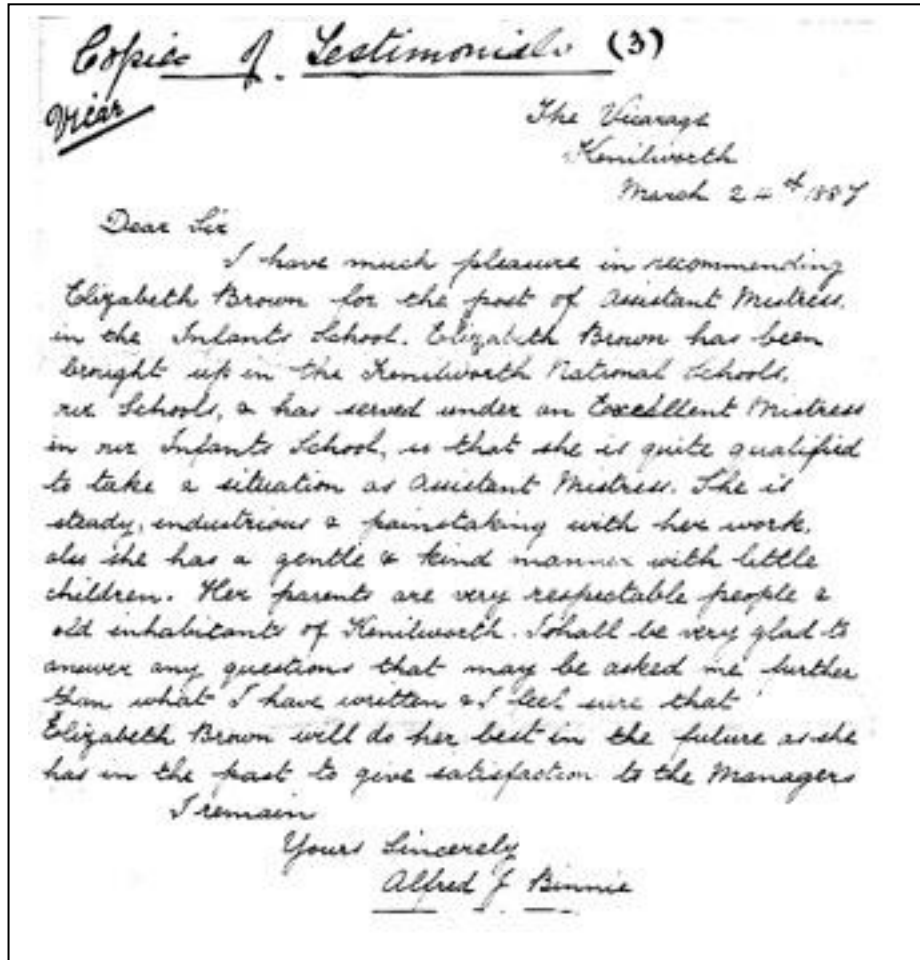


Sketch 1 Hand drawn picture of Alcott Hall on a Christmas Card

Mary’s grandmother’s family came from Kenilworth and in a Testimonial letter written in 1887 for Elizabeth Brown to become an Assistant Mistress in the Infants School, Alfred Binnie the Vicar at Kenilworth spoke of:

‘....her parents being very respectable people and old inhabitants of the town’. He felt that Elizabeth was ‘quite qualified to take a situation as Assistant Mistress’. She was described as having ‘a gentle and kind manner with little children and as being steady, industrious and painstaking with her work’.

At the same time H. Emlyn Barton, the Manager of the Kenilworth National Schools added that: 'in adding testimony to her good conduct whilst being employed at Kenilworth National School, he had known Elizabeth from a child he could speak of her constant and respectable conduct through life'.



Photograph 9 Testimonial Letter for Elizabeth Brown. March 1887.

Elizabeth Brown must have married into the Hall family who farmed the 117 acres of Alcott Hall Farm. Her husband Dick Hall died in 1932. Kitty Harrow, who grew up in the village, recalls: 'The Hall brothers from Alcott Hall Farm had a milk round and used to bring lovely, frothy creamy milk in a churn on a horse drawn cart and ladle the milk into the customers' jug'.

Elizabeth's daughter Emily Catherine Hall who was born in 1898 was educated at the school in Marston Green and left a few days before her 14th birthday in April 1912. Mrs Sarah Tart the mistress at the time gave her a glowing leavers report at that time:

"Always painstaking and conscientious in her work, also well behaved. She is bright and intelligent with a special aptitude for Composition and English, her spelling being particularly above the average".

The origins of the Red Cross Movement* were mooted in 1859 by a young Swiss businessman, Henry Dunant, who was appalled at the suffering of the wounded and dying on both sides during the Battle of Solferino in Italy.

Having experienced the atrocities he proposed the following idea that eventually led to the formation of the Red Cross: 'Would it not be possible to form relief societies for training volunteers to care for the wounded in wartime....based on some international principle'.

By August 1864 a delegation from 12 countries including Great Britain signed the Convention of Geneva "for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded in armies in the field".

In 1898, in Britain, a Central Red Cross Committee was formed under the guidance of the War Office as an attempt to ensure closer co-operation with the Army Medical Services and prevent any overlapping in duties. The primary objective was "to furnish aid to the sick and wounded in war" and a year later it began establishing Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD's) in each county.

With the outbreak of hostilities throughout Europe in 1914 it soon became apparent that the VAD's would be called into service to attend to the injured from the war. The British Red Cross and the Order of St John joined together to provide help to the aged, sick and injured throughout Europe and in Britain.



Photograph 10

World War I VAD recruitment poster

It did not take very long for a recruitment campaign to begin and only one recruitment poster was issued during World War I. The response was so great another poster was never necessary.

Owners of large houses and stately homes threw them open for the reception and care of convalescents. Marston Green had its own VAD Hospital.

*Information taken from 'The Red Cross Story' published by Dorling Kindersley 1995.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The many auxiliary hospitals throughout the country were opened at very short notice from October 1914 to receive wounded soldiers. Although women were more usually associated with the term 'VAD', there were men's detachments, which did vital work, particularly helping to transport patients from railway stations to the hospitals and working as hospital orderlies. In some places the men also helped the local constabulary and with public order.

Marston Green's VAD Hospital was set up in Prospect Villas in Elmdon Road.



Photograph 11

Post Card sent to Marston Green VAD Hospital.



Photograph 12

VAD Hospital in Marston Green.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Cissie Hall, as Emily Catherine was known (being the only girl amongst brothers) was at the age of 16/17 to become part of the VAD nursing organisation in Marston Green.



Photograph 13

Emily Catherine (Cissie) Hall

Cissie is dressed in her Red Cross VAD uniform when she was a nurse at the hospital in Marston Green during the 1914-18 War.

'Cousin Fred' sent a postcard to Cissie in February 1915 enquiring about her new situation, probably as one of the VAD nurses.



Photograph 14

Postcard sent to Cissie Hall at Malthouse Farm.



Photograph 15 VAD nurses in Marston Green in the First World War.

Emily (Cissie) Hall is the first nurse from the left, wearing a Red Cross Uniform. Seen here with the soldiers at the hospital, the nurses were members of the British Red Cross and the Order of St John.

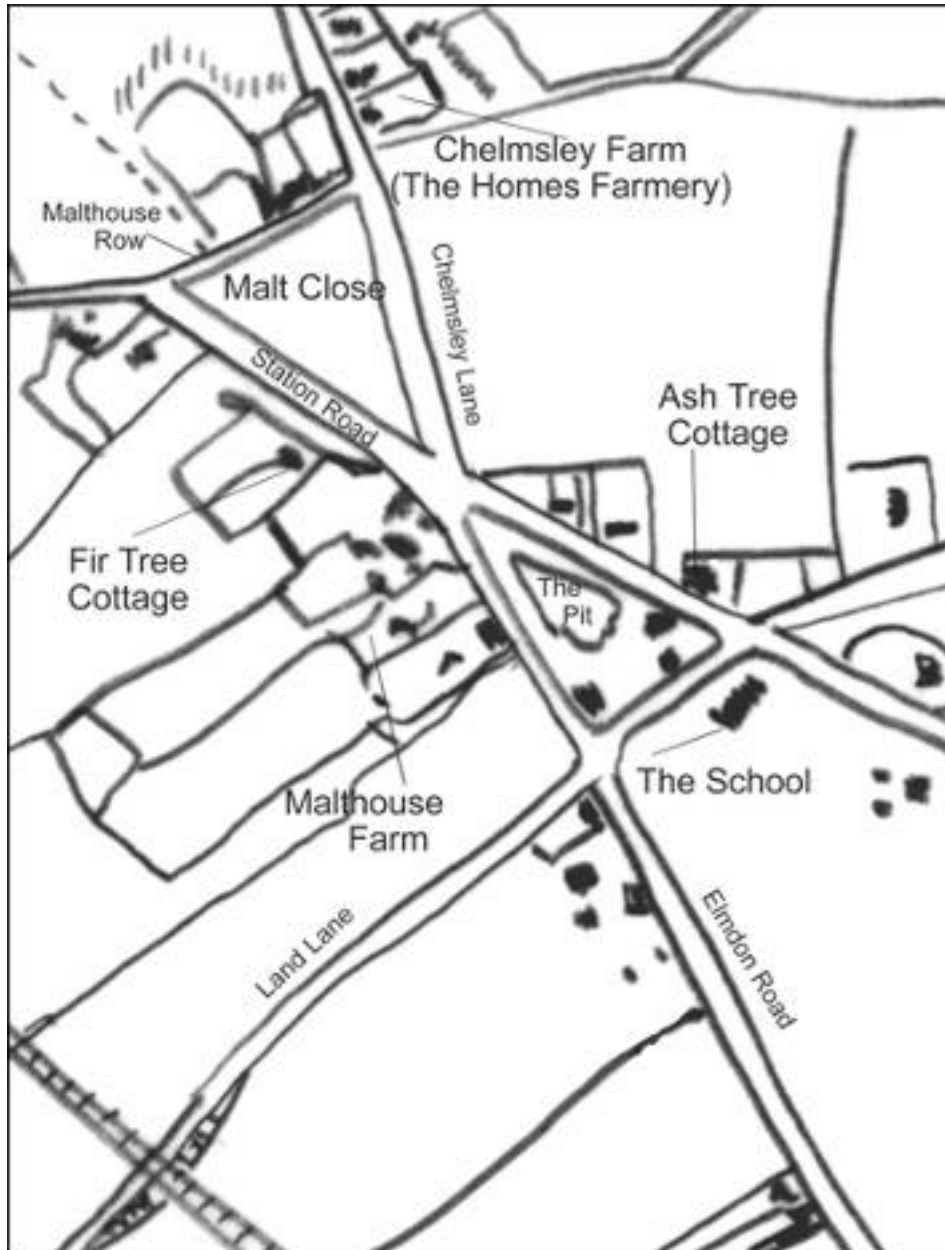
In 1915 Cissie, it appears, lived actually in the village at Malthouse House Farm as shown by the postcard from her cousin Fred. This was the farm, also run by the Hall family, which was right in what was then the Village Centre beside the gravel pit in Station Road.

Dora Phyllis Benbow (born 1895) was a little older than Cissie and was a friend and neighbour. She lived at Fir Tree Cottage, which was situated within Malthouse Farm in Station Road.

Cissie Hall married Victor Lea and had a daughter Mary. Dora Benbow married Leonard Richards and had a son Peter. Their children, Cissie's daughter Mary, now living near Ludlow, and Dora's son Peter who lives in Coventry, still correspond with each other in the year 2000.

Chapter 4 The Original Village Centre

The majority of the main buildings and cottages, which made up the village of Marston Green were built around the area of the gravel pit and Malthouse Farm at the junction of Station Road and Elmdon Road. This it appears was the original village centre.



Map 2 **The original village centre of Marston Green.**

Malthouse Farm extended roughly from the Tennis Club in Elmdon Road to almost the School entrance in Station Road and back as far as the railway line.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Several cottages and outbuildings made up the farm and Malthouse Row, which would have been opposite, would have been inhabited by the agricultural labourers who worked at farms in the village. The triangular field opposite (where the Chemist and other shops are now built) was known as the Malt Close. A couple called Southam farmed that land in the late 1800's.

A letter dated November 17th 1960 from Mr T Onley, who would have been about 75 years old at the time gives some details of that area in the village. Mr Onley had been born at Ash Tree Cottage on the corner of Station Road and Coleshill Road.

In an extract from this letter he says "Some of the cottages were probably built during the reign of William 3rd, who reigned from 1760 –1820, but the old farmhouse was much older and dated back to Charles 1st or possibly earlier. Where the present corn shop stands (Allcotts – now the modern office building) there used to be a Tudor period barn adjoining the two Tudor period cottages – which is now one, I believe".



Photograph 16 **Malt House Farm in Elmdon Road/Station Road**

This area then, would have been the hub of daily activity. The school at the crossroads, stood opposite the small Chapel. The original Tavern site of Ash Tree Cottage originally stood on this corner, but by 1862, a new Tavern was built on the present site, further along Station Road.

The gravel pit, would have been worked to provide the material for keeping the roads in order and the farm in the village centre would have been a hive of agricultural activity, providing work for many of the local agricultural labourers.

Marston Green – A Village Community

At one time Fir Tree Cottage was probably part of the Malt House Farm complex. A glimpse into the history of this cottage gives an idea of life in this busy little centre of Marston Green from about 1870.



Photograph 17 **Fir Tree Cottage, Station Road in 1987.**

Fir Tree Cottage or 77 Station Road, Marston Green is one of the oldest remaining cottages in the village and it must have seen many changes over the past 250 or so years.

Mr and Mrs John Stevens who bought the house in 1987 have shared their findings about the house including the letter from Mr Onley.

Mr Onley, in his 1960 letter says: "Fir Tree Cottage is a very interesting old house as it forms part of three built in that style – Fir Tree Cottage, Ash Tree Cottage where I was born and one more between Fir Tree Cottage and the two Tudor period cottages opposite to Malt House Row. This third cottage was for some reason allowed to run to ruins and the garden, although a large one, was seldom cultivated and became overgrown. It used to be said it was haunted or as the old folks called it 'arnted'.

Whether these two cottages were originally intended for farm workers I cannot say but they actually formed part of the old Malt House Farm and the farmer held the tenancy of them. Our old cottage was the Village Tavern thenadays. The triangular field opposite was known as the Malt Close and a quaint old couple rented it from the Digby Estate and they had the end cottage in the Malthouse Row by the Homes Farmery. They were called Southam and the old man did odd jobs and kept one cow".

Marston Green – A Village Community

Mr Onley went on to say that in his day “Marston Green was a very self contained place around the old pit – now the Garden of Memory – it was a very busy little centre”.

It seems likely then that Fir Tree Cottage was built probably sometime during the reign of William III (1760 –1820) and at some stage it became part of the Digby Estate. When renovation was being carried out in the late 20th Century and the roof was opened up, a date of ‘1761’ was found carved into the main roof purlin adding evidence to date supposition. The actual story concerning the history of the occupants of the cottage only extends as far back as the 1870’s – 80’s.



Photograph 18 **1761 carved into the roof ‘purlin’ of Fir Tree Cottage.**

At the Census in 1881 a John Penlington, who had been born in Cheshire and who at the age of 29 was a Solicitor’s Clerk was living there with his family. He and his wife Ruth from Liverpool had three small sons John, Stanley and Albert and also a 14 year-old domestic servant Maria Cadd. Given that the cottage only had a traditional ‘two up, two down’ construction, it must have been quite a squeeze to fit everyone in.

By 1891 Frederick Benbow and his family had moved in and the cottage had been extended – this time a date of 1888 carved into a joist provides the evidence. It seems an L shaped extension was added and the staircase, enclosed into the building. Only supposition, but it would seem possible that this may have been added by the builders involved with the development of the Cottage Homes at the time. Mr Benbow was the Schoolmaster at the Cottage Homes and obviously by this stage he was no longer living at the Homes and he had moved into the Marston Green community with his family.

Again, the late 20th Century renovations produced other artefacts - signs of teaching activity within the cottage. When cleaning out the floor space between the joists in one of the bedrooms a large amount of school teaching paraphernalia was discovered. Mr Thomas Onley said in his letter that he played in Fir Tree Cottage as a boy. Thomas was born in 1875 – so his recollections would probably relate to the families living there around the 1880 to 1890 period.

Marston Green – A Village Community

He says that: “These houses were old places when I was a child and played around them. In Fir Tree Cottage old friends of my parents once lived there but they left and went to live in Blackpool of all places Then another family came to live there and I well remember two of their children died of diphtheria. They went away and another family came to live at the Cottage and their boys were the big boys at our tiny school (probably the village school) where we could all stay until we were eight (1883/4 for Thomas Onley), when we had to go elsewhere if further education was thought necessary. The Governess did not take older pupils.

When the Marston Green Cottage Homes were built, many of the non-resident staff lived in or about the village and one member of the Educational Section came to occupy Fir Tree Cottage. He remained there for many years and I believe ultimately bought it and lived there until his death”.

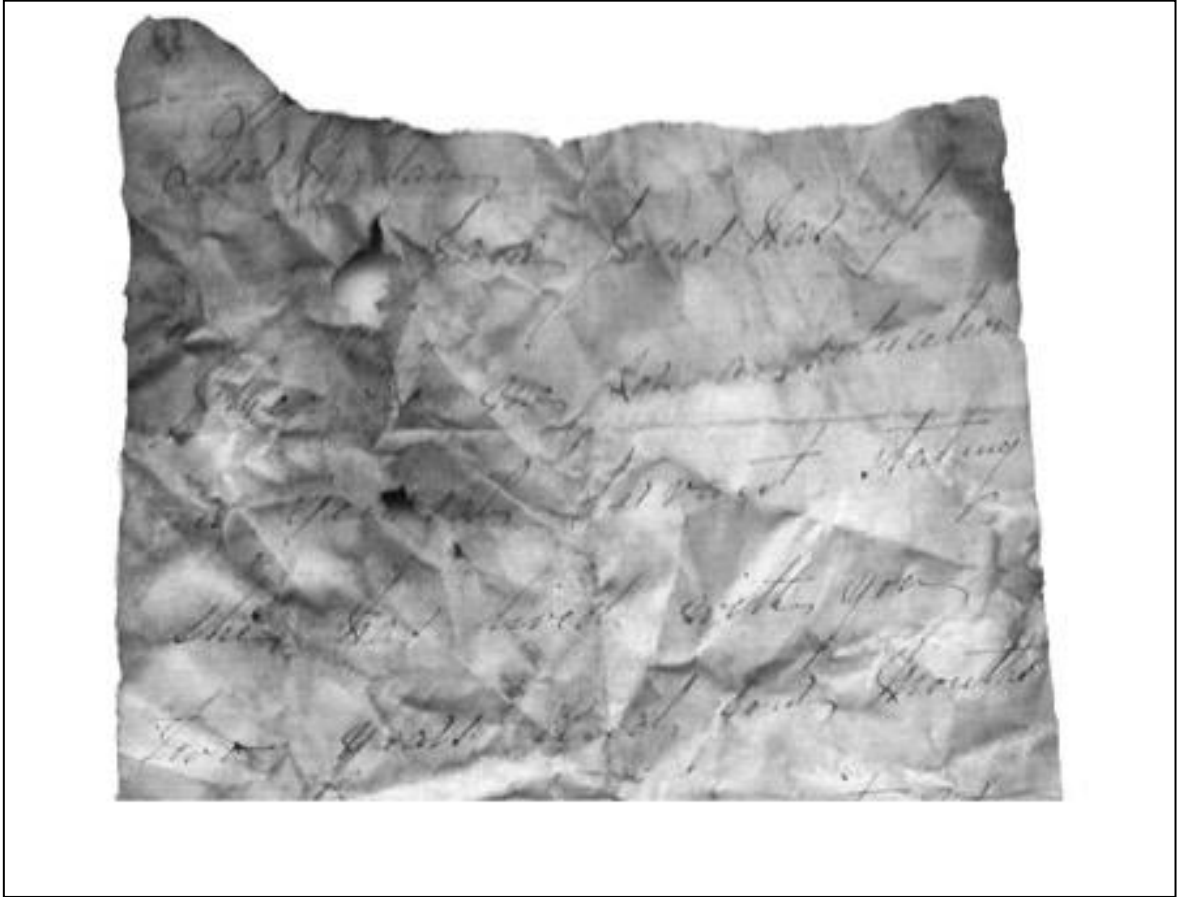


Photograph 19 **Artefacts found under the floor at Fir Tree Cottage.**

Pens, pencils and slate pencils were found along with a piece of jigsaw.

Marston Green – A Village Community

It would seem that Mr Benbow and his family started a private 'Dame' school at Fir Tree Cottage and the range of artefacts indicates that the education carried on there probably went above the eight years mentioned by Thomas Onley, who probably went to the village school. A variety of sewing items and a letter asking for a reference for a girl who had lived there appears to show that 'young ladies' received some of their education at Fir Tree Cottage.



Photograph 20

Letter asking for a reference for Jane Jones.

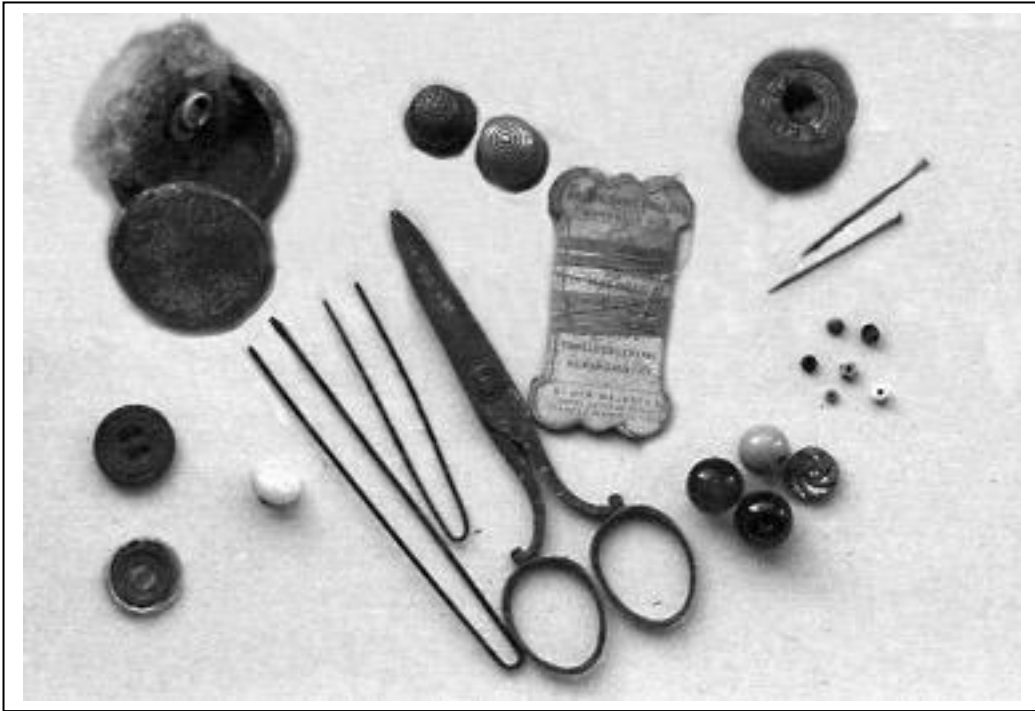
This barely decipherable letter was found under the floorboards in Fir Tree Cottage in the 1990's

Dear Madam

Jane Jones has applied (sic) to me for a situation as General Servant stating she has lived with you for two years and four months. Will you kindly write us regarding honesty and cleanly-ness and oblige.

Mrs Smith

An early answer will oblige.



Photograph 21 **Evidence of sewing carried on at Fir Tree Cottage.**

This was most likely when it was a Dame School. One of the thimbles has the words 'God Help Us' embossed around the rim.

It is possible to tie Frederick Benbow accurately into the history of Fir Tree Cottage as a result of copies of the censuses for 1881 and 1891 and letters received in the early part of 2000, from his grandson Peter Richards who lives in Coventry.

Peter says that he was born in 1927 in Marston Green and lived at 46 Chelmsley Lane with his parents, Dora and Leonard Richards and his older brother John.

"My grandfather died before I was born, but he was the schoolmaster at the Cottage Homes Orphanage in Coleshill Road, later to become a Mental Hospital. His name was Benbow, Christian name I think, Frederick. He had a crippled arm as a result of an accident with fire in his younger days. My mother, Dora Phyllis, was the youngest of three daughters. She was born in 1895 in a house in Station Road on the opposite side to Malthouse Row".

The census of 1881 confirms that a Frederick Benbow was indeed 'Schoolmaster' living and working at the Marston Green Cottage Homes. By the 1891 census he had moved out of the Homes and lived at Fir Tree Cottage with his wife Sarah and daughters Frances Frederika (Freda) and Constance. Dora was their third daughter and was born at Fir Tree Cottage four years later.



Photograph 22 Frederick Benbow with his family circa 1892.

Peter showed me this faded sepia photograph of Frederick with his wife Sarah (probably the lady on the left) and young daughter Freda. It is unknown who the other lady is.

Peter's Aunt Freda trained as a teacher in Birmingham, but she only ever spoke to him of having taught in various schools in Birmingham, so whether she would have been part of the 'Dame' school is unknown. Sarah Benbow, his grandmother, died in hospital in Birmingham when Dora was about six years old. The eldest daughter Freda had been instructed by her sick mother to look after Dora - which she did, even after Dora had grown up and had a family of her own.

Peter goes on to say that Frederick Benbow married again and although his mother sometimes spoke of having a stepmother he never had the impression that there was any particular affection between them.

It does appear though that Frederick Benbow, along with other members of staff at the Cottage Homes was keen to represent the local population by becoming a Parish Councillor with Bickenhill Parish. He was Clerk, Assistant Overseer and at one time Treasurer of the Council and he served them well for twenty years. In the Parish Council Minutes early in 1917 it states: “ On 1st October 1916, the salary of the Assistant Overseer, Frederick Benbow, is hereby increased from £26 to £34 per annum. Such salary to be for the making and collecting of rates and any other work therewith, but not registration work”.

He is mentioned again when the normally formal minutes of the Parish Council Meetings changed in tone dramatically. On October 26th 1922 they reported on the death of Mr Benbow as follows:

“The chairman – Mr C H Dickens said that before the business of the meeting was proceeded with, he desired to refer to the death of Mr F Benbow, who for many years had been Clerk to the Council and Assistant Overseer. The late Clerk had carried out his duties in a most conscientious manner and he (the Chairman) had always found it a pleasure to work with him. He considered that Bickenhill had undoubtedly suffered a loss and suggested that a message of condolence be forwarded to the widow and family”.

It was proposed and unanimously carried that a record of the late Clerk’s services be placed in the minute book. “That the members of Bickenhill Parish do place on record their appreciation of the services of the late Mr F Benbow, their Clerk, Assistant Overseer and Treasurer who was appointed September 3rd 1902 and who died October 5th 1922”.

At Frederick’s death in 1922, his second wife Clara, continued to occupy Fir Tree Cottage as a sitting tenant.

On 1st November 1924, after the sale of the Digby Estate, two brothers John and Charles Dickens, brickmakers from Elmdon Road and Belchers Lane, Bordesley Green bought the house from the Estate and sold it on to Clara Benbow, then referred to as a widow, for £525

In 24th April 1935, Fir Tree Cottage again changed hands when Herbert Vivian May (son-in-law) acted as executor in the Will of Clara Benbow and sold the place to Amy Taylor (widow) from Walthamstow in Essex for the sum of £550.

Amy Taylor died on 9th March 1981 and her executor Charles Moulds sold Fir Tree Cottage to Paul and Jacqueline Haggett in July of that year for £26,000.

In 1987 John and Joan Stevens bought Fir Tree Cottage and began the extensive renovations which have helped to reveal so much of this story.

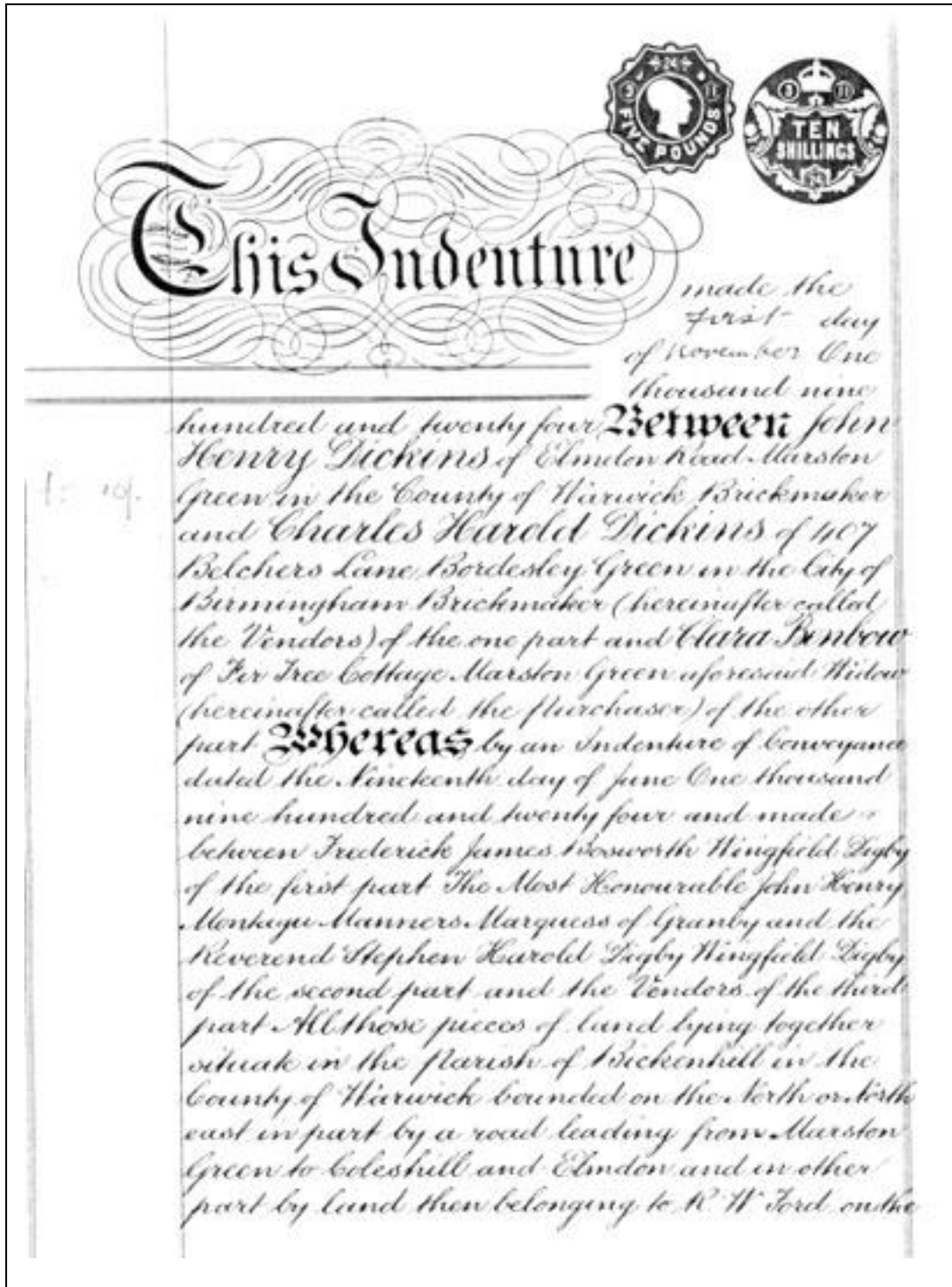


Figure 3 Indenture for the Sale of Fir Tree Cottage.

A copy of the Indenture between The Dickens brothers and Clara Benbow for Fir Tree Cottage was dated November 1924.

Chapter 5 The Airport Land

The land between the Birmingham to London railway line and the Coventry Road was exclusively farmland in the Parish of Bickenhill. Residents of Marston Green on the whole farmed the area.

When plans were put forward in the early 1930's for an airport in Birmingham this land first became threatened. This tale of the development from farmland to Major International Airport shows how the land changed.



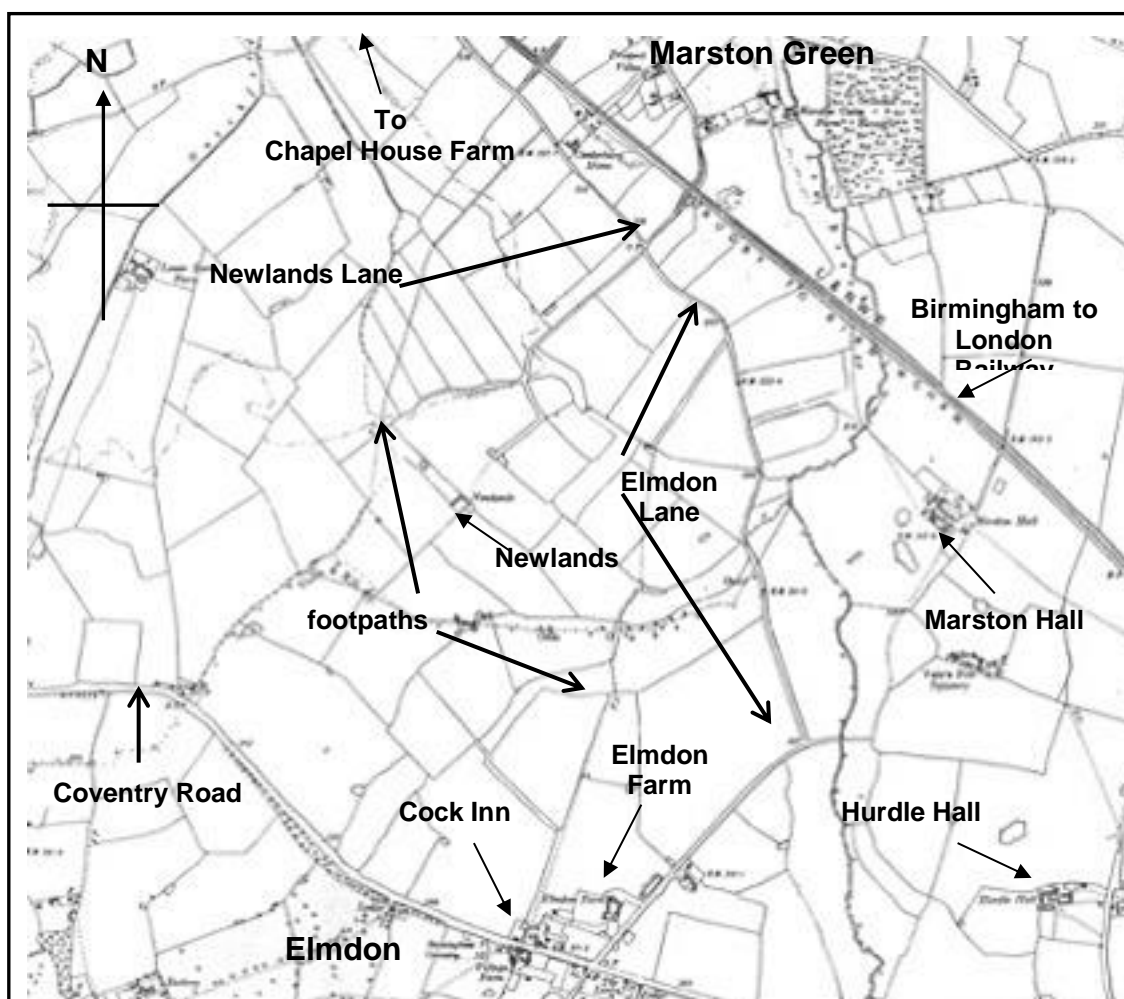
Photograph 23 **Birmingham Airport circa 1950.**

The Coventry Road at Bickenhill runs along at the front of the picture with the last few houses in Elmdon Lane, Marston Green at the top centre of the picture.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The map below shows the land onto which Birmingham International (formerly Elmdon) Airport has been built. In 1905 when the map was produced the area was exclusively farmland. It appears though to have been an important area to the folk of Marston Green and has been mentioned by many.

The main features of the area in 1905 have been highlighted on the map. The London to Birmingham Railway line is to the North East of the area and the Coventry Road at Elmdon to the South West. The main farms, which served the area, have been marked and named and the Cock Inn at Elmdon (not the Clock Inn at Bickenhill) was one of the alternative 'watering holes' of the Marston Green locals. The footpaths leading from Elmdon Lane and Elmdon Lane itself were the main routes to the Cock Inn on the Coventry Road.



Map 3 905 Ordnance Survey Map of the land south of the railway line.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Chapel House Farm was situated, close to Marston Green station, 'Newlands' was in the 'middle' of the site and Elmdon Farm and the Cock Inn close to the Coventry Road at Elmdon. Marston Hall and Hurdle Hall stood to the west the area on which the present Airport terminal now stands.

Apart from Hurdle Hall all the other farms on the land as well as the Cock Inn were offered for sale in 1919 at the auction of properties belonging to the Wingfield Digby Estate. This sale served as the first sign that there was a potential for change in the area. Whereas the properties sold within the village of Marston Green were suitable for housing development, this large area of farmland offered the opportunity for something else.

'Newlands' was a two bedroomed cottage with a 'useful assemblage of farm buildings' as described in the sale particulars of the time - the roadway leading to 'Newlands', Newlands Lane still exists at the corner of Elmdon Road and Elmdon Lane. It was part of the larger Elmdon Farm, which stood at the far end of Elmdon Lane. Between them they covered an area of 250 plus acres.



Photograph 24 **Elmdon Farm**

The Wingfield Digby sale particulars wax lyrical about 'The Highly Important and well-known, fully licensed, Cock Inn' It boasted a picturesque half timbered gabled elevation to the Coventry Road with gardens, useful outbuildings and a Paddock. It was tenanted to Mitchells and Butlers Ltd. The Brewers held it on a lease for 28 years from Ladyday 1914.

Like the Tavern at Marston Green it boasted an excellent Bowling Green, surrounded with trees and shrubs and it also had stabling for five horses, a pigsty, an unused four tie cowshed and hen roost amongst other features.

The first proposals for a municipal aerodrome at Birmingham were put to the General Purposes Committee in 1928, 'so that much of the continental traffic might be diverted from London to Birmingham direct....thereby stimulating the present and future trade of the City'. Cuts in the economy prevented further progress with the scheme until 1934 but by then Elmdon had been selected as the preferred site.

Originally the plan was for the aerodrome to occupy 300 acres, but the council decided more was needed and a compulsory purchase order for a further 200 acres was issued. Elmdon Farm, Newlands and the Cock Inn were first to go.

Shirley Mellish remembers: 'My dad Harry, owned some land down the Newlands which had to be sold as there was a compulsory purchase order - so we know who to blame for the airport - what a laugh!'

Bickenhill Parish Council made protests in October 1935 as the scheme for development of the land involved fell entirely within their domain, but by February 1936 approval was given for the new airport and work was started immediately.

The existing farmland would never be the same again - hedges were removed, hundreds of trees were felled, many ponds filled in and forty miles of drains laid and the topsoil removed and re-spread.

By the time Elmdon airport first opened in May 1939, having cost £360,000, only 215 of the now 800 available acres were in use, giving three grass strips of 3,000 feet and a fourth of 4,700 feet.

The Parish Council had questioned whether the airport and its runways would actually affect the rights of way across the land leading to Elmdon and were, it seems, led to believe that it would still be possible to cross the land despite the airport being there.

Several mentions have been made to me of Elmdon Lane, which continued across to the Coventry Road at Bickenhill, being closed off when 'the runways at the airport were extended'. Given the information of the development of the airport this did not make a lot of sense until I heard from Audrey Price (nee Green) who now lives in Australia.

"When the Second World War began in 1939 the airport was requisitioned for defence purposes. The Metropolitan Cammell Factory in Bickenhill Lane, just north of the Birmingham to Coventry railway line, was used for the final assembly stage of the Shorts Stirling bombers and Lancasters during the war. A bridge was built over the railway and the aircraft towed down a wide concrete track to the airport and flown from there".

This track, it seems, was the 'runway extension' which closed Elmdon Lane.

