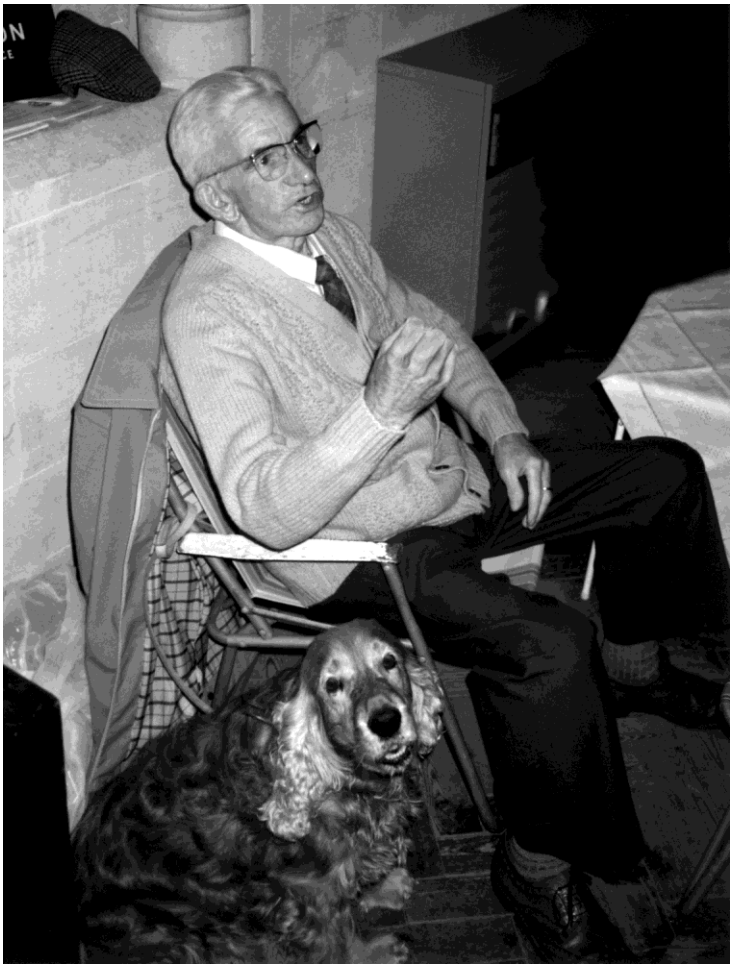


The Diary of John Crook 1913-1993

John Crook was a member of St Stephen's Church, Tivoli, Cheltenham for the greater part of the twentieth century. Before his death in 1993 he prepared the contents of this booklet at my suggestion, as a personal record of the changes which he had witnessed during his lifetime, in Tivoli, Whaddon and the Forest of Dean.

John was born in Cleeve View Road, Whaddon, Cheltenham. His father was a Post Office Inspector and his mother had started her working life 'in service' with a Colonel Ferguson at St Philip's Lodge, Leckhampton – now Ss Philip and James Church House. She had come from Clearwell in the Forest of Dean to work for the Fergusons as a kitchen maid. One day a heavy cooking pot fell on her toe and the nail had to be removed. She was very upset because she was to have been confirmed at St Philip and St James Church that evening and obviously would not be able to make it. The Colonel, who was Churchwarden, arranged for her to be confirmed at a later date in carpet slippers, at the newly built church around the corner – St Stephen's. John and his sister were both confirmed at St Stephen's many years later and his father was prepared for confirmation by the Incumbent there but was actually confirmed as an adult privately in Gloucester. Both John and his father saw service with the Royal Horse Artillery – in different wars of course – and for part of his early working life, John too was employed by the Post Office as a temporary telegraph messenger.

John received very little early schooling due to illness and the family was eventually advised to move away from Whaddon because of the dampness of the area. They made their new home at 22, Tivoli Street and within two hours of their arrival, the Vicar had called to welcome them. By the end of the first week in their new home, John was in the choir, the Church Lads Brigade, the Sunday School and the Gymnastics Club. In later life he became secretary of the Social Club, served for twenty five years on the Parochial Church Council, was an Altar Server for twenty five years and a Churchwarden for seven years.

There is much to wonder at in this 'diary', much to learn and much to enjoy. John told a good story and although his memory may have had the occasional 'blip' his reminiscences are worth recording, as he vividly shares with the reader his first hand account of the social history of this part of Gloucestershire.

The text has been edited, I hope sympathetically, but those who remember John will I am sure, hear within these pages his distinctive and individual style of narrative, but do please remember that Jack began this Journal in 1990 and so to any periods of time to which he refers, as say, 'twenty years ago', one must add another fifteen years.

Brian Torode.2005

The Royal Forest of Dean and Clearwell.

Although I have motored extensively over the moorlands, dales and beauty spots of England and Scotland, the most loved and frequented place throughout the course of my life has been the Forest of Dean. Its historical past embraces the Elizabethan era at the time of the Spanish Armada and spans the two World Wars to which it contributed much in the way of coal, iron ore and timber. Moreover its manpower contributed greatly to this country in times of need and peril through the sweat and labour of men's bodies in the mines and sawmills. Its 'Royal' title is justly deserved.

Over seventy years ago the Royal Forest was a very different place from that which exists today. Except for the main road that runs from Huntley to Monmouth, movement about the Forest was by means of footpaths and cart tracks. Life was very primitive and like most forests, it was always seen as somewhere gloomy, dark and spectral, haunted by the eerie sounds of birds and wildlife, which to a child can be most frightening. However as I grew older, the Forest of Dean never failed to impress me with its seasonal changes of colour and natural beauty. In both World Wars I have seen vast areas cleared of timber, but even so, nature and the richness of the earth never failed to renew themselves through the replanting and rising of new young trees. In my work, oak has always been my favourite wood and in so saying, Dean Forest oak is the hardest among its many foreign rivals. It is like unto the very iron ore upon which it grows. In my early working days I have many times sweated from planing and cleaning up Dean Forest oak and in the early thirties, I used it to lay the flooring of a new skittle alley in Cheltenham, aptly named 'The Royal Oak', and still further away, I used it for the floor of the new Catholic Church at Roath, Cardiff, which gave me far more satisfaction than the skittle alley undertaking.

Apart from the vastness of the Forest itself, I also remember the large number of coal mines and the ever-increasing number of slag heaps. As a boy, I visited many of the coal pits for my grandfather and his three sons who were all miners. From them, I learnt such names as The Royal, The Fancy, Fetterhill, The Norchard, The Flower Hill, The Pargutter and The Cannop Pits. These were but a few of the larger mines but there was also a large number of smaller workings widely scattered about the common land in the Royal Forest. After the 1926 General Strike, with the ensuing slump years, many of the main mines never restarted and soon all closed down. The poverty and distress of the South Wales Rhonda Valley miners was similarly experienced by the Forest miners at this time. When the South Wales miners made their hunger march to London, they passed through the Forest of Dean where they were joined by the local miners. I remember this very clearly for my mother's youngest brother was amongst them as were several other members of the family. In the course of their journey they passed along the Andover Road, Tivoli, Cheltenham and ate whatever they had in their packs or what they were given by well-wishers. At that particular time we were living in Tivoli Street and my uncle came to have his midday meal with us, leaving with a supply of food as he joined his fellow miners as they continued for another hundred miles or so towards London. He had one advantage on the march, for as a young soldier in the First World War he had served in the Coldstream Guards and was used to long marches. Both this uncle and one of his brothers were to suffer serious injury in the mines and a third brother was so seriously injured when the roof of one of the pits collapsed on top of him, that he could never work again.