Audrey continues:

”We moved to Marston Green in 1942 and lived at 199 Elmdon Lane, the last block of houses before the Isolation Hospital further down. Elmdon Lane went through to the Coventry Road until they started towing the Stirling bombers to the airfield. They closed the Lane and extended the runway and posted two sentries at the end near our houses - they were kept well fed and watered with cakes and cups of tea provided by the locals”

During the war years, Elmdon was an elementary flying school for the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm pilots as well as a flight testing and delivery base for Stirling and Lancaster bombers. Under the Air Ministry the two hard surface runways were built replacing the original grass strips which were notoriously boggy in wet weather!

Immediately after the war it was suggested that there was little chance of Elmdon providing trans-Atlantic services, but there was a hope that European services to Amsterdam and Paris would soon recommence. In fact it was in April 1949 when the Elmdon to Le Bourget (Paris) flights began. Once again the landscape was altered to make the approach to the newly resurfaced runway clear - about 200 trees at the side of the A45 were felled.

Flights to Jersey and the Isle of Man began and the first Aer Lingus return flights to Dublin commenced on May 2nd 1949 at a fare of £10.16s (£10.80). The Paris flights were not altogether successful at first and it was feared that this route might have to be withdrawn.

After the War the airport was finally taken over by the Ministry of Aviation but still only took up a relatively small portion of the land. A lot of the land was still farmed, - Heather Musson remembers going down with her dad John, to harvest the fields between the runways.

The City of Birmingham gained control of the Airport in 1960 renaming it Birmingham Airport.

Chapel House Farm had several uses while the airport was developing. During the war it was used for the headquarters of the local Home Guard and subsequently it became an 18-hole golf course. As the airport gradually developed the runway extensions caused the golf course to be reduced to 9 holes with a further 9 holes becoming Hatchford Brook Golf Club on the Coventry Road. Finally, Chapel House Farm was demolished in the 1970's with the ever encroaching demands of the airport.

The Mussons took over Marston Hall Farm during the 1960's and worked on the land until Marston Hall was also demolished in the 80's to make way for expansion of what had by then become Birmingham International Airport.



Photograph 25 Marston Hall

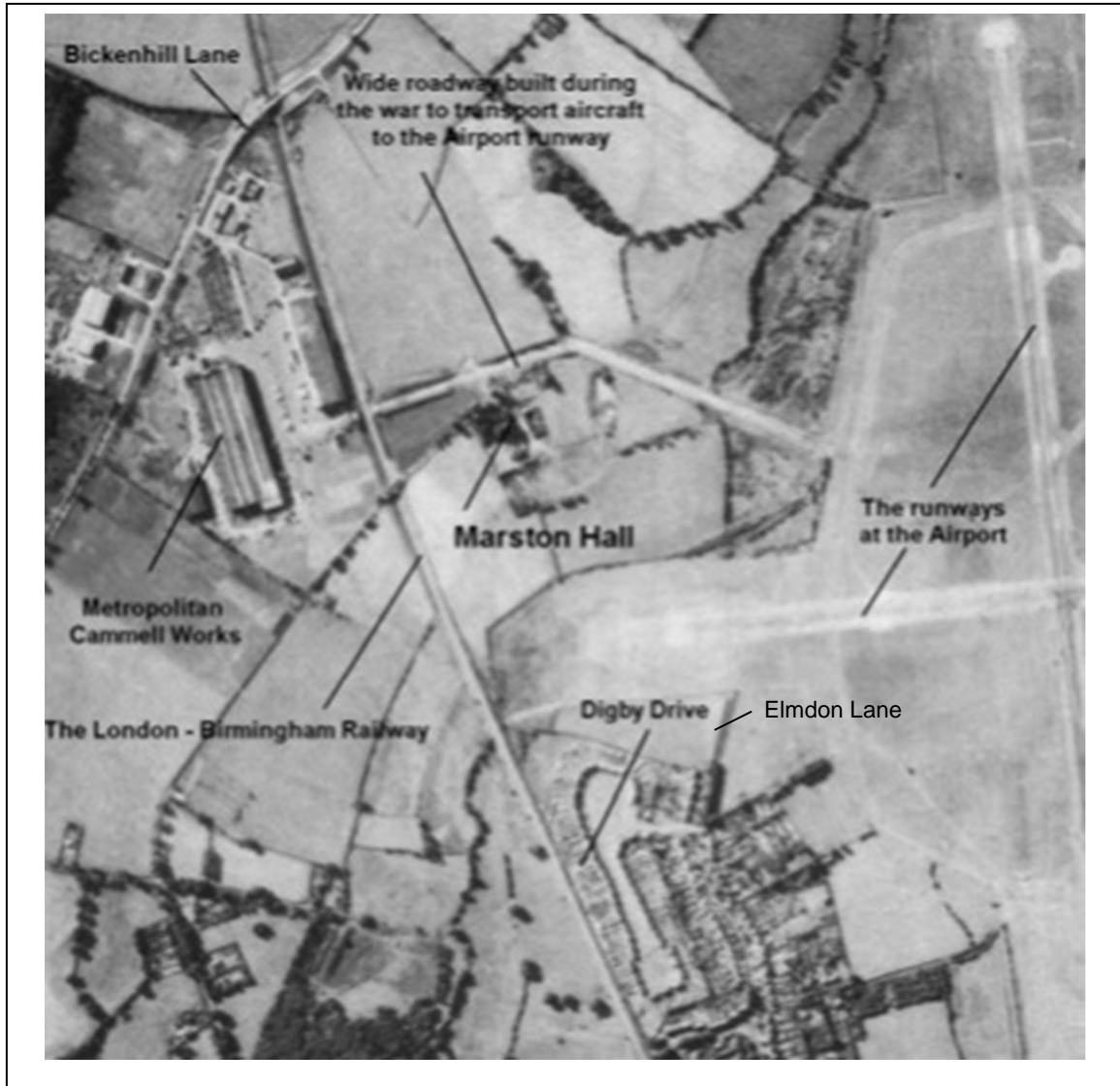
The elegant buildings of Marston Hall were built in the 16th Century and it was the main 'Manor' house of the Marston Wavers area. It was a farm of 242 acres and along with nearby Hurdle Hall with 379 acres they were situated in a large part of the area that is now the main Terminal at Birmingham International Airport.



Photograph 26
Marston Hall prior to demolition
(early 1980's)

Marston Green – A Village Community

Digby Drive built in the mid 1950's, between Elmdon Lane and the railway was never threatened by the Airport development, but the estate was 'snuggled' in between the runways and the railway line. In the early days of Digby Drive, the airfield was not securely fenced and as youngsters we often went across to the runways and played in the old air raid shelters at the end of the Foredrift, unaware of any potential dangers.



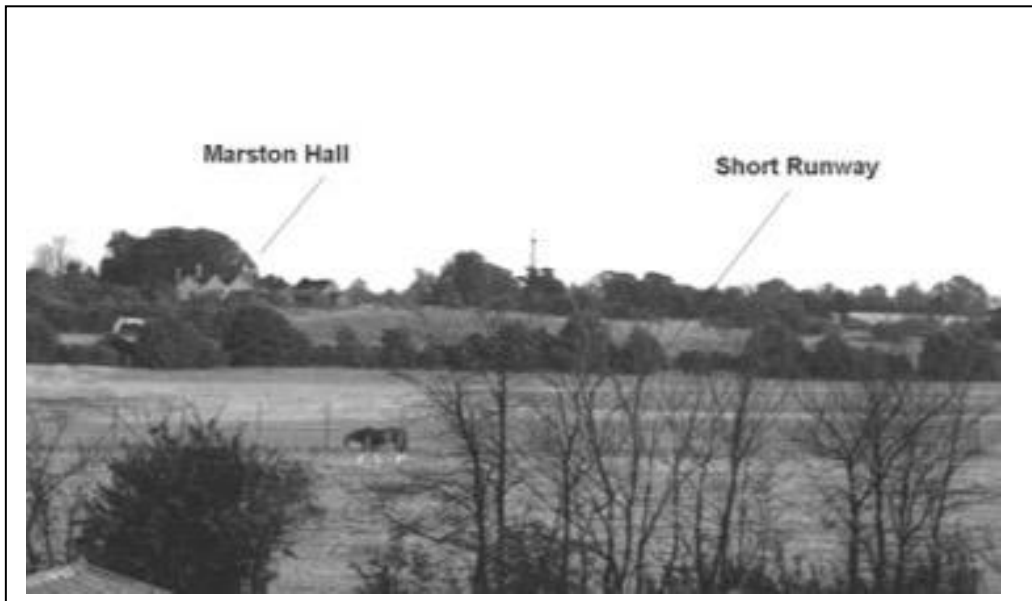
Photograph 27 **Aerial photograph of the Airport area.**

It shows the relative positions of the airport runways, Digby Drive, Marston Hall and the main Birmingham to London railway.

The abandoned 'runway' built for the wartime bombers stood derelict for many years and Peter Blakey and others remember it made a great skid pan for practising your driving. Many a driving lesson took place on this 'off road' area. Peter also remembers "Playing in what we believed were bomb craters in the fields between Elmdon Lane and the main runway".

Marston Green – A Village Community

The houses at the bottom end of Digby Drive overlooked the short runway and Marston Hall and until the 'bunds' and sound barriers were built, it was possible to watch aircraft movements from these houses.



Photograph 28 **The view from the end of Digby Drive.**

It is looking across the short runway towards Marston Hall. Mr Aston, the local butcher, used to graze his cattle in the field where the horse is standing.

In 1967 the main runway was extended and adapted to enable jets to use the site and by 1970 international flights to New York had commenced.

In the old Marston Hall area the Queen opened the new terminal building in 1984 and the old Elmdon site on the other side of the runway remained as an aircraft maintenance and cargo facility. A new Eurohub 'satellite' complex to deal with additional traffic opened in 1991.

The expansion continues at Birmingham International Airport. The motorway complex and the neighbouring National Exhibition Centre and International Station have assisted the voyage to the original hope back in the 1920's and 30's that trade to the City of Birmingham could be stimulated by such facilities.

Time has told the rest of this tale. The huge developments at Birmingham International Airport over the past 50 years have surpassed any of the wildest dreams, for use of the land. What would those farmers in the 1920's make of it all? The local residents of the 1930's, thought that at most, the promised runways would be a minor inconvenience or diversion to their journeys to the Cock Inn on the Coventry Road! The clock cannot be turned back - but one wonders how the area may have developed if the Airport had not been built there.

Marston Green – A Village Community



Photograph 29 **Training at the airport in the 1980's, seen from Digby Drive.**



Photograph 30 **Concorde arriving at Birmingham Airport in May 1981.**

Chapter 6 Early 20th Century People and Places

In the main Marston Green was purely an agricultural community until the 19th Century. The railway line, which was built in the 1830's, had an impact on the area as labourers would have lived in and around the area during the construction period. The Station Master had his own house built at the Station, but the porters, signalmen, other station staff and maintenance staff lived in existing village properties. The first significant changes came to the area with the building of the Cottage Homes in the 1880's. This introduced 'professional' newcomers to the area.

The Industrial Revolution enticed others to make their homes in Marston Green and other villages. Businesses were established in the Industrial areas of the West Midlands, but many of the owners of these manufacturing operations wished to live in the rural areas. These then were the early days of working in one area and living in another.

This is a look at some of the folk from a variety of backgrounds who lived in and became an essential part of the Community in Marston Green in the early 1920's.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Marston Green Cottage Homes

The development of The Cottage Homes, an experimental scheme to provide a safe haven for children from the Workhouses in the City of Birmingham, must have had a tremendous impact on the village of Marston Green in the late 1880's.

Although, at that time, technically outside the village the Marston Green Cottage Homes were built on the 43 acres of land bordering Chelmsley Woods, Chelmsley Lane, Coleshill Road and Berwicks Lane. Many of the staff lived in specially built houses in Chelmsley Lane or in other houses in the village (as did Mr Benbow, the schoolmaster). Also several members of the teaching staff became members of Bickenhill Parish Council, providing a 'professional' representation on the Council.

The people who were employed to teach skills to the youngsters at the Homes were experienced firstly, in their own particular trade. Whether it was farming or playing a musical instrument, the children received the best tuition possible at the time. The Farm at the Homes, ensured that they were self sufficient and able to provide most of the needs required to feed the large population there. At the same time the youngsters were trained to go out into the world, fully equipped to work and earn a living.

In the book 'An English Gentleman in Sweden' by Martin Allwood, his grandfather Charles Allwood, who was the original Farm Bailiff at The Cottage Homes is spoken of.



Charles Allwood, born on December 29th 1839 became the Farm Bailiff at the Marston Green Homes in 1879, when they first opened. Along with his wife Emma they bought up their two sons Charles and Frank in the house, which became Chelmsley Farm in Chelmsley Lane.

According to a childhood acquaintance of Charles Allwood – 'It was the purpose of the Homes to train orphan children from the slums of Birmingham to be tough farmers in Canada, Australia or South Africa. Many became very successful in their new lives'.

Photograph 31 Charles and Emma Allwood.



Their son, Charles Samuel Allwood became an English Teacher in Sweden. He wrote home regularly to his parents, telling them his news.

Photograph 32

Charles Samuel Allwood.

It was not necessary to address the letters any more fully than to Marston Green, Birmingham.

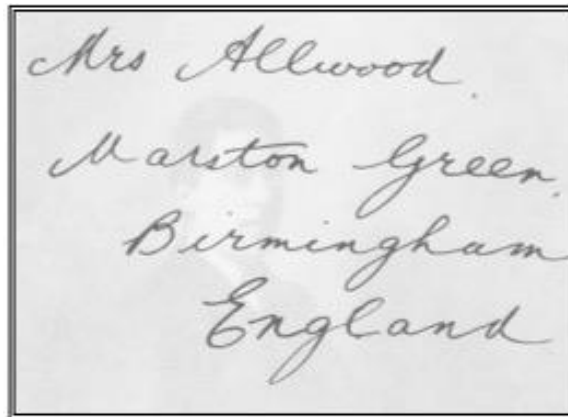


Figure 4 Envelope addressed to Mrs Allwood in Marston Green.

Charles Samuel Allwood travelled to Sweden in 1898 after his school days at Coleshill Grammar School and following teacher training courses at Saltley College and Worcester College.

His main role in Sweden became that of an English Teacher and Radio Pioneer. When he was in Sweden he met and eventually married his wife Aina.

By 1925 they decided to build their own home in Sweden and Charles named the house Marston Hill, 'to indicate that its origins were to be found in Marston Green in Warwickshire'. Aina obviously had an artistic side to her nature and on their trips back to England to visit the family, she could often be seen around Marston Green painting pictures of the neighbourhood.



Photograph 33 **A copy of one of Aina Allwood's paintings**

This copy of Aina's painting of Chelmsley Farm, kindly lent to me by John and Midge Musson, was on the wall at the farm when I visited in March 2000.

In 1940 Charles S Allwood made a radio broadcast in Sweden which he had entitled 'Random Reminiscences' – in it he relates tales of his childhood growing up in the Warwickshire countryside.

He refers to ".....luscious green meadows with big cows lazily chewing the cud and fine oak trees dotted about the fields". This is just what would have been experienced on the farm at the Cottage Homes in the 1880's and 90's.

He recalled moving there as a six year old: "My parents were not very well off at the time and all their furniture was piled on to a farmers waggon and I was perched on top of the tables and chairs". He continued "I enjoyed the dark winter evenings because we used to have a fine blazing coal fire in the open fireplace".

"When I was eleven years old I won a free scholarship at Coleshill Grammar School. This was a help to my parents because they had no school fees to pay after that. I had to walk three miles to school. The school hours were from 9 to 12 and from 2 to 4. I couldn't go home for dinner so I had to make do with sandwiches and have a hot meal when I got home at 5.00 o'clock".



Photograph 34 The fields of Chelmsley Farm looking towards the Cottage Homes.

Charles' parents back in England continued to work at the farm at the Cottage Homes, his mother did not enjoy the best of health and in 1912 his father retired on a pension from the job and they moved away to Yardley.

The following report of the subsequent death of Charles Allwood Snr. was found in a Birmingham Newspaper in 1916.

Forty Years as a Farm Bailiff

“The death took place of Mr Charles Allwood at the age of 76 years. The deceased who was the son of a Solihull farmer was an expert in agricultural matters. He became a Farm Bailiff at the Marston Green Homes when they were founded in 1879 – and for the following 33 years, he rendered the homes indispensable and conscientious service. He retired on a pension in 1912..... Among the floral tributes was a beautiful anchor from the Marston Green Homes”.

Extracts taken from “An English Gentleman in Sweden” Martin Allwood 1983

Along with other staff members at the Cottage Homes Mr Allwood was a highly respected member of the community in Marston Green and served on the Bickenhill Parish Council for many years.

Marston Green – A Village Community



Photograph 35 Chelmsley Farm photograph.

This was taken from 'An English Gentleman in Sweden' by Martin Allwood.

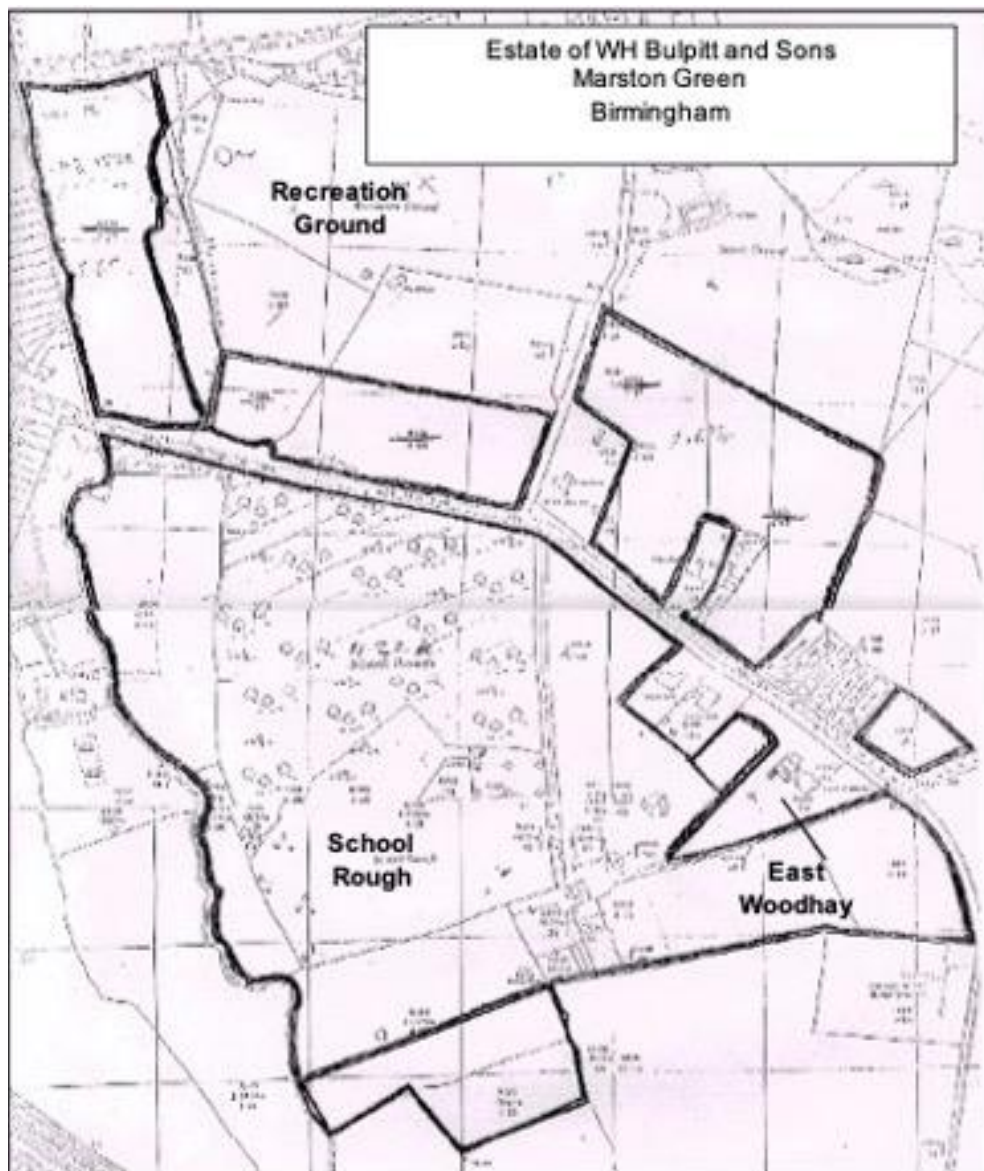


Photograph 36 Chelmsley Farm March 2000.

The Bulpitt Story.

Margaret Johnson's father Francis Bulpitt was born in East Woodhay, in Marston Green. At the end of 1999 she tells the story of her family who first built the house and developed the business which became Swan Brand.

'In 1909 my grandfather Walter Henry Bulpitt built East Woodhay which is at the end of Bickenhill Road. Walter was born in 1879, the third child and oldest son of a Walter Bulpitt, who was a Master Tin Plate worker, and his wife Emily. My grandfather's wife was Harriet Viney and they had been neighbours in the Stechford/Yardley area. They were married at Yardley Old Church and when they first married they lived in a house opposite to East Woodhay.



Map 4 Map of the Bulpitt Estate in Marston Green.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Walter and Harriet married around 1906, their first child was stillborn and buried in Coleshill Church. Their next child was Maurice Bulpitt born in 1910 then Francis Bulpitt in 1912 and Patricia in 1917 – that was ‘the family’.

Walter and Harriet built East Woodhay and bought up the family there. The Bulpitt Estate still exists and has gradually grown over the years as bits of land in the area were sold off. It is still owned by the family, with School Rough still being very visible as an area of conservation. East Woodhay, though, was sold as an entity and is now a Guest House. Walter’s younger brother, Albert, also built a house up in Bickenhill Road next door to East Woodhay and lived there for a number of years before moving to Hampton in Arden.

The Bulpitt children grew up and went to school in Marston Green in the early years at what my father always referred to as a ‘Dame School’ run by the vicar’s wife Mrs Coleman, in the Village Hall. Following that the boys were sent away to a prep boarding school, Stanley House School, in Edgbaston at the tender age of 7 and from there went on Solihull School, which was known as Solihull Grammar School in those days. Pat stayed at school locally going from Marston Green to the Hill School, Yardley and in her teens to Montrose Ladies College, Cliftonville, Margate.

They were keen huntsmen and riders and in those days Chelmsley Wood was a wood and the family hunted over the whole of the area round there. Country pursuits were very much ‘the norm’ in those days as well as field sports. Maurice was particularly good at point to point racing winning trophies over many successive years.



Photograph 37

A day spent in ‘country’ pursuits.

Marston Green – A Village Community

After the First World War it was felt that a Memorial building should be erected in Marston Green. This was to be the Village Hall, which was built with money given by the Bulpitt family to the village. They weren't the sort of people who made a big thing about giving money or doing good deeds, they did it low key. They did quite a lot for the village and certainly had a lot to do with expanding and building Chelmsley/Marston Green Hospital and the School as well as the Village Hall.



Photograph 38 **The newly built Village Hall in Elmdon Road in the early 1920's.**

Gradually the land that East Woodhay is built on, expanded to become a small farm – a 'Home Farm' which of course became essential in the days of both wars.

My grandfather was a J.P. and he was a member of the Warwickshire Yeomanry, mounted section, which appears to have been a type of Home Guard. He did not join the regular forces in either World Wars as he was in a protected occupation. Few of the Bulpitt men went away to war. They were all in protected occupations because they were involved with making armaments continuously throughout the war. It was a side of the business they rarely spoke about, I have only found bits of it out by 'ferreting about myself' since my father died 10 years ago.

Walter Bulpitt continued to fund worthwhile causes such as providing a Salvation Army canteen during the War and he was subsequently awarded the OBE for his contribution to the war effort.



Photograph 39 Walter Bulpitt handing over a Mobile Canteen to the Salvation Army.

To celebrate V.E. day they hitched up the trap because they had had no petrol for quite some time and rode from Hampton in Arden to Banbury blowing a horn all the way. It's the sort of thing young people got up to in those days'.



Photograph 40 VE Day journey from Hampton in Arden.
Francis and Maurice Bulpitt are with Bill Metcalf and the Groom.



Photograph 41 **A local party given in Blackfirs Lane to celebrate VE Day.**

Francis and Harriet Bulpitt attended the local party given in Blackfirs Lane to celebrate VE Day.

Bulpitt and Sons

'SWAN BRAND LIMITED'.

The company of Bulpitt and Sons, 'Swan Brand Limited', was founded in the middle 1800's. It was a small 'Back Country' type back yard set up knocking out aluminium for pans and small commercial items in the line of lamps and naval bits and pieces. It gradually built itself up and prosperity ensued. By the time the turn of the Century came it had become an increasingly prosperous company because it had large naval contracts. Bulpitt and Sons made armaments for the Navy and Army in both World Wars as well as general holoware.



Figure 5
Swan Brand Trade Mark

Marston Green – A Village Community

Margaret Johnson continues: 'My father became Managing Director of Bulpitt and Sons and his brother Maurice became the Chairman after their apprenticeships and working up through the Company'.

She remembers up until the 1960's, seeing aluminium torpedo shells being made. The company mostly dealt in aluminium because it was lightweight and multipurpose.

Margaret found a hand grenade made in 1914, by Bulpitt and Sons, in the attic at East Woodhay when they were clearing out the house.



Photograph 42 The Hand Grenade found in the attic at East Woodhay.

She took it to the Imperial War Museum where they had ledgers, which noted how many were made and the cost of them. The cost of one hand grenade was the same as one week's wages of a Captain in the Army when they started. The prices did actually improve and go down as they made more, as in any industry – but they were incredibly expensive to produce to start with. (One puff of smoke and they were gone!)

The ledgers gave details of when the first consignment of each order was required. An order for 9,000 empty Mark ■ brass hand grenades (without detonators) was placed with Bulpitt and Sons on 1st May 1915 with the first 1,000 to be delivered by 25th May of that year and the balance by 27th July 1915. The price was 11s 3d each (56p).

25,000 of the type found at East Woodhay, the Mark ■■, with short handle and streamer were ordered from Bulpitts in June of 1915 at a cost of 9s 9d (48p) each. At least 1,000 were required by the end of July with the rest by January 1916. This must have ensured intensive full time work by Bulpitt and Sons at the time.

After the War the company continued to prosper and grow, manufacturing a whole range of Aluminium Domestic Ware for the home.

A catalogue from 1930 advertises the range of products available including their latest 'Swan Brand' Electrical specialities, for example a kettle for 20/- (£1.00) rated to boil in 9½ minutes from cold.

Standard kettles, teapots, frying pans and saucepans were the mainstay of their products along with things like jelly moulds in many shapes and sizes. Various other utensils as well as graters, hot water bottles and ovenware 'pyrex' frames to fit casserole dishes were manufactured in aluminium, as well as flower vases for graves with a detachable perforated cover sold at a wholesale price of 33/- (£1.65p) per dozen.

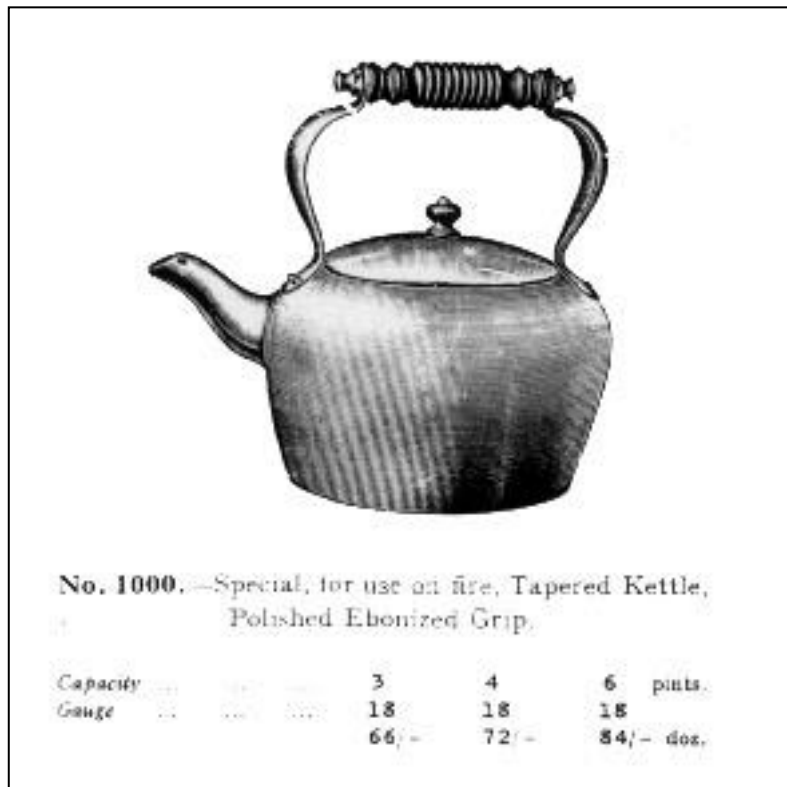


Figure 6 Advertisement for Swan Brand Kettles

The 6 pint version of a 'Special kettle for use on the fire' advertised above, sold for a wholesale price of 84/- (£4.20p) per dozen in 1930.

It was advertised that 'Swan Brand Aluminium Ware may be cleaned with hot water and soap, but bath brick, sand or Monkey Soap are very effective for unpolished surfaces'. To retain the brilliance on utensils with a polished surface they needed the use of a soft cloth and ordinary whiting after washing.

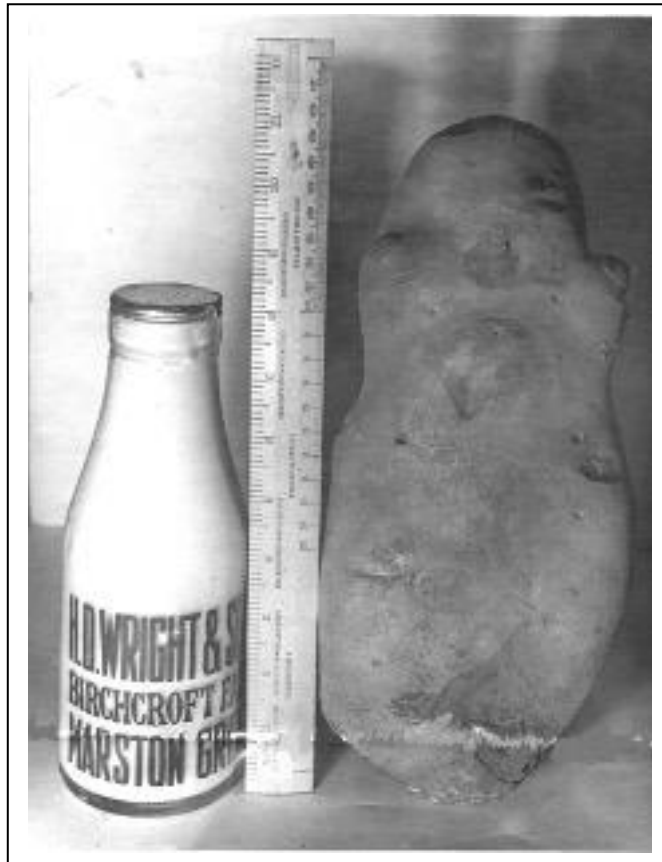
The very popular British household company 'Swan Brand' was sold to BKB in the early

Farming.

Audrey Wright (nee Palmer) has lived at Birchcroft Farm in Blackfirs Lane with her husband Jack for many years. They were one of the principal farming families of the area.

Audrey shares a few memories and photographs.

“On 5th March 1947 we had so much snow that the junction from Coleshill Heath Road to Blackfirs Lane was blocked for 7 days. A horse and cart was used to deliver the milk with extra from the neighbouring farms as the collection lorries couldn’t get through due to the blocked roads. The milk would have had to be poured away if it was not collected”.



Photograph 43 **A photograph taken for an advertisement for Wright’s produce.
(note the potato is 11½ inches long).**

Audrey remembers that threshing was the big event in the farming year before the introduction of Combine Harvesters.

“The threshing drum and baler would arrive the day before to get all the belts lined up ready for an early start the next morning. All the help that could be gathered was needed. It was a very dirty and tiring job with choking dust. The refreshing cups of hot sweet tea served in a big jug were much appreciated”.

Marston Green – A Village Community



Photograph 44 **Tea break during 'Threshing Time' at Birchcroft Farm.**

Les Smith, Bill Rogers, Arnold Lea and Neville Harford are at the front, Elmley Saunders is in the centre with the jug and Tony Cornwale at the back.



Photograph 45 **Everyone was called into service at 'Threshing Time'.**

Back (l to r): Jack Wright, Ivor Nicholls, in the middle Neville Harford, Les Smith, Arnold Lea, Tony Cornwale, Stan Whittaker, Bill Rogers, Jack Coats. Elmley Saunders and at the front, George Brown.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The family who owned the threshing machine were well known. The overriding memory from all was that the children were named after trees. They were the Saunders family and lived at Common Farm on the Chester Road, opposite Melbick's Nursery. It was a big farm and they had a traction engine and Mr Saunders used to go all around the Midlands area threshing the corn. In those days they used to stack the corn in the stack yard and then thresh it, as there were no Combine Harvesters.

Derrick Hayes and Mary Bowen recall, 'Uncle' Oakley Saunders with his 'chug – chug' threshing machine, and his family of Barbara, Hazel, Oakley, Ashley, Elmley and Birchley.

Mary says: "Uncle Oakley was a real character, he always towed his little Austin Seven behind the thresher so that he could go home at night. My brother and his pals wrote 'jet propelled' in the dirt on the back window!"

Chelmsley Farm at the Cottage Homes was self-sufficient and provided the food for the community of the Homes and they grew corn and vegetables as well as keeping stock and a fine dairy herd, which gave plenty of milk for their needs. After the original Farm Bailiff, Mr Allwood was Mr Johnson and another after that was Mr Marriott. There were also gardens at the Homes, which had to be managed and Fred Wilson, the son of the bandmaster of the same name was the head gardener there.

Margaret Birch, who lived in Coleshill Road, relates childhood memories of living close to Gorse Farm opposite Berwicks Lane.

"The fields behind our house and on the opposite side of the road were farmed by Mussons (Mr Musson and his sons John and Harry). Mr Musson's daughter Betty lived in a cottage a short way down Berwicks Lane".



Photograph 46

Musson's Cottage in Berwicks Lane.



Photograph 47 Mr and Mrs Musson with baby John and his sister Betty. Circa 1915.

Margaret continues:

“Sometimes they sowed an arable crop, sometimes they grazed cattle. It was not unknown for a cow to get into our back garden and munch some of the plants in the field next to Berwicks Lane. I remember seeing the cows gathering by the gate in the late afternoon, ready to be driven across the road to the farmyard to be milked. Most years we used to enjoy slipping into the fields behind the house to go blackberrying. Strictly speaking we were trespassing and twice we were caught red handed and given a sharp reprimand by Harry Musson. Occasionally we went further afield towards Franklin’s Farm (nearer to Coleshill) and played by his tree-fringed duckpond in what we called our ‘secret dell’”

John Mussons wife Midge, remembers when they lived in the Berwicks Lane cottage in the 1950’s. “We used to let our young children just go off and play down in Chelmsley Woods and in the fields without any worries. They would come back home when they were hungry. I could look out of the window and see two blonde blobs (the children – Heather’s hair was almost white) and two black blobs (the dogs who never left their sides). We didn’t worry about them like you do with the children nowadays”. John and Midge finished their farming years at Chelmsley Farm, which is still awaiting the final decision on its use. It is still owned by the Hospital Trust and the farmhouse and outbuildings are to be retained for sheltered accommodation. It will stand beside the pedestrian link to the proposed Marston Green Park development within the remaining land from the Cottage Homes.

Marston Green – A Village Community

In October 1999, John proudly took me through the fields and farmyard reliving his memories of his farming days throughout his life in Marston Green.



Photograph 48 John Musson in 1999 in the fields of Chelmsley Farm.

John is looking towards the remaining buildings from the original Cottage Homes. The planned Marston Green Park will be formed where the hedgerow runs in the middle distance.



Photograph 49 The boarded up farm yard buildings of Chelmsley Farm, late 1999.

Chelmsley Farm

Photograph 50

The weather vane on top of the farm buildings.

John was proud to tell me how he had made the weather vane that still stands securely on the top of the barn. Someone else drew the shape of the cockerel but otherwise, it was all his own work.



Photograph 51

Gateway of Chelmsley Farm

The sign saying 'Hospital Grounds – Private' has stood by the gate for many years. There is a story about the big old rock in the centre of the picture. It was allegedly one of the original Parish Boundary Stones and it was 'manhandled' from further along Chelmsley Lane near the woods to its present site many years ago.



Photograph 52

Chelmsley Farm Drive

Looking from the gate in Chelmsley Lane down along what is planned to be the pedestrian access to the new Marston Green Park from Chelmsley Lane. On the right is the orchard.



Marston Green – A Village Community

As well as the farms there were several nurseries and market garden type operations carried on in and around the village.

Moseley's was in Alcott Lane and they grew wonderful flowers as well as produce.

Charlie Batchelor had a nursery alongside the railway line near where Moseley Drive now stands.

Greenways had properties in Elmdon Road and Elmdon Lane and had a stall in the Market Hall in the Birmingham, where they sold plants and produce.

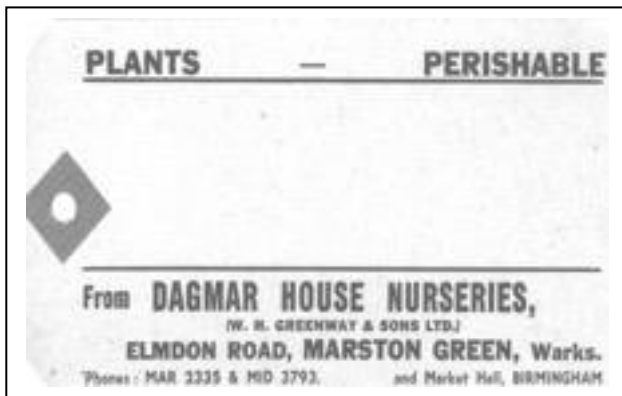


Figure 7

Sale label for Dagmar House Nurseries.

This was run by Greenways.

Derrick Hayes' father who lived up in Blackfirs Lane had several pieces of land around the village and he was a Market Gardener. Every Saturday they had a stall in the Bull Ring in Birmingham, underneath Nelson's statue. Derrick remembers that they kept the produce underneath the market buildings.

"My father used to own the land, over Land Lane bridge by the railway where it drops away (where Hall Drive is now) and he had a greenhouse on it. He used to grow produce there for the market in the Bull Ring, he also had another greenhouse on a bit of land in Bickenhill Lane near the Villas, which backed onto Mr Anderton's land. Mr Skelcher, who was the Birmingham City Architect, originally owned all of that land".

Derrick also recalls that:

"There were several farms and smallholdings in the village, but often the farmers did not necessarily have all their fields together and they would need to travel around the village to go about their daily tasks. Mr Moseley had a nursery in Chelmsley Lane. He had half a dozen Jersey cows, which grazed in a field where Brook Croft is now. He would be seen everyday walking down to them with his milking stool and bucket in his hands to go to milk them.

Marston Green – A Village Community

A Mr Brindley had a farm, up near where the burial ground now is. He used to sell eggs. He sold them to the factory workers at the Metropolitan Cammell, they used to come up to the fence and collect the eggs there. He grew wheat and potatoes and he had pigs and chickens. The road beside his farm was the main road leading to Marston Hall over the railway from Bickenhill Road.

Heath Cottages in Bickenhill Road used to belong to Mr Crease who was a local farmer and milkman. He came round with a little Ford Van to deliver the milk. Previous to that the milk came from Wright's Farm in Blackfirs Lane".

The practice of the farming of available fields, even if they were not together, was reported by Mr Onley in his 1960 letter. He referred to a Mr Southam, who lived in Malthouse Row and rented the Malt Close from the Digby Estate in the 1880's. The Malt Close was the triangular field opposite Fir Tree Cottage in Station Road. According to the 1881 census 41-year-old Arthur Southam was a farmer of 4 acres and his wife Mary, who was 48 was a laundress. As well as the Malt Close, Arthur Southam who did odd jobs and kept one cow also rented another little field, adjoining what is now the Airport, from the Digby Estate according to Thomas Onley. It is likely that he had more than these two small areas to make up his four acres.

Chapter 7 Community Spirit

Over the years it seems any opportunity for the residents of Marston Green to gather together to celebrate local and national events has never been far away. Likewise in times of adversity the community has always 'pulled together'.

Coronations and Jubilees featured with large-scale parties and processions through the village. The Festival of Britain in 1951 was a major event and the annual Flower Shows and Scout Galas continue to pull the community together. Many other large and small-scale events have also occurred over the years but I will concentrate on those about which I have been told.



Figure 8 Poster advertising the Coronation in 1937 in Marston Green.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The earliest photograph of any of the village events I have is of the 1910 Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. Several of the young ladies and girls in the picture have descendants who are still part of Marston Green village community in the year 2000.



Photograph 53

1910 Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary.

Names written on the back of this delightful photograph from Ethel Morley are:

Back Row: -, -, -, Cissie Hall, -, Elsie Palmer, Lottie Bailey

Middle Row: -, Annie Smith, Olive Mowe, Cissie Knight, Nellie Bicknell,
Gladys Bissell

Front Row: Hilda Wheeler, Nellie Gibbs, Gertie Knight, Lizzie Lane,
Annie Gibbs,-, Annie Austin.

Cissie Hall is mentioned earlier in the book, the daughter of Dick Hall of Alcott Hall and Malthouse Farms and one of the VAD nurses.

Elsie Palmer was one of the daughters of the stationmaster at the time.
Annie Smith was Kitty Harrow's mother.

Cissie and Gertie Knight were Phyllis Knights sisters - Phyllis being Molly Crooks mother.

Gladys Bissell lived at the Tavern and **Lizzie Lane** was Ethel Morley's mother.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The girls and young ladies were obviously dressed up for some kind of pageant relating to events surrounding the Coronation. There would have been a party atmosphere with everyone playing their part as appropriate.

Sadly too soon the mood within the village and the country as a whole would have become less cheerful as the threat of imposing war came along. The period from 1914 to 1918 would have seen the community pulling together for other reasons.

Many of the local men and youths went away to war and the local Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital set up at Prospect Villas served to provide all too necessary care for the wounded who returned home. Sadly 13 were never to return from this conflict.



Photograph 54 The date plaque in the Garden of Memory.

This commemorates those who fell in the First World War another plaque commemorates those from the Second World War.

By the early 1920s the Wingfield Digby family were selling off many portions of their Coleshill Estate and as a result the small rural community of Marston Green showed the first major signs of development. New housing was beginning to appear along the main roads such as Elmdon Lane and Coleshill Road and folk began moving into the area from the nearby City of Birmingham and further afield.

These were the early years of The Flower Show which continues to be an annual event and The Marston Green Players, who produced 3 or 4 amateur dramatic productions each year into the 1980s. For these and other similar events the need was for the local population to 'work' and 'play' together.

Marston Green – A Village Community

By 1935 the anticipation of an excuse for celebration was on the horizon with the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary. A fancy dress parade organised for the local children offered a first prize of 10 shillings (50p) and a 5 shilling second prize - which had to be spent in the village.

By 1937, there was to be more in the way of festivities with the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. A Coronation Celebrations Committee was made up of many of the local public figures and between them they organised a day of events starting at 9.30 in the morning and closing with a bonfire and fireworks display at 10.00 that night.

A letter had been sent to all the residents of Marston Green giving information for:

‘The forthcoming celebrations in order that you may have ample time for preparation’.

The committee proposed that they would be responsible for decorating the roads in the immediate vicinity of the Carnival Grounds, but it was hoped that ‘residents would co-operate with one another throughout the district by running streamers, bunting etc across the roads’.

Coronation Day, May 12th, began with a parade of ex-servicemen, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Brownies and continued on to a United Religious Service in the Village Hall accompanied by a combined choir of the St Leonard’s and the Free Churches.

Houses and shops were decorated and they were judged throughout the day. The district was divided into four areas to each of which three prizes of £7.10/- (£7.50) were being allocated for the house decoration. The shops had the opportunity to win one of four prizes of £2.10/- (£2.50).

There were Sports and Games, a Grand Carnival and Fancy Dress Parade as well as a tea for the children and supper for the old folks in the Village Hall.

The programme for the Coronation Celebrations included an entry form for any kind of decorated vehicle or individual fancy dress as well as the opportunity to be part of a Tableau illustrative of the British Empire.

The procession began at 1.30 p.m. from Elmdon Road at the side of the School Field and led over Land Land along Elmdon Lane to the station level crossing into Station Road and back to the starting point. The adult and vehicular procession made a much wider circuit of the village continuing over Elmdon Road bridge and continuing on to Elmdon Lane.



Photograph 55 1st Marston Green Guide Company in the Coronation Procession 1937.

England as Britannia is the Captain- S Heath
Ireland - S. Goodhall
Scotland - Ethel Whitehead
Wales - P. Perkins
Justice is the Lieutenant - M. Gladwyn
Industry - S. Yoxley
Liberty - Esme Taylor

The whole community was catered for and from the literature available at the time it seems that everyone enjoyed being part of this national celebration.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Sadly again, war was just around the corner, but once again the villagers of Marston Green all pulled together to protect and support each other.

Local ARP (Air Raid Precaution), Police, Fire Services and Home Guard units were set up in an attempt to keep a watchful eye on the area and to deal with any emergencies occurring there. The wounded Canadians who were housed in the hospital in Coleshill Road also were keen to become part of the community and dances and activities to which the locals were invited at the hospital, helped in a small way, to ease the strain of living through another war.

Life went on despite all the hardships, but by 1951 when the Festival of Britain was arranged to try to revive the spirits of the country after the war years, the village once again joined wholeheartedly with the celebrations.

A whole week of events and activities were organised during August in 1951 to celebrate the Festival of Britain. Again committees were formed, and patrons listed in a 50 page souvenir programme which was produced to broadcast the forthcoming activities.

On the weekend of the 12th August 1951 a Tennis Tournament began the events along with a play, *Mountain Air*, by the Marston Green Players. A combined Church Service of the Parish Church and the Free Church led by Rev H.R. Sproule and Rev S.D. Cuthbertson took place on the Sunday morning. A Children's service was held in the afternoon. The Model Railway belonging to the Marston Green Model Arts and Crafts Club was on display and ran all week and later a football match between Marston Green and an Aston Villa XI took place. There was a Whist Drive arranged by the Golf Club in the Village Hall and the following evening the Women's Institute organised the Carnival Evening where the Carnival Queen was crowned at the Festival Dance. The Cricket Club challenged the Football Club to a Cricket match to conclude the weekday events, before the main feature at the weekend which was the Carnival Procession and the Annual Flower Show organised by the Horticultural Society. A Gymkhana, Maypole Dances, Children's Sports, Punch and Judy Show, the Model Railway and a show of Foreign Birds were all held in addition to the usual side shows and exhibits of the Flower Show.

The organisation of such a vast range of events must have been awesome, given that the population of the area would still not have been that big. Many of the local organisations were represented to help with this enormous task.

Along with the District and Parish Councils, the School, the local Churches and Sports Clubs (Golf, Tennis, Football and Cricket), Scouts and Guides, the Village Club, Model Arts and Crafts, Horticultural Society and Residents Association, some clubs and societies which have long since disappeared were involved with the Festival of Britain. The long forgotten Unionists and Women's Unionists Associations are mentioned in the programme along with the Pig Club and the Rabbit and Poultry Club.

The Festival set out a range of objectives in a rather novel fashion.

Object of the Festival Week

Marston Green Festival Week has been
Arranged by the
Representatives of the various
Societies of the village
The Festival has as its
Object, firstly a Programme of
Numerous Social Events including a

Grand Carnival Procession with Band, Model
Railway, Various Sporting
Events, Cricket, Football and Tennis,
Entertainment by the Dramatic Society
Not forgetting Crowning the Festival Queen,

Flower Show and Gymkhana
Etc., and a Whist Drive.
Secondly, it is hoped to plant
Trees and Flowering Shrubs
In the Dual Carriageway grass
Verges and to provide any other
Amenities which will benefit the
Local Inhabitants.

Of course it will be necessary to provide
Funds to do this and all profits made

By the various events and Donations
Received will be placed
In a Special Fund
To provide for the
Amenities mentioned.
It is hoped that
Not only will the Festival

Week be a financial success, but that
Everyone will have a very
Enjoyable time during the week
Keep the dates open August 12th to 18th 1951

Figure 9 **The objectives of Festival of Britain Week. August 12th to 18th 1951.**

Marston Green – A Village Community

As in previous celebrations many of the Clubs and Societies entered groups dressed up to specific themes. A variety of Tableaux from many of the local organisations paraded through the village on lorries.

At the Festival of Britain Celebrations the Women's Institute presented a Tableau of Nations. John Gardiner's mother Nellie, carefully documented the music used to represent each of the countries and along with the photograph (Britannia's trident and helmet was made by his father) it is easy to imagine the fun which would have surrounded such an event.



Photograph 56

The WI Tableau of Nations in 1951.

Country

Music Used

America	Marching through Georgia
Holland	Dutch National Anthem
Scotland	Bonnie Dundee
Wales	Land of my Fathers
Italy	La Paloma
Norway	Grieg's Military March
China	Chin, Chin Chow
Russia	Volga Boatman
South Africa	The Trek Song
Sweden	Swedish National Anthem
Canada	Maple Leaf
England (Britannia)	Theme Song: Land of Hope and Glory.

Marston Green – A Village Community

This WI display appears spectacular, but the winners on this occasion were The Darby and Joan Club with their Tableau entitled 'Golden Wedding Memories'.

Prizes galore were offered for the fancy dress parades, decorated prams and cycles as well as cars and trade vans and the Tableaux on lorries. The Gymkhana events and of course the annual Flower Show exhibits also were hotly contested. Special Prizes, Challenge Trophies and Medals and Diplomas were all available to those who wished to compete.

The money raised at the Festival of Britain celebrations went towards local projects including planting of trees and shrubs on the dual carriageway verges and other amenities which were needed by the villagers.

It was not long until June 1953 when the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place. Similar celebrations to those in the past were organised by a committee and a day of events was planned on Tuesday 2nd June. One different aspect of that day was the televising of the Coronation Procession and Service in the Village Hall.

The actual celebrations in the village began in the afternoon in Elmdon Road with a Fancy Dress Parade and Carnival, which began in the school grounds and proceeded to the Village Hall and adjoining field. The procession route went via Station Road, over the level crossing, along Elmdon Lane and into Elmdon Road.

A children's tea party and presentation of souvenirs took place in the Village Hall and sports events for children and adults were held in the field. An Old Folk's Supper was provided in the Free Church Hall and a bonfire and firework display took place at dusk. The events closed with dancing in the Village Hall and adjoining field until midnight.

Flower Shows continued annually through the years giving cause for regular community celebrations. Peter Jacob's recollections of the Flower Show give a feeling of village togetherness.

'It was one event in the year that everyone really looked forward to. It was a Flower Show **and** Gymkhana and it was greatly anticipated by everyone each year. The shops were all closed and it was an all day event.

Mr Griffin at the garage used to give a new bike as the first prize in the raffle. It would be displayed in the garage for weeks before and the children all hoped that they would be the proud winners and spent those weeks imagining it was theirs. The 'Bowl for a Pig' was one of the main events, it was hotly contested, but the reality surely had to be...in the days before freezers etc and with much smaller families and a different way of life, what would you actually do with a pig if you won it?'

Marston Green – A Village Community

Margaret Birch also remembers the Flower Shows around 1950. 'At first they included a gymkhana as well as exhibits of produce and cakes and they were held in the field where the cricket pavilion is now. There were classes for children which included arranging wild flowers in jam jars and creating miniature gardens to reflect various themes. I also recall that Reg Aston (one of the three local butchers) always won first prize for his magnificent dahlias.'

The main reason behind the Flower Show run by the Horticultural Society, of course, was the competition and displays of predominantly, vegetables and fruit, in the early days. It was a showcase for the adults who wanted to grow the biggest and the best and who coveted the many trophies on offer. For the youngsters it was a day to be enjoyed, when they anxiously awaited the swingboats, sideshows and other attractions and events that annually reminded everyone that Marston Green was a true community.

By the mid 1960's the Scouts decided to hold a Gala Day to help raise funds initially for a new headquarters. Fancy dress parades and competitions, decorated floats and fundraising stalls all contributed to an enjoyable annual village event which continues into the 21st Century.

In July 1971 'The Marston Green Festival of Entertainments' was held and the programme and balance sheet lent by Ray Hornsby give an interesting insight into the value of 'money' at the time - in the months after decimalisation.

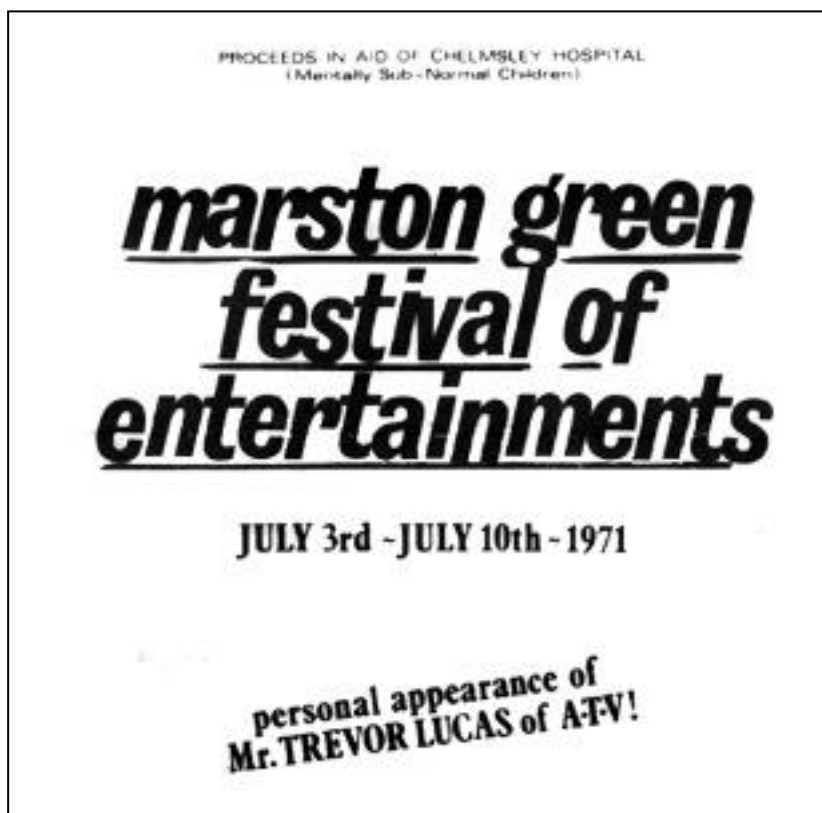


Figure 10 1971 Festival of Entertainments programme.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The Festival was organised as a fund raising event for the children of Chelmsley Hospital and it began with a Grand Barn Dance and Crowning of the Festival Queen in the Tennis Pavilion. The evening cost 40 pence for admission and supper and resulted in a £25 donation to the funds.

Different groups organised a variety of events in a range of venues throughout the following week, including a Treasure Hunt by the Residents Association, a Musical afternoon of Dance and Mime at the Junior School and a Brownies Concert at the Free Church, both costing 5 pence admission. The Sunday Evening Youth Group organised a discotheque and The Marston Green Players produced the play 'So you want to be an Actor' in the Village Hall.

Playgroup held an Open Morning in St Leonard's Church Hall and The Infants School Sports Day was held in the afternoon, both events charging admission of 7½ pence. Wednesday at Eight organised a Beetle Drive in the evening at the Free Church Hall for 10 pence admission resulting in a £7.00 donation.

Mother and Baby Club came into the events with competitions for a decorated pram or pushchair, a mother and child competition and a Fancy Dress, all conducted during their regular hour and a half meeting for 7½ pence. £2.00 in total swelled the funds.

The Sue Latham School of Dance held a display in St Leonard's Hall and a further one at the Carnival and donated £50 to the final total gathered from the week.

On Saturday 10th July, The City of Birmingham Police Pipe Band led the Carnival Procession of decorated floats and continued to the Recreation Ground in Bickenhill Road where side shows and entertainments took place. The Model Railway was again part of the proceedings along with a Fencing Display, Morris dancing, a Military Display, a Cricket Match and Five a Side Football Match.

The Model Train Rides alone raised £15.74 towards the Festival of Entertainments, a street collection added £44.98 and the main raffle organised for the week brought in an additional £347.85.

The week's events concluded with The Resident's Association organising a Grand Festival Dance, at 65 pence admission (including supper). The Raymo Combo Dance Band led the evening, as they often did at similar events around this time in the village.

The grand total raised with all the donations and contributions throughout the week came to £652.16 and British Leyland gave a separate donation of £50.00 providing a total of £702.16 for the Children of Chelmsley Hospital.



Photograph 57 The Raymo Combo Dance Band

The band was seen at many local events, Morris Raybould was the MC and saxophonist, Harold Smith on keyboard, Doug Wallace, guitar and John Thorpe, drums.

There were no further national events until Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her Silver Jubilee in 1977. Once again the village committees were formed and as the village was now much larger, several 'local' street parties were held and individual events organised.

Many other events have obviously been held over the years and there will be more to come retaining the Community Spirit in Marston Green.

Local Issues

In 1894 Parish Councils were formed across the country, established as a result of the Local Government Act of that year. They were intended to act as a kind of safeguard against the authorities of the local squires and vicars of the time. The Parish Council powers were rigidly controlled and their right to raise money was limited but they did in effect provide for the first time an opportunity for a kind of 'Parochial Parliament'.

Bickenhill Parish Council includes the villages of Bickenhill and Marston Green as well as parts of Elmdon. The Parish Council Minutes dating back to 1895 give a view of the breadth of issues addressed by this body of unpaid Councillors. The first of these Councillors would have been nominated and elected from within the Parish and it would have been possible to include people from all sections of the community. In the early years, several people on the Parish Council were members of the staff at the Cottage Homes.

Over the years the Parish Councillors have continued to come from a wide range of professions and trades, with many of them holding key positions in the local community. Newspaper reporting of some of the issues discussed by the Parish Council has often allowed a wider coverage of important issues within the area, allowing the local community access to background information into such subjects. The Airport has often been discussed, as have the developments of Chelmsley Wood and the National Exhibition Centre. With this information available to them it has often been possible for the local general public to have their say in many of these issues.

The group, involved solely with village issues was the Marston Green Ratepayers Association. This changed its name in 1933 to the Marston Green Residents and Improvements Association – more commonly referred to as The Residents Association

The Minute Books of the Marston Green Residents Association from 1933 onwards, provide an insight to the daily ongoing events that caused concern to, or the need for intervention by members of the local community. Over the years the Association has dealt with a variety of village issues and endeavoured to maintain the best interests of the locals at all times.

The Residents Association and Parish Council at times worked together on important village matters and at a meeting in 1934 the Chairman of the Residents Association reported that he had written to a Mr Liggins regarding a Recreation Ground in Marston Green. The Chairman stated that the Parish Council had been asked to make suggestions regarding the space to be reserved by the Town Planning Committee for a Recreation Ground and Burial Ground.

Marston Green – A Village Community

For many years the possibility of Recreation Grounds in Bickenhill and Marston Green were discussed at Parish Council and other meetings in the area. Committees and sub committees were formed and discussed the possible sites worthy of consideration. By February 1935 a Recreation Ground Sub Committee reported their findings at the Parish Council Meeting.

Recreation Ground Sub Committee report February 1935.

.....the Clerk reported back, giving the replies to letters he had written regarding possible sites for the Recreation Ground in Marston Green and their prices.

He had approached;

Mr J Bodenham who informed the Council that the land enquired about was not for sale.

Mr Selman replied through his solicitor that he was open to sell the whole farm, but a small portion would require a very tempting offer.

Mr F Pinney agent for the Digby Estate informed the Council that the land enquired about had been surveyed for the purpose of Building Development. There was land, which could be offered to the Council between Coleshill Road and Bickenhill Road on the Parish Boundary. He would let us have a plan and price in due course.

This initial enquiry encouraged the following response at the next meeting

Sub Committee Meeting, March 1935

Mr Pinney had written back to the Council with regard to the land between Coleshill Road and Bickenhill Road, for which the Estates asked £120 per acre. After some discussion it was decided that the committee visit the spot on Friday next at 5.30.

The full committee meeting in May of 1935 was held after the members met at the field to look for themselves at the proposed site.

Full Committee Meeting
May 1935

The Parish Council first inspected a field in Donkey Lane to ascertain whether the same was suitable for a Recreation Ground and then returned to the school for the meeting.

A resolution was passed that a letter be sent to Mr Pinney to ascertain the price and acreage of the land near Donkey Lane for consideration at the next meeting.

It took until October to receive a response from Mr Pinney with agreed costs for the land and fees associated with such a purchase.

4th October 1935

The Council had received a letter from Mr Pinney agreeing to a valuation of the land near Donkey Lane and also agreeing to sell the land for £100 per acre plus surveyors fees, legal charges and tenant right compensation. They also received a letter from the Playing Fields Association saying a grant of £50 towards the scheme could be relied on from them.

The Council agreed that £100 per acre was reasonable but it was decided before they proceeded any further that it would be best to call a Parish Meeting to test the feeling of the ratepayers.

Details still needed to be discussed of the possible Recreation Ground and the meeting in November obviously contained some more specific points.

1st November 1935

The Clerk read an estimate of the cost of purchase and lay out of the proposed Recreation Ground amounting to £1813.

Mr Docker drew attention to a Press report in which the site was described as a bog. The Council reported that: "We have examined the ground and also having taken independent professional advice are of the opinion that it is level and suitable for a Recreation Ground".

A letter had been received from The Public Works Board giving the interest and terms for which the money for the proposed Recreation Ground could be borrowed and a suggestion that a contribution from the City of Birmingham towards the cost of the Recreation Ground be asked for.

Unfortunately, things still did not run completely smoothly as the minutes of the next meeting at the end of November reported.

29th November 1935

At this meeting it was reported that Mr Docker took exception to the press reports of the last meeting and the Clerk was instructed to make a report to the press with regard to the present meeting.

By August 1937 it became clear that the Recreation Ground was no longer likely to receive its regular slot in the meetings because, as it was reported:

'The Conveyance of the Recreation Ground was put before the Council for signature'.

The Clerk reported that it followed exactly the contract signed by the Council.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman signed the Conveyance.

Mention occurred again though in 1939 when an offer to mow the grass on the Recreation Ground was received from Mr Holmes (of Woodbine Cottage) for which he was willing to pay 10 shillings. The offer was agreed to.

Many, many items have been discussed over the years by the both Bickenhill Parish Council and Marston Green Residents Association and many potential problems have been resolved by the hard work and dedication of the people, who over the years have offered their services to the local community.

Marston Green – A Village Community

For example: In 1961 a letter was sent from the Residents Association to Meriden Rural District Council about rats which had been found in the Hospital Refuse Dump causing a nuisance and possible disease.

It is possible to date many of the major changes in the area as a result of Residents Association minutes. In 1962 it was reported that it was understood that an extension to the runway at the Airport was due to start later that year. Mention was also made of the Land Lane and Elmdon Road bridges: 'British Railways have confirmed that both these bridges will be widened to allow for footpaths on either side when rebuilt for electrification of the railway'.

The following extract of the AGM of that year, 1962, reported on the events from the previous year.

'We have held five functions during the past year including talks from visiting speakers. The Christmas Tree has been erected in the Garden of Memory and illuminated nightly, thanks to two gentlemen, one of whom lent the timing switch free of charge and the other who supplied the electricity on similar terms.

In January, a Social Evening of games, dancing etc was successfully run, the enjoyment of which was added to by an interval with refreshments excellently prepared by our lady members'.



Photograph 58 Dance organised by the Residents Association during the 1960's.

Chapter 8 Personal Tales

Memories of life and times in Marston Green cover a wide range of experiences from several people, over the years, giving an overall view of a generally happy, united community.

Some of their memories are shared here.

Ron Wilson told me that he was born in the old Tavern as his grandparents kept the pub. Mr Bissell was the publican. He remembers a stable at the back and taking a horse and covered wagon there He used to help Jack Symmonds to cut the grass. They also kept a lamb at the Tavern.

Ron's grandmother kept Wilson's Suburban Stores opposite the Tavern. It was a tea rooms and sold a variety of supplies. There were two lawns at the back set with tables. He recalls: 'Between this and the Tavern at Whitsuntide it was chaotic when the bluebells were out. Trains came packed with people coming to visit the bluebell woods. We made sandwiches, teas, lemonade etc and after they had all gone there would be primroses and bluebells strewn all around and along the lanes'.

Ron used to deliver telegrams for Mr Coltman who ran the Post Office next door. He went out on his pushbike and received about half a crown (12½p) for each one.

'My dad was Joe Shewring, he was a Groundsman at the golf course which was run by the council. The staff could be called upon to grit the roads or clear snow in the winter as they were council workers. The men had a 'mess room' at the back of Chapel House Farm, where they made their tea and coffee.

The pond at the golf course was full of watercress, which we collected for Sunday tea. Several of the houses in Elmton Lane had gates in their gardens to give them access to the golf course'.

Mrs Wright

Marston Green – A Village Community

Peter Richards on 'The Police'.

The main 'crimes' in a village community like Marston Green were stealing chickens, eggs etc. We never regarded the police as 'foe' but we were careful to be on our best behaviour when a policeman was in sight.

Peter's best friend Jack Gallahar was killed when HMS Saumetez was hit by a mine laid by Albania. This was after the war had ended in 1946. He is remembered in The Garden of Memory.

There was always a police presence in the village, but as youngsters we were wary. The local 'Bobby' would 'have a word with you' if it was felt necessary.
Ron Wilson

There was a bar on the wall of the old police house, it looked like a towel rail. The prisoners were handcuffed to this bar until someone came to collect them.
This was as late as the 1960's
Mr Whateley

Sometimes, hidden behind Mason's fence, the village policeman, Mr Russell, waited to catch anyone (once me) riding over the halt line without stopping.
John Gardiner

Marston Green Lawn Tennis Club

The Club was founded in 1912, when grass courts were laid on land at the rear of the houses facing the Memorial Garden in Elmton Road. In 1934, The Marston Green (Private) Lawn Tennis Club amalgamated with the Marston Green Lawn Tennis Club which had courts behind the Free Church and took on the latter title, but operated from the Elmton Road site. Hard courts were planned, but the scheme was delayed due to the war and they were not laid until 1949.

Taken from the WI book of Marston Green

Boys Band at the Cottage Homes

A number of boys were trained to form a brass band which beside playing at home fulfilled many engagements in the neighbourhood and surrounding district. It was most band boys' ambition to join, as soon as age permitted, a Military or Naval band and competition to become members of the Homes' Band was keenly contested.
Taken from the WI book of Marston Green.

'When we lived in Mowe Croft the residents were frequently disturbed by the Scouts band practices. The Scout Hut was on the church land at the top of the Croft'.
Mr Whateley

Marston Green Maternity Hospital

The hospital, which was situated in Berwicks Lane was housed in buildings erected for the Canadian Military Hospital during the Second World War.

In an article by the WI the following report was written by a resident of the village during wartime.

‘When the Canadian Military Hospital came to Marston Green, there was quite a stir. Children were evacuated from the Birmingham Hospitals during an air raid and installed even before the nursing staff had arrived. The orderlies were wonderful with them, the little ones were put into military pyjamas - miles too big. They had no feeding bottles so they had to search the village. The Medical Staff had to be billeted with the villagers, as the quarters had not been finished. Thus a firm contact with the village people was established. The welcome they received was much appreciated by the Canadians, who said that to visit a home and sit round a fire with a family made them feel less homesick. The Dunkirk boys were brought here. It was pathetic to see a young life so maimed, but the courage of the soldiers made one feel humble. Not only military were admitted, but air raid victims were cared for. Several of the village girls married Canadians and went to live in Canada’.

The Canadian Military Hospital was taken over by the City of Birmingham to become the second largest Maternity Hospital in the country.

After extensive alterations and reconstruction the Maternity Hospital opened on September 1st 1948 with a theatre unit and accommodation for 30 patients. More wards were gradually opened and by 1952, the hospital had its full complement of 143 beds. It included a theatre unit, X-ray, pathological department, dispensary and outpatients’ department. There were 2 wards for ante natal care; 7 post natal wards; 1 gynaecological unit with its own theatre attached and a special unit for premature infants.

There was a staff in the order of 100 nurses, a consultant and resident medical staff working for Miss Mildred Maxwell the Matron who was in charge from the opening day. Approximately 3,000 babies were born there each year and a great deal of local support was given from a flourishing Ladies’ Linen League and the League of Friends.

The Hospital was a training school for midwives and was one of the few hospitals in the country where Part 1 and Part 2 of the Central Midwives Board Certificate could be obtained.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Kitty Harrow's Tales.

Kitty Harrow nee Gallahar writes:

"I remember Marston Green in the 1920's and 1930's with much happiness and with some nostalgia. I will write down a few memories of that period and recall some of the names of the folk who were so well known.

There was great excitement in the 1920's when the number 165 Midland Red bus began to run an hourly service from Birmingham Bull Ring via Marston Green village to Coleshill. Many folk had previously had to walk to Coleshill (as very few had cars) so this was a great boon. There were many more ordinary shops than there are now, so shopping could be done locally – and most shops delivered their goods so one did not have to carry heavy bags.

We had three local postmen – Bill Knibbs, Vic Webb and Mr Hill and the post was sorted at the local post office.



Photograph 59 The Old Post Office.

It was in Land Lane opposite the school. The house is still there today - the library now stands where the school once stood.

My great Aunt Emily Smith who lived at 'Culey Place' in Chelmsley Lane delivered the mail during the First World War and my mother Annie Smith also worked with her for a while.

Marston Green – A Village Community

There was a cobbler's shop (where the Church Mouse is now situated) and Jack Knibbs was the boot and shoe mender and very good he was too. Then there was Frank Allcott's shop where he supplied corn, bran and other feeding stuff for animals; he also sold many gardening tools etc. He was also an inventor of sorts and built a small gauge model railway.

Mowe's shop on the corner of Land Lane and Elmdon Road (now a solicitor's office) was a very popular and busy shop selling groceries. My aunty Dolly Smith worked there as an assistant for many years. It was very popular with local schoolchildren as you could buy 1d (pennyworth) of broken biscuits and many halfpenny novelties, sherbet fountains, liquorice pipes, aniseed balls and many, many more.

My grandparent's Jim and Polly Smith lived in a very old cottage in Berwicks Lane and the Musson family lived opposite, before they moved into Gorse Farm when the old Mr Bill Musson died. I spent many happy hours, weeks and months with my grandparents and used to wander over the fallow fields with Betty, John and Harry Musson looking for pee-wits' nests but we never disturbed them or took the eggs. Our enjoyment was the pleasure of seeing them!!!

Familiar sights in the village used to be Mr Jenkins the chimney sweep trundling along on his bicycle with a set of brushes and a rather smutty face! Also the rotund figure of Mr Griffin from the garage with his round beaming face. Apart from the actual garage work Mr Griffin ran a taxi service meeting folk as they left the station and taking them to their destination.



Figure 11 1937, advertisement for Griffin's Garage.

This was one of many advertisements for local businesses displayed in the Coronation Programme for King George V1 and Queen Elizabeth.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Griffin's also repaired bicycle inner tubes at the garage, which was a most useful service, and each year he gave a new bike as 1st prize at the Annual Flower Show, which was held for some years in Alcott Lane beyond the Police Station and where the houses now stand. An Annual Fair also used this site and was very popular, especially the Coconut Shy.

A family named Hodnett had a wooden building in Station Road (where the school driveway is now situated) and they sold second-hand goods there. They lived on the opposite side of the road in a cottage named 'Wayside' and there were two houses alongside called Belmont House and Stockton House. These were all demolished to make way for the cul-de-sac, Wayside.

There was an old, rather dilapidated partly corrugated iron building at the very end of Elmdon Lane before the airport came into existence. It was used as a Fever Hospital in the First World War for sick soldiers. A lady named Mrs Maddox then lived in it and she did dressmaking.

Harry Mellish was a well known and liked local man and had a thriving coal business – his yard and office being where the station car park is now'.

Kitty's recollections of the area between the wars gives a feeling of comparative peace and tranquillity at a time when there were few material possessions, but when individuals bought an importance and richness to day to day living.

It would appear from the 1881 census (below) that Kitty's family are one of the old original local families. Her great grandfather James Smith was born in 'Bicken Hill' (the local Parish) in 1850 and in the 1880's was a labourer on the railway, living at the station in Marston Green. His wife, Elizabeth was also born around 1850 in Coleshill. By 1881 they had six children and by then the two oldest boys, James 14 and Edwin 12 were already in employment as farmers boys, but still lived at home. Great Aunt Emily, who delivered the post in the First World War was born to James and Elizabeth in 1876. Their oldest son James married Polly and they were Kitty's grandparents.

Dwelling:	Railway Station			
Census Place:	Bickenhill, Warwick, England			
	Marr	Age	Sex	Birthplace
James SMITH	M	31	M	Bicken Hill, Warwick, England
Elizabeth SMITH	M	31	F	Coleshill, Warwick, England
James SMITH		14	M	Bicken Hill, Warwick, England
Edwin SMITH		12	M	Bicken Hill, Warwick, England
Ada SMITH		9	F	Bicken Hill, Warwick, England
Charlotte SMITH		8	F	Sheldon, Warwick, England
Emily SMITH		5	F	Bicken Hill, Warwick, England
Herbert SMITH		10 m	M	Bicken Hill, Warwick, England



Photograph 60 Last Day at School in 1936.

Kitty and her husband Bill still live in Bickenhill Lane and their families have had associations with Marston Green throughout the whole of the 20th Century.

The photograph above shows the final day at Marston Green School for Kitty and her friends in 1936.

Back row l – r: Mr Frank Cooper (teacher), John Smith,
Mr Clarence Bate (headmaster).

Middle row: Norman Bowker, Bill Harrow, Joe Billington,
Leslie Colloby, Gordon Davies.

Front row: Ethel Whitehead (Morley), Peggy Perkins,
Kitty Gallahar (Harrow), Elsie Jacobs.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Jeffrey French's story.

Mr Jeffrey French is in his 90's in the year 2000. He has lived in Marston Green since 1925, when he moved there from Small Heath as a newly married man.

Mr French was small local builder, initially working for a variety of contractors and eventually was on the staff at Chelmsley Hospital where he was responsible for the maintenance of the buildings. He left the Hospital and went into the Army for 3 years, when he came back he helped to build the Canadian Hospital, which subsequently became the Maternity Hospital.

In 1945/6 Mr French started his own business in the village and worked on his own doing general alterations, renovations and repairs as well as building a few houses. In 1962 he was offered the opportunity to build the new Free Church in Land Lane.

He had a shop in the village centre – where the laundrette now stands, but he sold it to the Mitchell's who sold it on to Mr Piff, who worked there, until he bought new, larger premises further along the parade of shops. Jeffrey carried on his general building work until he retired, when he passed the business on to his son.

Mr French's memories of Marston Green in 1926 were of a very different village to the one today. He says :

“It was nothing like it is today. The old Tavern was still there with its Chalet at the back and the wonderful Bowling Green.



Photograph 61

The Bowling Green and Tea Rooms at the Marston Green Tavern

Marston Green – A Village Community

High Elms Farm (where Elm Farm Avenue now stands) was still there, although it was empty. You could go along Elmdon Lane through to the Cock Inn on the Coventry Road at Elmdon – the Airport was not even a thought in those days. A tin Isolation Hospital for WW1 soldiers stood on the land at the end of Elmdon Lane, but I don't think it was ever used. The Garden of Memory was just a pool, with a sign beside it saying 'No Bathing'".

Mr French remembers when the village was first connected to a mains sewerage system. It was reported in the local press that: "In the late 1920's discussions were held about the possibility of a main sewer being put through the village. In 1934 Meriden Rural District Council applied to borrow the £23,000 necessary for sewerage works at Bickenhill and Coleshill. As a result the rates in Bickenhill were increased by 2/1d (just over 10p) to cover the cost of the loan". At the same time it was also reported that Birmingham Corporation were spending £8,000 in converting the former Children's Home at Marston Green to accommodate about 500 mental defectives.

Mr French recalls a few of the businesses, places and people who featured in Marston Green in his early years there.

"Hodnetts had an antique shop on the land where the telephone exchange stood for many years and the site of the hairdressers next door was a builders yard. Mr Griffin began his garage business as a taxi firm. Jones' kept the tea shop where Bacco's Italian restaurant has been developed.

Every year the road at the Bell flooded and the local farmers used to take their horses and carts down there to help people across the river. Transport to and from Birmingham was quite good with the railway and when the Midland Red bus service was started it was possible to get into town for 6d (2½p) return.

There was one chap in the village who was a gunsmith – one day he was showing off his guns and blew his finger off!"

Some of the houses and buildings that Jeffrey built were Geoffrey Barnett's home behind the old school in Bickenhill Road, 144 Elmdon Lane, 180/182 Coleshill Road and the Scout Hut as well as the Free Church. Another of the local builders George Foster, used to get his sand for building out of the sand pit which stood where Canterbury Drive now stands.

All the land on which the Village Hall stood and up to Land Lane was given to the village by the Digby family for the use of the village. Maintenance of the old Village Hall, which was instigated by the Bulpitt Family and built as a memorial to the First World War, was one of the projects Jeffrey had over the years. He was repainting the hall once and nearly managed to burn it down. He was cleaning off the old paint and sparks from the blowtorch set fire to the surrounding grass!

Marston Green – A Village Community

“When the new Police Houses were built in Alcott Lane there was suddenly a greater police presence in the village with a local ‘Bobby’ on the beat. On the whole though the people were crafty and made sure they did not get caught! The land behind the Police Houses was where the Flower Show was held in its early days. There were no other houses built on that land then”.



Photograph 62 The Police Houses in Alcott Lane built circa 1930.

In 1927 it was proposed to build a new Police House in Marston Green, but it was felt costs were too high. Consequently the matter was deferred for at least 12 months to see if the price of building materials would come down!
(Thanks to the Warwickshire Constabulary History Society for this gem!)

The Police Houses obviously were built shortly afterwards and for many years served as the local Police Station.

Jeffrey remembers with fondness, ‘The Point’ – the area where the old church in Station Road stood, as it was the place where the social life of the village took place, with many dances and other activities being held there. He helped to demolish the old building when it was no longer needed and took the bell down and moved it to St Leonard’s where he erected it. Other clubs he remembers were the Tennis Club and the Ladies Bowling, both of which held dances and social events where everyone who attended were ‘all togged up’.



Sketch 2 'The Point'

The area on which the old St Leonard's Church in Station Road stood, where many of the village social events took place.

Stella Reece also recalls 'The Point' and the tiny church building which was used for a whole range of activities. Stella reports on the '40 Club' a dancing club, which was held there in the 1940's. "It was run by my grandfather Frederick William Holt, the local clock and watch repairer. He was a teacher of Ballroom dancing and he qualified on May 1st 1898 with the British Association of Teacher's of Dancing. The '40 Club' was so named because it only allowed 40 members, probably because the room could hold no more than that comfortably. Cliff Holt, my father, was the pianist for the Club".

That church room holds many happy memories for Stella, the first being tap and ballet classes run by Barbara Laing (Crane) and she held her 14th birthday party and attended Girl Guides meetings there too. The mobile library also called there for the locals to regularly change their books.

Vera Webb remembers that Warwickshire County Council was anxious to open a library in the Village and asked for volunteers. The old Church proved to be the ideal place for this to open. Vera says: "Jean Chance and myself volunteered. We opened on Monday evenings from 6.00 to 7.30 p.m. After a while we had a good membership and eventually it moved over to the school and opened more often. We could not continue because we both worked in the day".