For over twenty five years after moving to live in Tivoli, I regularly made an annual visit at Christmas to relatives living near Newport and on my return, I came via St Briavels to stop at Sling, Clearwell and finally Coleford, before making the last thirty miles home to Cheltenham. One such visit was at the start of the extremely heavy snowfall in the winter of 1947. The snowfall was slight as I drove from Clearwell to Coleford but it had faded away before my father and I arrived. I remarked to him that I was relieved that we had left the snow behind us, but how wrong I was. After spending a couple of hours indoors with the relatives, I was astounded upon going out to the car, to find it half covered in snow which was continuing to fall heavily. My aunt phoned the bus company in Coleford to be told that no vehicles had left for either Monmouth or Gloucester since earlier that afternoon. Some phone lines were also affected and my father was worried about the effect on my mother if we stayed overnight without being able to notify her. I recalled from early childhood only one possible way of getting out of the Forest in such impossible conditions. If we could get out of Coleford for a couple of miles, I knew of a long downhill, rough and winding road that eventually merged after several miles, with the South Wales road. I also remembered that it was a virtual tunnel of overhanging trees which would keep it fairly free from settled snow. My father had never travelled this road before and even I was apprehensive about attempting to reach Cheltenham this way. However, the decision having been made, we managed, with only a little difficulty, to leave Coleford and we began the downward course for a couple of miles heading for the tunnel of trees. From there onwards we experienced little difficulty and finally emerged out of the Forest on the main road to Blakeney. My father was understandably relieved at our eventual safe return to Cheltenham and so was my mother who had heard on the wireless how bad conditions were in the Forest.

It was always a problem to journey into or out of the many places of interest which were of attraction to us. Living in Cheltenham my mother would put me on the train with a strict reminder, “Now don’t forget to get off at Lydney.” Having done so it was necessary to cross over the long elevated iron footbridge beside the main railway line from which a network of lines began stretching out over the Forest, thus providing the only means of getting to and from such places as Parkend, Whitecroft, Cinderford, Milkwall and at the end of the line, Coleford. All trains were goods trains with a passenger carriage attached. Many of these trains operated solely to the coalpits on branch lines. I always alighted at the very small station at Milkwall from where I continued on foot the three miles into Clearwell. At the time of which I am speaking, the locals never left the Forest except for the odd day or so within the year and I never remember having had company on my walk from Milkwall to Clearwell.

Throughout the thirties, the Bristol Blue Bus Company operated a service from Cheltenham to Coleford on a Sunday afternoon. It was laid on for the benefit of the young girls who were ‘in service’ in the big houses in Cheltenham. The bus left Cheltenham at 2.30 pm returning at 8.00 pm. The return fare was 2/6 (12½p) but the journey was not restricted to in-service girls only. Sometimes during the summer months three coaches made the journey, but in normal circumstances there was only one. It was generally known as the Lovers’ Coach, for many of the local lads who were courting the girls used to accompany them on their excursion. In fact, this was probably the start of the Forest’s popularity with so many Cheltenham people.

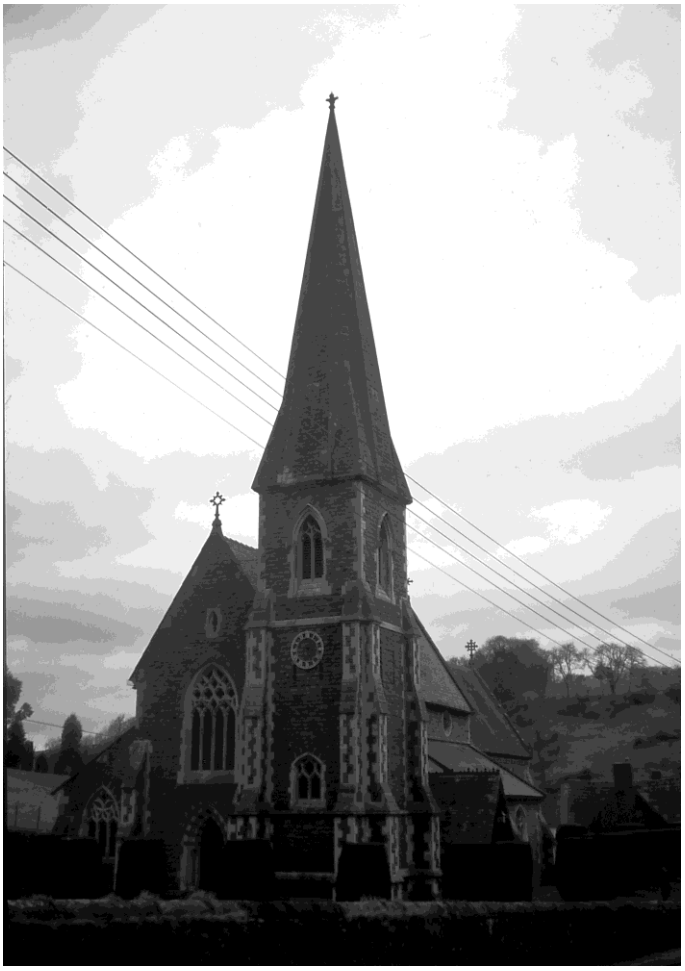
I’ve said that this part of the country was the most loved of all the places I have visited in the course of my life, and Clearwell is undoubtedly the place which inspired this feeling. From a child, it was always far more of a home to me than either Whaddon or Tivoli. The marked difference was that in Cheltenham I was forever beset with illness, whereas in the Forest, with the lovely fresh air, open common ground on which to play and plenty of home grown produce, my appetite grew overnight and in consequence I became a robust, healthy-looking lad. Also, at my grandparents’ home there was always much more to attract and absorb my youthful interest.

In later years lines from a poem I had once learnt came back to me: ***It never came a wink too soon nor brought too long a day***. I was indeed always active from dawn to dusk.

After my father went out East in the First World War, my mother decided to close up house in Cheltenham and to return to the home of her childhood days at Clearwell Rocks, and then visits to Cheltenham were with the sole purpose of making sure that everything was right in the house.

For those who do not know Clearwell, I must say that it is markedly different from the rest of the Forest. It is a village nestling in a valley with the inevitable stream running through it, yet there is no sight of a clear well. Crystal clear spring water does however gush from an embankment only yards away from the village's stone cross in the centre where the roads branch out in the shape of a letter Y. The vertical stem takes one to Newland and Redbrook with the stream running through the village making its way to the River Wye. The right hand branch of the Y leads to St Briavels or Lydney. Up this road with an embankment either side, are three important buildings. Midway on the right stands the beautiful church of St Peter; at the end of the churchyard walling and separated from the wall by a green, are the gates of Clearwell Castle; opposite the church and also in an elevated position is Clearwell School.

My parents were married in Clearwell Church and both my sister and I were baptised there. I have read, and heard said that Clearwell Church is one of the prettiest in the Diocese and with that I would agree. It is quite a large church for so small a village and has a spire and a good peal of bells. From a very early age, while at school we were taken across the road on all appropriate occasions to visit the church and I soon learnt the significance of two words engraved across the chancel entrance – **Alpha and Omega** – Beginning and End. These words never failed to attract my attention. Throughout the years, going back to the time of my grandparents, my family has been connected with St Peter's and it is worth remembering that the architect was none other than the same John Middleton who designed the church of St Stephen, Tivoli.



(**1) Clearwell Church**

I spent my first two years schooling in Clearwell and enjoyed them immensely. My favourite memories are of the times we were taken out into the autumn woods to collect leaves, berries and evergreens to decorate the school for Harvest festival or Christmas. I shared a desk at school with the son of the Lodge keeper at the Castle, and although I have not seen him since, this lad returned to Clearwell in adult life and became the owner, occupier and restorer of the Castle and promoted its interest amongst tourists and locals. My last contact with the Castle was in the thirties after it was seriously damaged by fire and I had the opportunity to go round it.

(2) Clearwell Castle

When I lived in Clearwell, it was of course a mining village and all the menfolk were miners. The only exceptions were the Vicar, the Reverend Robinson, and the village schoolmaster, Mr Evans, who was also church organist and choirmaster, and I suppose I ought to include the owners of the three public houses. Even the Chapel Minister was a miner.

In those days the entire population depended upon the aforementioned spring for their water. When I last saw it, it was flowing like it had done for many hundreds of years. Carrying pails of water home morning and evening was a daily routine for everyone in the village. I used to carry out this task for my grandmother, the distance being three quarters of a mile each way. It was not until the thirties that piped water was introduced into the village. There were no sewage or drainage systems and lighting in the home was usually by candle-light although candles were not usually called by that name. They were purchased as 'comps', an inferior composition of wax candle. It was only on Sunday or some other special occasion that the paraffin lamp was brought into use and the status of the family could easily be determined by the type of lamp they used. The poorer families only had the cheap, tin back-reflector version.

A place I have mentioned, known then as now as Clearwell Rocks, was a steep incline really no more than a cart track. It was strewn with boulders and loose stones. A little up the track on the right hand side was the home of my grandparents. It was a large Forest stone house with a Forest stone roof, built about two hundred years previously as a public house. Further up the track was a vegetable garden which went round the back of the house. The front garden was roughly eighteen feet long and both front and back gardens were surrounded by a Forest stone wall. During the severe winter of 1947 a huge part of the wall collapsed. I was never sure how he was physically able to do it, but my grandfather rebuilt the wall and made a gate of Forest oak – what else? - to replace the one that had come down with the wall. He was at the time, in his late eighties! Grandfather was a remarkable man in many ways. In his younger days he had been employed by the Gloucestershire Highways as a foreman ganger. He later became a miner and that is how he ended his working life, as a checker at the pithead. He was also an expert thatcher of house roofs and hayricks as well as being a reputable stone tiler. All of these jobs he did as hobbies in addition to his mining work. A retired Colonel eventually bought the old home and he often remarked to me that he wished he had known my grandfather. For my part I have often thought of what my grandfather would have made of the changes that have come about since his death nearly fifty years ago.

To come back to this family home for a moment. The house was entered through a pair of small doors and one found oneself in a small lobby. You were immediately confronted by a sombre ticking grandfather clock. A door to the left took you into the main living room. The fireplace was of the type which had cooking ovens on either side of it, with the usual suspended hooks and chains associated with an open fire. The fire burned day and night throughout the year as hot water was in constant demand in a miner's house. As well as being necessary for personal washing there was also the need to wash clothes and have them ready for the next day's work. Two of my uncles often returned from work soaked to the waist from the water in which they had worked at the coal face. There were no showers or baths at the pits in those days and on arriving home, they stripped naked in the small outer lobby, quickly entered the living room with its roaring fire and jumped straight into the hip bath which had been prepared for them.

I have said that the fire burned incessantly. Well that's not strictly true. I always knew that if my uncles or grandfather returned home with a holly branch or gorse bush, it was time for the chimney to be swept of soot. It was an easy task but it had to be done thoroughly. At the back of the house, the eaves and the guttering finished about a foot off the ground and it only required a ladder to be placed on the roof to be able to get to the chimney stack. The holly or gorse was tied to the centre of the cope with a long length of rope. My uncle usually went

onto the roof, dropped one half of the length of rope down the chimney to where my grandfather was waiting below inside the house, and with a good grip at each end they pulled the rope up and down until the job was completed - with most effective results.

The living room like all the others, had exposed beams. The noticeable thing here was the half sides of bacon hanging from hooks on these beams. They were being home cured, for amongst all his other interests, my grandfather kept pigs. With a large family there was always some waste food, and this, complemented by the vegetables grown in the garden meant that the pigs also enjoyed their meals with squeals and grunts of satisfaction. This they should have done, for apart from their prepared meals they also roamed all over the common land, eating nettles and whatever else took their fancy from the hedgerows.

The right hand side of the lobby gave access to a much larger room which would have undoubtedly been the lounge of the original public house. Underneath this room was a large cellar which had been excavated out of the solid rock, upon which the house was built. There were another two doorways leading out of this room, one of which opened on to the main stairway which led up to the three bedrooms, and there were also some steps leading down to the cellar. The cellar was never used by my grandparents and although curious I accepted that this area was out of bounds and the worn steps were dangerous. The other door out of the main room took one into what was my grandparents bedroom. One totally unexpected and unusual feature of this room was the fireplace. The back panel was of cast iron and depicted in high relief the story of the Last Supper. The perfect features of everyone, their clothing and the table, stood out boldly from the background of this marvellous casting. Some years before the deaths of my grandparents, one of their sons bought the house for them as security in their old age. On their death, he sold the house, first having had the cast iron Last Supper removed to his own home in Coleford. At all times it was blackleaded and was a truly beautiful work of art.

As a boy I well remember Clearwell caves being worked as iron ore mines and from my little bedroom window, before retiring at night, I used to watch the flickering flames at the mine entrance – acetelene lights they were. I also remember the red water that was pumped out of the mines and which was allowed to flow down through the village. The iron workings began at Clearwell Rocks and continued underground for about a mile to Sling on the main road from Coleford to St Briavels. In my youth, Clearwell Rocks referred to the boulder-strewn track leading up past the old homestead and fading out at Dean Pool Farm. Nowadays the tourist is attracted to Clearwell Rocks which includes Clearwell caves and covers a very much larger area. The land today is all Crown Property. I often wonder if the garden at the back of our house was an old Roman rampart. It would have indeed been a most strategic position and lookout over the entry into Clearwell. During the early part of my grandfather's life he built a stable, hen house and pig pen against the rock face behind the family home. He kept a large number of geese, hens and turkeys, and of course there were the pigs. On one or two occasions I witnessed the slaughter of a pig, and also pig sticking, which at that time was legal, for most people killed their own meat if they were able to. After an early morning meal, the pigs and poultry were set free for the rest of the day until sunset. Then they returned eager for their last meal before being secured for the night.