Marston Green – A Village Community

Bob Moseley reports that George Mellish - Harry's dad, who was deaf - used to scrub the floor of the old church in Station Road.

Ethel Morley recalls services in the old St Leonard's Church: "The organ was at the back on the left hand side and the boys 'manned' the bellows – sometimes not very successfully. The young folk attended morning service, afternoon Sunday School and evensong. The church was very well attended and we youngsters would save seats for each other at the back on the right hand side".

The first boys in the choir at the old church, just before the war were Harry Musson, Brian Jackson and Maurice Colloby.



Photograph 63

The interior of the old St Leonard's Church in Station Road.

Bob Moseley Remembers.

Bob Moseley moved with his family to Marston Green from Wythall around 1923/24.

He remembers that he and Jack Griffin sat together in class at Marston Green School. Their teacher was Mrs (not Miss) Sarah Tart and when she retired they all had a collection and managed to get enough money to buy her a silver bracelet. Mrs Tart always had her cane handy and was not averse to wielding it. Next in line was Miss Jenner followed by Miss Harbourne.

The Moseley Family were Nurserymen. They specialised in cut flowers and fruit and vegetables and they lived in Alcott Lane on the corner with Chelmsley Lane. Their home was compulsorily purchased, by Birmingham City Council, when the City wanted land to put a road, Moorend Avenue, into Chelmsley Woods in the 1960's.

Bob's dad started the original flower shows, which were in the early days held in Alcott Lane. Bob ran the coconut stall.

Even after the family moved away, Bob still visited the village Flower Show to run the coconut shy.

In the 1970's, The Coleshill Chronicle reported:
"Mr Bob Moseley who has been coming to the show since 1930 when it was held in Alcott Lane, is seen here, running the coconut shy"

Bob said: "The good old coconut shy is one of the things that keeps the shows funds up, year after year".

Now in his 80's and living near Tenbury Wells, Bob shares his memories of Marston Green in the late 1920's and 1930's.



Photograph 64

Bob Moseley at the Coconut Shy in the early 1970's.

"We start at Marston Green Station – Joe Palmer was the station master for many years and he ruled the Station with a 'rod of iron'. Ted was one of the porters and lodged with Mrs Waldron in the cottage next door to the Tavern. Tom Gregory used to cart coal with his horse and cart from the wharf at the station to the Cottages Homes, for the orphans who lived there.

Marston Green – A Village Community

The men who worked at the signal box were Jack Harby, Jack Donohue and Tom Williams. They worked from 6am to 2pm/2pm to 10pm and 10pm to 6am.

Next to the station was the sawmills run by Mr Dukes and his two sons. Miss Dukes kept house and used a front room as a sweet shop.

Down Holly Lane was Thompsons the butchers opposite Crawfords grocery shop and beside that on the corner was Miss Blamire the hairdresser. Then came Heron's veg. and fruit and then Moseley Drive was built down there in the 1960's (named after my dad William Moseley). Down the lane we came to Joe Linford the blacksmith (opposite the Bell).

The Midland Red bus came up Holly Lane into Chelmsley Lane then into Alcott Lane to wait by the Tavern. Then it went to the Post Office run by the Coltman family and next to this was the Garage run by the Griffins – George, Eddie and Jack. Leah, their sister married Joe Martin.

The roads were kept tidy by George Hill and John Holmes with his horse and cart. Down Station Road was Mr Frank Allcott's shop (now Johnson's the Estate Agent near Malthouse Row) where 'Gurn' dog biscuits were sold. Next to Mr Allcotts was a shop in which one room was used for the bank. Barclays came from Stechford on Mondays and Fridays from 10am – 1pm. Opposite there, around where the Telephone Exchange stood for many years, was a little wooden building. It was a shop owned by the Hodnett family – he was a furniture maker and they sold second hand goods there.

Next we go to Elmdon Road where Jack Knibbs had his shoe repairs shop. This little shop (now the Church Mouse) which is opposite what was Lloyds butchers was built by 'grandad' Knibbs for his son Bill to be a Boot repairer. It was built next to his own cottage, but his other son Jack was injured in the war and the brothers swapped with Bill becoming the postman and Jack the boot repairer. There was an apprentice at the shop who was from the Cottage Homes.

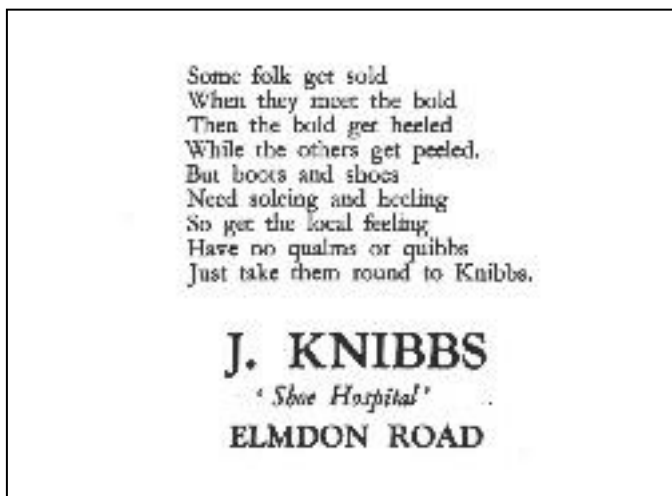


Figure 12

Knibbs 'Shoe Hospital'

This advertisement appeared in the 1937 Coronation Programme.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Before Lloyds took over the shop in Elmdon Road, Frank Abbot was the butcher there. He was tragically killed, when he was on his bike in Coleshill and it left his wife with small children to bring up alone. On the same side of the road as the butchers (which was also an abattoir – where Elmdon Court now stands) was Leah Martin's Elizabethan Cottage. This was originally two cottages and had two occupants – Billy Carter who was a window cleaner – he used to go around with an old box on wheels and he had 2 chaps who worked with him - and before Leah was Fred Loveridge who was night watchman for the Council.

Beside the cottage and opposite the gravel pit was Malt House Farm. The old house right on the corner of Elmdon Road and Station Road at the crossroads was the home of a Mr and Mrs Ford, who were something to do with the Digby Estate. Mr Ford was found dead in the garden one day. My brother had the job of carrying his body indoors.

We come to the Land Lane/Elmdon Road corner next, where Mrs Mowe, who lived in the cottage opposite, kept the corner shop. (The shop is now the Solicitor's office).



Photograph 65 **Mowe's Stores on the corner of Station Road and Land Lane**

The school, was just across the road, where the library now stands and in the mid 1920's we school children would go in to Mowe's to buy two pennyworth of broken biscuits at the end of the day. (By the mid 60's, Mrs Mason owned the shop and it was more likely that the children would buy four blackjacks, or chews for a penny. Mrs Mason didn't stand any messing about in there, when it was invaded by school children at 4.00 o'clock).

Marston Green – A Village Community

Mr Mowe lived in the cottage opposite the shop and he kept a couple of trucks there for me and one of the lads from the Cottage Homes. We used to meet the trains at 7.00 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. which were carrying the newspapers. We collected our trucks from Mowes and the other boy delivered papers to Elmdon Lane and I delivered to the rest of the village, morning and evening. On the last corner was Mackie and Gladstone – the ‘off-licence’.

Up in Land Lane was Sam Smith’s grocery shop with Harold Blizzard’s fruit and veg. beside it. Next door was Aston’s butchers where I worked as a 14 or 15 year old for about 15 shillings a week. Jones and Walford drapers were next door”.

Bob mentions other individuals and little snippets that he remembers from these early days.

“Some of the village policemen over the years were Jack Chapman, Billy Colloby, Les Russell, George Willey and John Ferris.

The Bulpitts lived at School Rough, which was a big place. Sam Rawlins was groom, Bert Perkins looked after the farm and Wilf Webb was the gardener.

The six inhabitants of Malthouse Row, were Mr and Mrs Arthur Webb, Sammy Glover, Bill Austin, George Windle, Bob Ingles and Ernest Symmonds”.

The farms – most of which are now gone, were vital to the village community and Bob goes on to recall the farmers who were there in the 20’s and 30’s.

Alcott Farm – on Moorend Avenue, Chelmsley Wood (Alcott Hall) – **Dick Hall**

Malt House Farm – near the gravel pit – **Dick Hall**

Chapel House Farm – near the Station – **Sid Walker**

High Elms Farm – now Elm Farm Avenue – **Harry Brasenell**

Hall House Farm – **Tom Holmes** and his son **John**

Moat House Farm – bottom of Elmdon Road bridge – **Fred Gilman**

The Newlands Farm – end of Newlands Lane on the airfield – **John Suckley**

Birchcoft Farm –Blackfirs Lane– **Jack Wright**

Gorse Farm – Coleshill Road, opposite Berwicks Lane – **Bill Musson**

“Milk was delivered from Dick Hall’s Alcott Farm and I delivered milk for Sid Walker from Chapelhouse Farm with a pony and float. I got 10s (50p) a week from them. The milk was ladled out in pint or half-pint measures. We delivered at night in summer to keep the milk cool”.



Photograph 66 Moat House Farm

The old farmhouse once had a moat around it and stood between Bickenhill Road and Elmdon Road.

“Archie Chamberlain delivered the bread with his mare, Madge. His father did the baking at Lea Hall. At Christmas he would use his ovens to cook dinner for you. He baked delicious cottage loaves. Willis, another baker, delivered from Coleshill”.

Ethel Morley also recalls Archie Chamberlain, she says “ He would deliver the bread with a pony and covered wagon and I can remember as a child lying in bed in the cottage next door to the Tavern, hearing ‘clip,clop’ at the same time every evening and hearing my parents say, ‘there goes Archie’ He would have been on his way back to Lea Hall having stopped at various houses in the village throughout his day. He was in effect the local ‘news broadcaster’. Time meant nothing in those days and it could take him all day to do the job as long as it was completed. The horse knew the way home, so no matter what the time – Archie delivered the bread **and** the news and he arrived home safely”.

Bob also remembers one occasion when the pool behind Chapel House Farm was emptied in order to be cleaned and re-stocked. The plug was taken out only after all the fresh fish from the pond had been delivered to people around the village.

So, back in the days when he could get a hair cut for 6d (2½p), get a tooth removed at Mr Peek’s for 2/6 (12½p) and buy petrol for 1s 1½d (6p) a gallon, Bob was a part of quite a small community where everyone, it seems, knew everyone else and on the whole lived together harmoniously.

Molly Crook's Story.

Molly Crook, who grew up and still lives in Marston Green is descended from of one of the staff members at the Cottage Homes and shares some of the memorabilia relating to her Family History.

“In 1897 my grandparents Fred and Harriet Wilson came from Yorkshire to Marston Green for Fred to take a position as a Bandsman/Storekeeper at Marston Green Children’s Homes, which were opened in January 1880”.



Photograph 67

Fred and Harriet Wilson.

They were married on December 7th 1893.

Fred became the Bandmaster at the Cottage Homes in 1897.

“On October 19th 1891, Fred had been discharged in Bombay from the Army Reserve and 2 KO Regiment of the North Yorkshire Light Infantry, where he had been a Bandsman/Fitter”.

Figure 13

Discharge papers for Fred Wilson.

They were issued on 8th December 1891.

According to the papers, Fred was 5ft 6ins tall, with a ruddy complexion, hazel eyes and light brown hair. He was 26 years old when he left the Army, having served in Bombay in India.



Marston Green – A Village Community

“At the time of applying for the position at Marston Green Children’s Homes he was working at North Riding Lunatic Asylum in a similar position to the one that he was applying for and Harriet was to be a nurse”.

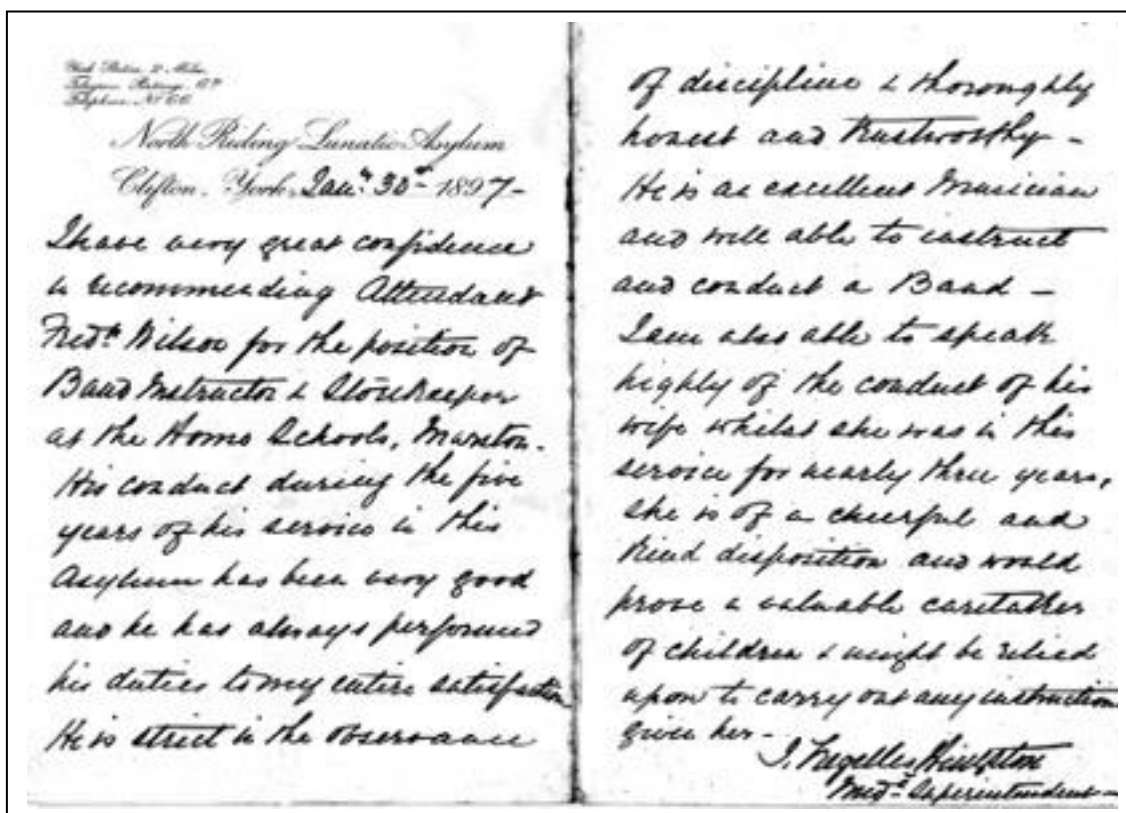


Figure 14 Testimonial letter received in 1897 for Fred Wilson.

Fred is said to be ‘Strict in his observance of discipline and thoroughly honest and trustworthy. He is an excellent musician and well able to instruct and conduct a Band’. The Superintendent of the Asylum also speaks highly of Harriet saying ‘...she is of a cheerful and kind disposition and would prove a valuable caretaker of children’.

Fred and Harriet got the jobs and moved to Marston Green, where the Cottage Homes Boys band proved to be very popular and successful.

Jack Heath, who was an orphan and subsequently a member of staff at the Homes said that there were many opportunities for the children to learn to play a musical instrument. Jack began playing in the band at 5 years of age and later as an employee, played in bands at Coleshill Hall and Chelmsley Hospital. The Cottage Homes Band continued and thrived. By the late 1920’s the band leader was Mr Allen and David Hipkiss another band member remembered that competitions took place yearly between Marston Green, Shenley Fields and Erdington Cottage Homes – all orphanages. Marston Green were always the winners and as winners always wore the uniform with the blue stripe down the side of each leg and blue band round the Pill Box hat.



Photograph 68 The Cottage Home Boy's Band under the instruction of Fred Wilson.

Molly continues:

“When Fred and Harriet Wilson started their family they moved into a Homes house in Chelmsley Lane. Harriet had seven children. My father, Norman was their 6th child and was born in 1905. During the late 1930's to 1950's he worked as a boot and shoe repairer. He was the last cobbler in the village. His shop is now the Church Charity Shop called 'The Church Mouse'.”



Photograph 69

**Knibbs Boot and Shoe
Repairers in Elmdon Road.**

Norman Wilson worked there before he eventually ran the business. He was the last cobbler in Marston Green.

Molly shares her own childhood memories.

“When I was about 6 or 7, I can remember going to Mrs Tipper’s cottage in Chelmsley Lane, roughly where Moorend Avenue goes down to Chelmsley Wood. She was married to the Chimney Sweep and sold sweets. Her cottage, for me, was like Aladdin’s cave as she had coloured bead curtains and a large bead curtain that you passed through to see the large bottles of sweets. There were Dolly Mixtures, Liquorice Comfits, and Boot Laces, Jelly Beans, Troach Drops, Acid Drops and large boiled sweets in the shape of a fish!



Photograph 70 Woodbine Cottage.

This very early photograph of Woodbine Cottage was taken before any development in Chelmsley Lane. The Tipper and Holmes families lived at either end of the cottage.

My cousin David and I would be given a silver threepenny bit as ‘wages’ for cleaning out my Uncle Frank’s show rabbits and collecting dandelion leaves for them. We would go down on a Saturday afternoon with our coupon books and have ½ oz of our favourite sweets. Mrs Tipper was very kind and would sometimes give us a sweet to try!

Another memory is of going down to the ‘Fire Station’ that was situated where the Garden of Memory now is. During the War on a Saturday they would show films like Old Mother Riley, Roy Rogers and Gaby Hayes. Some of the Cowboy and Indian films had the older children standing up to cheer their heroes and being small, I couldn’t see. One of the boys, a Michael Kimberlee, broke his leg and was pushed to the front in a wheelchair. I was so jealous that I wished I could break my leg so I could go to the front and have a better view of the film!”

Marston Green – A Village Community

Peter Richards Story.

Peter Richards was born in Marston Green in 1927 and was brought up in the village, living with his parents Leonard and Dora Richards and brother John at 46 Chelmsley Lane, until he left to join the Royal Navy in 1943. His memories are those of life there until the mid 1940's.

Peter's mother was the youngest of three daughters of Frederick Benbow, one of the first schoolmasters at The Cottage Homes, she worked for a law firm in the City of Birmingham where she met his father. They married, and Leonard eventually became the manager of the Labour Exchange in Coleshill. Like his father-in-law, Leonard became Clerk to the Parish Council in the 1930's.

Peter remembers:

“Our house at 46 Chelmsley Lane was just a few yards from Wood Lane that led to the old wooden bridge over the brook. I have memories of fishing for tiddlers and sometimes my friends and I would paddle up as far as the White Bridge, but not often as we knew we were trespassing on the farm territory belonging to the Cottage Homes/Mental Hospital. The water was deeper there and there were bigger fish, probably trout, to be seen. We never attempted to catch these with our nets.

A little further the other way along Chelmsley Lane was Woodbine Cottage, which I remember as a smallholding.



Photograph 71 **Woodbine Cottage in Chelmsley Lane, looking down Alcott Lane.**

Marston Green – A Village Community

The gentleman who ran the smallholding part of the cottage was John Holmes and he had a son, Jack. They kept pigs, poultry and ducks and during the war years he may have planted a field of potatoes.

In the front garden of the cottage was chalked a sign 'FRESH EGGS, MANURE'. My dad would sometimes send me for a barrow load of manure. In 1940 it was only 6d (2½p) for as much as you could load on a builders type barrow and wheel away. I was warned to walk as far away from the side door to the cottage as possible, in making my journey to the manure heap at the back. Mr Holmes' dog lay outside his kennel in the yard. At the sight of me it barked and ran and hurled itself towards me, but was restrained in mid air by a long thin steel chain. However once I had passed the dog settled down again, only to repeat this performance when having loaded the barrow with dung I made the return trip struggling to steer a steady course whilst observing the dog out of the corner of my eye. The pig manure had a potent pong that lingered behind me as I progressed along the lane through Donohue's garden (our next door neighbour, but one) and then through a gate into our own back yard and garden".

Peter spent his school years at Marston Green and has recollections of the teachers at the time as well as the events, which occurred in the early years of the war.

He continues "As mentioned by others before, Mr Bate, the headmaster for many years was a good teacher until he lost his temper. Unfortunately he was always losing his temper. In the mid 30's, Mr Cooper joined the school staff, he was a very fair man he was followed by Mr Moore, Miss Banks and Miss Sheasby. Mr Moore took the class I was in and was very well liked. Two of the pranksters in the class put Valentine cards on both Mr Moores and Miss Banks' desks purporting to have been sent to each other. We spent the mid morning break studying their faces to see their romance.....All in vain! Mr Moore went into the RAF as aircrew and did his training in Canada. He invited the class to write to him there which I did once or twice, but what happened to him I don't know.

In those days a pupils' final year at Marston Green Council School was made more interesting by the introduction of woodwork for the boys and cookery for the girls. These subjects had been taught in classrooms in the original old school, but the year our class reached its final year was different. In order to find more classroom space the woodwork benches had been removed and the plan now was for the pupils to learn these subjects at Coleshill Central School, situated on the 'Hill' in Coleshill. The girls would travel there by local Midland Red bus and the boys on their bicycles. For boys who didn't have a bike, the school had bought the required number of second hand machines. I recall on Fridays going to school earlier than usual, collecting a bike and pedalling away to Coleshill. When the lessons finished at Coleshill Central, we got back on our bikes and rode home, or a few like myself, rode back to school and deposited our bikes and then walked home.

I think we all enjoyed both the lessons and the different routine. We had lunch at the school and the girls would have cooked some part of our meals.

Well after some weeks of this practice, the air raids commenced and so in case there was an air raid while we were en route it was decided to cancel the arrangement. Whatever happened to our half made items of woodwork, I don't know.

However there was another change coming. At this early period in the war the Government was encouraging everyone to grow their own vegetables, keep fowl and even have a sty for a pig in the garden, 'Dig for Victory' was the slogan everywhere.

In keeping with this, the school had obtained permission to turn part of the field at the back of the school for an 'Allotment Garden'. Spades and seeds would eventually be provided by the school or some authority, meanwhile Mr Bate, keen to start and have the ground ready for the planting season, requested all the children to ask their parents for spades or any tool that could cut turf.

A motley array of different implements arrived next day. In the afternoon Mr Bate and Mr Cooper led the boys down to tackle the field. To give Mr Bate his due, it was his drive that ensured work proceeded as fast as it did, because it **was** hard work. We skimmed off all the turf and stacked it in three piles. Then the ground was double dug all over before we planted. All this took many weeks, on rainy days we had lessons on gardening, rotation of crops etc, but at the end of it the produce was fine. Cabbages, potatoes, carrots etc were sold to the children who bought their mothers' shopping lists and the prices were very low.....I know – I sold a lot of it!

The proceeds were destined to pay for the following years' seed".

Derrick Hayes, a little younger than Peter, remembers the subsequent war years at Marston Green School.

"We had to 'Dig for Victory' during the war. Half of the school field had been dug up and we had to cultivate it. The senior boys went out there twice a week to do the work. There was a hedge along the school field and on the school side of it was the underground air raid shelter. It was a lot longer than the one you would have in your garden and a while later they built a surface one on the other side of the playground. It was just a square concrete one.

We had assistant teachers during the war, they were not trained but they taught a class. The two we had were the Saunders sisters from the farm opposite to Melbick Nursery on the Chester Road".

Chapter 9 Growing Up in Marston Green

Life was changing in the 1930's, young people were enjoying growing up in the countryside of Marston Green, but by the end of the decade the Second World War changed things dramatically.

Some of the youngsters at the time have told their tales of growing up in the village and the impact that the war had on their lives. Here they recall some of their childhood influences and memories of Marston Green in the 1930's, 40's. and early 1950's

Derrick Hayes has always lived in Blackfirs Lane, and Margaret Birch in Coleshill Road. John Gardiner was born and spent his childhood and youth in Elmdon Lane. Audrey Price (nee Green) moved to Marston Green as a young child with her family and lived at the far end of Elmdon Lane - close to the airport - before she married and lived in Lyndon Croft. The family, along with her brother and sister and their families emigrated to Australia in the late 1960's. They still keep in touch with old friends from Marston Green. Peter Jacobs has always lived and worked in the village and owns and runs 'Flair DIY' in Station Road.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Derrick Hayes remembers.

Derrick Hayes who has lived all his life in Blackfirs Lane recalls tales of people and events, which had an impact on his early life in the village.

“Although I was born in hospital in Birmingham my earliest days were spent in Blackfirs Lane. Numbers 1 to 8 Blackfirs Lane were the first council houses to be built in Marston Green and I lived in one of them. One of those houses there still has the 300ft Ordnance Survey marker on the outside wall.

My parents met when my mother Bertha Welch was in service for the Bulpitt family at the bungalow next door to the big house, East Woodhay. She was born in 1900 and she worked for Mr Walter Bulpitt and looked after his children. Her father was a gamekeeper and she used to tell me stories of how he used to take her rabbiting. My father was a horticultural grower and he lived down in the farm, which is now School Rough. He lived in a long wooden building, a bit like the old Scout Hut. At one end was a house and at the other end where he lived it was just two rooms - a living room and a bedroom. The people who lived in the house were Mary and Bert Perkins and Bert ran the farm for the Bulpitts. My mother and father got married from there”.



Photograph 72 The wedding day of Derrick Hayes' parents

They were married from the wooden bungalow at School Rough.

Derrick's earliest memories are of a happy childhood, where like other young boys at the time he would get into little scrapes and generally come to know and love the countryside he lived in.

Marston Green – A Village Community

“I went to school in the village and on the walk down Bickenhill Road, we passed School Rough, the wooded land opposite the Recreation Ground. There used to be a large orchard in there and in the autumn my friends and I used to go and scrump the apples on our way to school. We would hide them in the ferns alongside the road and collect them on our way back home.

I remember getting into trouble on another occasion for scrumping from the orchard belonging to the Barnetts. Their cottage stood right back behind the school hedge that ran down Bickenhill Road - where the cul de sac is now. We got caught one day by Gaffer Bate and got the stick for that”.

The deputy head, Miss Harbourne lived next door to Derrick, which on occasions like that could be a bit of a disadvantage.

Being an inquisitive lad Derrick recalls talking to Harry Gardner an old chap who also lived in Blackfirs Lane and who was a roadsweeper with a big bass broom.

“I was naive young lad and he used to tell me that the extra hole in the broom head was to put a candle into, so he could see what he was doing, when he was sweeping the roads at night.....It was of course so the broom head could be turned around when it was worn out on one side.

When Lyndon Croft was being built we used to go and play on the scaffolding on the building site. There were no fences or security guards or anything to prevent it”.



Photograph 73

Derrick Hayes as a choir boy.

As a youngster Derrick was a keen member of the St Leonard's Church choir.

Derrick recalls one amusing incident, which occurred on one particular choir practice evening.

“Mr Ryder was the choirmaster at the time and he lived near to us in Blackfirs Lane, so we used to go along to choir practice together. I had just got a shiny new bike, of which I was very proud, and I was riding it on that particular evening. Mr Ryder was on his old bike. We parked our bikes round the back of the church as usual when we arrived, but when we came out of choir practice we were amazed to discover Mr Ryder’s old bike had gone. My shiny new one was still there.

Well, I was dispatched by Mr Ryder to go to report the missing bicycle to PC Russell at the Police House next to the Tavern.

‘Come with me lad’ said PC Russell, and he took me round the back. ‘Is this the bicycle?’

It had been found before it had even been reported missing.

It seems that PC Russell had been riding around the area on his own bike when he saw someone coming towards him on another bike. The person suddenly jumped off the bike and threw it into the hedge before running off.

It was a patient from Chelmsley Hospital who must have taken the bike from the back of the church and panicked when he saw the Policeman. This left PC Russell with the problem of getting two heavy bikes back, along largely unmade roads, from Coleshill Heath Road to the village centre. He had just arrived when I got there to report the bike missing”.

“In the Wartime, in the summer we had to go potato picking, it was better than going to school – or so we thought. In those days there was no ‘Health and Safety’ and the youths of about 12 or so used to drive the tractors while the men threw the corn and stuff on. There wasn’t the labour in those days because of the war.

When I was not much more than 12, I used to take the horses from Wright’s Farm in Blackfirs Lane to Coleshill to the Blacksmiths, which was next door to the Cameo Cinema in the High Street. I used to go on my own and I would sit on these great big Shire Horses and go all the way to Coleshill – it was only lanes and there were no motor cars around in those days”.

Derek’s mother Bertha Hayes was one of the village post ladies for 15 years along with Mr Knibbs who was a keen bee keeper and lived next door to the Tennis Club in Elmdon Road. Mr Kibble was the owner of the Post Office then.



Photograph 74

Bertha Hayes one of the village post ladies.

She is standing outside Jones Suburban Stores (now Bacco's Restaurant) next to the Post Office in Alcott Lane.

Derrick and others recall an old chap who was always seen around the village in the mid 1940's to 50's.

“There was an old man who became known as ‘Tom Shanty’ or ‘Shanty Israel’. He was a religious fanatic who lived in a barn at Moat House Farm (at the bottom of Elmdon Road bridge). He had a bicycle with lots of religious texts all over it. He would leave it strategically placed in the village where people could see his messages. He would go into Birmingham to the Bull Ring on market day and try to convince everyone that the Day of Judgement was near. He was an educated man, but did not appear so”.

Peter Jacobs also recalls:

‘As youngsters my pals and I would play Tom Shanty up’. Peter continues, ‘He lived in a kind of brick outhouse near the brook at the back of Moat House Farm by Bickenhill Road bridge. The building had a tin roof and we would throw stones onto the roof to make him come outside to see what it was. We ran away to hide and he would come out ranting and raving, only for us to repeat it when he went back in.’

Peter also remembers doing odd jobs around the village, working as a paper boy and in the early 1950's potato picking with his younger brother for a Mr Cattell who farmed the fields where Digby Drive is now. ‘We spent four hard days picking potatoes for him (we didn't slack off) and he paid us 10/- (50p) between us’.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Peter worked for Mr Aston in the butchers in Land Lane when he was still at school. He and the other youngsters working there were given some of the more unpleasant jobs to do. 'Good training to see if we were up to the job'.

'We used to have to go to the slaughterhouse at Lloyds butchers in Elmdon Road (where Elmdon Court has been built). Mr Aston used to employ someone from Stechford to slaughter his cattle, pigs and sheep and used Lloyds facilities. They had the contracts to provide the meat for the schools for the dinners. They got cow meat - nothing as sophisticated as beef!'

Obviously the training stood him in good stead as Peter went on to later open his own Butcher's and Greengrocery shops in Holly Lane, before he developed 'Flair', his DIY business in Station Road.

for BEST QUALITY MEAT & POULTRY
shop at
PETER'S BUTCHERS
20 HOLLY LANE · MARSTON GREEN
TELEPHONE: 779 2347

STOCKIST OF MONK'S, PORK FARMS & PARR'S SAUSAGES · MEAT & PORK PIES	COOKED MEATS, BACON & FARM EGGS MEAT & VEGETABLES FOR DEEP FREEZE
--	--

ORDERS DELIVERED DAILY

for FRESH DAILY, FRUIT & VEGETABLES
PETER'S Greengrocers
20 HOLLY LANE · MARSTON GREEN
TELEPHONE: 779 2347

*FRESH FISH, FROZEN
FOODS & CANNED GOODS
CUT FLOWERS, POT PLANTS*

ORDERS DELIVERED DAILY

Figure 15

1976 Advertisement for Peter's Butchers and Greengrocers.

Peter also recalls in his childhood seeing that the people who were patients of Dr Cant, who came from Coleshill. They had to sit outside Hetty's shop, near the station, on benches to wait to be seen. 'If they felt ill before they started, in some of the awful weather they were probably worse before they even saw the doctor.'



Photograph 75 Mrs Walker's Class circa 1947

Peter Jacobs has remembered the names of all his classmates, when they were about 8 years old and in Mrs Walker's class.

Back Row left to right:

Dennis Crumpton, Cliff Harby, Ralph Willey, Derek Ward, John Smith, Tony Smayle, Dave Brazier, Brian Crooke, Ian Cotton, Peter Jacobs, Alan Ball.

Middle Row:

Mrs Mary Walker, Harry Myers, Alan Bott, Jimmy Crook, David Birley, Linda Middleton, Margaret Hall, Margaret Wilson, Richard Jones, Bryan Reading, Chris Bell, Bobby Doble.

Front Row:

Valerie Endley, Stella Holt, Pauline Huddleston, Heather Bates, Josephine Horsley, Rosemary Sharrard, Pat Scott, Barbara Jenkins, Molly Wilson, Jean Nolan.

At least three of the youngsters in this photograph have made a contribution to this book. Peter Jacobs is on the back row and Stella Holt (Reece) and Molly Wilson (Crook) are sitting on the front row.

Margaret Birch's memoirs of 'Past Marston Green'

“My family moved from Erdington to Marston Green when I was four in 1940, as my maternal grandmother, Mrs Mary Heacock, was worried that German bombs, which might be targeted at ICI Witton, where my father worked, might also fall on Erdington. Grandma helped towards the purchase of our house and my mother paid rent to her until her death in 1948. Grandma lived three doors away from us in a house which she and Grandpa had had built for themselves in 1923. I was told that this house (called ‘Chelmsley’) was only the second house to be built in our section of Coleshill Road (between Berwicks Lane and Coleshill Heath Road), apart from Gorse Farm, which was already here and a house, ‘Mona’, which had been built nearer to Berwicks Lane. This house had been built by Grandma’s builder, Mr Dare, for his newly married son.

My mother, who had lived at ‘Chelmsley’ before her marriage, told me that in the 1920’s, Coleshill Road was only a lane. Grandma and Grandpa acquired a pony and trap, as Grandma was a country girl (from Arley near Bewdley). The pony, Kitty, had belonged to a patron of the Bell Inn and when they drove Kitty in that direction she refused to proceed beyond the Bell. Kitty was kept in a field just up the road and one day she bolted and my mother’s sister, Edith, (who lived at home because she was fairly deaf), was sent to get her. When Uncle Harry (mother’s eldest brother) acquired a Renault car Kitty was sold, but Kitty’s stable was still at the bottom of the garden at ‘Chelmsley’ in 1961.



Photograph 76 **Back garden of ‘Chelmsley’ Coleshill Road in the 1930’s.**

The Tennis Court gives an impression of the size of the garden.

Marston Green – A Village Community

I remember another couple of stories my mother told me of events in the 1920's regarding animals. The Burmans farmed Heath Farm in Coleshill Heath Road. They had a large family and my mother used to go and help by looking after the youngest children. One evening in 1924, after helping to bath the children, mother realised on the way home that she had left her new gold watch behind (a present from her parents for her 21st birthday). So she had to steel herself and walk back in the dark and finally traverse a field of full of cows, all breathing heavily, to retrieve the watch. The Burman family subsequently moved to Chapel House Farm and stayed there for a few years.

On another evening, mother, along with her eldest brother Harry and sister Edith, was returning home from a concert in Birmingham and they were walking home in the dark from the station. They had just turned into Coleshill Road when mother heard the sound of galloping hooves and realised that a horse was bolting towards them. Edith and Harry were both deaf and did not realise the situation. Mother had to quickly push them into the hedge and the horse rushed by just missing them by inches!"



Photograph 77

Margaret Birch as a toddler in 1938.

She is sitting outside
'Chelmsley', Coleshill Road.

Margaret goes on to recall her childhood years spent in Marston Green during the war and some of the developments and changes in Coleshill Road.

"When my grandparents first moved to Marston Green they had bought an acre of land. By 1939 they had sold half an acre and three houses had been built on it of which 'Sunnymead' was the first.

I spent the winter of 1939 – 40 with Grandma, while convalescing from diphtheria followed by whooping cough and also while my mother gave birth to my sister Evelyn. I loved Grandma's large garden, with flower beds and fruit trees that surrounded the tennis lawn.

Marston Green – A Village Community

By 1939 Coleshill Road was 'tarmaced' and we had a two-hourly bus service, the Midland Red 165 service from St Martin's Church, Birmingham to Coleshill. By 1940 the buses ran once an hour. At first they drew a sort of generator behind them which smelled strongly of diesel (as did the inside of the buses, too).

Until 1951, the houses had names, not numbers. Ours was called 'Chumleigh' when we bought it, after a horse on which the previous owner, a former publican, had won a large amount of money. My parents changed the name to 'Selworthy' after the pretty village in Somerset which they had visited on their honeymoon. All the houses had gates then, too. The stretch of road opposite was not developed until after the war (i.e. 1948). There was a grass verge, a shallow ditch and a straggly hedge with an oak tree. We strung a rope over one of the branches and used to enjoy swinging over the ditch.

I remember the appearance of the single storey building put up for the war wounded in Berwicks Lane. It was just beyond the copse, which was opposite Betty Musson's cottage. Occasionally we played in the copse in the ruined cottage there, which we called 'haunted', but we were not encouraged to do this, due to the fear of falling masonry. The first batch of war wounded were Canadians and on fine days they were brought in their wheelchairs up Coleshill Road to take the air. This was in 1941 and my sister was a toddler at the time, with fair curly hair and blue eyes and they would frequently pat her little head and call her 'blondie' (The first time I had heard this word).

One odd memory I have of the war was finding short streamers of silver backed paper, dropped from aeroplanes. We were always strictly forbidden to pick up anything strange we found in the garden in case it exploded.

Other memories include sleeping under the stairs with my sister on a tray on the music stool, then in the dug-out shelter, complete with bunk beds, in our neighbour's back garden where a number of us near neighbours took shelter during air raids. My family only used it until we had our own Anderson Shelter in the dining room. The old dug out shelter was always a bit damp and after the war it became even damper through disuse, although a gang of us children would use it as a den. Eventually it was locked up, but the mound which covered it continued to provide a good vantage point for many years. When we were slightly older we sometimes went down to the Recreation Ground to play. Talking of air-raids, my grandmother had a bomb in her back garden. It blew out all her back windows and blasted one of her damson trees (not to mention the hen house and some of the hens) into the field beyond the garden, leaving an enormous crater. Once the crater had been inspected and declared safe, we were encouraged to throw stones into it as often as possible. Some weeks later soil was thrown on the top and root vegetables were planted there. At the following harvest festival service at the church we children amused and astonished everyone by bringing carrots and parsnips that were three feet long! (This record was not repeated the next year).

Marston Green – A Village Community

During the war years I can remember seeing gangs of prisoners at the Recreation Ground (Rec). The access from Coleshill Road was, and is, over a ditch, the prisoners were digging the ditch to improve the drainage. The first gang, I think, were Italians and they were described as lazy, later a gang of Germans worked on the same ditch and did a much better job". Margaret remembers that the poplar trees, which for many years flanked the grounds of Chelmsley Hospital in Coleshill Road, had not been planted when the ditch at the Rec was being dug. She says "Overlapping wood fencing surrounded the grounds and this was subsequently replaced by ranch fencing. The 'less serious' men patients used to dig the garden for various families in the village (but they had to be continuously supervised to ensure they did not dig up the wrong plants or simply slack-off). One or two of the patients delivered the newspapers as well. One of them, Albert, was able to look after himself in later years and lived in a house in the village."



Photograph 78

Chelmsley Hospital in Coleshill Road in the 1940's.

As ICI was operating 7 days a week, making ammunition, we did not see much of my father, but I recall that he once walked from central Birmingham to Marston Green on the night that Marshall and Snellgrove was bombed and described seeing it in flames.

There were one or two war-efforts, held on the village green, at one of which our friends, the Heath family, won a competition when they decked our old pram with seaweed and put their two small children in it and called them 'the water babies'. I also saw my first display of maypole dancing on that or a similar occasion.

Marston Green – A Village Community

During and after the war we presented our coupons and money for our weekly sweet ration at Mrs Jones' shop in Alcott Lane (others went to Osbornes or elsewhere). I recall our excitement when ice creams and bananas became available again!"

"In the late 1940's or early 50's I remember there was a handbell ringing group which met for a few years. There were 8 or 10 people in it, including Mr Sproule the vicar at the time. For some reason they asked if they could rehearse at our house, even though none of the family were in it. They used to arrive after my sister and I had gone to bed, but after a few weeks my mother caught us listening at the top of the stairs and decided that we were missing our sleep! So they were asked to find another venue. This happened in the early days of the group, but it survived for several years and I remember that the ringers featured in our carols round the village and even in the occasional carol service and concert".

Early Life in Elmdon Lane as recalled by John Gardiner Jnr.

John Gardiner remembers vividly his earliest years in Marston Green in the 1930's and in particular growing up in Elmdon Lane.

John says:

“Much of ‘Life’ at this time was ‘parochial.’ We could not travel far. Summer outings were local picnics to ‘The Woods’ (Chelmsley) and bicycling to Maxstoke or Packington Ford, or Elmdon Park. Playing was up at the ‘Rec’ with the swings the maypole ride and the seesaw. There were the occasional bus trips to the Cinemas along the Coventry Road, e.g The Sheldon and The Atlas or The Beaufort at Stechford where my cousin Michael lived.”

“I was born in June 1934 and lived at number 87 Elmdon Lane, one of the 5 original village roads. This was a new 3 bedroomed detached house, into which my mother and father moved after their marriage in 1931.



Photograph 79

87 Elmdon Lane in 1950.

Ours was one of many houses built in Elmdon Lane by Mr Foster - the local builder who lived at 109 Elmdon Lane. That house became The Manse, the home for the Minister of the Free Church. Our nearest postbox, which is still there, was in the brick pillar of the gateway of the Manse. The gate posts there in fact originally formed the gateway to Canterbury House, where, the Headmaster of King Edward's Birmingham, Cary Gilson, lived.

My mother told me that he walked to the station each day and, 'Us youngsters in the 3rd class compartments watched as his rather flamboyant figure entered his 1st class compartment, the 8.18am train having been kept waiting for him'..... that would have been in about 1925.

A sand pit extended behind the gardens of about ten houses either side of our house and separated us by about 100 yards from the LMS (London, Midland and Scottish) Railway line. In the dry summers, cinders from the steam trains often set the embankment and sandpit vegetation on fire. Sometimes Tom, the porter, used to come up from the station and my mother and I would 'help' beat out the blaze.

It was great fun for me!

Builders' lorries used to access the 'sand pit' by the drive at the side of our house, their motors labouring up the drive with the weight of a load of sand. The council refuse lorry also used the drive to occasionally pump out sewage from the cesspit in our garden - quite interesting for a small boy. We had a large garage alongside our house, which was 'thinned down' in the 60s, the sandpit access becoming Canterbury Drive with houses built on the filled in sand pit.

At the corner of the front garden of our next door neighbours was a large elm tree. When it was felled it left a big 'dent' in Mr Clare's front lawn on the opposite side of the road. Another large tree was the very tall poplar in the back garden of 93 Elmdon Lane, presumably surviving from Canterbury House. We children thought it would have to have a red light on as a warning to low flying aeroplanes.

It was only about 1940 that a pavement with kerbstones was made and Elmdon Lane seems to be the only road in Marston Green to have extensive grass verges and trees on one side of the road.

Our kitchen at number 87 had, until gas was laid on some years later, an 'old fashioned' coal range with hob, copper kettle and oven, on which all our cooking was done. The pantry had tiles and a marble slab and a meat safe with perforated zinc sides.

My maternal grandparents, Ernest and Nellie Upton, like several other families had come from the Birmingham area to Marston Green. They moved from Saltley in 1923 to live at the newly built 140 Elmdon Lane. It was built by a builder from Alum Rock and it cost about £100. At this time there were only about a dozen houses in this attractive lane which was called the 'back lane'. They called the house 'Brockton' which was Grandfather's amateur 'stage name'. He used to sing and do monologues. It was lit by gas mantles, until about 1939. I can remember sitting on the stairs and watching when my cousin Jack Upton, who was starting up as an electrician was putting the fuse box up, and wiring up the house for them.

Marston Green – A Village Community

My earliest memory is that of my grandfather Upton taking me, as he often did, in my pushchair, down Newlands Lane and the Foredrift. Sometimes we went as far as we could along Elmdon Lane (no Digby Drive then) and one day we found a barrier across the road. He told me that the road was to be closed for the airport runway to be extended and then we would no longer be able to walk to Elmdon.

Although Elmdon Lane became closed by the Airport runway we could still walk through the fields to the Coventry Road via the footpath off Elmdon Lane opposite Land Lane (there was no runway there nor golf course then). We collected tiddlers and frogspawn in the stream as we walked across the fields.



Photograph 80 140 Elmdon Lane where Ernest and Nellie Upton lived from 1923.

I did not know my paternal grandparents, George (Garnolds) Gardiner and Elizabeth as they had both died in the year before I was born. They had moved to Marston Green from the Hockley district of Birmingham where he had a jewellery business in Vyse Street in the 'Jewellery Quarter'. They bought a pair of semidetached houses, 47 & 49 Chelmsley Lane. My father, John Garnolds Gardiner, known as Johnny or Jack, lived with them there until he married Nellie Upton at the Free Church in 1931. They had met at the Tennis Club which had two courts on the land behind the Free Church".

As he grew up, despite the war, Elmdon Lane and the surrounding area became the playground for the boyish pranks of John and his mates.

Marston Green – A Village Community

“Just beyond the first gate on the gravel path leading across to Elmdon from Land Lane the farmer had a couple of haystacks on which we played. We could slide down into a dugout, which overlooked the airport.

One day we were seen on top of the stacks and, too late to run, we hid in the dugout. Unfortunately the farm dog smelled us out and we had to give our addresses and were warned that the farmer would be coming up later to see our fathers - which he did. I remember the embarrassment was sufficient punishment and we didn't play on the stack any more.

Later we had an allotment by this path on the land which is now number 78 and in one year of our ‘Dig for Victory’ efforts we lost all our cabbages to the cows which came up the path from the fields. Too late we had to put up a post and barbed wire fence.

With boyhood friends in Elmdon Lane (Graham Clare, Dennis Freeman, Malcolm McDougald, Peter Edmunds and others) we had a dugout trench in this allotment (where I smoked my first 5 Woodbines and was horribly sick). From our trench we sometimes bombarded, passengers who were walking up the lane from the station with ‘earth grenades’! Once we also tried the ‘dropped’ parcel on a string trick - but were disappointed when no one tried to pick it up.

There was a brick wall to our front garden against which, when we were older, we rebounded footballs and tennis balls, stopping for the occasional car. We were particularly watchful when creeping down the front drive of the house opposite to retrieve ‘lost balls’ - Mr ‘Gaffer’ Bate, the headmaster lived there!”

John, along with most of the other village youngsters at the time, received his early education at Marston Green School.

“In 1940 I would walk over Land Lane bridge (then old red brick with sandstone capping in which past residents had carved their initials) past the shops to school where I was taught the three ‘R’s. I remember with affection, gratitude and respect some of my teachers;..... Miss Peel, teetering around on her high heels, the stentorian tones of Mrs Walker and the ‘punishment rituals’ of Miss Harborne and Mr Bate.

Miss Harborne would call you to her desk, carefully take off her wrist watch and place it on her desk, administer either a slap or a ruler on the wrist or leg, and then would replace her wrist watch, while you returned, chastened and demoted from being ink monitor, to your desk. The desk was a double one, iron framed with solid oak top, a tip up seat and inkwell.

To have to report to ‘Gaffer Bate’ in the Old School House was the worst, as one could usually expect a caning. He would line us up and keep us waiting on tenterhooks while he sent one of the boys out to cut a suitable twig from the hedge for use on the hand!

Marston Green – A Village Community

In winter the milk bottles in their metal crates would be placed near to the stoves to warm up. Then at playtime we had to drink the horribly tepid milk. At playtime we would kick a ball around and play 'tig' and we would put lumps of ice on the metal flues outside.

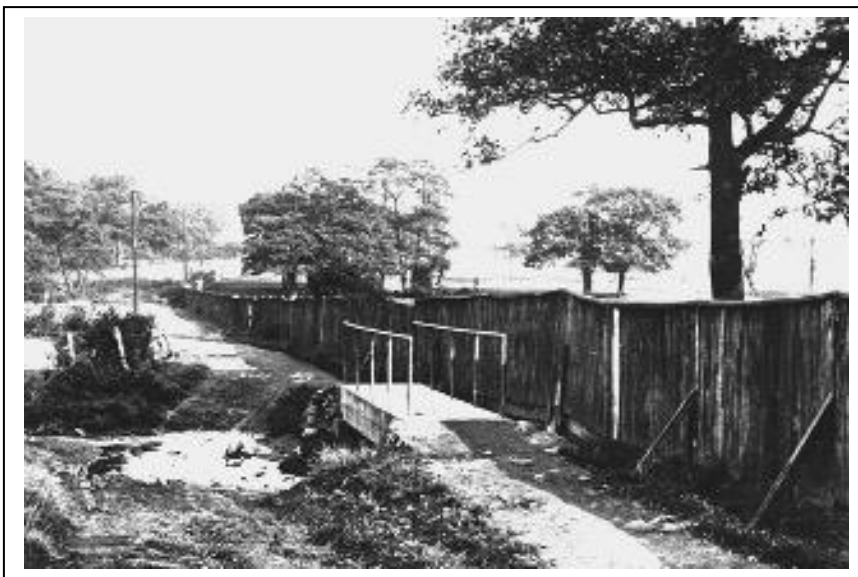
My teachers must all have taught me well because when I was 10 years old I was accepted into the Preparatory department of Solihull School. I received some kind of grant from Warwickshire County Council for transport to get to Solihull. The choice was either the bus fare - although there was no direct service to Solihull, or a new 'sit up and beg' bicycle. I chose the bike and together with several other pupils from Marston Green we rode, often as a group, via Bickenhill and Catherine de Barnes to Solihull, a daily return distance of about 12 miles - a healthy exercise in any weather. The only time we couldn't get through was in the winter of 1947 when snowdrifts blocked the route.

I had a large yellow cape, leggings and hat, fine for rain but not for wind.

One icy day I fell off and twizzled around encased in my cape feeling like a turtle a helpless on its back!"

The path from Wood Lane leading to Chelmsley Woods and the bridge over the stream was where John practised on his new bike.

"I was 10 years old when wheeling my new, and for me somewhat large, bike across this bridge, my bike slipped through the rail. As I didn't want to let it go it dragged me with it into the stream. I remember the shock, to my pride, and going home a bit wet **but I'd still got my 'wheels'.**"



Photograph 81
Meadow Brook at
Wood Lane

This is where John nearly lost his bike.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Back to the War years at Marston Green School - we had a brick air raid shelter above ground and I think one below ground - which I do not remember having to use. But we did have to use the open outside toilets

During the war we local children were entertained a few times by parties arranged by the troops who were at the Canadian Hospital, built next to The Cottage Homes in Coleshill Road. Later this became the Maternity Hospital, and was modernised.

At the end of the war we all received a letter from King George with significant war record dates on the reverse.

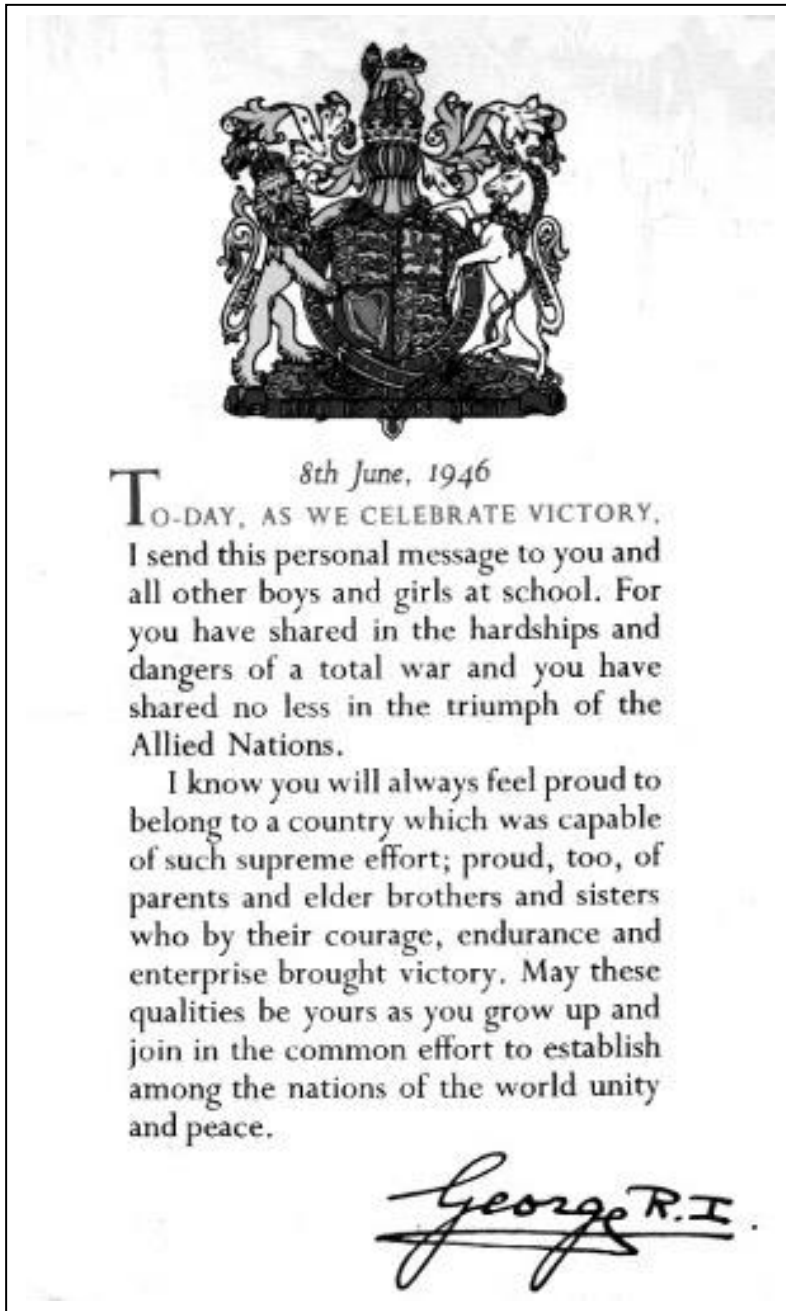


Figure 16
The letter received from King George VI.

Marston Green – A Village Community

During John's wartime childhood he recalls some of the activities that filled his time.

"Toys and books were not plentiful - there were no plastics or computers, but we had jig-saws, board games - Snakes and Ladders, Monopoly etc. and wooden building bricks, and Dinky toy cars. I had a German made clockwork tinplate toy crane which had a mechanical 'joystick' which controlled up or down and turning left or right. It was valuable and would be even more so had I kept it. The crane was bought as a 'penance' by my father, who, in swinging me around by my legs, had let go! This resulted in nothing more than a scar on my nose and much anguish - only to be calmed by buying this wonderful toy which I had seen on the top shelf of a shop in Cromer where we had been on holiday in 1939 or 40.

We also had much 'Blue Peter' type stuff for making 'things' - including a model theatre. These, plus reading - Arthur Ransome and Biggles - kept us occupied when homework or piano practice were **not** 'causing us grief'.

I would help my grandfather get up the potatoes in his garden at 140 Elmdon Lane. He kept his lawn like a Bowling Green and when relatives came we used it for this game.

Also for several of the wartime summers I had great enjoyment from a reconstruction along the rockery in our garden of an '0' gauge model railway layout which had originally belonged to Marston Green residents, Roger Ward and Cyril Driscoll. I still have much of it.

Mr Edmunds - away in the army for much of the war, made his son Peter, with whose Hornby layout we played, a model of Lea Hall Station which was then a brand new 'modern' station. I was very pleased when he gave me a model too. Railways were 'significant' to us".

Despite the war years and the austerity that followed it seems that the youngsters at the time were in a position to remain at home in Marston Green with their families and enjoy growing up with their friends there.

Marston Green – A Village Community

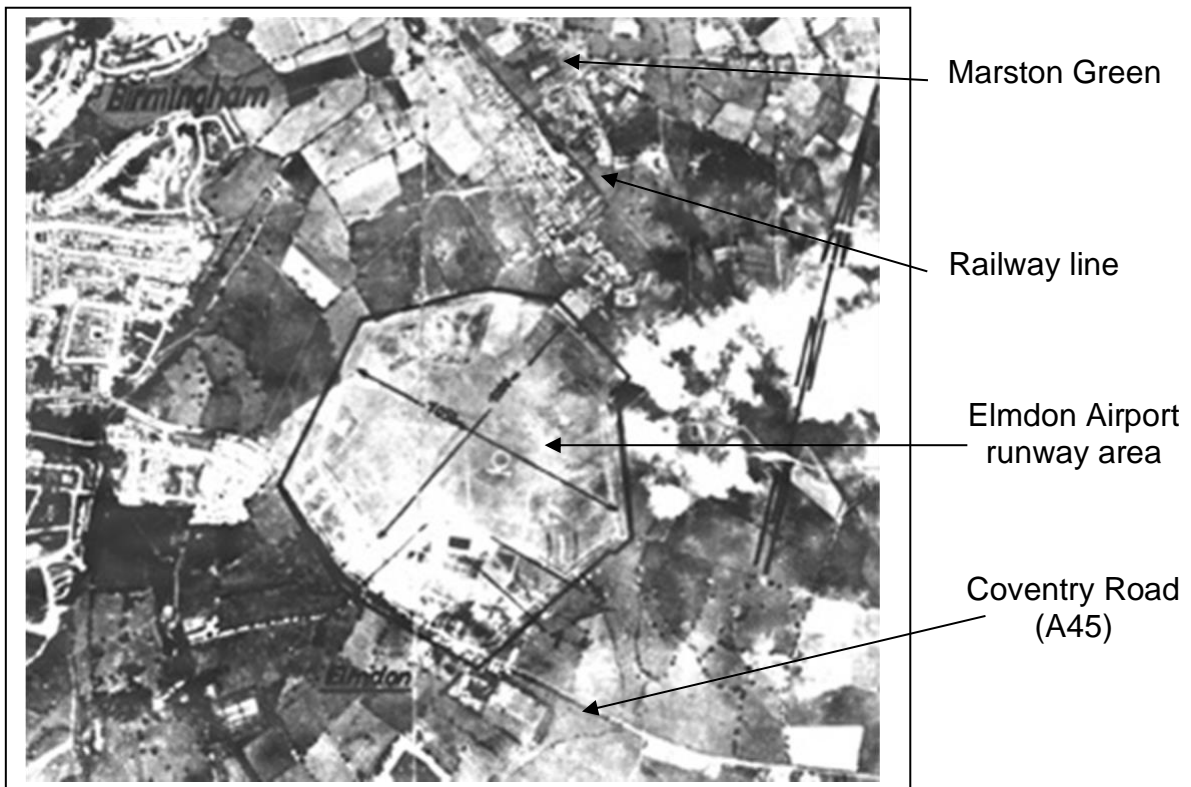
Wartime memories.

These memories from the Second World War are mainly from folk who were children or young teenagers at the time.

The school allotment garden in Elmdon Road, was one thing for which the young people were responsible so that they could play their part in the War effort. They cultivated produce for sale to the local families in the 'Dig for Victory Campaign'.

Obviously the position of Elmdon Airport in relation to Marston Green made the village a target for the German bombers and there were reports of bombs in several areas. Some people remember, when thinking back that many of the bombs that fell in and around the village actually occurred when the major raids on Coventry were happening.

Peter Richards remembers one bomb falling in the field behind his cottage in Chelmsley Lane. It blew out the back windows and damaged the roof. Several bombs fell around Elmdon Lane - with the airport so close, this was hardly surprising. One house near to the railway station was hit. The man of the family, who were in the air raid shelter, had just popped back indoors to make a cup of tea for those in the shelter. He was killed.



Photograph 82 **German wartime reconnaissance map.**

Elmdon Airport is clearly marked in the centre of the picture.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Derrick Hayes remembers a line of bombs falling across from Blackfirs Lane to Bickenhill Road near the Recreation Ground. Derrick and his young friends went across to investigate the craters and on their return were asked by the local policeman how many there were. As they replied 8..... and walked away there was terrific explosion as another bomb blew up where they had been standing a few minutes earlier.

Changes had to be made to the way of life of the locals. John Gardiner's dad had to 'lay up' his car - a Hillman Minx, for the duration of the war. The headlights of the cars had to have covers over with a slit in so that during blackouts the headlights would not illuminate the whole area. John also reports that during the wartime some of the locomotives would have a tarpaulin over the cab to prevent the light from the firebox being seen by enemy aircraft.

Many of the adults in the village who were not called up, formed part of the local rescue services.

The local Home Guard was based at the farm house of Chapel House Farm near the railway station and the Air Raid Wardens, Civil Defence Volunteers and Police Reserve all played their part in making life as safe as possible for the folk of Marston Green. There was a hand grenade and mortar range in the village necessary for training the Home Guard.



Figure 17

**Air Raid Warden Service
information leaflet.**

The ARP, Air Raid Precaution Service, distributed leaflets to the locals giving information regarding how best to deal with any first aid incidents caused by gasses or other hazardous substances.

RHYMED INFORMATION.

If you get a choking feeling and a smell of Musty Hay,
You can bet your bottom dollar that there's Phosgene on the way,
But the smell of bleaching powder will inevitably mean,
That the enemy you're meeting is the gas we call Chlorine,
When your eyes begin a-twitching and for tears you cannot see,
It's not Mother peeling onions but a dose of C.A.P.
If the smell resembles peardrops, then you'd better not delay,
It's not Father sucking toffee, it's that ruddy K.S.K.
If you catch a pungent odour as you're going home to tea,
You can safely put your shirt on it they're using B.B.C.
D.M., D.A. and D.C. emanate the scent of roses,
But despite their pretty perfume they ain't good for human noses.
Tho' for garlic or for onions you've a cultivated taste,
When in War you meet those odours leave the area in haste ;
For it's mustard gas, the hellish stuff that leaves you one big blister,
And in hospital you'll need the kind attention of the Sister.
And lastly, while geraniums look pleasant in a bed,
Beware their smell in War time—if it's Lewisite, you're dead.

Figure 18 Rhymed information from the ARP.
This gave advice about wartime dangers.

These 'Dad's Army' groups were important and like their professional counterparts had to practise their skills regularly.



Photograph 83
The Marston Green Civil
Defence Volunteers practising a
rescue procedure.

FIRST-AID TREATMENT.		
	CHOKING OR LUNG IRRITANTS. PHOSGENE (C.G.)	NOSE GASES OR ARSENICAL SMOKES. CHLORINE.
Protection.	Respirator complete.	Respirator complete
First Aid Treatment.	Rest : Most important. Patient should be a stretcher case. Warmth : To prevent shock and shivering. Oxygen : When breathing becomes embarrassed from oedema of lungs. D.M., D.A., D.C.	As for Phosgene.
Protection, First Aid Treatment. ...	Respirator complete. Usually not needed as symptoms subside after initial tendency to increase, on removal to pure air. REST : FRESH AIR. Remove contaminated clothing and shake it. Wash out mouth and nose with warm water. Assure patient of no ill effects. K.S.K.	C.A.P. Respirator complete. Not usually needed. Face the wind and do not rub eyes. If irritation persists, wash out eyes with warm water or saline solution. (1 teaspoon salt to 1 pint of water). B.B.C.
Protection, First Aid Treatment.	Respirator complete. As for C.A.P. Remove clothing if contaminated by liquid.	Respirator complete. As for C.A.P. Remove clothing if contaminated by liquid.
Protection, Preventive Treatment.	LEWISITE.	
	Respirator for eyes and lungs. Protective clothing for skin. LIQUID. Eyes : As for Mustard Gas but action must be immediate if it is hoped to even mitigate the injury. Skin : Wash thoroughly with soap and water or an alkaline solution. VAPOUR : Vapour contamination to be treated as for liquid. NOTE : SPEED IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN ALL PREVENTATIVE TREATMENT. Lewisite Blister contain Arsenic and should be evacuated by qualified person.	
Protection, Preventive Treatment.	MUSTARD GAS.	
	Respirator for eyes and lungs. Protective clothing for skin. LIQUID. Eyes : Irrigate immediately with warm water and repeat treatment frequently. After irrigation instil a drop of medicinal paraffin in the eye. Skin : Four methods : (a) Bleach ointment ; (b) Bleach cream ; (c) Soap and water. (d) Solvents, as petrol, paraffin, etc. VAPOUR. Eyes : As for liquid in the eye. Skin : Well scrub the body with soap and water	

Figure 19 ARP First Aid Treatment

Along with medical advice as in the card above, the ARP and Civil Defence Volunteers were ready to act in the event of a real emergency.

John Gardiner continues: "I remember hearing on the 'wireless' at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning, September 3rd 1939, the now famous announcement from Neville Chamberlain that we were at war with Germany. It was a beautiful day and we were in our back room with the French window open. I was only 5 years old but I remember feeling that it was somehow 'significant'. On the wall was a well-known photo of Churchill in his 'bulldog' pose.

My sister Mary was born in May 1938, just before the war started. My father had made some blackout panels of thick tarred light proof paper to fit the kitchen windows and when the air raid siren went, usually at night, we would both have to go downstairs and sit by the residual warmth and light of the range in the kitchen.

Marston Green – A Village Community

By 1940 when the air raids commenced, we were often put to sleep under the stairs, this being the recommended safest place. I can still remember the sloping ceiling, the ticking and slight gas smell, as we were beside the gas meter, and my mother's anxiety when one night several bombs were dropped across the rail line. One of the bombs partially demolished a house at the back of the Free Church. We feared that they might have hit the 'old' church in Station Road being used as the Ambulance post where my father was as a member of The Local Defence Volunteers. This preceded the Home Guard.

Later we had a Morrison Shelter inside the house occupying nearly half of the back room. It had a large plate steel top, on which we could dance. There was wire mesh around the sides - ideal for playing 'shop' and other imaginative games. We had two mattresses. These were roll up khaki covers, filled in sections with black granulated rubber. They lasted a further 50 years!

My father joined the local Rescue Service and was a first aider and drove the ambulance. He was also a quartermaster in the Home Guard Unit associated with his employment in the City of Birmingham Water Department. Being a keen musician he continued playing saxophone with a dance band in Coventry, sometimes playing until 2 or 3 o'clock, and once or twice walked back to Marston Green, carrying his instrument, along the rail track, stepping from sleeper to sleeper, when 'enemy action' prevented train movements.

I remember seeing the red glow in the sky from the Coventry Blitz in November 1940".



Photograph 84 **Air Raid Precautions Modified Car.**

This vehicle, converted into a makeshift ambulance was the means by which the ARP would move casualties to a safe place where they could be treated.

Marston Green – A Village Community

John continues: “Few bombs fell in Marston Green but a delayed action one did blow up early one morning down Elmdon Lane near Land Lane. I picked up a ‘prized’ piece of shrapnel in our back garden. Some incendiaries fell on Land Lane Bridge and were smothered by a sandbag by Mr Hancox, who was a warden of the ARP I think. He lived just on the corner. I do recollect though my excitement at seeing, from my Grandmas` at 140 Elmdon Lane, a German aircraft flying low over Elmdon Airport, and dropping a bomb”.

As a young, new schoolboy John remembers in the road outside the school, one dim November lunchtime, seeing his first film.

“This was projected by the Army Kinematograph Corps, onto a screen on their truck. It was about the primitive conditions of life of the Serbs and Croats and our allies, the Russians.

One day I had to take my new gas mask to school, in a small 6inch square cardboard box, to be shown how to put it on. Not realising the seriousness of the situation we were all amused by our appearances - peering through the eyepieces and with the large air filter at the front like a horse feeding bag”.

At the end of the war, memories of the Marston Green Rescue Service and its ‘goings on’ were ‘burlesqued’ at Victory revues put on at the Village Hall - the centre of local entertainment then. My father and friends produced them and he also designed the two programmes, using only a sharp point on a Gestetner wax master”.

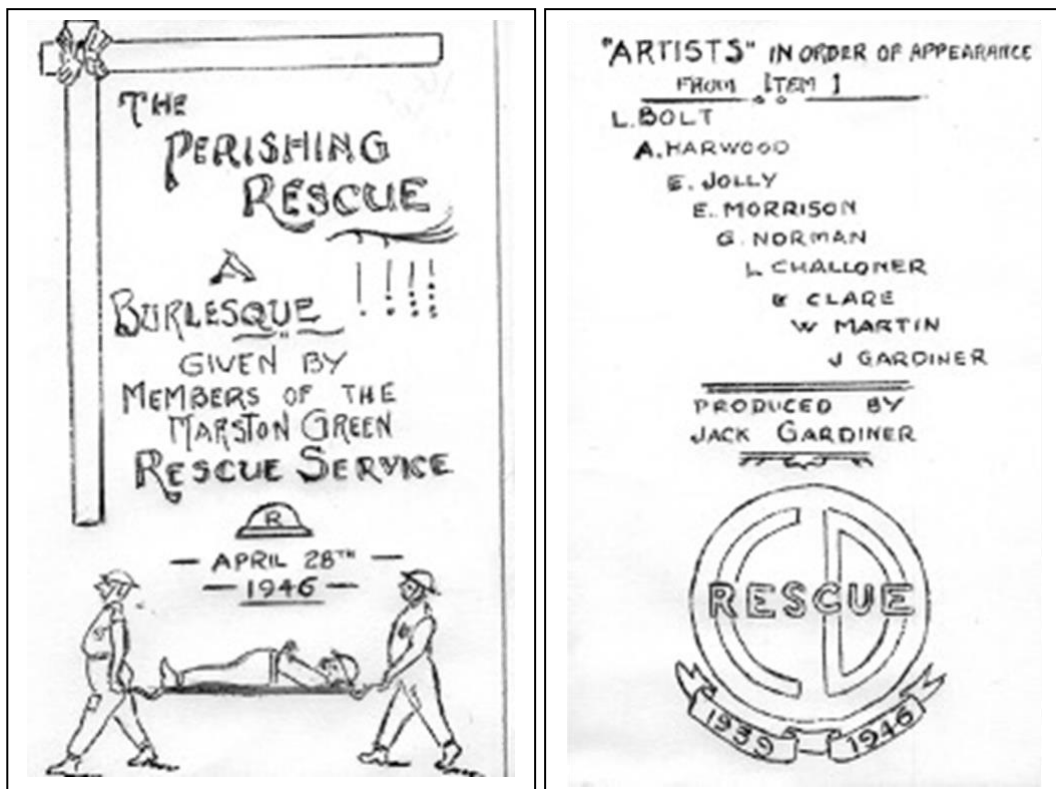


Figure 20 Revue Programme produced by Jack Gardiner.

One other lasting memory of the wartime for the Gardiner and other households was the need to use things economically.

John remembers:

“The steel corner pieces and the 8’x4’ top of the Morrison Shelter were very heavy and were kept by my father ‘in case they should come in useful’. It was an attitude ingrained in us at that time by the wartime necessity to ‘make do and mend’.

‘Recycling’ isn’t new !

My father later took it with him when he and my mother and grandmother Upton moved to 52 Elmdon Lane. It may well still be there in the garage!

It is just a thought that the shelter might have been the ‘recycled’ iron railings from Canterbury House, the remains of which lie in the blue capping stones of the front walls of 89 and 91 Elmdon Lane, as iron and aluminium had to be collected for ‘the war effort’.

Audrey Price (nee Green) adds:

‘We lived at the far end of Elmdon Lane during the war and I remember watching the trailers of the German bombers turning above Marston Green for the run into Coventry. They also sent a pile of incendiaries all across the Airport and our father told us to get out and go to the top of the back garden. Much to our disgust, three 500lb bombs fell in the back field (now Digby Drive) and we got covered with clods of soil - it was part of a stick of five bombs. One of the others landed in Land Lane and another in Elmdon Lane’. (Possibly the same ones as mentioned earlier by John Gardiner).

‘As a teenager it was all very exciting. Several of us went to the local Youth Club and Peggy Smith the local midwife and Mrs Blizzard held a Keep Fit class once a week in the old Village Hall. There was always a dance held on Saturday night and it was well attended by the Canadians who had a big hospital, turned into Marston Green Maternity Hospital in Coleshill Road after the war’.

Chapter 10 The Church Communities

St Leonard's Church in Elmdon Road and the Free Church in Land Lane have existed alongside each other for the best part of 80 years.

They have both played a large part in the lives of young and old within the village.

Tales relating to both of the Churches are told here. Regular monthly editions of Criss Cross, the Church magazine report on church activities.

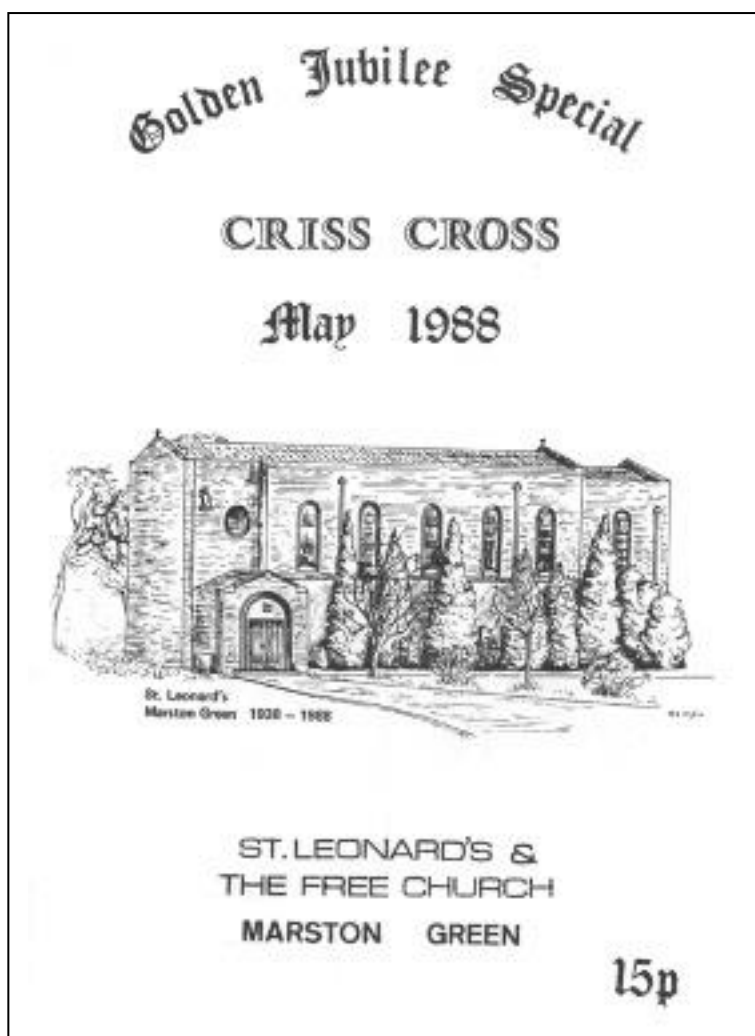


Figure 21 Criss Cross Magazine.

This edition reported on the Golden Jubilee Celebrations at St Leonard's Church in 1988.

Memories of Church by Margaret Birch.

Margaret Birch has been a member of the St Leonard's Church congregation and choir since her early years. Here she recalls some of her memories.

"My earliest memories were of Sunday School, to which I went when I was five. It was 1941 and the vicarage was the house called 'Elmcroft' in Coleshill Heath Road. The vicar, Mr Sproule used to collect us children in his Austin Seven, accompanied by Mrs Sproule, and take us down to the church. We normally walked back. Our age group was accommodated in the north west corner. We used to sit on hassocks or on a rug and listen to bible stories. Sometimes we went to the house of Mrs Elliott (16 Bickenhill Road) instead. At six we transferred to Mrs Barnetts class. Mrs Barnett lived in a large cottage on what is now the road called Oaklands. I remember her once telling us that the cottage was 175 years old. It was full of furniture and pictures and the atmosphere was homely and relaxed. Mrs Barnett accompanied our hymns on her piano. There was an orchard behind the cottage and my sister recalls that just before the annual summer party Mr Barnett would scythe the grass between the trees and leave plenty of hay to roll around in and play. I remember how we all went on the train to Berkswell once or twice and had a party, including a picnic and various races, in a field there, and how long the walk between the field and the station seemed.

Sunday School for children aged eight and over took place in the front rows of the congregation seats. I am grateful to a number of ladies for some excellent tuition over those years: Mrs Castelow from the Radleys and Mary and Molly Talamo. Mr Sproule himself also taught us. I always found him interesting, but, unlike the ladies, he was not a trained teacher and he was not able to command universal attention as they were. I suspect some of his words went above the heads of one or two of his listeners!

At thirteen we were encouraged to be confirmed and Sunday School for people of thirteen and over was replaced by the Youth fellowship, which took place in the Vestry (now adopted by the Bowling Club for their clubroom). By the time I had reached this age Mr Sproule had asked Dad to take on the Youth Fellowship. (This happened shortly after Dad stopped working seven days a week). Dad was not keen to have me in the Youth fellowship so I went to help Mrs Barnett with the Sunday School. By this time she was teaching all the under - eights in the Old Church. I mainly taught the six year olds and finally left when I joined the choir in 1953.

At Sunday School we used to receive a stamp every time we attended and we used to stick these in a special album. Each year after Christmas we had a party in the old Village Hall and prizes (usually books) were awarded for good attendance. Another annual event in the village hall was the pre-Christmas Bazaar (the forerunner of the November Craft Fair), for which my father used to compose an introductory piece of doggerel, mentioning key local names and events.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Smaller church functions took place in the Old Church and I remember one Social at which we were invited to wear a homemade newspaper hat in a fancy dress parade. Dad coddged together a sort of cushion and called himself 'Henry VIII' and won first prize (for humour and originality rather than artistry, it must be said).

As a Sunday School teacher I usually found myself accompanying the hymns on the piano, so, when the adult church choir was looking for new members, I was invited to audition. The choir, it seemed, had experienced a revival with the appointment of Mr George Cutler as organist and choirmaster in 1946, but by the time I joined he had been succeeded by a brilliant and humorous music student at Birmingham University, called Brien Masters. At that stage I was the youngest member of the adult choir, but I soon made friends with Jean Russell from Lyndon Croft and Janet Black, who when she joined, was a year younger than me. In those years the choir sang at Mattins, Holy Communion services (apart from the 8.00a.m. one) and at Evensong, so we were kept busy”.



Photograph 85 **Circa 1950, St Leonard's Church Choir.**

Over the years the choir was led by a variety of excellent musicians including on more than one occasion sixth form boys. Under the able guidance of these talented musicians the choir was able to tackle some quite demanding church music, including the occasional six-part motet. Margaret continues: “For most church choirs the musical highlight of the year comes at Christmas and in those days we copied the format of the King's College Service of Nine Lessons and Carols exactly.

Marston Green – A Village Community

We also went carol singing round the village and I recall two occasions when we finished with mince pies and hot drinks at the home of Mr and Mrs Bulpitt, East Woodhay in Bickenhill Road. Under Brien we also sang carols at Hampton Manor, in Hampton-in-Arden, where he then worked. It was a home for 'mongol' girls and I was struck by the appreciation shown by the girls and their ability to remember each of us by name from year to year.

From time to time over the years we have had a Parish outing and some times the choir has sung evensong in a country church which did not have a choir of its own, in return for which the grateful parishioners have treated us to refreshments afterwards. Places which stand out in my memory are Stevington (Bedfordshire), Crowland Abbey near Peterborough, Tardebigge (near Bromsgrove), Over Whitacre and Shustoke. We have also supported many of the Diocesan or Deanery Services organised by the Royal School of Church Music, singing a cathedral type evensong after an afternoon's training by one of the RSCM staff. These events have taken us to Worcester Cathedral, Tewkesbury Abbey and to Birmingham Cathedral (St Philip's) as well as to churches in various districts of Birmingham and Solihull".



Photograph 86 **1957 St Leonard's Church outing to Crowland Abbey.**

Brien Masters (organist and choirmaster) is standing at the right end of the back row. The gentleman half hidden behind a lady's hat on the back row is Rev Roy Sproule. Margaret Birch stands third from the left of the 2nd row.