Of all creatures – great and small – my uncle's horse Ben was outstanding. All the family was fond of Ben for apart from being an intelligent and sturdy horse his usefulness to us and to many others in Clearwell was of paramount importance. As I have said, there were no baths or showers in the pits in those days, but the miners did have one perk – they had a special free coal allowance. It was by way of these loads which had to be delivered in Clearwell and the mining families that I visited the mines on several occasions with uncle Jim. Some mornings after being on night shift, he was not too pleased to find the horse already harnessed to the cart and ready to fetch a load of coal from another mine, usually about three and a half miles

from Clearwell, at Fetterhill Colliery. Such was his manner on these occasions that he would lift me up over the sides of the cart, climb in himself and not a word was spoken. After my first such experience, I knew what to expect. Soon I was on my knees fiercely clutching the sides of the coal cart. Being over six feet tall, and with legs outstretched against the sides of the cart, reins in one hand, my uncle would crack the whip in the air as we careered off at terrific speed. In fact, with Ben's tail flying high in the air and mane all dishevelled, anyone watching us might have likened us to contestants in a Roman chariot race. After a short distance at this breakneck pace, which seemed to dispel my uncle's displeasure, he soon returned to what was his more normal jocular self. Once loaded up at the pit, we walked home picking up lumps of coal that fell off the cart as it heaved and bumped over the rough ground. On our return, I was almost equal to my uncle in appearance, being black of face and hands. I well remember him saying to me on one occasion, a grin on his face and with the Foresters' dialect, "Tha dost look a reet bit of a Ferrister and miner theeself." He quickly added, "Thaast better git washed up." Sometimes Ben was too impatient to be properly brushed and would roll on the ground to free himself of the coal dust. Moreover he was keen to be free for the rest of the day to roam over the hill.

There were other requirements of Ben and his strength and this involved the use of the wagonette - a four wheeled carriage with mounting steps at the rear. Seating was along either side of the carriage and also under the driving seat for the coachman. After being thoroughly groomed, with polished hooves, best harness and glittering brass buckles, Ben really looked his best. My grandfather too, in his bowler hat and best serge suit really looked something. I only remember one person ever driving that vehicle – my grandfather. It was used for local outings and sometimes for football matches. What I do recall most clearly is stepping up alongside my grandfather in the high driving seat as he conveyed on two separate occasions, the members of the Clearwell Mothers' Union to meetings in Newland and Monmouth. At the time I felt very proud to be the only other male beside my grandfather, when behind us was a carriage full of chattering women. My grandmother was of course a member of the MU, and up to now I have made no mention of her.

While I have extolled the merits of my grandfather, my grandmother was no less capable in her feminine achievements. She was a very loving and kind woman, an exceptional needlewoman and dressmaker but above all a good mother, having brought into the world, and nurtured, twelve children. It was regrettable that one dark night, while descending a rough track to where it met the road, she was struck by a motorcycle without lights. As a result she had one of her feet almost severed at the ankle and never walked again without crutches.

My own mother was the firstborn of the large family and I was the first grandchild, although from my mother's brothers and sisters there ensued many more.

In what I have written so far, I have relived and re-experienced some of the happiest times of my life, and I could continue to write of many other similar experiences. I will however conclude in saying that of all that has come out of the Forest, it must be mentioned that no fewer than six men, all of them Foresters, have been awarded the Victoria Cross. I feel very proud to have known one of them, Christopher Miles, who served in the First World War, entering it from that little mining village of Clearwell in the Royal Forest of Dean.

(3) The home of Christopher Miles V.C.

Whaddon Estate and My Early Childhood

In writing about Whaddon it must be remembered that I ceased to live there in 1923 and during the first eight years of my life, up to the end of the first World War, half of my time was spent with my maternal grandparents in the Royal Forest of Dean. My schooling at Clearwell lasted until Christmas Eve 1920, whereupon I was conveyed to Cheltenham General Hospital where I remained for the next three months, but more of that later.

Contrary to what some folk might expect, I still have some very vivid memories of my early childhood in the Whaddon area of Cheltenham. There is in fact much about Whaddon which I shall never cease to remember, mainly on account of the many illnesses I experienced, the care and attention I received from my parents and also the kindness of neighbours which surrounded me at the time. Additionally there were many events which transpired during my early working life which connected me to the development of what were to become the Whaddon and Lynworth Housing Estates.

To begin, Whaddon of today just did not exist in those far off days at the beginning of the century. From the entrance into Whaddon Lane (not Whaddon Road) off the Prestbury Road, and continuing along Bouncers Lane, Cemetery Road, and finally on to the old Greyhound Inn in Hewlett Road, one saw nothing but open fields and hedgerows. Whaddon Lane was I imagine a cart track which took one to Whaddon Farm which one entered by field gates just off the Prestbury Road. The owners of this farm had connections with the Gloucestershire Dairy which used to own a very fine shop with tea rooms above, situated just to the right of what was until recently Hoopers, opposite Cavendish House in the Promenade. The farm was solely a dairy farm and the herds of cows grazed over many fields which have now become the Whaddon Estate. As I first remember Whaddon Lane, it was a pot holed, unpaved quagmire, a good half a mile long from the Prestbury Road end which finished up against a wooden paled fence and a pair of gates which was the entrance to the old Cheltenham Town Football Club ground. On the left hand side of this fence was an open fast running brook. Its source was from the Hewletts and Harp Hill and although it was culverted at this extreme end of Whaddon Lane and eventually appeared again in Pitville Lake, during periods of prolonged rain and heavy thunderstorms it still used to overflow, in consequence of which Whaddon Lane became and remained the quagmire which I have already named it. I can add here, that on final completion of Whaddon School, roughly situated where the old Whaddon Farm was, the playground surround to the school was finished with an asphalt surface. Within a week there was a heavy thunderstorm. On my last visit to the school where I was site representative for all the joinery in connection with the new building, I was horrified to see that underground water had burst through and broken up almost the entire playground.

But to return to Whaddon Lane. On the laft hand side as one progressed from the Prestbury Road entrance, it was hedgerowed for its entire length except for the kennels where now stands the new Robins Football Ground and Clubhouse, and a few houses. One then reached the open brook about which I have already spoken. The kennels was home to a recorded pack of forty five pairs of hounds which constituted the Cotswold Hounds pack. They hunted three days a week. Until the closure of the kennels, a dog cart was always in attendance at the Cheltenham races when, if some unfortunate horse met with an accident and had to be put down, it was transported to Whaddon Lane kennels where it was used for dog meat. Not a pleasant thought but even more unpleasant was the aroma which drifted through Whaddon on those occasions. The Lane, when the boiling of horse flesh took place was something about

which I dare say no more. The man who drove the dog cart was an Albino who had a shock of very bleached white hair and eyebrows and startling pink eyes.

The other side of Whaddon Lane was a more pleasant and appealing sight. A little way in to the right there was the Scottish Walker Memorial Chapel, a building of timber and corrugated iron. On Sundays, I was taken there by a neighbour and his son, and next to this church were a few newly built bungalows. Beyond these the hedgerow commenced again and remained unbroken for a distance to almost opposite the kennels. At this point was a large open stone yard with buildings in the background. It was in fact a stonemason's yard in which I was very interested and I enjoyed watching the men at work on very high trestles and planks as they cut down through huge blocks of stone – Caen or Bath – with an equally large crosscut saw. As they progressed downwards they had of necessity, to lower the planks. At that time, because of my age, I had not the slightest idea what the stone was to be used for, but in years to come, during my working life, I became associated with that firm of stonemasons and their ecclesiastical contracts. When I did become involved with the firm, they had moved from Whaddon Lane, and like myself, had established themselves in the other side of the town, nearly into Tivoli. Their new premises were behind the shop that was Willett's Motor Accessories in Andover Road and more recently a sports equipment shop.

(4) Walker Chapel

Having left the stonemasons' yard, the next building was the lodge for the caretaker and groundsman at Whaddon Recreational Playing Field. The floral beds were certainly the most appreciable part of Whaddon Lane, and the brightest place within it. After leaving the length of the Playing Field, one was nearly at the opening into Cleeve View Road, but before we enter that, there were about six houses on either side of this opening. The last house finished at the entrance to the football ground and overlooked the open brook on the other side. Over the brook was a planked footbridge which took one to some allotments, which were often waterlogged.

I was born at 2, Teresa Villas, Cleeve View Road, the last but one of pairs of semi-detached villas on the left hand side. The road was then about half its present length for a field separated it from Hewlett Road. Actually Cleeve View Road was a cul-de-sac within the cul-de-sac of Whaddon Lane. I would imagine that Cleeve View Road was the start of what was intended as the housing estate. The outbreak of the First World War certainly delayed this intention and it was not until the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s that any real progress was made. My early recollections from about 1917 enable me to say that residents on the left hand side were more fortunate than those on the right, for we had quite a nice length of garden with a paled wooden fence which separated us from the field on which the Town Football Team played. Everyone on this side of the road had a removable fence or gate which allowed children access to the field for playing. The views from the back of the house were appreciable and looked over towards Harp Hill and Cleeve Hill. In the autumn and the early months of the year, the fields between us and Cemetery Road were wreathed in mists, subject to the wet and waterlogged conditions which prevailed. On reflection, the best summer mornings reminded me of that piece of poetry which I was to learn later at Christ Church school: ***I remember, I remember, the house where I was born. The little window where the sun, came peeping through at morn.***

(5) 2, Teresa Villas

The residents of Cleeve View Road consisted of many Post Office workers of whom my father was one. This contributed to a very friendly and neighbourly community especially during times of illness and bereavement. The war years of course helped to bring people closer together. Having said that, I think back with gratitude to a Mrs Hiron who sat up many nights with me in times of illness to relieve my mother. My father had enlisted in the Royal Horse Artillery and was not of course at home. From the age of three I did not see him again until he returned from Mesopotamia at the end of the war. I believe that he had had only one period of leave after his initial training at Woolwich Barracks. It was while on this leave at

home, that a German Zeppelin came over Cleeve Hill – at least it was assumed to have been a German airship – and my father was adamant that it was. My father took no chances and with a walking stick put all the lights out not only in Cleeve View Road but also in the whole of Whaddon Lane. But back to Mrs Hiron. She was a jolly woman, several years older than my mother. She had four daughters and two sons. The youngest son, Stanley was only eleven months older than myself. Mrs Hiron inspired my mother with a lot of her own confidence. Stanley must have been a very late chick in Mrs Hiron's life for her eldest son Thomas was then in the army and her four daughters Vera, Ivy, Sybil and Hilda worked in Cavendish House when Stanley and myself were still young boys. Mr Hiron was also a postman and it was he who took me to the Walker Chapel with young Stanley. He was a very kind man and I've often thought of him as a born naturalist. He enjoyed taking us boys over Harp Hill to catch butterflies or to seek birds' nests and yet again, on other occasions, he took us to the old brick ponds at the foot of Harp Hill where he did some fishing. He was an enthusiastic floral gardener and the beds in his back garden were a joy to behold. Ivy, their second eldest daughter never got marred and lived in the same house all her life until she died but a few years ago. Until her dying day, she could never be persuaded to change from gas to electricity. At the time I lived in Cleeve View Road, the old upright gas mantles used to be most frustrating. On taking them out of the cylindrical box, you had to set fire to them which turned them to a white cobweb ash, before putting them on the gas burner. Very often they would disintegrate before you were able to do this. The Veritas, a newer and later model was a great improvement and truly worthy of the caption on the box – Dismayed but not Dismantled. One more memory comes to mind about Mrs Hiron. She was great humorist and her delight was to watch all those original comedians on the old silent films. I well remember The Keystone Kops, Snub Pollard, Larry Seman, Chester Conklin, Fatty Arbuckle, Harold Lloyd and of course above all, Charlie Chaplin. There were thriller films as well, Pearl White, Doctor Fu-Man-Chu, and the Adventures of Tarzan and the Apes. We used to see all these at Poole's Picture Palace in the High Street or at the North Street Picture Cinema. The man who played the piano accompaniment at Poole's lived opposite us in Cleeve View Road. His name was Frank Parker, the youngest of five sons and only one daughter. The Parkers were of Prestbury background, and although Frank did not get home from Poole's until after eleven at night, he used to continue practising on his own piano until the early hours of the morning. The family was famous in Cleeve View Road for not least among the five brothers was Charlie Parker the outstanding left hand bowler for Gloucestershire County Cricket Team. He was selected many times I believe for Test matches in this country but never played abroad. His brothers Sam, Wally and Bill were golfers of renown and were connected with the Cleeve Hill Course.

(6) Picture Palace

There is little left to say about Whaddon except for one more thing about Cleeve View Road. Behind the paled fence and the gate where it ended in the field which separated us from Hewlett Road there was a huge and ever increasing sawdust heap. This sawdust was conveyed through the town from Knapp Road and was from a sawmill which operated under the name of Barradel's. It was situated if not on, then near to where St Gregory's school is today. Another happy memory was when my mother used to take me down Whaddon Lane and put me on a tram which was destined for Lansdown Castle at the corner of Lansdown Road and the old Gloucester Road. There I got off the tram and walked down the right hand side of the Gloucester Road. There were no houses beyond Church Road St Mark's at that time, for here too it was all hedges and fields. Eventually I came to Benhall Cottage, opposite Granley Road, which was the home of my uncle and aunt but which belonged to the Unwins of Arle Court. My uncle and aunt must have been delighted with this home after their distressing time at Merestones Stables which I shall talk about later on. To me as a young boy, the memories of that cottage and the big garden that surrounded it, will always remind me of paradise. Set well back off the road, it had a path to the cottage that was flowered and bordered with all those old time sweet smelling pinks and other flowers that used to make up an old world cottage garden. What to me was of even more delight was the abundance of fruit in the

garden. There was everything – apples, pears, plums, damsons, strawberries, loganberries, gooseberries, raspberries and currants. I'm afraid my aunt often indulged me for she would often say, "Go on, go get yourself a fresh hen's egg out of the hen house for your tea." They only had one son, and he was in the Royal Flying Corps. After the War he became chauffeur at Staverton Court. My uncle and aunt remained at Benhall Cottage for the rest of their lives for which I was very happy as I was indeed very fond of them.

I have mentioned my ill health and it was very fortunate that although I caused my parents continuous anxiety with illness throughout my childhood days, medical expenses were covered by my father's job as a postman for the benefit extended to his wife and children. Doctor Hugh Powel was the Medical Officer for the Police and the Post Office staff in the town. He lived in the corner house at the bottom of College Road as one turned right into London Road. He was a very kind and attentive doctor who also practised I believe as a surgeon at the Hospital. I might also add that he too must have been a believer in the health merits of Weston-super-Mare, for on his retirement from practice, he moved to Weston where he remained until his death at over ninety years of age.

Nevertheless although medical attention was covered, medicines and any other requirements had to be paid for by the patient to the chemist. The chemist was the recourse of many who were seriously ill and who could not afford the expenses of a doctor's visit. Many poorer people doctored themselves with an abundance of patent medicines and pills for the relief of aches and pains. Thermogene was one such popular remedy, a kind of medicated cotton wool bought in rolls which when wrapped round the aching part of the body, radiated warmth and thus reduced the pain. I well remember as a child being wrapped up in it from toe to chin by Mrs Hiron, of Cleeve View Road. She, like my grandmother at Clearwell, was a great believer in the benefits to be gained from Thermogene and it was a regular home remedy for all sorts of aches and pains.