In conclusion, Margaret also mentions The Folk Mass Group which was started in the middle 1970's when Jo Evans was the vicar. The group sings music of a more evangelical nature. Some of the traditional choir members belong to it and it undertakes outside engagements. It joins with the traditional choir on important musical occasions, such as the Carol Services and sometimes even leads the Sunday morning worship.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Reverend Cuthbertson remembers.

The Reverend 'Bill' Cuthbertson, who was Minister at the Free Church in the early 1950's remembers the time he and he wife Dorothy spent in Marston Green. They now live in their retirement in Huddersfield.

"We arrived in Marston Green in 1949 and left in 1956. Our first visit to meet the folk and 'test the water' was in 1948. German Prisoners of War had been digging potatoes in fields by Mackadown Lane. The village looked its attractive self and seemed self contained which would help in ministry.

Our house was in Elmdon Lane and had the pillar box gate posts, relics of the old manor.

It was almost inevitable that I became Chaplain at the same time of the Homes (Chelmsley Hospital) and the Maternity Hospital, which meant fitting in weekly visits and other duties as they arose. Miss Maxwell, Matron at the Maternity Hospital became a close friend and she and some of the nurses visited the Church from time to time. Each week an average of 70 babies were born at the Hospital. At the Homes, I served Communion and the lads who came along seemed attracted by a new face and a handshake at the door.

In the Free Church we started a Darby and Joan Club and another for Young Wives. These were both popular and Winifred Chalkley organised the Darby and Joan and my wife Dorothy looked after the Young Wives".



Photograph 87 The Marston Green Young Wives Guild in the 1960's.

A photograph in The Coleshill Chronicle in the 1960's shows the Marston Green Young Wives Guild, which by that time had 20 members. It reported: 'In the picture are the President, Mrs Margaret Cuthbertson (no relation), Mrs Onions, secretary, Mrs Griffin, treasurer and Mesdames Wheeler, Teague, Swindell, Davis, Smallwood, Willey and Brelsford'.

Marston Green – A Village Community

“One of the great Annual events was the Autumn Fair. People cooked and knitted and Matron made toffee apples. It was a village affair in effect.

One of the unforgettable aspects of our Sunday services would be the Deacon who stood at the door. When the prayers were too long he rattled the keys in his pocket!

After a few years we agreed to see if a Sunday School would take on in Tile Cross. Birmingham Council established the area of Tile Cross to house people from the slums of the City and there were stories of coal being kept in the bath! However the Sunday School proved acceptable. Mr and Mrs Stentiford who lived nearby were the founder teachers, but a member of our church, Mr White joined us and when we left in 1956 he administered the School. Eventually during Reg Harvey’s ministry the Sunday School became Tile Cross Church.

One of the characters I remember was ‘Shanty Israel’ and his bike. His home was a lean-to shed at Moat House Farm. He had a vivid notice on his handlebars, warning of the coming ‘Day of Judgement’. He went down to the Bull Ring in Birmingham on market day each week. I think local people fed him”.

The Women’s Institute in the mid 1950’s reported on several of the Clubs and Activities in Marston Green – their report on the Darby and Joan Club gives a view of a what they referred to as ‘A Happy Fellowship’

“As an antidote to the pessimism and gloom of our time, **Marston Green Darby and Joan Club** is an example of goodwill and happy fellowship. Every Tuesday afternoon it meets in the Free Church Hall”.

Mrs Winifred Chalkley wrote:- “At a preliminary meeting in September 1950, seven people attended. Later we had a tea party with about 25 there and from that small beginning it has gone from strength to strength and now (1956) the membership is nearly 80.

The Secret of Marston Green Darby and Joan Club

The secret of its success lies largely in the simplicity of the meeting with no formality and everybody happy over a game of cards, a chat, tea and sometimes a sing song. For those who do not play cards there are other games.

The outings organised each year have been very well supported and each year we are hoping to have a holiday by the sea. Some of the members decorated the Free Church for the Harvest Festival and very beautiful it looked and was very much admired.

Marston Green – A Village Community

No matter what the weather quite a number attend the meetings and those who cannot otherwise attend there is a taxi. Birthdays are always an event and usually mean an extra cake for tea. A choir has been formed which has competed at the Musical Festival in Warwick”.



Photograph 88 **The Darby and Joan holiday to Paignton in the early 1950's.**

The Darby and Joan Club was open for everyone to join. The only necessary qualification being that the members must be 60 years of age or over and that they must remember: **'Life begins at Sixty'**.

The Young Wives Guild and Darby and Joan Clubs in which Rev. and Mrs Cuthbertson were involved continued to thrive for many years after they left Marston Green. Several group competitions in the Midlands area had representations from these Marston Green activities and were often met with a good deal of success.



Figure 22

Marston Green Darby and Joan Club.

They achieved success at a Handicrafts competition held at Alton Towers in 1960.

Activities for youngsters.

Cubs, Scouts, Brownies and Girl Guides existed in Marston Green as well as many activities associated with the two Churches. There were plenty of organised activities for the youngsters.

The Free Church had 'Ropeholders' one evening a week, the activities were mainly of a handicraft nature. The group started and finished with a hymn and a prayer.

In 1932, when Peter Richards was about five years old, two of the Free Church Sunday school teachers, Miss Driscoll and Miss Martin introduced him and his brother John to the Sunday School.

Peter recalls:

'The Free Church Anniversary Day was a special event, the Sunday School classes were encouraged to join the choir for this day. I remember going to choir practice one evening a week and a choirmaster was recruited to take charge. We learnt special songs and hymns.

On the Anniversary Day we sang on a raised platform in front of the congregation, augmented by mums and dads who did not usually attend Church. There was a prize giving for regular attendance at the Sunday School and tea with sandwiches and cakes followed.

Perhaps the most joyous occasion for the children was the annual summer Picnic Outing. I only recall them as sunny days, when all the parents contributed sandwiches and cakes. The Sunday School children were ferried out to Packington by as many dads who had a car to offer for this service.

About 1940, my friend Jack Gallahar learnt of a Fellowship meeting on Sunday evenings at the Free Church. Jack's mother said that although it was intended for adults we should go along and see if we could attend. We did this and a new chapter opened in our Church life. The meetings began with a hymn and a prayer, followed by a discussion on a topic with a religious angle. Jack and I were about 14 or 15 years of age and so did not contribute a great deal to the discussions, but we enjoyed it and felt accepted. The Miss Driscoll mentioned earlier had by now married and she and her husband Mr Ellis, were leading members of the Fellowship.

The Minister at this time was a Mr Buckley, who was young and enthusiastic and amongst other things organised Carol Singing in some of the village streets at Christmas - before we were bombed. The Fellowship all took part in this and Mr Buckley who had links with the Canadian Military Hospital persuaded a couple of soldiers to join us as well'.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Peter revisited Marston Green in June 2000 which triggered a further memory about the Carol singing, 'When walking down Bickenhill Road I remembered one of our party John Gardiner didn't sing but he accompanied us on his saxophone. When we went to sing down there we paused to sing outside the Bulpitt's House. Someone opened the door and invited the whole lot of us in for mince pies and something to drink, which made a pleasant break and engendered Christmas goodwill to all of us before we continued on our way.'

A note from the Author - if I may recall a Carol singing memory of my own. 'When I attended the Free Church in the late 1950's and into the 1960's, I became a Sunday School teacher and I was a very enthusiastic member of the Junior Choir and often sang solos at Sunday morning services or for any of the regular 'Special services'. I never did become a member of the Senior Choir, but my one wish was to join them at the annual Christmas Eve Carol service at the Maternity Hospital. Every year I asked to go, but whether it was because I was too young or what I don't remember, but the answer was always 'no you can't come'.

Finally when I was about 16 the 'yes' came that I had waited for, for so long. I will always remember the crib set up on a little pedestal in a corner with a newly knitted matinee set ready for the first baby to born on Christmas Day. The nurses had decorated the hospital and shared mince pies and a drink with us all. We were even allowed a little peek at some of the latest arrivals. It was worth all the years of waiting'.

Back to the early war years, when a group of the 'Village Elders' decided to call a meeting of parents and children interested in forming a Youth Club. A committee of parent and children representatives was formed and the Youth Club began. It was held at the Free Church. Membership cards and rules were issued, one of which was that every member should attend Sunday School or worship at least once a month, but it became amended to read that it should be a Church of England Sunday service once a month. As a result of this amended rule certain members who came from the Free Church found themselves leaving the Youth Club.

When Rev Cuthbertson was the Minister from 1949 onwards, there was a Youth Club attached to the Free Church, which John Gardiner Jnr. attended where they played table tennis and records and even had the occasional Square Dance. The club was run by Mr Organ amongst others. John remembers Dick Huddleston being the Free Church Sunday School Superintendent for many years when his family attended. Len Martin was the choirmaster who rehearsed John's Sunday School Anniversaries with encouragement to 'open our mouths and not sing through clenched teeth'. Later John's father took over as choirmaster.

'At the Sunday School parties we 'spun the plate' etc but the highlight was when Cyril Driscoll would set up his projector and treat us to Disney cartoons - Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and Goofy as well as Pop Eye.

Marston Green – A Village Community

His wife Peggy and helpers would somehow provide wonderful cakes and jellies - a real treat in the '40's. We also had an annual summer outing at Wright's farm along Bickenhill Lane'.

Again from the Author "Into the 1960's my brother Alan and I attended the Free Church and took part wholeheartedly in the many activities that went along with plans for a new church building and the ideas of the young enthusiastic Minister at the time, Rev. Reg Harvey.

We could buy a brick, onto which we wrote our names and were then allowed to put it into the footings of the new building. This all went towards making us feel part of this exciting project. We could even buy an engraved wooden mallet to tap the brick into place. It all helped to swell the building fund.

We attended Sunday School and under the tutelage of Peggy Driscoll, the Sunday School Superintendent, enjoyed many interesting events. Every Easter we would go by train to Hampton to pick primroses from the railway embankment for little floral arrangements on each of the windowsills around the new church building.

The junior choir took part in the regular Sunday morning services and the younger members of the congregation were invited to stay into the first part of the service, before moving quietly on to Sunday School while the Sermon took place. Anniversary and Children's Day services still continued. New hymns were always fun to learn and in my later years as a Sunday School teacher (mid 60's) we were producing Nativity Plays at Christmas in the Church, with the little children from the 'Beginners' class being dressed up to represent the characters and me reading the story. The audiences of proud parents were always generous in their praise for our efforts.

A variety of fundraising events continued with Peggy and her son Jimmy Driscoll, my brother Alan Baugh and Roger Organ, for many years collecting newspapers for recycling.



Photograph 89

A lorry loaded with waste paper in the early 1960's.

Sunday School Christmas parties still continued with a variety of games and fun and the annual Prizegiving for good attendance was always popular.

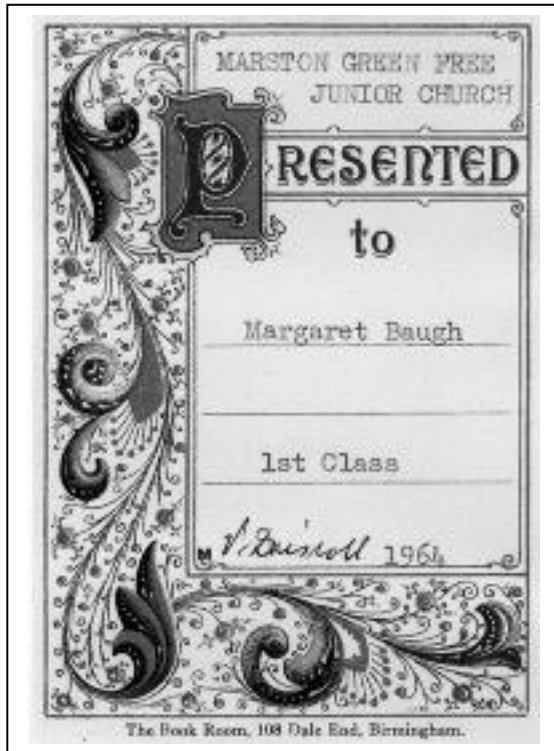


Figure 23

**Marston Green Junior Free Church
prize giving Certificate 1964**

Christian Aid Week was always a time for the young people from both churches to collect as much money as possible. In May 1965 we worked together and built a representation of a Chinese Refugee Hut out of old bits of wood and cardboard at the bus shelter in the village centre. The idea was to live there for a week with no more in the way of supplies and shelter than the refugees themselves would have. Money was collected from passing passengers and locals in the village. A few days were missed from school for those ‘living’ there.”

An article in a local newspaper reported:

“The hut is being erected to draw attention to the millions of less privileged people in the world. It is an attempted copy of a Chinese shack made up of boxes, flattened oil drums, boards and cardboard. Nothing has been bought and all the necessities have been provided through the goodwill of villagers and the operation is co-ordinated by the village youth clubs.

The Chinese shack itself is very cramped with a bed made up of boards resting on boxes occupying most of the room. These boards serve the purpose of chairs and tables as well as the bed,most of the belongings are scattered on the floor or hung on nails”.

The Refugee Hut was certainly noticed as it stood, scruffily, beside the bus shelter.



Photograph 90 **Preparing to build the Chinese Refugee Hut in the village centre**

The following year a sponsored walk to Stratford on Avon was organised - through the night! We (young people and responsible adults) set off one Friday night from the village at midnight and walked cross country towards Knowle and then along the Stratford Road arriving in Stratford by about 8.00 a.m. I remember every one of those 25 miles! My sponsorship contribution raised almost £11.00 - an enormous amount in those days.

The sight of those who chose not to walk and had come to collect us and return our tired limbs home, was very welcome.

These were exciting times with everyone working together. The majority of activities were still occurring from within the village. It was considered safe to be out and about after dark and on the whole everyone still looked out for everyone else.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Fellowship in Marston Green

In February 2000 Ray Hornsby reported on the
St Leonard's Men's Fellowship.

"It is now 19 years since the Rev C.J. Evans left Marston Green for congregations and pastures new. The present congregation of St Leonards and the community of Marston Green, still benefit from a number of initiatives that he took during his ministry here, eg The Folk Mass Group; links with St James, Freemont, California; the occasional visit by elements of the California State Girls Choir and the St Leonard's Men's Fellowship which he established in 1974.

The objectives of the Fellowship were, and still are, to provide a regular opportunity for all the men of St Leonard's, together with other members of the community as guests, to meet socially and, through a program of invited speakers, to learn more about the experiences and work of others especially those who in some way serve the community. Links with other Men's Fellowships have been established in particular with Dorridge & Packington (Leicestershire).

A highlight of each year's program is the Ladies Night in December which often had elements of homespun entertainment guaranteed to bring tears of laughter from the audience and tears of despair from the producer!



Photograph 91

St Leonard's Men's Fellowship.

One of their evening activities provided entertainment for all.

Marston Green – A Village Community

For some years an annual Crib Tournament was held for the Charles Belcher Cup. In earlier years an annual Tennis & Bar-b-Que event was held at Coleshill School. This has been replaced by a Sunday Afternoon Social Bowling event on the bowling green at the rear of the church. A Beer & Skittles evening at a suitable hostelry is also a fairly regular annual event. The links with other Men's Fellowships consist of Annual Quiz Evenings and the occasional Games Evening.

Over the years the Fellowship has used a number of venues for its regular meetings: Southalls Pavilion, The Birmingham Welsh Rugby Sports Club, The Marston Green Cricket Club and currently the Marston Green Social Club. By a strange coincidence all these venues happened to be licensed premises.

For many years the Fellowship has annually adopted a charity, either local or national with local associations, which it supports from the proceeds of its membership subscriptions and proceeds from its various social events. Wherever possible a speaker from the supported charity is invited to talk to the Fellowship about the work of the charity”.

St Leonard's Ladies' Fellowship.

Mrs Shirley Evers has shared recollections of the St Leonard's Ladies' Fellowship, she writes:

'Our fellowship started in March 1973 (after our branch of Mothers Union closed) with a small group of women who wanted to continue to meet together to share their love for the church and concern for each other and the community. As we go forward into the new millennium, who could have imagined we would still be meeting, once a month and now with a membership of over 50.

Looking back over 27 years, we have shared so many happy times together. We have listened to many interesting speakers. Some have caused us to rock with laughter and others have made us think long and hard about serious issues. We have enjoyed our summer outings and garden parties and in more recent years, our New Year Lunches.

The fellowship is open to ladies of all ages and is not confined to members of St Leonard's Church. We always have an interesting and varied programme, something for everyone and all will be ensured of a warm welcome'.



Photograph 92 **1992 Ladies' Fellowship Teddy Bears' Picnic.**
It was held in the Courtyard at the Free Church.



Photograph 93 **1999 St Leonard's Ladies' Fellowship.**

The Church Mouse Charity Shop.

Shirley Evers recalls the development of the Church Mouse in Elmdon Road.

“In September 1993, thanks to Hilda and Charles Elliott who made the small premises adjoining their cottage in Elmdon Road available to us, members of St Leonard’s Church were able to open a small shop. The shop sells clothes, bric - a - brac etc to raise money to help with the fabric of the church and many other local and national charities.

After the saying ‘As Poor as a Church Mouse’ we decided that would be the name for our shop. One of our friends made us a “mouse” complete with pockets hanging out of his overalls to place in the window.

Mrs Molly Sproule, the wife of the first Vicar of St Leonard’s, opened the shop on Thursday 2nd September 1993.



Photograph 94 The official opening of The Church Mouse in September 1993

People have been so generous and have given us many lovely things to sell. It is always a thrill to open up the black bags and to bring out the treasures. We haven’t found a Rembrandt yet, but who knows? Ladies clothes that are up to date are always popular. I well remember one dear lady holding up a blouse and asking, “Do you have this in pink?” I said we would do our best to get one!

Marston Green – A Village Community

We couldn't run the shop without our band of volunteers who give so freely of their time and talents or without our loyal friends and customers who have supported us so well over the years. I feel the Church Mouse now has a firm place in our community. A place where laughter or Sympathy can be shared and a cup of tea is always available.

We may be as poor as the proverbial Church Mouse, but we are rich in love and happiness”.



Photograph 95

The Church Mouse Charity Shop.



Photograph 96

The Marston Green Church Mouse.

Chapter 11 Clubs and Activities.

Many clubs have existed over the years in Marston Green.

Several have been in existence for many years and the stories told here relate to just a few of the clubs.

New clubs over the years have replaced old, but the community spirit within all the groups remains. The Evergreens is one of the more recently formed clubs.



Photograph 97 **Marston Evergreens meeting in February 2000.**

The talents of the people who organised and joined in with the clubs and activities over the years are fondly remembered. Skills such as those acquired at the Model Engineering Club must have helped guide some folk towards their future careers. A few of the older established Clubs and activities are reported here.

Marston Green – A Village Community

First Marston Green Scout Group

Mr John Swindell and Mr Chris French have recalled some of the history relating to Scouting in Marston Green.

'Sometime in 1925 a number of young men got together with a view to starting a Scout Troop and Wolf Cub Pack in Marston Green. These included Wilf Martin, Dick Huddleston, George Jackman and I believe a Mr Clifford, who became the local District Commissioner in the early 1930's and again after the war.

A Scout Troop and a Wolf Cub Pack were started and registered as the 1st Marston Green Scout Group in 1926 in the Yardley District of Birmingham. It flourished and as Scouting grew joined what became the Coleshill District of Warwickshire. A Rover Crew was formed for the over 18 age group and meetings were held in the vestry at the back of the old Free Church in Land Lane.

In 1935 the Group had the opportunity of building its own headquarters on land fronting Elmdon Road owned by St Leonard's Church (where St Leonard's Close is now). An appeal was launched in August 1935 for funds to enable the building to be completed'.



Figure 24 The leaflet asking for help to finish the building of the Scout Hut in 1935

Marston Green – A Village Community

An appeal had been sent out in early 1934 to all the homes in the village asking for contributions to complete the building of the New Scout Hut. By mid 1935, £33 had already been raised and this had enabled the building to reach roof level, but a further £60 was the sum required to complete the job. For King George V Silver Jubilee Celebration in 1935 it was decided to send out a further appeal letter requesting help with raising this final sum.

The Boy Scout movement was very popular at this time and the King and the Prince of Wales were keen to promote the ethos of Scouting.

H M King George V said “May the Scout Movement go from strength to strength in development and prosperity.” H R H Prince of Wales reiterated these thoughts and added, “They are doing most valuable work for their country and for the peace of the World”.

The letter sent from ‘The Marston Green Boy Scout’s Committee Appeal Fund’ acknowledged the £33 already raised and said that it had enabled them to commence erecting the structure on land kindly provided by the Church Council. The letter invited local folk to visit the site to view the progress and hard work already put into the job by the Rovers and Scouts. The additional £60 was needed to erect the fourth side of the building, put on the roof and fit out the interior of the structure.

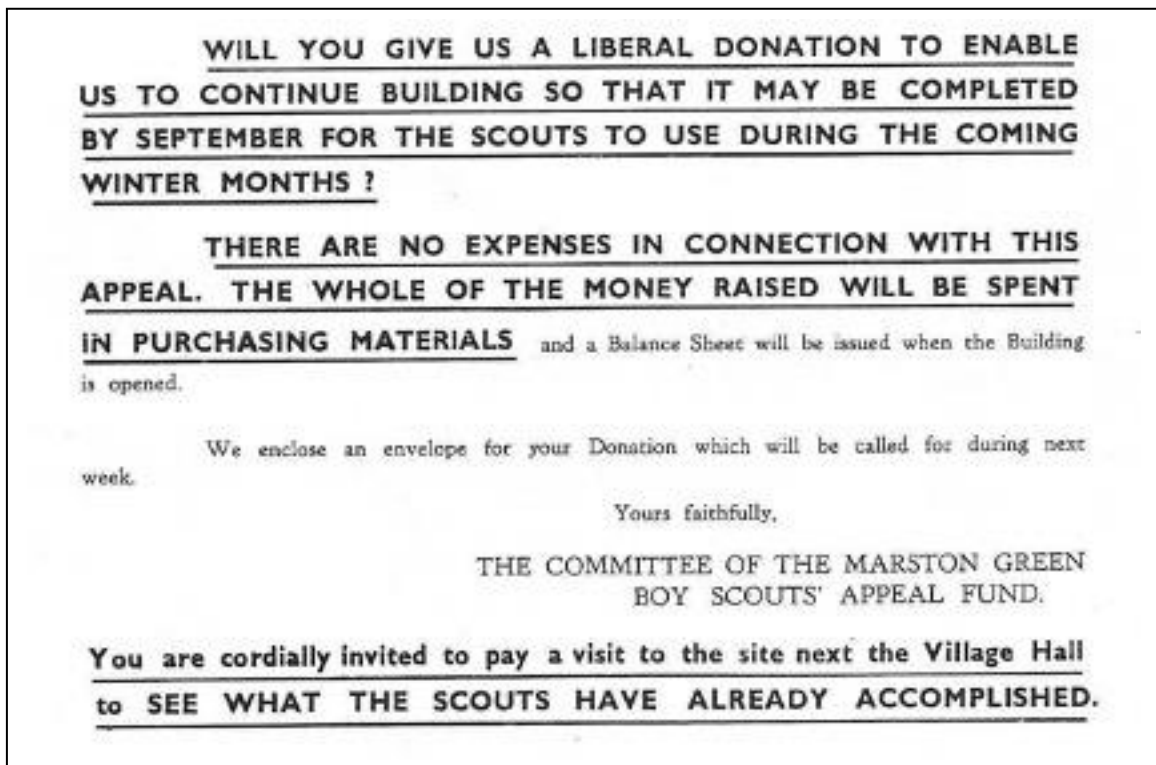


Figure 25 An appeal for funds to build the Scout Hut.

Part of the letter sent to the local population

Marston Green – A Village Community

Once completed the Cubs and Scouts, Girl Guides and Brownies used this building until the land was sold in the middle 1960's.

'During the 1930's the Scout Group was very active until the Second World War put a stop to some of the activities like camping. It was also handicapped by a lack of leaders as they were called up to serve their country The Troop carried on throughout the war led by enthusiastic teenagers. After the war the Troop was very strong and then folded through lack of leadership, although the Cubs continued to meet.

Very early in the 1950's John James came to Marston Green and restarted the Scout Troop and by the mid 50's the Rover Crew was reformed. One of the Crew's last acts in 1966 was to introduce the Blood Transfusion Service visits to Marston Green twice a year. These visits continue to the present day.

The Group Committee of this time soon became involved once again with raising money to construct a new headquarters on land leased to it by the Village Hall Trustees. The Gala Day was introduced with Fancy Dress Parades and competitions, decorated floats and fund raising stalls'.



Figure 26 An early Scouts Gala Day Poster.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Mr Swindell continues: “The new brick Scout headquarters were completed on their present site and were opened by the Warwickshire County Commissioner, The Earl of Aylesford in October 1971.

The Scout band was reformed about 1965 and makes regular appearances in the village, at the Gala and on Remembrance Sunday. For some years now members of the Guide movement have also played in the band”.



Photograph 98 The Scout Band in the mid 1980's.

On this occasion they were performing at the National Exhibition Centre.

Members of the Scout Group have taken part in various international events over the years such as: Scout Jamborees, International gatherings of Scouts from many countries in Holland, France, U.S.A., Canada and also in England (Sutton Park).

Warwickshire Scout County has held four Amikiro Camps, mini Jamborees with Scouts from the U.K. France, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and the U.S.A. The Marston Green Scout Group took a very active part in these, organising one of the daytime activities.

The group continues successfully and one of the popular events over the past few years has been the annual Father and Son camp, usually held at Beadesert Campsite on the edge of Cannock Chase.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Over the years a number of Scouts and Venture Scouts from Marston Green have earned the highest award of King's or Queen's Scouts. There have also been a number of awards to the leaders who have given many years of dedicated service'.

The Scouting movement was not just for boys and although the Boy Scouts have built and provided premises for their activities, over the years in Marston Green the Brownies and Girl Guides also have had several packs.

Margaret Birch recalls her early associations with the Brownies and Guides.

“At age eight, encouraged by my school friends, Anne and Gillian Heath, who lived up the road, I joined the Brownies, which met in the then wooden scout hut. Our Brown Owl was Ethel Whitehead and I remember the Brownies formed a guard of honour when she got married (to Al Morley) in Sheldon Church. I also remember being taught to do various knots by Miss Sheila Heath who lived with her mother in Elmdon Lane and who had founded the Girl Guides in the village some years beforehand and was Guide Captain at the time. I remember the fun of group ‘tracking’ and ‘stalking’ round the village and later, of cooking sausages over an open fire at ‘Bulpitts Wood’ in Bickenhill Road.

One summer evening we walked with Miss Heath from Elmdon Lane across fields to the Coventry Road. These fields have long since been incorporated into the airport!”

Almost eighty years on from its beginnings, the Scouting Movement still thrives today in Marston Green. The Gala Day continues to be a popular annual event with many village organisations having an opportunity to put on displays and stalls for the benefit of the visitors.

Marston Green Model Engineering Club

A Brief History

Many thanks to Mr David Wright for this history of what has been a very successful club, running for more than 55 years in Marston Green. Without the knowledge and enthusiasm of its founder Frank Allcott, the Model Engineering Club would never have existed.

The Founder

The late Frank Allcott who was born in 1896, founded the Marston Green Model Arts and Crafts Club, with the first meeting being held on 29th June 1945. Other founder members were Fred Priestly, Eric Withington, Charlie Belcher, Fred Teague and Charlie Cokayne. Mr Allcott died on 27th December 1971 and shortly after his death it was decided to change the club name to The Frank Allcott Model Arts & Crafts Club. By the AGM on 21st October 1980 the name was changed again to The Marston Green Model Engineering Club, as it was felt that few people knew where the club was based, with no location being in the title of the Club.

Frank Allcott, who in addition to being the club Chairman served 21 years on Bickenhill Parish Council and became Chairman of the Council. He was head of Civil Defence, an Air Raid Warden, head of the wartime Poultry and Rabbit Club, assisted with planning the layout of the Memorial Garden, assisted with the church youth club and in fact took an active part in many village activities and projects.

He was a seed merchant whose first shop in Marston Green was opposite the present school in Station Road. He then moved to newly built premises opposite the Memorial Garden in Elmdon Road where he sold garden requisites, ironmongery and tools.

As well as running the shop Frank was also a skilled engineer who had a compact well equipped workshop at the bottom of his garden at 83 Station Road.

Frank was a pattern maker by trade and very skilled with wood. He was in at the beginning of many things we all take for granted, one of his first projects was making patterns for the first ever overhead valve engine whilst at the Wolsey Car Company. He also made small single cylinder petrol engines for model aircraft. During the war he produced turned parts for army tanks and after the war made precision components for the railway companies, including some for the royal train.

In the evenings Frank instructed some of the local lads in his workshop in the basic skills of metalwork and engineering. These lads usually made a small oscillating steam engine which involved many aspects of engineering and they had lasting benefits from the good procedures they were taught.

His workshop was a mecca for those fortunate youths who could not afford the expensive equipment required for model engineering. With his and the lads' enthusiasm it was decided to form the club. A committee was formed and rules introduced. Meetings were held at Marston Green School on the last Wednesday of every month.

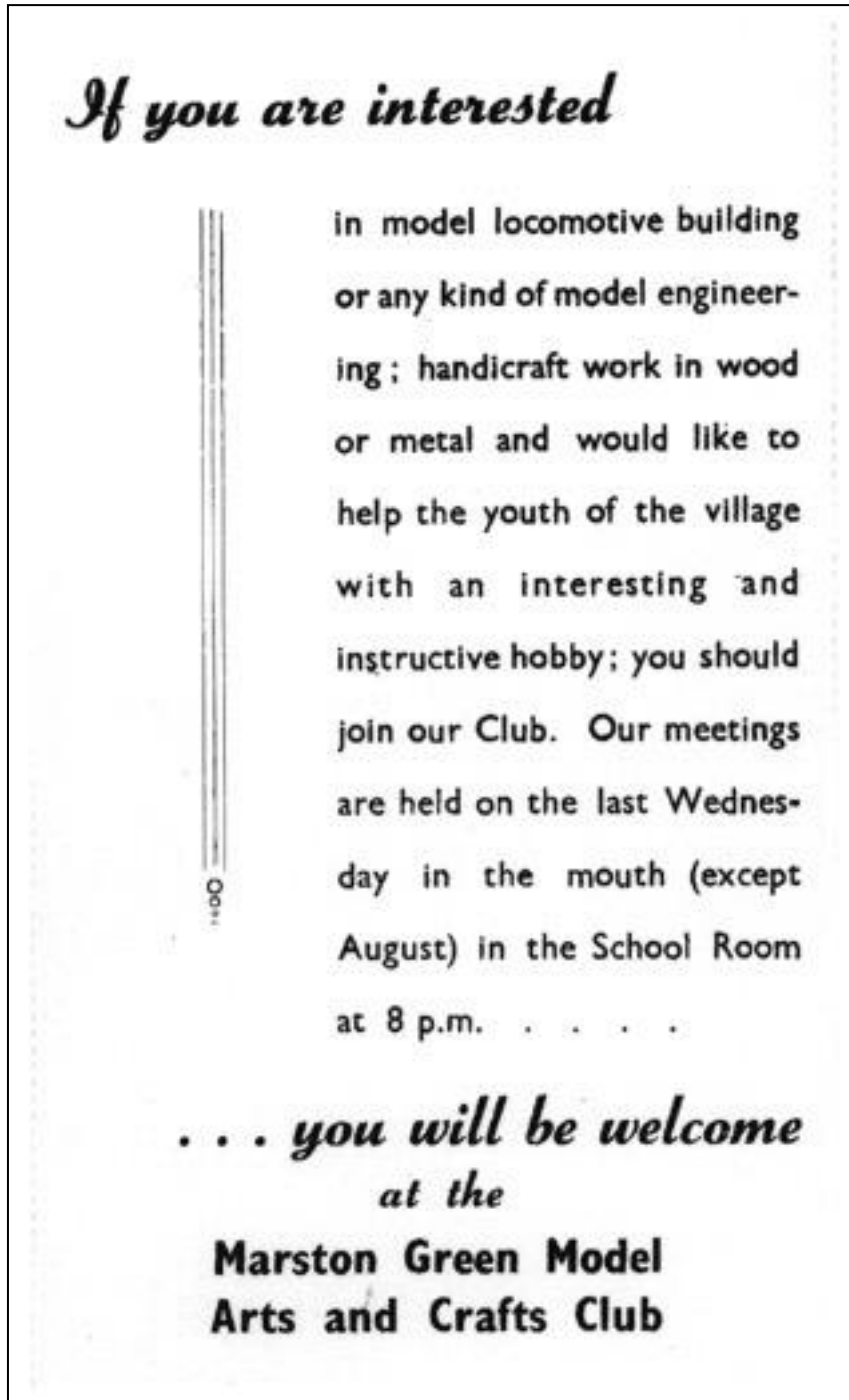


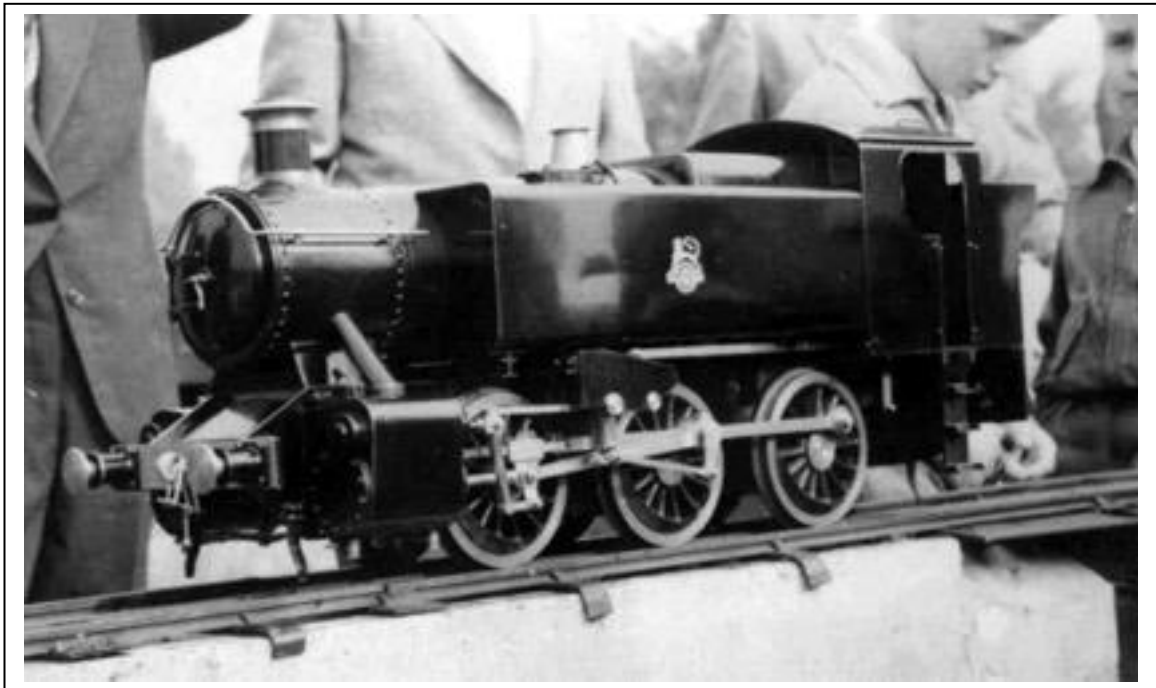
Figure 27 1951 Advertisement for The Marston Green Model Arts and Crafts Club

Marston Green – A Village Community

The Club was looking for a permanent home and in April 1950 Mr Allcott said he knew of some land with possibilities for a future headquarters. The committee went to view this land which was on the corner of Coleshill Road and Bickenhill Road but although Mr Allcott was on the Parish Council the owners of the land could not be traced so this fell through. Despite this it was still agreed that preference should be given to finding their own headquarters/workshop rather than building a portable railway track which was suggested in January 1949. In the meantime, meetings were still held in the school hall.

While all the ideas and developments were being discussed the first engine was being constructed and as a result for many years Frank Allcott and his steam engines were a familiar sight at the local village events.

The first major construction that took place in Mr Allcotts workshop was 5" gauge GWR 0-6-0 panier tank locomotive called 'Speedy' driven by steam. It was estimated that it would take about 2,000 hours to complete. Although track was necessary and the members had many other ideas, the need to build their own premises remained the priority.



Photograph 99

Frank Allcott's 'Speedy'

In January 1951 – the club was asked to provide a track and engine for the Festival of Britain celebrations in the village from 12th to 18th August 1951. Coventry Society of Model Engineers offered to lend the club a 3½" gauge track 100ft long and trucks. Vic King's loco Heilan Lassie would run for this event. The track was set up at Griffins Garage, which is now the Jet filling station in Marston Green and it ran from 6.00 p.m. on the Monday to Thursday. They charged 2 old pence for children and 4 old pence for adults for the ride.

MONDAY, AUGUST 13th, to THURSDAY, AUGUST 16th.

Marston Green Model Arts & Crafts Club

A MODEL RAILWAY
at GRIFFINS CAR PARK, STATION ROAD

will be on show each evening from 6.0 p.m.

Train Fare for the Return Trip: Adults 4d., Children 2d.

Come and see the Railway built by your own Model Arts and Crafts Club.

The Engine, which is only 5in. gauge, is capable of pulling five adults or ten children.

Figure 28 The Model Railway running at the Festival of Britain Celebrations in 1951

By June 1951, Frank Allcott was making bogeys for passenger carrying trucks and at the same time the building of the track was making good progress and in June 1952 all was completed. Vic King offered to lend the club his loco, Heilan Lassie for all club engagements.



Photograph 100 Heilan Lassie.

Marston Green – A Village Community

John Harbidge recalls around this time the bearings for the trucks were not standing up to the weight as they were home made bicycle type cup and cone bearings. These had to be replaced with ball races and involved him doing necessary machining and fitting, this had to be done overnight in readiness for another track run. It seemed like great fun for a young lad to stay up all night. John also remembers one incident at the Rover works in Clay Lane where the club ran inside the canteen when Heilan Lassie broke away from the driving truck, the regulator was pulled wide open as it broke away and the loco careered away to the end of the track. It hit the buffer block at the end and broke two or three sections of track away. The only damage to the loco was that the boiler had moved forward $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch.



Photograph 101 **Frank Allcott driving 'Neil'**

This was one of the clubs model locos at an event at the old Village Hall.

In 1952 some land within the grounds of St Leonard's Church was offered to the Club, this land being at the bottom right hand corner of where St Leonard's Close is now. The church council's approval was obtained to let this piece of land and after lengthy discussions with Warwickshire County Council and approval of plans the prefabricated building measuring 25ft by 12ft was purchased for £147-13-0. 5½cu yds of ready mix concrete was ordered for the base at a cost of £3-9-0 per cu yd and this was delivered on Saturday 30th October 1954. The electrics were installed and the lathe moved from Mr Allcott's workshop to the headquarters, and on 25th May 1955 the first meeting was held in the new clubroom.

Letters were sent to engineering companies in the Birmingham area asking for donations of redundant machinery and tools etc to help equip the workshop. Shortly afterwards the workshop was reasonably well equipped to give a good start. Electric motors were purchased and a milling machine was motorised, a welding kit purchased, new lathe and tools were purchased and an old Myford lathe sold.

The Club ran very successfully for many years through the 1950's and early 1960's but by November 1966 they were notified that the church would shortly be selling the land they were on as well as the surrounding area for the building of St Leonard's Close. They therefore needed to start looking for a new site. In July 1968 a letter was received from the Vicar, regarding the sale of land for building St Leonard's Close. He suggested a new site adjacent to the Church Hall for the Club together with financial help if they moved their workshop to the potential site. It was agreed and a new concrete base was laid on 3rd May 1969 and on the August Bank Holiday weekend the old building was dismantled and re-erected on the new site at the same time adding additional sections to make it another 13ft longer.

Over the years the Model Engineering Club continued and many youngsters and older members developed and improved their engineering skills. Engines were built and overhauled, track made and trucks and bogeys constructed to enable the Club to keep up a presence at many local and regional shows and events. In 1976 for the first time for a while an engine and track were in evidence at the Marston Green Flower Show to get them known again locally.