I was born a delicate baby and I suppose that it was natural that I should contract every child ailment that prevailed. I never missed out on any of them – measles, mumps, chicken pox and whooping cough. Of the latter, I suffered the worst of its attendant effects – damaged and discharging ears. In consequence, I hated being taken to the Ear, Eye, Nose and Throat Hospital in North Place, where I would have my ears syringed or cleaned out with peroxide or some such solution. Twenty years later I experienced the same procedure for sixteen miserable weeks but this time at the General Hospital.

(7) ENT hospital

One other experience of the EEN and T Hospital in North Place happened when I was little more than four years old, and it was a terrifying experience indeed. I remember my mother walking me from Cleeve View Road to the Hospital for it had been arranged by my doctor for me to have my tonsils and adenoids removed. On arrival at the hospital, which was a dismal place, I was taken from my mother by a nurse and still clothed, I was escorted to the theatre and placed on the operating table. No pre-med in those days. I was covered with a thick red rubber sheet, chloroform was poured on to a gauze pad which was then placed over my mouth and nostrils, quickly followed by a rubber mask which was held firmly on to my face. For a split second, I imagine my screams would have been heard at Land's End, but this of course aided my oblivion. After the removal of my offending parts, I was returned to my mother who carried me back home again, still unconscious. I know that my mother was very concerned for a few days afterwards when I coughed up blood and my face appeared to be burnt from the chloroform.

The Hospital Treatment Scheme to which my father belonged was financed by deductions made from his wages. It was a voluntary scheme and one to which I contributed when I started work and which continued in Cheltenham until 1947 at which time the National Health Service was introduced.

There is but one final revelation about my medical history to which I have already referred in the previous chapter. It was Christmas Eve 1920 and I was just six and a half years of age. I was living with my grandparents in the Forest and their doctor told my mother that I needed to be transferred to hospital quickly. It presented them with some problem as my mother insisted that the hospital must be Cheltenham. It was providential that a car existed in a small village like Clearwell, for it was nearly a decade later before cars became that noticeable even in Cheltenham. A Mr Maynard Keyes, son of the Licencee of the Wyndham Arms was a pioneer of motoring and he was at home at the time. He agreed to transport me to Cheltenham Hospital shortly before midnight and I shall be forever grateful for this good samaritan action.

Well, I was admitted to the children's ward and remained there for the next three months. I was a suspected appendix case which at that time was often referred to as inflammation of the

bowels. I was too weak to be operated on and I became known as what was then called a starvation or dispersal case. My outstanding memory was the daily dose of castor oil and the thick mixture of liquorice powder. I made but very slow recovery from these purges. Food at that time was not palatable and it was expected that it would be supplemented by more tempting food sent or brought in by one's family at visiting times. Even so this was offset by the pungent smell off carbolic or lysol. Ward sisters and nurses were usually stern which was of necessity rather than desire, but I particularly remember one who was very kind to me and I was very sorry and depressed when she was off duty. However I recovered and am still alive to tell the tale.

The time is now fast approaching a move. It is 1923 and I have a baby sister, Molly. We are about to move to a place called Tivoli on the other side of the town. I will of course miss my old playmates, but hope to see them from time to time.

(8) Teresaville, 22, Tivoli Street, Tivoli.

The Move to Tivoli 1923

It was in February 1923 that my sister Mollie was born at which event my father was advised to get the family away from the damp and waterlogged Whaddon area. Five weeks later we arrived at 22, Tivoli Street, in the parish of St Stephen. We had not been in the house two hours when the Vicar was on the doorstep. The Vicar, who was later to become Bishop of Shrewsbury said to my father, “I have been awaiting your arrival. Can I come in?” On doing so he observed my mother changing the five weeks old Mollie upon which he remarked that perhaps the first thing he could do for the new arrivals was to arrange to baptise the baby. Mother explained that the baptism had already been arranged to take place at Clearwell where she and father had married and where I had been baptised. He then turned to me and said, “Very well, then this young man must come on Friday night to the Vestry to meet the organist and choirmaster, and enrol as a choirboy. On Monday evening, you had best go down to the Church Hall, find Mr Hope and ask him to enrol you as a member of the Church Lads Brigade. Mr Hope will also probably be your teacher at Christ Church day school. A Miss Faber will look after you so don’t worry, I’ll tell them to expect you.” I’ll never forget that first encounter with the Reverend Robert Hodson.

(9) Rev R Hodson with Choir c1930. Jack Crook is on the right of the group against the church wall, holding an acolyte’s candle.

In those days, the choir numbered twenty eight boys, twelve each side of the chancel and two under each of the clergy stalls. In addition there were usually twenty men choristers. The congregation was very large and at the main 10am service, eight sidesmen were needed. The new Lady Chapel with its memorial wall was also filled to capacity. I remember in particular two little girls who sat with their mother in the nave right near the pulpit. One was fair and the other dark. I had to be careful as we were not supposed to look at the congregation and discipline was very strict. In those days we only had male Altar servers and they and the choir boys were kept under strict scrutiny. If they proved unsuitable, they were soon told to “Go.” This was the ultimate disgrace.

On major Festivals there were said Communion services at 6am, 7am, and 8am and the new or junior servers had to supply these early morning duties. If a server returned to the vestry and found that the next server had failed to arrive, then he was expected to stay on and fill in for the absentee. At the mid morning service, a new server might carry a banner but it took about two years before one could become an acolyte and carry the processional candles. As for carrying the Processional Cross, that was considered the privilege of the secretary of the servers, and if he was unable to carry out this privilege he, and he alone, delegated it to one of the senior servers. Pecking order was very much the procedure of the day.

Outside the vestry and down at the Church Hall, there used to be some very large fir trees, with huge overhanging branches. All new members of the choir and the Church Lads Brigade had to go through an initiation ceremony. This took the form of having to be tossed into the branches of those trees three times, after which you were accepted as "one of us." Knowing what was going to happen to a new boy, the Vicar, the organist and the choirmaster all tried to avoid the ceremony if at all possible or at least turned a blind eye to it.

On all Sundays and particularly on Festival occasions, the church was filled with those who came because they recognised that St Stephen's was indeed a place of dignified prayer, praise and thanksgiving. In the 1920s it was still the days of men and maid servants employed in the large surrounding houses. The first early morning service was for their benefit, so as to enable them to return to their place of employment in time to begin their morning duties. The 8am service was attended mainly by local parishioners with a considerable number of girls from the Ladies' College boarding houses. The 10am Choral Eucharist was the outstanding service of the day. The very large number of people of all classes – locals as well as visitors – who sought out St Stephen's for its distinctive style of worship, made the need for the eight to ten sidesmen absolutely essential. As a boy, I always looked forward to the Festival Eucharists as well as Festal Evensong, with the processions, anthems and solos. In the Vestry on such occasions one was always struck by the array of so many freshly laundered surplices which were neatly hung round the walls. On conclusion of the Eucharist there was a short period of about fifteen minutes before Mattins at 11.15 am and if I remember rightly about a third of the previous congregation stayed on for this service, with menfolk being the more numerous. This service was more relaxed and the men's voices blended in more readily with those of the choir. On the first Sunday of each month, at 12.15pm there was a very special celebration of Holy Communion for the infirm, but apart from its announcement in the weekly notices, no particular emphasis was placed upon it. The usual celebrant at these services was lame and had a very pronounced limp. He was in fact none other than Canon Edward Link Jennings, the second Incumbent of St Stephen's who had retired. Mr Hawker, the Verger, used to place a wooden ramp over the chancel steps before the start of the service to enable those in Bath chairs or other type of invalid chair, to actually get to the Altar.

(10) Rev EL Jennings

Evensong was at 6.30pm and they used to come from every street and lane in the parish, so much so, that it might be styled the Family Service of its day. Apart from the choirboys, sons and daughters accompanied their parents even though they had already attended Sunday School or Bible Study classes in the afternoon. One of the most spectacular services was the children's Harvest Festival. From the west end to the chancel, floral decorations abounded. What was already in the church and all gifts received during the service, were conveyed afterwards in a large taxi, to Cheltenham Children's Hospital at Battledown, the Strickland Homes in Hewlett Road, or Dr Barnardos Home, with a little of the non-perishable gifts being kept in reserve for distribution within the parish itself.

One last service needs to be mentioned. In the published History of St Stephen's mention is made of the singing of the Russian Cantakion for the Departed at the dedication of the Lady Chapel. I must add that equally moving was the rendering of that same anthem by the choir only, at the main Eucharist on Remembrance Sunday for many years afterwards. I have suggested throughout this chapter, that St Stephen's earned for itself a reputation for reverence and respect in all its worship. This is well illustrated one Sunday morning when a visiting preacher spoke from the pulpit with genuine sincerity. "I have been informed and heard so much about St Stephen's that on being invited to preach here, I began to worry as to whether I would be able to cope with the high standards and correctness that prevailed." Nevertheless he accepted the invitation and survived! **(11) Lady Chapel memorials**

Of the names inscribed on the Memorial to the Fallen in the South Aisle, each one was a choirboy who later became a server. The names are not prefaced by rank or title, they are all just 'lads of the parish' who lived in Tivoli and worshipped in their parish church. I knew them all. **(12) South Aisle Memorial**

The annual choir outing to Weston super Mare was always eagerly anticipated by both choirmen and boys, for it also included an excellent luncheon and tea at Brown's café, famed in those days for its catering. On arrival at Weston, the main objective of the boys was to race through the town to the Birbeck Island Old Pier, upon which was a water shute, a small zoo and a fun fair. The latter was owned and run by a family who lived in Tivoli Road. There was a son, Norman Clark and a daughter also, but they did not remain long in Cheltenham and

eventually moved to live in Weston. Whenever I think back to those very happy choir outings, I cannot but help recalling with affection dear old William Hawker, who devoted so many of his years to St Stephen's as Sacristan/Verger. He was great advocate of the health merits of Weston and spent many of his holidays there.

The choir also looked forward to the Christmas 'treats'. The choirmen had a choir supper, while the boys had a separate Christmas tea with the servers. However all ages were taken to see the local Pantomime or a Christmas cinema film. I remember with appreciation a Mrs Beasely who was the kind financial benefactor of these events. She was always remembered in prayers at the Christmas teas and the Vicar never failed to remind us of her generosity.

In addition to the above events, the servers had their own summer half day outing which always took place in Malvern, Evesham or Stratford upon Avon. On one of our visits to Malvern in the early thirties, we were passing the theatre when a very tall man with a white beard came out. He was dressed in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbocker trousers. He abruptly stepped on the pavement, pivoted around and went into some sort of Irish jig. We were then informed that he was none other than the famous Bernard Shaw, well known for his eccentric capers. This event added extra excitement and conversation to our day.

Sunday School summer outings were always held on a Saturday afternoon and our destination was always Denley's Pleasure and Tea Gardens at Bishop's Cleeve. Once again there was a mad rush from Cleeve Station hoping that we would be amongst the first to get on the zinc lined helter-skelter. There was always at least one boy and one girl with the seat of their trousers or dress torn, having been too eager to seat themselves on the rush mats that were provided. There were also many other delights for the children – swing boats, roundabouts, a small open truck railway and of course, donkey rides. As well as Cheltenham Sunday Schools, Denley's was frequented by similar organisations from all the surrounding Cotswold parishes.

Nearer home was another great attraction for children. This was the First World War tank mounted on a concrete base with iron railings all round, sited near to where the electricity sub station now stands at Westal Green. It was the building of the sub station that necessitated the removal of the tank to a new site alongside the Montpellier Gardens lodge. Years later it was taken away to allow for the roundabout and road widening, but in its original position, it provided an unusual playground for the boys of Tivoli.

(13) WWI Tank at Westall Green

Thinking back to schooldays, there are three outstanding events which I well remember. The first is being taken from Christ Church School and being lined up on Malvern Road Station platform to await the arrival of the Duchess of York – the late Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother – who was making her first visit to Cheltenham Ladies' College. My second great memory was a visit to the Empire and Colonial Exhibition at Wembley, again with Christ Church School. The most enthralling parts were the displays and sections from Africa, India, Burma and Ceylon. It was a very exciting experience for everyone and on our particular visit the halls were filled with children from all over the country.

My third memory was of Sunday 13th June 1927. In company with other members of the St Stephen's Church Lads Brigade, we travelled to London in charge of our Captain, Mr HEH Hope. We were on our way to the Royal Review by HRH the Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward VIII, in Hyde Park. He was at the time, Patron of the Church Lads Brigade. Our uniforms were the same as the First World War soldiers – khaki tunics, breeches and puttees, brown belt, and peaked cap with the same cap badge as the King's Royal Rifles to which the Brigade was affiliated. Its motto, and our hymn, was ' Fight the Good Fight'. On arrival at Paddington, along with many other West Country units, we marched through London until we reached Wellington Barracks, where we ate our haversack rations with tea provided by the barrack cooks. We then marched to Hyde Park where we lined up with contingents from all over the country, numbering well over several thousand. His Royal Highness was scheduled to arrive at 3 pm and we were duly brought to attention on time, but it began to rain heavily and HRH did not appear. It was very much later that he was observed across the Park as he came charging up to the assembled parade. He brought his horse to an abrupt halt, causing the animal to rear up on its hind legs, upon which the Prince brought it down, turned round and charged off again. The Lads were not impressed and small wonder for they were all very wet by this time. Two months later I attended the CLB camp at Bridport and this too was a very wet experience – I was very nearly put off the CLB for ever.

By the age of fourteen I had finished my school days. A job and long working days loomed ahead of me. However before I could take a job I was taken ill with rheumatic fever and had to remain in bed for several weeks. During that time, the Vicar, the Reverend Addenbroke, in the company of Mr Hope, brought me my Royal Review Medal, in a velvet presentation box. It had not been announced before the Royal Review Parade that we were to receive any medal and it may well have been a gesture on the part of the Prince of Wales to compensate for his lateness and poor behaviour on that earlier parade. **(14) Rev Addenbroke**

Of one thing my mother was certain. My illness was as a direct result of my soaking in Hyde Park and at Bridport.

Throughout the 1920s there was lots of illness in Tivoli and I well remember three boys and one girl, all neighbours, who died from tuberculosis at the time of our arrival in Tivoli. In those days, it was not uncommon to see people going round wearing white arm bands to signify that they had been inoculated against smallpox, scarlet fever and diptheria, all of which were prevalent in the parish in those days of 1923.