Sadly it is no longer possible to use the model trains for carrying public passengers. Insurance costs are too expensive.

Over the years as well as building and displaying the model trains many other activities have gone on behind the scenes, including visits, talks and lectures on a variety of subjects and static exhibitions of members' models. In June 1949, Vic King offered to buy an internal combustion engine up to 2.5cc and present it to the boy producing the best or first control line model aircraft. Later that year the West Midlands Federation asked the club to provide judges for their next rally. They were Frank Biddle - locomotive prototypes, Vic King - boilers, Fred Priestly - general engineering and Fred Teague - cabinet making.

Club outings were often arranged and in June 1973 on a club visit to Edgbaston Observatory they were shown all the weather measuring equipment including a tray let into the ground of approximately 6ft x 6ft x 12ins deep for measuring the rainfall. They were all standing around this tank being given a talk when the guide moved on. David Wright remembers well 'A very young Clive Harbidge falling into the water and bringing most of it out with him! The Meteorologist giving the guided tour said "*oh well, I'll just have to guess at the figure to give to the Birmingham Mail tomorrow*".

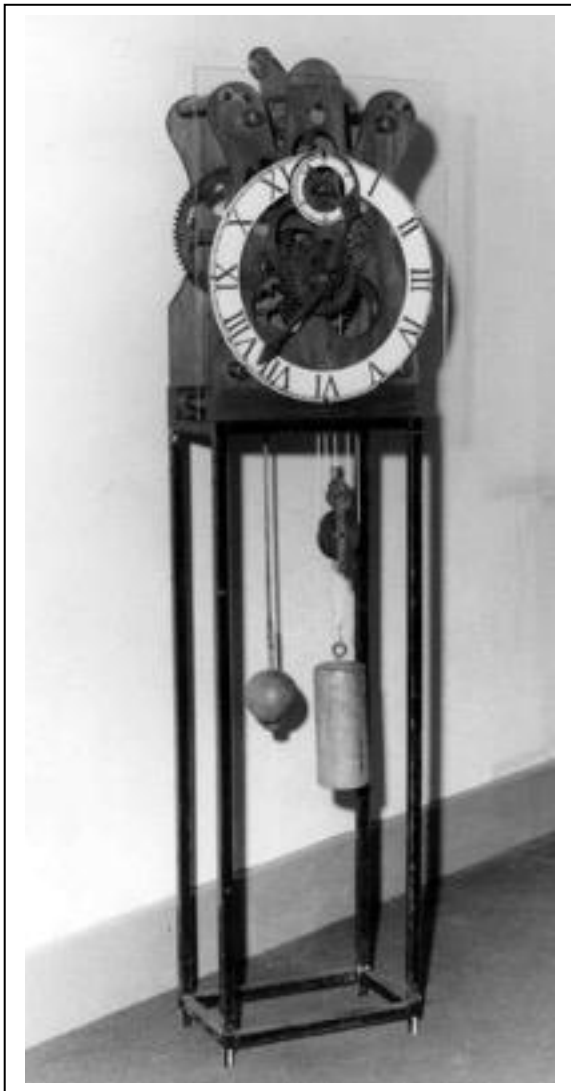
Marston Green – A Village Community

In 1978 Eric and John Withington won a prize for a lathe gearbox and Andrew Griffiths one of our junior members at the time won a cup for his model loco 'Titch' at the Midland Model Engineering Exhibition at Stoneleigh.

In October 1984 the club won the Society Shield for the best stand at the West Midland Federation Exhibition at Birmingham University.

In 1985 John Withington won the Appleby Rose Bowl for his tool and cutter grinder at the Midland Model Engineering Exhibition at Stoneleigh.

1992 saw Martin Sheridan win the Campbell Cup at the Town and Country Festival for his superb model of a GWR County Class loco and in 1995 Ray Sanders won the Rose Bowl at Stoneleigh Town and Country Festival for his model of a tool and cutter grinder.



Photograph 102

A Model Wooden Clock made by David Wright.

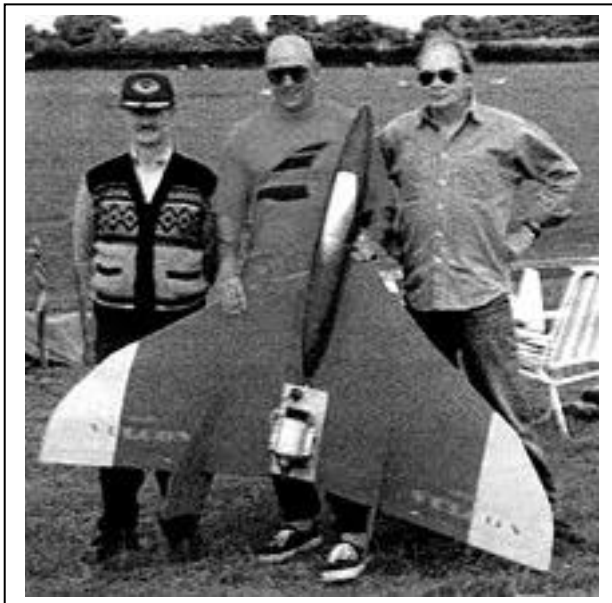
This shows another aspect of the models produced at the Model Engineering Club.

On 30th June 1995, the club's 50th birthday, a party was held in the Elmdon Lounge at St Leonard's Church. All past and present members were invited. The track and an engine were set up outside. Some models were on display and there was a buffet, music and speeches.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Over the years the Model Engineering Club has visited a range of events and venues throughout the Midlands hiring out their track and locomotives to help local charities and club funds. These have included such places as: 3M's Company, Birmingham Bingley Hall, BSA Tools, Golden Hillock Road, Wolsley Motors, Drews Lane as well as at many of the events held in Marston Green over the years. Static exhibitions have been held in such places as Coventry Police Headquarters, Aston University and Birmingham University.

In 1997 the Secretary at the time, Clive Longstaff who was very interested in model aircraft, got some of the members interested in this side of the hobby. This section of the Club initially operated from a field in Gressel Lane, Tile Cross and from there on to Shustoke then Maxstoke and finally Fillongley. The club is now very active in the building and flying of model aircraft, some with internal combustion engines, jet engines, electric motors and gliders, small and large up to 8ft wing span radio controlled and free flight.



Photograph 103

Club members with a model of a Vulcan Bomber.

Left to right:

Tom Williams, made the model and the jet engine

Stuart Horrocks, flies it

John Goodfellow helped cover the model.

It is interesting to note that Frank Allcott in the early days made many model aircraft engines and in the early years of the club there was an interest in control line flying. Nowadays the club is made up mainly of aero modellers.

In 2000 Fred Teague one of the Founder members of the Model Club, continues to be President and vice chairman and despite several 'ups and downs' over the years the Club continues to thrive. It has provided many hours of education and enjoyment for so many people during that time, as well as giving pleasure to the many who have seen and appreciated the hard work involved with the trains and aircraft over the years.

It is also noted that the club owes a lot to the founders and early members as well as those who continue to give their time and support in keeping this successful club going.

Marston Green Players 1927 -1983

(The following is taken from a report in The Coleshill Chronicle, November 15th 1963).

“Marston Green Players, an Amateur Dramatics Group was formed in the 1920's as part of Marston Green Village Club, based at the Village Hall.

The Club was formed when the late George A Parker offered to produce a play in the newly built village hall, for the benefit of the village. Mr Parker was a solicitor who produced plays in the Lyceum Theatre in Birmingham (now the Alexandra) in his spare time.

Along with the Marston Green Players the Village Club was able to offer a range of activities for the local population and when it was originally formed, there was no object, other than the entertainment of it's members. In the early years other successful sections of the club included a choral society conducted by Mr Round and a girls club which continued well into the post war years. This was organised by Peggy Smith, a lady who was well known in the village for helping anyone in need. Bridge was played every Wednesday evening from 1933 up until 1962 and the Jazz band led by John Gardiner Jnr. was noisily successful in the 1950's. The Billiards section of the club boasted four full size tables with the opportunity to play every evening except Sundays, with junior and senior trophies for both billiards and snooker being hotly contested.

Between the wars, social functions were part of the club life. Dances and Whist Drives were frequently held and well attended. The dances were of a high standard and one newcomer to the village even attended a whist drive in full evening dress, thinking that it was the done thing.

The first play presented by the drama group was “Our Boys” performed on November 25th 1927. There were several problems in the early years with producing plays – gas footlights which were installed with upright ceramic mantles had been designed and produced by the members. No account had been taken of vibrations and during the course of the play the mantles collapsed one by one leaving the poor players coping with tropical heat and running grease paint as well as the need to remember their lines. Conditions improved with better lighting and a larger stage and eventually a scenery storage shed was added along with heating and power points”.

By 1963, interest in so many activities at the club had waned and there was only the Billiards and Drama Club remaining, but the plays were continuing to be produced with as much enthusiasm as ever with a four night run of “Doctor in the House” planned for November. Around this time though an appeal was made by Vera Webb for extra help with the Marston Green Players, as their numbers were depleting. The article asked for playing members, backstage crew or even a prompt! The appeal was obviously a success, because by 1965 they were able to celebrate their 100th play.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Vera Webb shares her memories of the History of the Marston Green Players, with which she was involved for many years.

“The Company was formed in the 1920’s, they had a small Orchestra of three, who played before and during the interval. Over the years a great number of members took part. If they did not act they were happy to stage manage, provide the Electrical requirements (Mr Cyril Driscoll did this for many years) and help in any way behind the scene as well as the all important person with the script - ‘The Prompt!!!’

One of our male members went on to have a part in Coronation Street, namely Frank Pemberton, who lived in Elmdon Lane.

We had some very enjoyable times rehearsing in the old Village Hall, especially in the winter. The heating was very poor with just small gas fires which gave very little heat. We all rehearsed in coats, hats, scarves and gloves and when we had a break for a ‘cuppa’ we warmed our hands on the cup! Happy days!!!

During the power cuts we had our torches and one or two powerful lamps (probably borrowed from friends)”. The show had to go on!

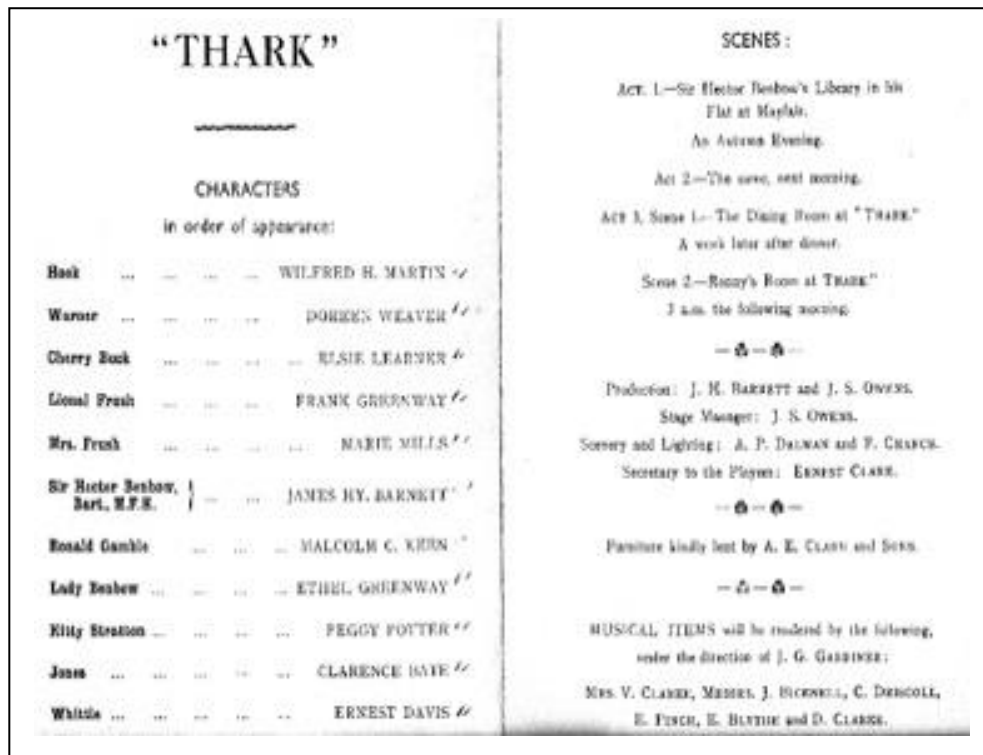


Figure 31 ‘Thark’ performed in December 1938.

Members came from all walks of life, and ‘Thark’ was, was one of the plays in which Clarence Bate, the local headmaster took part.



Photograph 104 **A scene from *The Torchbearers* performed in the 1953**

In early 1965, in her role as the honorary secretary of the Marston Green Players, Vera and a sub committee were preparing for the 100th Play and were trying to contact as many people as possible, who had ever been involved in any way with their activities. They were to be invited to a special performance exclusively for members past and present.

A standard letter was sent saying:

“The Marston Green Players will be performing their Hundredth Play this year. We have been active for nearly forty years and apart from the war years have produced plays with unfailing regularity.

We have been fortunate in tracing practically everyone who has ever acted in, produced or stage managed a play and it is our intention to hold a special reunion of as many as possible on Saturday 1st May, when a special performance of “Dear Octopus” will be given to celebrate our Hundredth Play. All members past and present and their husbands and wives are invited to attend. Curtain Up is at 7.00pm in the Village Hall. A buffet will be served after the performance, with time to meet for reminiscence with old friends and fellow thespians”.

The responses to the invitation were very positive, with offers of accommodation and names and addresses of past members being passed around. Historical facts about the company over the years were also added. One such letter was from Mr Fred Docker, who lived in Coleshill Heath Road, he wrote:

Marston Green – A Village Community

“.....When it was first decided to form a Dramatic Society, a Mr George Parker, who at the time lived at ‘Whiteacre’, Bickenhill Road, offered to put on a play entitled ‘Our Boys’ by a Dramatic Company which he and Mrs Parker had been with for years. This gave us a very good start, and has been a very big success for these many years.

.....If you contact Matron at the Maternity Hospital, it is possible that she knows the home address of Miss Cynthia Walker since she left the Hospital. This is the only one I can help with.”

The Coleshill Chronicle reported on the forthcoming special ‘Gala’ 100th performance saying that:.... ‘ex members had been traced in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The sub committee said they were expecting over 100 people, many of whom would be in their 80’s and 90’s.

The performance of Dear Octopus, which was a costume drama had a large cast which included all the members at the time, was a great success. The many ex members who were able to attend enjoyed a delightful evening of reminiscences with old friends and neighbours. Supper was held afterwards and Alan Martin provided Champagne for a special toast. The other performances, as usual were filled to capacity and the interest in the Marston Green Players was revived further’.



Photograph 105 ‘Dear Octopus’, the 100th Play

The Players continued to survive until the plans to build a new Village Hall came into being and they were all very sad when they realised the old Village Hall was to be demolished. Vera Webb says: “We knew things would never be the same again for the Marston Green Players. St Leonard’s came to our rescue and we moved there until the new hall was ready. Whilst the new hall was bigger, brighter and of course very modern we never really enjoyed being there as much as in our ‘Old Faithful’. It was a very sad day in November 1983, when we held our last meeting when it was decided for various reasons that we were unable to carry on as a Drama Group.”

Marston Green Women's Institute

The Women's Institute (WI) has been part of the 'Community of Marston Green' for many years. The Women's Institute is a national organisation with a wide range of activities and interests, many of which have taken place in Marston Green.

In the mid 1950's and 1960's the WI produced two delightful books for competitions about the life and times of people, places and activities associated with Marston Green.

Their introduction about the village of Marston Green in the mid 60's makes interesting reading.

“Marston Green today stands at a crossroads, between the past and the future – a future full of uncertainty and regarded by many with apprehension.

How much longer shall we be able to retain the character of a typical Warwickshire village? Are we doomed to lose our identity in that of the neighbouring large town? These are the vital questions facing us at the beginning of 1965. Meanwhile, we hope that for many years to come, we shall remain 'The Marston Green Ward of Bickenhill Parish Council, in the Meriden Rural Area'.

Marston Green was essentially an agricultural community from the beginnings in pre-Norman times, up to the end of the First World War. Even the coming of the railway in 1838 had little effect on the life of the people, but in the period between the two World Wars, house building developed rapidly and since 1945 this process has continued with increasing speed”.

Sadly the apprehension felt by the WI had an element of foundation and the rapid developments and changes increased in ways which could never have been imagined back in 1965. Their experiences of life in the village and their activities prior to these changing times show much of the diversity which the group enjoyed.

The WI for many years had their own choir. Margaret Birch recalls some of the events, which involved her Auntie, Edith Heacock, who had been a WI member for many years, prior to being asked to take on the conductorship of the choir in about 1948.

'Auntie Edith had, in her youth, had her voice trained and had been in large choirs most of her adult life and in spite of partial deafness she could communicate well with others. Under her the choir entered various Competitive Music Festivals, such as Tamworth and Leamington. Auntie subsequently took over the conductorship of the Darby and Joan as well'.



Photograph 106 WI choir winning The Shield at a local Music Festival,
(circa mid 1940's)

In the 1960's the local headmaster, Mr Enstone who took over leadership of the choir regularly continued to take them to the local Music Festivals in the Midlands and they continued to enjoy regular success.



Photograph 107 WI winning the Banner at the Leamington Spa Music Festival in 1965

Marston Green – A Village Community

As well as the choir, the WI had a drama section. They and the choir, on occasions, performed pantomimes and other performances together in the old Village Hall.

The Coleshill Chronicle of December 18th 1948 reported on the Marston Green WI production of San Marino. Thanks to John Gardiner the newspaper report remains in tact.

'Colourful desperadoes, beautifully dressed dancing señoritas, a swaggering dictator and a pirate chief - all in gay Spanish costumes - were among the characters seen on the stage of the Village Hall on Saturday and Monday when members of the Marston Green Women's Institute presented 'San Marino' a two act comic opera. In aid of the Violet Marsh Building Fund, all twenty one roles were taken by women.

A musical comedy story set on a Spanish American Island in the Caribbean Sea was enjoyed by large audiences. The dances arranged by Louise Elliott were well performed both individually and by the whole cast. Singing by the two principals Madge Taylor and Molly Rogers was well received both in solos and duets and all singers well supported in the chorus.

Comic relief was produced by Nellie Gardiner as 'Dicky' an English detective (kneeling in centre of photograph) and Phyllis Clare as 'Miriam' a henpecked American husband. Romantic themes were dealt with by Madge Taylor and Molly Rogers, Edith Banner and Nellie Gardiner, Muriel Law and Kathleen Black. The opera was produced by Dorothy Cowley and Edith Heacock was musical director'.



Photograph 108

WI production of the comic opera 'San Marino' December 1948

Marston Green – A Village Community

Over the years the Women's Institute organised a variety of outings and these included trips abroad as well as in the UK.

In 1949 a visit was organised to London and about thirty members posed for their photograph outside the Houses of Parliament.



Photograph 109 **1949 WI outing to London.**

In the 1960's an outing was organised to the Dutch bulbfields and the starting point was Elmdon Airport for the many members who went along.



Photograph 110 **1960's WI trip to the Dutch Bulbfields.**



Photograph 111 1960's WI performance 'Stop the World I want to Get Off'

In the 1960's the WI were still performing and one of their performances was 'Stop the World I want to Get Off'.

Many women over the years have belonged to Marston Green Women's Institute and the photographs and information provided for this section have come from many different folk..... so thanks to Derrick Hayes for 1940's choir photo which shows his mother Bertha, to Ethel Morley for the 1960's choir and 'Stop the World I want to Get Off', John Gardiner for 'San Marino', Nellie his mother is centre stage. Margaret Birch provided the picture of the outing to London with her Auntie Edith Heacock standing on the left end of the front row and Midge Musson shared the trip to the Dutch Bulbfields. Midge is standing next to the person at the top of the steps, awaiting the trip. Mrs Thomas standing on the runway in the light coloured suit was the President at the time. The delightful WI books are stored safely, but they are a delight to see - so many thanks to the Year 2000 members for allowing me to take information about various village activities from them.

The Women's institute in Marston Green is still in existence as it has been for so many years, providing a group where the women of the village can meet together and share their interests.

Marston Green – A Village Community

Marston Green Floral Art Club.

In 1973 a group of about 45 interested people met with the idea of forming a Floral Art Club. The Club was formed and has run successfully ever since.

Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month in the Free Church Hall. The Marston Green Floral Art Club is affiliated to the South Midlands Area of the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies and for several years a few members have visited annual competitions in various parts of the country, although none have ever been brave enough to take part.

In the first year the members were shown some simple flower arranging techniques and arranged competitions within the group. These were judged by local folk within the village. A suggestion was also made that the Club should make the village aware of their existence by putting on a display at the Annual Flower Show, to be held that August.

The Club has maintained a presence in the village and is often asked to provide displays for various events. Every year until 1996, when it closed down, the Floral Art Club decorated the Chelmsley Hospital Church for their Christmas services, which were attended by the patients, family, friends and staff.



Photograph 112 The interior of the Chelmsley Hospital Church

The Church was decorated annually by the Marston Green Floral Art Club.

Marston Green – A Village Community

In 1984 the Club were part of a Flower Festival held in St Leonard's Church, the theme of which was 'The Village'.



Photograph 113 & 114 The Airport and the Railway Floral Displays in 1984

These were some of the features represented in the displays, which were at the Flower Festival of 'The Village'.

The Floral Art Club continues to thrive. The members visit places of interest regularly adding to their ideas for producing spectacular floral displays.

Chapter 12 Odds and Ends

I have been told and read endless odd tales and snippets of information relating to happenings around Marston Green over the years. Some of them are retold here, in no particular order. Apologies for slight 'memory' lapses or 'poetic' licence from newspaper reports. Minutes from the Residents Association and Parish Council Meeting have been transcribed as written. I hope that some of these recollections may produce a smile or two.

Windfall.

In July 1954 it was reported that Mr H Mellish, chairman of the Marston Green Pig Club handed over to the council a cheque for £32 17s. 1d. representing the balance left over after the club's affairs had been wound-up.

The club had asked that this money be used for the planting of flowering trees and shrubs at the proposed Burial Ground and also in the Garden of Memory.

Explosion!

George Higginson cut down and removed the huge elm trees in Station Road and he blew up the roots once the trees were reduced in size.

Shop in Elmdon Lane

At the Residents Association meeting in January 1934 - Mr Pullen reported that Mrs Bates had opened a shop in the front room of her private house in Elmdon Lane, contrary to the conditions of conveyance of her property.

Mr Foster was taking the matter up with a view to enforcing the restrictions and preventing Mrs Bates from continuing this shop.

Inscription.

All the coping stones on the railway bridges, in the days before electrification, were made in the soft local sandstone. Many of these had been engraved and etched with a variety of messages over the years. There was one inscription on the fourth coping stone on the right of the Birmingham side of Mellish's (Elmdon Road) bridge for all to see. It read: "**Near here was killed by lightning Tomas Ashby, June 11th 1857 aged 56**". The ravages of the weather over the years made the wording indistinct, but they remained until the 1960's when the bridges were all removed and rebuilt to allow for the overhead gantries and cables.

Chelmsley Wood.

In 1951 the fate of Chelmsley Wood, the favourite haunt of picnic parties from Birmingham and surrounding towns and villages hung in the balance. It was reported that: "Through the intervention of Birmingham Corporation a temporary 'reprieve' had been obtained for the wood, where all the trees were reported to have reached maturity and to be ready for felling".

Evidently the trees were in the process of 'dying back' and much of the valuable timber would be lost unless the entire wood was levelled. Meriden RDC decided to allow permission for felling the trees on condition that certain sections were replanted with suitable trees and that when mature trees were felled they were replanted on a tree-for-tree basis. It was also reported that the question of the preservation of the wood was under consideration in connection with certain 'strictly confidential' suggestions put forward by Birmingham Corporation.

On further investigation 'Birmingham', it was said 'would like The Wood to remain intact, as an amenity to be enjoyed by the people from the new Tile Cross Estate'.

Slave Trade.

Someone who has long since left the village has told me this following tale. When they bought their house in Coleshill Road, the Solicitor dealing with the sale was fascinated by some of historical information he received about the plot of land on which the house had been built. Apparently the land was acquired as a result of monies raised through slave trading activities. Despite extensive attempts to find more out about this - even the Land Registry is unable to help - the story remains as just another odd little tale of happenings in Marston Green.

Cinema

The Coleshill Chronicle reported in **September 1950** that it appeared that when the Parish Council investigated an untidy hedge in Station Road that they discovered: “Leaning drunkenly behind the unkempt hedge a weather-beaten notice board announcing that the land on which it stands is a site for the proposed Clifton Super Cinema.”

The villagers it seems had waited for several years for the ‘much needed Picture Palace’ and were unaware that the plan had been abandoned. It was not until investigations were made by the clerk to the Council, Mr Mynard, that the facts unfolded.

Apparently, Mr Mynard wrote to the architect whose name was on the faded notice board and the architect wrote to a firm of builders, who wrote back saying they had contacted an Estate Agency, which was unable to say who the present owner of the site was. They did say that the notice board ‘should have been taken down long ago’. Despite the best efforts of the Parish Council they admitted they ‘hadn’t got a clue’ who owned the site containing the unruly hedge, which extended from the fish shop to Wrenson’s grocery store.



Photograph 115

The forgotten notice board.

The Marston Green Tavern.



Sketch 3 The Old Tavern. (Original drawing by Denis Carroll)

The old Tavern in Marston Green was demolished in the early 1960's to make way for a new 'modern' Public House. When the demolition was taking place a request was made that the lantern, which hung outside over the front door, should not be destroyed. The lantern (pictured below) was given to the Village Club and has hung outside the Club House in Coleshill Road ever since.



Photograph 116

The lantern from the old Tavern.

It is now hanging outside the Village Club.

The old benches inside the Tavern were, like everything else, being thrown away. The local residents were told that if they wanted anything from the pile of unwanted debris that they needed to remove it themselves. That was how the benches found their way to the Snooker Club in the Village Hall – the club members carried them all from Station Road to Elmdon Road.

Whitehead's Cottage.

The cottage next to the old Tavern in Station Road was demolished when the present Tavern was built in the early 1960's. Ethel Morley's great grandmother lived there and the family continued to rent the cottage after her death. The 1881 and 1891 censuses showed that Thomas Linforth and his family were the proprietors of the Tavern.



Photograph 117

The Old Tavern and the adjoining cottage in Station Road.

The cottage was occupied for many years by Ethel Morley's family, the Whitehead's.

As a child Ethel remembers 'Old Mrs Linforth' coming every week to visit her gran and she now realises that rather than being the friend she imagined, that Ann Linforth, Thomas's daughter must have been visiting to collect the rent!

'The Dunmow Fitch'

By 1939 a few more houses had been built in Coleshill Road, one of which was called Sunnymead, where Beatrice and Leonard Lindsay lived for a while. While they were there they won a side of bacon, known as 'The Dunmow Fitch' - based on a tradition from the village of Dunmow in Essex.

In this jovial contest between married couples, the participants had to prove, by giving a speech, which was the happiest married couple in the village. Beatrice and Leonard obviously convinced the judges that they should be the winners and went away with the prize.

Postal Deliveries

In 1934 members of the Residents Association reported that there was no gap in the delivery of letters on Tuesday, but it was reported that no telegrams were delivered on Tuesday afternoons. The secretary was asked to arrange to see the Postmaster to ascertain if anything could be done in the matter. If he was unable to obtain any satisfaction from Mr Coltman the Postmaster, he was to write to the Head Office in Birmingham on the matter.

Hedgerows

At a 1934 Residents Association meeting Mr Driscoll reported that an accident had happened on the corner of Chelmsley Lane and Station Road on the left hand side and that this was apparently due to the high hedge which made it impossible to see approaching traffic.....

By the following meeting - It was reported that the hedge at the corner of Chelmsley Lane and Station Road had now been trimmed so that it was possible to get a clear view of both roads.

It was resolved that the best thanks of the Committee be conveyed to the Authorities for their prompt action.

Public Footpaths across aerodrome site.

At a Parish Council Meeting on 4th June 1934 Mr H Gittins spoke on the possible effect of closure of the Public Footpaths which crossed the ground, which would be used for the aerodrome, between Marston Green and Elmdon. Mr F Docker and Mr F Moseley also spoke on this matter. Mr J Mowe, chairman, said he had seen the plan of the ground and did not think that the footpaths in question would be affected. He proposed that a letter would be sent pointing out the views of this Parish Council which are: 'that they strongly object to any interference with these footpaths.

The footpaths, along with the farms and other buildings across the land were all removed as the Airport was developed.

By October 1953 attempts were being made have the public footpaths across Elmdon Airport reopened. The Coleshill Chronicle reported that the Parish Council was seeking the aid of Sir John Mellor M.P. in their cause. He had been approached and had promised to write to the Minister of Transport asking him to assist the council. Sir John promised to get back to them when he 'received the Minister's considered response'.

The response could not have been as positive as hoped for. The footpaths remained closed.

Truant

Mr Fell, the school Inspector came to find you on his pushbike, if you didn't go to school.

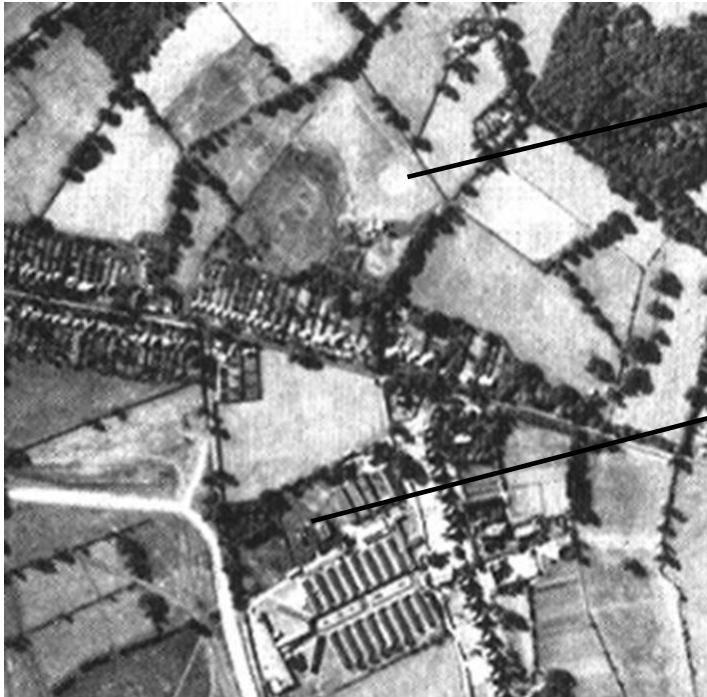
Peggy Smith

Peggy Smith was the lady who was called upon to 'lay out' the deceased of the village. She used to live in a little farm, which stood down a track opposite the Old Village Hall. George Aston's father used to keep his cattle on the field at the back between there and the railway (now Aylesford Drive). Peggy was everything to the Village, 'layer outer', nurse, comforter etc.

She had two sons Dennis and Cyril. Cyril was World Sidecar Champion one year and he and his brother were obviously very interested in Motor Bikes – so being friends, Derrick Hayes and his mate Joe Brindley, also spent a lot of time 'playing' with and building motor cycles.

Baseball

The 3M's ground, which was beside the Donkey Path, leading from Bickenhill Road to Coleshill Road (on the other side to the Recreation Ground) was where the Canadians (who were based at the Hospital) had their baseball pitch. The diamond could still be seen from the air in the 1967 aerial photograph of the village. They just crossed Coleshill Road to get to the ground and could return quickly, if the need arose.



Baseball diamond at the 3M's ground.

The Maternity Hospital, built as a hospital for Canadian soldiers in World War 2.

Photograph 118

Aerial view of the Maternity Hospital area and Coleshill Road.

Can you believe it?

The shops below in Holly Lane were originally built in the 1930's by the Birmingham Co-operative Society and were a Co-op store. It was closed down and number 32 became a greengrocers and 32A was a butchers for a while.



Photograph 119 32 and 32A Holly Lane

By 1963, after 32A had stood empty for a long time, it was noticed by a representative of the Residents Association that a sign had appeared in the window, that it was proposed to open the premises as a Betting Shop. It was recommended that a letter be sent to Coleshill Licensing Committee informing against this. In January 1964 it was revealed that the Betting Office at 32A Holly Lane had been approved in spite of letters of objection and Parish Council opposition.

Mr Brown was the first bookmaker there and it is said that he went missing along with a lot of money! Cutlers the bookmakers took over and finally Corals bought it. One Friday night there was evidently a robbery at Cutlers. The proprietor was knocked on the head and someone ran away with the takings. After much investigation it was found to have been a fake robbery and the whole thing, it seems, had been a 'put up job'!

Marston Green Station

At a Parish Council Meeting in January 1936 the Clerk was instructed to write to the London, Midland and Scottish Railway to ask for more modern lighting facilities at Marston Green Station. By the March and April meetings no reply had been received, so he was instructed to write again.

At the meeting in November of 1936, it was unanimously agreed that the Clerk be instructed to write to the Railway Company again. He was to ask for a reply to the letters already sent and to point out that the electric lighting had been installed in the Goods Yard, which closed at 5.0 o'clock but not on the station which was open until 11.00 p.m.

The Railway Crossing

In August 1963 a Parish Council meeting discussion showed that things were not always as idyllic as they seemed.

'Complaints have been received from local residents of unpleasant incidents at the level crossing, when the gates are closed without regard to approaching traffic. The Association will write to British Railways with a view to obtaining more civil and reasonable conduct from the signalmen'.

The following month, a letter was received from BR to say that their enquiries had not been completed.

It wasn't long before the crossing was mentioned again when it was reported that: 'A proposal to close permanently Marston Green Station's level crossing gates met with almost unanimous opposition from village residents, who felt it would create a potential road hazard'.

The report in a local newspaper continued:

'Not since new homes built in Brook Croft were threatened with flooding more than seven years ago has the Parish Council's AGM been so well attended'.

British Rail wished to close the crossing as with increased rail traffic it had to be opened and closed a good many times each day and they felt the maintenance of a 24 hours - a - day manned crossing was unnecessary. The Parish Council had agreed in principle as long as a suitable pedestrian ramp was provided over the railway line to preserve the right of way.

Mr James who ran the local newsagent's shop opposite the crossing said: 'The old folk and people with prams would find it difficult to cross over, they come in now in the morning and they are out of breath.' Mr James also felt that: 'If people using the station had to cross over to buy their tickets and cross back again to catch the train, all by using the ramp, they will be deterred from travelling by train. He said he thought numbers would dwindle and the village would lose its station'.

Mind your heads!



Photograph 120 **The old bridge being removed from the station in 1984.**

From the changes in the 1960's with electrification, through to closure of the level crossing and building of the pedestrian ramp there have been several other major alterations made at the station over the years. In July 1984, the old bridge was removed, when the station was being modernised. Judy Simpson captured the moment when the bridge was being rather precariously lifted by a crane before it was taken away.

Early morning arrival.

My dad worked at New Street Station. As he worked three different shifts, it wasn't always easy for him to get to and from town on the trains.

Occasionally if he was on an early shift at the weekends and needed to be on duty by 6.00 a.m., he would get a lift in as far as the dairy at Vauxhall, with one of the milkmen, who was also on his way at about 4.30. Otherwise it was a walk to Tile Cross for the number 14 night service bus. Likewise the return home from a night shift ending at 5 or 6.00 in the morning could be a problem. It was not unheard of to see him scrambling down the embankment in Digby Drive, having climbed down from the steam engine of a freight train which happened to be leaving New Street at the same time as he was.

Numbering of Houses

In October 1935 at a Parish Council Meeting it was agreed that a letter be sent to Meriden Rural District Council asking for houses to be numbered. In November 1935 the District Council were to be asked to fix the numbers to the gateposts of the houses in Marston Green instead of the doors of the houses.

The old school bell.

One of the pranks by the lads at the old school was carried out when an old church bell was still up on the roof. The boys used to climb up onto the roof, tie a length of string onto the clapper of the bell and the run onto the field ringing the bell!

Policing.

A report in the Coleshill Chronicle in September 1953 pointed out a problem highlighted by the local residents to the Parish Council of the day.

Mrs Leah Martin reported that residents had expressed their concerns over the increased number of burglaries in Marston Green in the previous few months.

She stated that: 'In 1920 we had 50 houses and one policeman.....now (1953) there are 500 houses and we still have only one policeman who has a very large beat and sometimes has to go to Coleshill on duty. While the parish's sole police officer was doing his work conscientiously he did not think it was fair that he should have to shoulder the responsibility ten times greater than that of his predecessor in the 1920s. If anything his duties were more arduous because of extensive building development in the area'.

A reply from the Chief Constable the following month attempted to reassure the folk of Marston Green by saying that: 'The the one constable at Marston Green had the all the resources of the Constabulary behind him'.

He continued to say that 'Indeed in recent months the parish had been supervised by other uniformed officers by wireless cars, plain clothes patrols and dogs of the City of Birmingham Police. This effort has been directed towards effecting the arrest of the thief who has committed the series of breaking offences to which the Parish Council had referred'.

No additional police constables were to be made available on a permanent basis to the village, but the Chief Constable promised continued additional support from the City Police.

Holly Bush Corn Stores

Over the years Holly Bush Corn Stores owned by Frank Allcott sold a wide variety of goods including pea sticks at 1/3d (6p) a bundle and bean sticks for slightly more. Bob Moseley would deliver them in a three-wheeled cart for anyone who could not carry their own bundles home. He would also, on other occasions, take out bundles of pea and bean sticks on a horse and wagon to sell them.

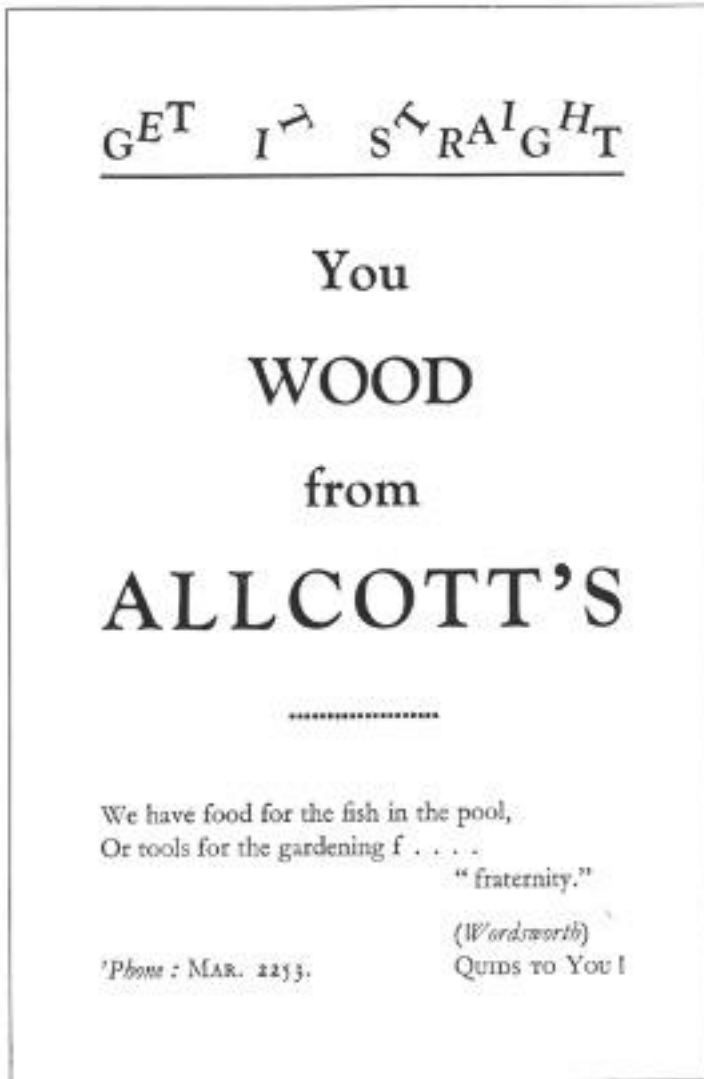


Figure 32

Advertisement for Frank Allcott's, Holly Bush Corn Stores.

This advert was one of those featured in the 1937 Coronation Programme.

Peter Blakey remembers.

Peter Blakey worked for Mr Allcott in the late 1950's on Friday evenings and Saturdays, while he was a schoolboy at Coleshill Grammar School. He says 'That was a shop that sold just about anything in the ironmongery, tools and hardware line. Mr Allcott used to have a cat called Tiddlepop that would sleep on the sacks of dog biscuits in the front of the shop. That was one cat that you did not disturb when it was asleep!'

Peter recalls his childhood years growing up in Marston Green and has fond memories of the time when he worked for three years on Friday evenings and Saturdays at Frank Allcott's Holly Bush Corn Stores in Station Road.

Peter was involved in his move from the old shop near to Osbourne's Stores, to his new premises next door to Leah Martin's cottage in Elmdon Road, across from the Garden of Memory.

'Frank Allcott also had several miniature steam engines. Every Flower Show Frank had his engines running along tracks giving children rides'.

Peter also mentions the green grocers called Starkey, next to Broughton the Chemist (still on the same site as the present Chemist) and Osbourne's shop next to that.

'Osbourne's was one shop where you could buy cigarettes in packets of five with no questions asked. Mr and Mrs Osbourne ran the shop with a regimental regime – they closed for lunch and for half an hour at 5.00p.m. for tea finally shutting shop at 7.00p.m. They even opened on Sunday mornings – unheard of as a general rule in the 1950' and 60's'.

Peter also remembers that Dr Jenkins, who had his practice in Elmdon Lane, had a gate put in at the bottom of his garden so that he could get out and practise on the 8th Green in his spare moments.

Finally he has one item which sticks in his mind and those were the times when there was snow and he and his friends went tobogganing on what they called Mellishes bridge (Elmdon Road bridge). 'If we were lucky there would be enough snow and ice to give us a good run down the slope towards the village hall and it used to get better as it was packed by the odd vehicle. The fun was invariably spoiled by Peter and Bob Moseley who spread grit from the back of a cart pulled by a horse in the early years and later from a lorry. This forced us to then either start sliding down the sides of the road embankment into the fields either side and eventually head off home cold and wet. That hill was also the best in the area for running our home racers down, a good run would get you close to the Village Hall'.

Elmdon Lane



Photograph 121 Elmdon Lane viewed from Land Lane.

The photograph above (taken probably around the mid 1920's) shows Elmdon Lane in the days before it was fully developed. It is taken from Land Lane bridge looking towards the Station. The house on the left is number 51 Elmdon Lane, easily recognisable by the chimney shape (see picture below). The house was built on $\frac{1}{2}$ acre of land, building began in 1925 and it was completed in 1926. Number 53 Elmdon Lane is in the middle of the picture.



Photograph 122 51 Elmdon Lane



Photograph 123 53 Elmdon Lane

Water, water everywhere.

One thing that is often mentioned by the older members of the Marston Green population are the problems connected with water lying in the area.

It is impossible to enter or leave the village without passing over either Hatchford Brook or Low Brook. The roads and surrounding land at the bottom of Holly Lane, Bickenhill Road and Coleshill Road were always liable to flood. Even the 1905 Ordnance Survey map of the area showed that the land alongside Hatchford Brook was 'liable to flood'. The local farmers were often called out to provide 'transport' across the flooded rivers with their horses and carts.

I have an image of the children at the old school not only being cold, but wet, in the winter time. The children who lived at the Radleys would often travel to school in the village on their bicycles gathering speed down the hill towards the Holly Lane bridge then putting their feet up on the handlebars to use the speed and momentum to take them through the flood. They arrived safely at the other side with 'sodden underwear as well as socks and shoes'. In those days though there were no synthetic fabrics and once your woollen or cotton clothing was wet, that was it for the day!

Children who walked from the top of Bickenhill Road or Coleshill Road, down to the school also encountered problems - the fields, paths and tracks there often being underwater - again wet feet were the order of the day, especially if the brook was flooded.

The willow trees planted in Aylesford Drive at the bottom of Elmdon Road bridge were put there to help with the problem of excess water lying there. Willow is a tree that will take up as much water as you will give it!

The mention of the potential site for the Recreation Ground being described as a bog, probably had some truth in it. That whole area would have often lain very wet, there were a couple of dew ponds over towards the Coleshill Road side of the site towards the bridge.

Eventually the brooks were dug out and culverts put in to alleviate the flooding problems.

One interesting tale, which relates to water in the area, was connected with St Leonard's Church. The original piece of land given by the Wingfield Digby family extended from Elmdon Road to Bickenhill Road. The land at the back of the church was designated as the churchyard for burials - but when investigations were made a spring was discovered, which would have made the development of graveyard impossible. As a result the Parish Council was asked for help to find a site for a Burial Ground, which they eventually did at the top of Bickenhill Road.

The Scout Hut was built on this church land in 1935 and in 1955 the headquarters for the Model Engineering Club built there. A further part of the land was sold off to John Mowe, who at one time was the signalman at the station. Plans were submitted and agreed for a housing development on the site and around 1957 the houses at Mowe Croft were built.



Photograph 124 Mowe Croft and Bickenhill Road houses - late 1950s.

My husbands' family moved into one of the houses in Mowe Croft when they were newly built and enjoyed their early years there. One day when they went into the living room they sat on the settee and discovered that it was disappearing through the wooden floor!

When they investigated they discovered that the floorboards were soaking wet and that the footings beneath the house were full of water. A combination of a burst pipe and the spring and a possibly a pond on the land had filled the eight foot deep footings of the house. It took three days to pump the water out through the windows. The problem was identified and fixed and they filled the footings up with rubble and concrete to provide a more solid base to the house.

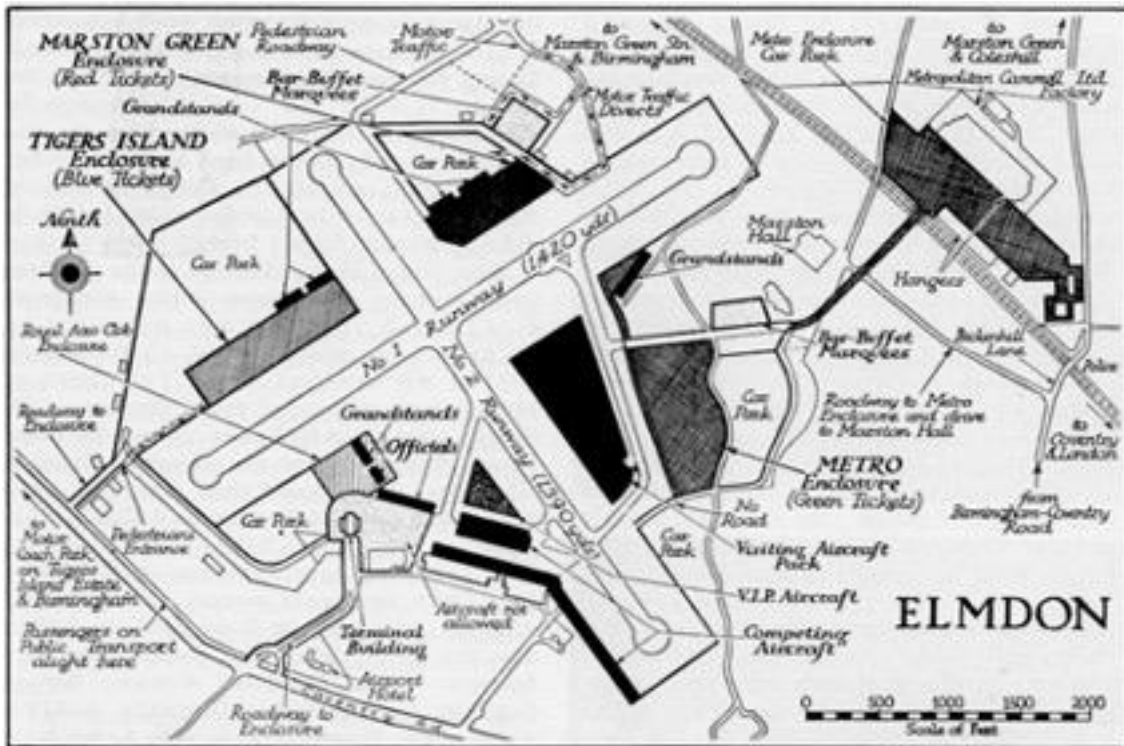
There is still a lot of water sitting under the ground in Marston Green. The land at the back of Gorse Farm in Coleshill Road for example has never been developed because of a stream of running silver sand beneath the surface. The topsoil remains where it is but the sub soil constantly runs and moves. Modern engineering techniques may be able to overcome some of these problems nowadays, but the underlying water in the area will remain.

The 1949 Air Races

In April 1949 the Royal Aero Club announced that large-scale air racing would be re-introduced and that the venue for the National Air Races was to be at Elmdon during the August Bank Holiday weekend of that year. The city had been due to hold the 1939 races but the war had prevented them from taking place. The meeting was the largest to be held at any UK airport and it attracted 120,000 visitors.

Several trophies were hotly contested with many aircraft entered in the races. On the 1st August it was advertised that the world's fastest race, the SBAC Challenge Cup was due to take place. It was open to any jet and was won at a speed of 510 mph.*

The whole of the local area was involved and the map produced to show the arrangements of the air racing events shows the development of the airfield as it stood in mid 1949.



Map 5

Map of Elmdon Airport for the 1949 Air Races

* Information taken from *Aviation in Birmingham* by Geoffrey Negus and Tommy Staddon 1984

Chapter 13 Letters and Testimonials.

Transcripts of some of the letters, testimonials and other documents, referred to or shown throughout the book.

These documents, written in another age reflect a different way of life.

Marston Green – A Village Community

These copies of Testimonials, written in 1887 are for Elizabeth Brown, who married Dick Hall of Alcott Hall. They are from the Vicar at Kenilwoth, Rev. Alfred J Binnie and from H. Emlyn Williams, Manager of the Kenilworth National Schools.

*The Vicarage
Kenilworth
March 24th 1887*

Dear Sir

I have much pleasure in recommending Elizabeth Brown for the post of Assistant Mistress in the Infants School. Elizabeth Brown has been brought up in the Kenilworth National Schools, our Schools, & has served under an Excellent Mistress in our Infants School, so that she is quite qualified to take a situation as Assistant Mistress. She is steady, industrious and painstaking with her work, also she has a gentle and kind manner with little children. Her parents are very respectable people and old inhabitants of Kenilworth. I shall be very glad to answer any questions that may be asked me further than what I have written and I feel sure that Elizabeth Brown will do her best in the future as she has in the past to give satisfaction to the Manager.

I remain

Yours sincerely

Alfred J Binnie

Figure 33 Testimonial letter written by the Vicar in 1887

*Kenilworth
March 24th 1887*

I have pleasure in bearing testimony to the good conduct of Elizabeth Brown while she has been employed in the Kenilworth National School. Miss Harper under whom she has served, speaks in high terms of her attention to her duties and kindness of manner in managing the children placed under her charge. Apart from her opinion in the schools I have known her from a child, and can speak of her constant and respectable conduct through life.

H. Emlyn Barton

Manager

Kenilworth National Schools.

Figure 34 Testimonial letter written by the Schools Manager in 1887

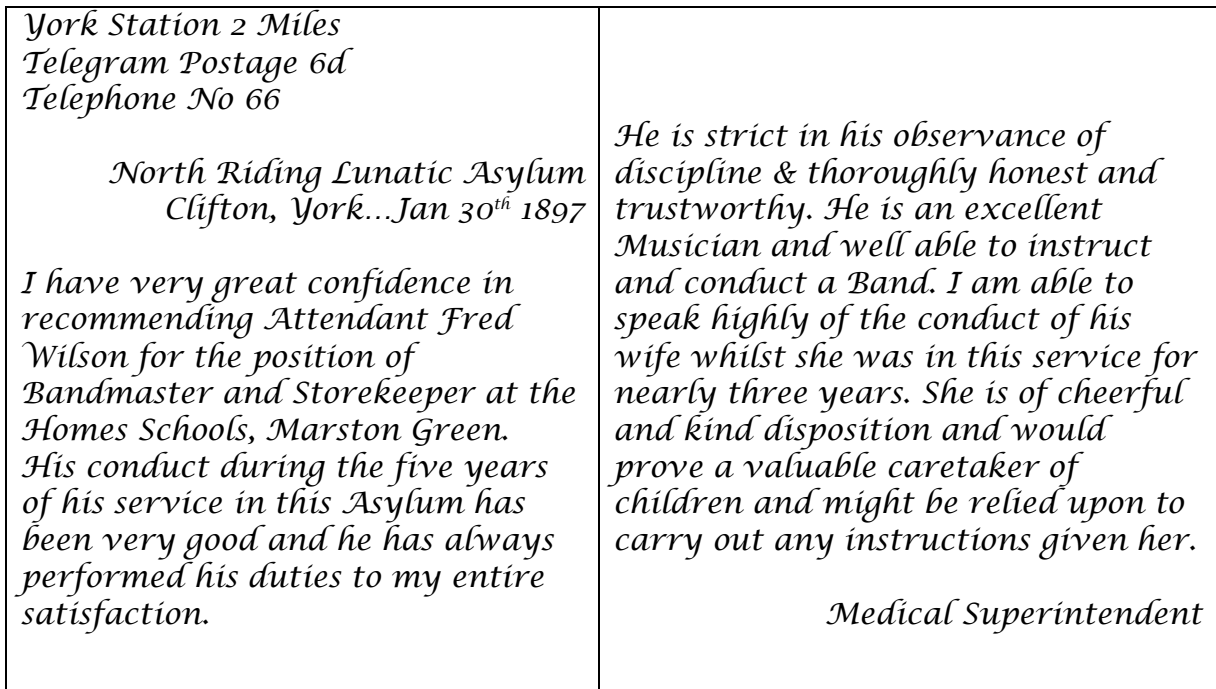


Figure 35 Testimonial letter for Fred Wilson written in 1897

Fred Wilson was applying to work at the Cottage Homes as a Bandmaster and Storekeeper after working at the North Riding Lunatic Asylum in York.



Figure 36

Discharge papers for Fred Wilson

Army Form D. 439
Parchment Certificate of Character for No 1120 (Rank) Bandsman.

Name**Fred Wilson**
Army Reserve and 2.K.O.
Regiment....Yorkshire Light Infantry
Discharge Depot.. Fort Brockenhurst
8th December 1891
Place...Bombay 19th October 1891

At his discharge Fred Wilson, No. 1120 Bandsman and Fitter was: 26 years and 7 months and 5ft 7ins tall, with a ruddy complexion, hazel eyes and light brown hair. He had no marks or scars and was said to be in good health.

A scrap of newspaper found under the floor at Fir Tree Cottage, dated during the summer of 1914 has an advertisement for domestic servants. The article on the reverse of this advertisement related to the possible outbreak of the First World War.

**TO: DOMESTIC SERVANTS
WANTING PLACES**

The Birmingham Daily Gazette and Aris Weekly Gazette circulating extensively amongst the Nobility, Gentry and most respectable families of Birmingham and the Midland Counties, are the best media in the district for securing all kinds of situations.

POSTAGE STAMPS RECEIVED IN PAYMENT

Persons answering Advertisements are requested to observe that the word "Address" (such as a number) means address by letter and not personally. Applicants for situations are cautioned not to send original testimonials but copies only.

DOMESTIC SERVANTS WANTED

WANTED, a respectable GENERAL SERVANT - apply 73 Francis Road, Edgbaston.

WANTED, a GIRL about 14 as Nurse - Mr Herne, 22 Waterloo Place, Bloomsbury.



Figure 37 Newspaper advertisements for Domestic Servants in 1914

In 1960 Mr Thomas Onley wrote a letter about the cottages in the village centre to Mrs Moulds, whose mother had lived at Fir Tree Cottage. Mr John Stevens who now lives there kindly allowed me access to this letter.

“Garfield”
36 Moor Lane
Rickmansworth
Herts
November 17th 1960

Dear Mrs Moulds,

I am sorry I cannot tell you the date on which your mother's house was actually built but from my memory of it I would say it was probably built during the reign of William 3rd who reigned from 1760 until 1820. I used to play there when I was a child with the children who then lived there and I well remember in the kitchen there was a very large fireplace and we could go down on our knees when there was no fire in the grate and look at the stars up the chimney. Now in the old Farmhouse adjoining there was a similar chimney but that old farm dated back to the days of Charles 1st and possibly earlier as where the present Corn Shop stands there used to be a Tudor period barn adjoining the two Tudor period cottages - now one I believe - where Mrs Martin lives or used to live when I was living in Coleshill Road.

Your mother's house is a very interesting old house as it forms part of three built in that style - Fir Tree Cottage, Ash Tree Cottage where I was born and one more between Fir Tree Cottage and the two Tudor period cottages opposite Malt House Row. This third cottage was for some reason allowed to run to ruins and the garden although a large one was seldom cultivated and it became overgrown. It used to be said it was haunted or as the old folks called it 'arnted'.

Whether these two cottages were originally intended for farm workers I cannot say but they actually formed part of the old Malt House Farm previously mentioned and the farmer held the tenancy of them and our old cottage was the village Tavern thenadays.

These cottages were doubtless built by the Digby Estates in those far off days and they were old places when I was a child and played around them. In Fir Tree Cottage old friends of my parents lived there but they left and went to live in Blackpool of all places and the father died there. Then another family came to live there and I well remember two of their children dying of Dyptheria. They went away and then another family came to live at the Cottage and their boys were the big boys at our tiny school where we could all stay until we were eight when we had to go elsewhere if further education was thought necessary as the Governess did not take older pupils. Then someone else had the place for a while. About 1875 the Marston Green Cottage Homes were built and many of the non-resident staff lived in or about the Village and one member of the Educational Section came to occupy Fir Tree Cottage. He remained there for many years and I believe ultimately bought it and lived there until his death.

The triangular field opposite the cottage was known as the Malt Close and a quaint old couple rented it and another little field adjoining what is now the Airport from the Digby Estate and they had the end cottage in the Malthouse Row by the Homes Farmery. Their name was Southam or something like that and the man did odd jobs and kept one cow.

Marston Green even in my day was a very self contained place and around the old pit - now the Garden of Memory I am told - was a very busy little centre. I am glad you are trying to revive the history of the few remaining houses belonging to the ancient hamlet and if I can help you in your efforts to do so do let me know. I wish you every happiness and success in your endeavours

Yours sincerely

T. T. Onley

Figure 38 Letter from Thomas Onley 1960

SCHOOL LEAVING CARD.

This card issued on behalf of the Warwickshire Education
Committee, to

(Full name
of pupil) Emily Catherine Hall
of

(Address) Marston Green,
No. 15 Lane.

(Signed) S. Tart Head Teacher, Date April 26 1912.

Figure 39
School leaving card for
Emily Catherine Hall
1912

SCHOOL RECORD.

Date of Birth April 8th 1898 Name of School Marston Green S.
Entered School on Jan 6th 1907 Left on April 4th 1912.
Age on leaving 14 years — months.

General report as to character, work, conduct, and special aptitude (if any).

Always painstaking & conscientious in her work, also well-behaved. She is bright & intelligent, with a special aptitude for Composition & English; her spelling being particularly above the average.

(Signed) S. Tart Head {
Mistress Date April 26th 1912

Emily Catherine (Cissy) Hall received a glowing leavers report from Marston Green School.

On April 26th 1912 Mrs Sarah Tart reported that 14 year old Cissie was: 'Always painstaking and conscientious in her work, also well behaved. She is bright and intelligent with a special aptitude for Composition and English; her spelling being particularly above the average'.

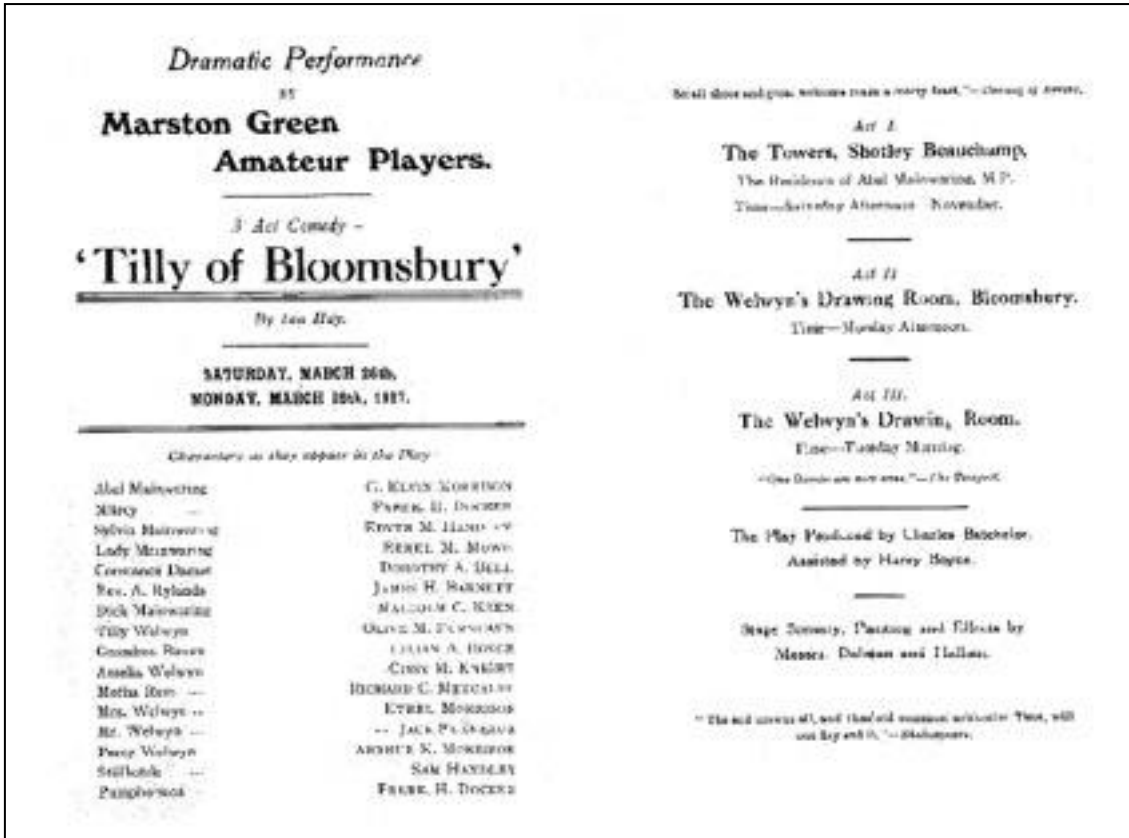


Figure 40 Details of 1927 Amateur Players Programme

Local residents who took part in the 1927 play ‘Tilly of Bloomsbury’, also signed the programme.

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| G Elvin Morrison | Frederick Docker |
| Edyth Handley | Ethel Mowe |
| Dorothy Bell | James Barnett |
| Malcolm Keen | Olive Furneaux |
| Lillian Boyce | Cissy Knight |
| Richard Metcalfe | Ethel Morrison |
| Jack Furneaux | Arthur Morrison |
| Sam Handley | |

The play was produced by Charles Batchelor, with Messers Dalman and Hallam being responsible for the stage scenery, painting and effects.

Figure 41 Signatures on the programme



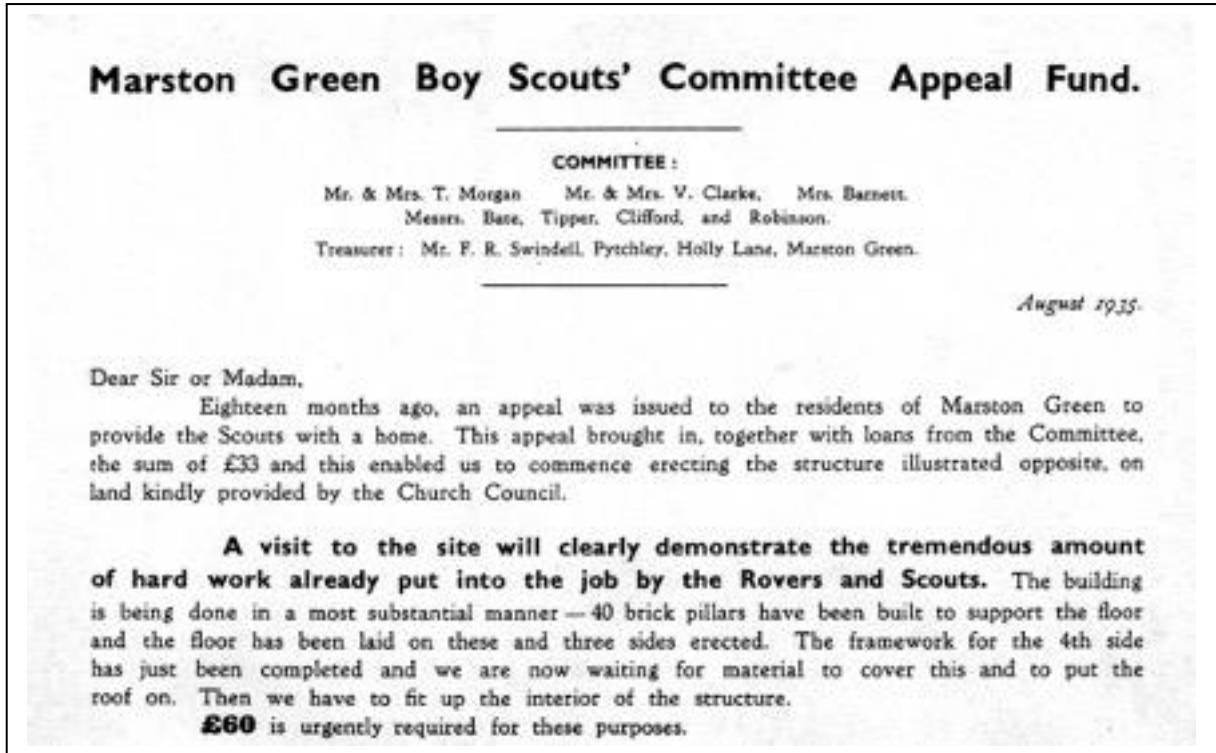


Figure 42 Appeal letter from the Scouts in 1935

The Marston Green Boy Scouts' Committee sent a letter to every household in the village in August 1935 appealing for the final £60 required to build the Scout Hut.

The letter, part of which is shown above and the rest in Figure 28 in Chapter 11 sets out the requirements of the Scouts.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Eighteen months ago, an appeal was issued to the residents of Marston Green to provide the Scouts with a home. This appeal brought in, together with loans from the Committee, the sum of £33 and enabled us to commence erecting the structure illustrated opposite (in Figure 27), on land kindly provided by the Church Council.

A visit to the site will clearly demonstrate the tremendous amount of hard work already put into the job by the Rovers and Scouts. The building is being done in a most substantial manner – 40 brick pillars have been built to support the floor and the floor has been laid on these and three sides erected. The framework for the 4th side has just been completed and we are now waiting for material to cover this and to put the roof on. Then we have to fit up the interior of the structure.

£60 is urgently needed for these purposes.

APPENDIX

List of Maps, Sketches, Figures and Photographs

List of Maps

	Page
Chapter 2 - Ordnance Survey Map of 1905	
1 Map adapted from the 1905 Ordnance Survey Map	7
Chapter 4 _ The Original Village Centre	
2 The original village centre of Marston Green	22
Chapter 5 - The Airport Land	
3 1905 Ordnance Survey Map of the land south of the railway line	33
Chapter 6 - Early 20th Century People and Places	
4 Map of the Bulpitt Estate in Marston Green	47
Chapter 12 - Odds and Ends	
5 Map of Elmdon Airport for the 1949 Air Races	188

List of Sketches

Chapter 3 - The Woods	
1 Hand drawn picture of Alcott Hall on a Christmas Card	16
Chapter 8 - Personal Tales	
2 'The Point'	89
Chapter 12 - Odds and Ends	
3 The Old Tavern. (Original drawing by Denis Carroll)	175

List of Figures

Chapter 1 - The Original Settlement of Marston Green	
1 The Domesday Plaque displayed in Marston Green Library	2
2 Development of the Digby to Wingfield Digby Family Tree	5
Chapter 4 - The Original Village Centre	
3 Indenture for the Sale of Fir Tree Cottage	31
Chapter 6 - Early 20th Century People and Places	
4 Envelope addressed to Mrs Allwood in Marston Green	43
5 Swan Brand Trade Mark	51
6 Advertisement for Swan Brand Kettles	53
7 Sale label for Dagmar House Nurseries	60
Chapter 7 - Community Spirit	
8 Poster advertising the Coronation in 1937 in Marston Green	62

Marston Green – A Village Community

9	The objectives of Festival of Britain Week. August 12 th to 18 th 1951	68
10	1971 Festival of Entertainments programme	71
Chapter 8 - Personal Tales		
11	1937, advertisement for Griffin's Garage	83
12	Knibbs 'Shoe Hospital'	92
13	Discharge papers for Fred Wilson	96
14	Testimonial letter received in 1897 for Fred Wilson	97
Chapter 9 - Growing Up in Marston Green		
15	Advertisement for Peter's Butchers and Greengrocers	108
16	The letter received from King George VI.	120
17	Air Raid Warden Service information leaflet.	123
18	Rhymed information from the ARP	124
19	ARP First Aid Treatment	125
20	Revue Programme produced by Jack Gardiner	127
Chapter 10 - The Church Communities		
21	Criss Cross Magazine	129
22	Marston Green Darby and Joan Club	135
23	Marston Green Junior Free Church prize giving Certificate 1964	139
Chapter 11 - Clubs and Activities		
24	The leaflet asking for help to finish the building of the Scout Hut in 1935	147
25	An appeal for funds to build the Scout Hut	148
26	An early Scouts Gala Day Poster	149
27	1951 Advertisement for The Marston Green Model Arts and Crafts Club	153
28	The Model Railway running at the Festival of Britain Celebrations in 1951	155
29	Marston Green Amateur Players' programme from March 1927	161
30	The signed programme of 'Tilly of Bloomsbury'	161
31	'Thark' performed in December 1938	162
Chapter 12 - Odds and Ends		
32	Advertisement for Frank Allcott's, Holly Bush Corn Stores.	183
Chapter 13 - Letters and Testimonials		
33	Testimonial letter written by the Vicar in 1887	190
34	Testimonial letter written by the Schools Manager in 1887	190
35	Testimonial letter for Fred Wilson written in 1897	191
36	Discharge Papers for Fred Wilson 1891	191
37	Newspaper advertisements for Domestic Servants in 1914	192
38	Letter from Thomas Onley 1960	193
39	School leaving card for Emily Catherine Hall 1912	194
40	Details of 1927 Amateur Players Programme	195
41	Signatures on the Programme	195

List of Photographs

Chapter 2 - Ordnance Survey Map of 1905

1	Stone Sleepers at Chapel House Farm	8
2	Mowe's Cottage	9
3	Ash Tree Cottage	10
4	Malthouse Row Cottages	11
5	Meadow Brook	12
6	The Old Police House	12
7	The Old Tavern and neighbouring cottage	13

Chapter 3 - The Woods

8	Alcote Wood	14
9	Testimonial Letter for Elizabeth Brown. March 1887	17
10	World War I VAD recruitment poster	18
11	Post Card sent to Marston Green VAD Hospital	19
12	VAD Hospital in Marston Green	19
13	Emily Catherine (Cissie) Hall	20
14	Postcard sent to Cissie Hall at Malthouse Farm	20
15	VAD nurses in Marston Green in the First World War	21

Chapter 4 - The Original Village Centre

16	Malt House Farm in Elmdon Road/Station Road	23
17	Fir Tree Cottage, Station Road in 1987	24
18	1761 carved into the roof 'purlin' of Fir Tree Cottage	25
19	Artefacts found under the floor at Fir Tree Cottage	26
20	Letter asking for a reference for Jane Jones	27
21	Evidence of sewing carried on at Fir Tree Cottage	28
22	Frederick Benbow with his family circa 1892	29

Chapter 5 - The Airport Land

23	Birmingham Airport circa 1950	32
24	Elmdon Farm	34
25	Marston Hall	37
26	Marston Hall prior to demolition	37
27	Aerial photograph of the Airport area	38
28	The view from the end of Digby Drive	39
29	Training at the airport in the 1980's seen from Digby Drive	40
30	Concorde arriving at Birmingham Airport in May 1981.	40

Chapter 6 - Early 20th Century People and Places

31	Charles and Emma Allwood	42
32	Charles Samuel Allwood	43
33	A copy of one of Aina Allwood's paintings	44
34	The fields of Chelmsley Farm looking towards the Cottage Homes	45
35	Chelmsley Farm photograph	46
36	Chelmsley Farm March 2000	46
37	A day spent in 'country' pursuits.	48
38	The newly built Village Hall in Elmdon Road in the early 1920's	49
39	Walter Bulpitt handing over a Mobile Canteen to the Salvation Army	50
40	VE Day journey to Hampton in Arden.	50
41	A local party given in Blackfirs Lane to celebrate VE Day.	51
42	The Hand Grenade found in the attic at East	52
43	Photograph taken for an advertisement for Wright's produce.	54
44	Tea break during 'Threshing Time' at Birchcroft Farm.	55
45	Everyone was called into service at 'Threshing Time'	55
46	Musson's Cottage in Berwicks Lane.	56
47	Mr and Mrs Musson with baby John and his sister Betty. Circa 1915	57
48	John Musson in 1999 in the fields of Chelmsley Farm.	58
49	The boarded up farm yard buildings of Chelmsley Farm, late 1999	58
50	The weather vane on top of the farm buildings	59
51	Gateway of Chelmsley Farm	59
52	Chelmsley Farm Drive	59

Chapter 7 - Community Spirit

53	1910 Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary	63
54	The date plaque in the Garden of Memory	64
55	Marston Green Guide Company in the Coronation Procession 1937	66
56	The WI Tableau of Nations in 1951	69
57	The Raymo Combo Dance Band	73
58	Dance organised by the Residents Association during the 1960's.	78

Chapter 9 - Personal Tales

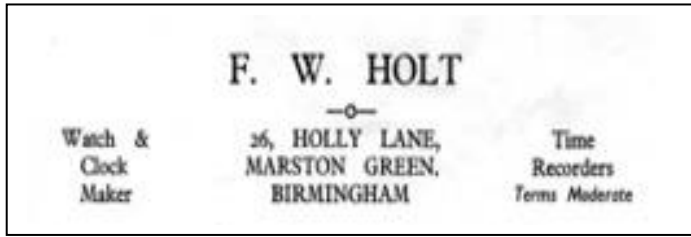
59	The Old Post Office.	82
60	Last Day at School in 1936	85
61	The Bowling Green and Tea Rooms at the Marston Green Tavern	86
62	The Police Houses in Alcott Lane built circa 1930	88
63	The interior of the old St Leonard's Church in Station Road.	90
64	Bob Moseley at the Coconut Shy in the early 1970's	91
65	Mowe's Stores on the corner of Station Road and Land Lane	93
66	Moat House Farm	95

Marston Green – A Village Community

67	Fred and Harriet Wilson	96
68	The Cottage Home Boy's Band under the instruction of Fred Wilson.	98
69	Knibbs Boot and Shoe Repairers in Elmdon Road	98
70	Woodbine Cottage	99
71	Woodbine Cottage in Chelmsley Lane, looking down Alcott Lane.	100
72	The wedding day of Derrick Hayes' parents	104
73	Derrick Hayes as a choir boy	105
74	Bertha Hayes one of the village post ladies	107
75	Mrs Walker's Class circa 1947	109
76	Back garden of 'Chelmsley' Coleshill Road in the 1930's.	110
77	Margaret Birch as a toddler in 1938.	111
78	Chelmsley Hospital in Coleshill Road in the 1940's	113
79	87 Elmdon Lane in 1950.	115
80	140 Elmdon Lane where Ernest and Nellie Upton lived from 1923	117
81	Meadow Brook at Wood Lane	119
82	German wartime reconnaissance map	122
83	The Marston Green Civil Defence Volunteers practising a rescue procedure	124
84	Air Raid Precautions Modified Car.	126
Chapter 10 - The Church Communities		
85	Circa 1950, St Leonard's Church Choir	131
86	1957 St Leonard's Church outing to Crowland Abbey	132
87	The Marston Green Young Wives Guild in the 1960's	133
88	The Darby and Joan holiday to Paignton in the early 1950's	135
89	A lorry loaded with waste paper in the early 1960's	138
90	Preparing to build the Chinese Refuge Hut in the village centre	140
91	St Leonard's Men's' Fellowship	141
92	1992 Ladies' Fellowship Teddy Bears' Picnic	143
93	1999 St Leonard's Ladies' Fellowship.	143
94	The official opening of The Church Mouse in September 1993	144
95	The Church Mouse Charity Shop.	145
96	The Marston Green Church Mouse.	145
Chapter 11 - Clubs and Activities		
97	Marston Evergreens meeting in February 2000	146
98	The Scout Band in the mid 1980's	150
99	Frank Allcott's 'Speedy'.	154
100	Heilan Lassie	155
101	Frank Allcott driving 'Nell'	156
102	A Model Wooden Clock made by David Wright	158
103	Club members with a model of a Vulcan Bomber.	159

Marston Green – A Village Community

104	A scene from The Torchbearers performed in the 1953.	163
105	'Dear Octopus', the 100 th Play	164
106	WI choir winning The Shield at a local Music Festival	166
107	WI winning the Banner at the Leamington Spa Music Festival in 1965	166
108	WI production of the comic opera 'San Marino' December 1948	167
109	1949 WI outing to London	168
110	1960's WI trip to the Dutch Bulbfields	168
111	1960's WI performance 'Stop the World I want to Get Off'	169
112	The interior of the Chelmsley Hospital Church	170
113	The Airport and the Railway Floral Displays in 1984	171
114	The Airport and the Railway Floral Displays in 1984	171
Chapter 12 - Odds and Ends		
115	The forgotten notice board.	174
116	The lantern from the old Tavern	175
117	The Old Tavern and the adjoining cottage in Station Road.	176
118	Aerial view of the Maternity Hospital area and Coleshill Road	178
119	32 and 32A Holly Lane	179
120	The old bridge being removed from the station in 1984	181
121	Elmdon Lane viewed from Land Lane	185
122	51 Elmdon Lane	185
123	53 Elmdon Lane	185
124	Mowe Croft and Bickenhill Road houses - late 1950s	187

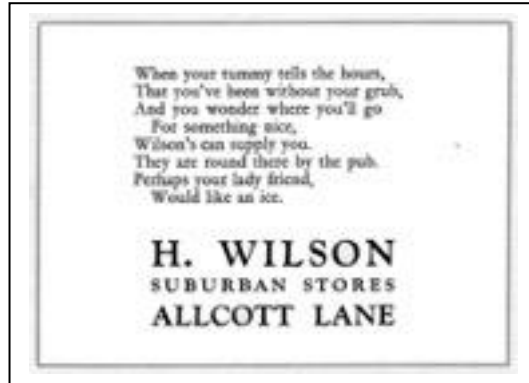


“My grandfather Frederick William Holt was a watch and clock maker and he ran the ‘40 Club’ at the old church on the Point in Station Road. He qualified as a ballroom dancing teacher in 1898”.

Stella Reece

“My grandmother kept ‘Wilson’s Suburban Stores opposite the Tavern. Between this and the Tavern at Whitsuntide it was chaotic when the bluebells were out”.

Ron Wilson



“One day I had to take my new gas mask to school, in a small 6inch square cardboard box, to be shown how to put it on. Not realising the seriousness of the situation we were all amused by our appearances peering through the eyepieces and with the large air filter at the front like a horse feeding bag”.

John Gardiner



“I spent many happy hours, weeks and months with my grandparents and used to wander over the fallow fields with Betty, John and Harry Musson looking for pee-wit’s nests but we never disturbed them or took the eggs. Our enjoyment was the pleasure of seeing them”

Kitty Harrow

“.....so, back in the days when I could get a hair cut for 6d, get a tooth removed at Mr Peek’s for 2/6d and buy petrol for 1s 1½d a gallon, I was a part of quite a small community where everyone, it seems, knew everyone else and on the whole lived together harmoniously”.

Bob Moseley