Working Life

Autumn 1927 saw the beginning of my working life. Before I left school it had been decided that if possible I should enter the Cheltenham Postal Service. My name had been registered at the GPO for consideration as such time as a vacancy should occur. It was in the October of that year that I was sent to start duty on a temporary basis as a telegraph messenger. On reporting for duty I was given the Official Secrets Act to read after which I was sworn in by a Postal Inspector. I was issued with a leather belt, attached to which was a pouch for the secure delivery of messages and finally an arm-band with the letters GPO clearly visible on it. Afterwards I was allocated a red GPO cycle with the warning that I would be expected to keep it cleaned and oiled. The cycle would be inspected weekly and if found to be satisfactory, I would receive an extra shilling (5p) a week on top of my wages. At the date that I started there was a staff of twenty four appointed youths ranging in age from 14 to 18. If one passed an examination, one became a junior postman, and if one passed at a sufficiently high standard, one could later become a post office counter clerk. Apart from the town shops and residential areas, the extent to which telegrams were delivered stretched for a four mile radius around Cheltenham. This included the top of Cleeve Hill, Charlton Kings, Leckhampton, Hayden and Coombe Hills, Bishop's Cleeve, Dowdeswell, Shurdington, Up Hatherley and the Reddings.

There were three sets of rotating duties and these covered all the messages that were received in Cheltenham daily. Deliveries began at 8am and continued throughout the day until 10pm. Our duties were split into eight hour shifts the messengers operating from a ground floor room under the supervision of an Inspector or the Head Postmaster. The messages were addressed and enveloped by the receiving telegraphist in the top room of the post office then conveyed to the messenger room in a metal cylinder through compressed air pipes. After six in the evening, the messengers who were still on duty or returning from delivery, reported to the telegraphist's room where from then on the messages were received direct from the telegraphist. By 8pm there was only one receptionist on the keyboard and two messengers. The last few minutes leading up to ten o'clock were always awaited with tenseness. If up to the last minute before ten the morse keys started tapping we knew that a message had to be delivered. It would mean overtime pay of course, but on a rough winter night, a trip to the top of Cleeve Hill or one of the other hills was one of our worst expectations. And such excursions were not uncommon for messages were sent to the recipients who were awaiting the day's closing stocks and shares prices, and I well remember having to cycle two of these late turns in most inclement weather. Early into 1928 the cheap telephone resulted in the reduction of the number of telegrams which were delivered daily, but very few shops contained a telephone and there were no public boxes as we know them today. Up to 1928 hardly any residential houses possessed a telephone and in that year, our messages received were reduced by 50%. In consequence the required number of messengers was reduced from twenty four to twelve. I was one of those who had to go.

I had little regret about not continuing in the postal service but my parents were naturally disappointed at the time. As it transpired, I was to experience a far more interesting and satisfying working life in the years ahead. Towards the end of 1928 my father read in the Echo that a workshop boy was required with the prospects of becoming an apprentice carpenter and joiner. My father hurried me to the office of this joinery works in Albion Street where the multi-story car park is now situated. This was, I soon learned, a new department of the well known Smith Brothers' Timber Yard, which was situated on the opposite side of the road. The new department was named Albert Joinery Works after the sole proprietor a Mr Albert George Hawkins. He lived at Ashley House, Ashley Road, at the top of Battledown Hill. He was very well known in Cheltenham as a man of property. He also owned the Liverpool Wine and Spirit Vaults in the High Street which he sold in the 1930s and the

premises was then demolished. Mr Hawkins also owned several private houses in the area most of which were large Villas in Pitville Circus Road. He had scooped these up at a good price when they became empty after the First World War. He was certainly a remarkable self made man, having risen I later learnt, from being a wine and spirits sales representative. It was most fortunate for myself and other employees that during the slump years of the thirties, Mr Hawkins had those Pitville houses renovated and turned into self-contained flats. This provided much need work for us carpenters, joiners and builders in general. Mr Hawkins always had to be addressed as 'The Gov'nor.'

I was lucky to get the job at seven shillings and sixpence (37p) for a forty seven hour week. On my first morning I arrived in good time to commence work at 7.30am. A number of employees had already assembled outside the premises awaiting the arrival of the foreman who would open up the big sliding doors. Mr TR Buckland was works manager at the time, but he also acted as foreman and he was not averse to taking off his coat and working alongside the other men on the bench. I never entered the workshops during the first two days for on observing me outside, Mr Buckland said he wanted me to go with Mr James. He then pointed out to me a small man who was waiting with his bicycle at the kerbside. When I joined this man with my own cycle, I asked this man where we were going to. " Do you know Pates Grammar School playing field?" I replied that I did indeed – it was off the Evesham Road at the end of the Agg Gardner Recreation Ground. "You've got it" he replied, a true north countryman, and I always found him to be very genial. When we arrived at our destination, I beheld a big, mainly wooden new sports pavilion which included changing rooms. Mr James was a carpenter not a joiner but in the course of my working with him, I realised that he was an excellent craftsman. There were only the two of us and Mr James said, "Now what I want you to do is to go round inside and out and collect up all the rubbish and short ends of timber and burn them. After that, sweep the whole place clean of dirt because we shall have to clean the windows too before we leave the place." By the second day I had come to like Mr James for he was a very likeable man although he smoked incessantly and chewed a piece of twist at the same time. I was pleased when he caught me looking at a nice., clean piece of pine matchboard, for he told me that if I wanted any for firelighting at home, I could take what I wanted. At this time the old Pates Grammar School was situated at the corner of North Place and St Margaret's Road. It was not a good building being mainly a wooden structure on a brick base surrounded by a fairly tall brick wall.

(15) Pates Grammar School, North Place.

During those first two days, had anyone told me that I would again become involved with Pates Grammar School at a much more responsible level, I would never have believed them. And that same little carpenter, some years later being unemployed, came seeking me out to enquire whether I could give him a job. Need I say what my answer was? But I did have to remind him to be careful with the smoking as it wasn't allowed in my workshop.

It was on my third evening of employment with Albert's Joinery Works that I first entered into the ground floor of the workshops. What a sight met my eyes. I was amazed to see several rows of church pews of almost identical appearance to those I knew so well at St Stephen's. They were awaiting the process of being fumed prior to being wax polished. Later that same morning after having been told to sweep up round the joiners' bench which was on an upstairs floor, I was sent with a barrel truck to a nearby chemist to collect one of those carboys of very strong ammonia. This was the requirement for fuming oak. Later that same day, those pews were tented over with close woven sheets of canvas and before the ending of the working day large flat pans were filled with ammonia, quickly placed between the pews and left to do their fuming overnight. Next morning all the doors and windows were fully opened and the men commenced another day with streaming eyes and running noses until the strong ammonia fumes had evaporated. After being finely sanded down with glass paper and dusted off, the pews were ready for wax polishing. I was given a very sharp knife and some

big blocks of best, pure beeswax. I was told to shred these up and half fill some buckets with the shavings, to which I was to add best Canadian turpentine, so that the buckets were filled three quarters to the top. These prepared buckets were then immersed in larger containers holding water, and placed on gas burners. As the mixture came to a simmering temperature, it was removed and immediately brushed into the pews while still warm. With the aid of two apprentices I began the laborious and arm aching task of polishing off those pews and the job continued for a good few days.

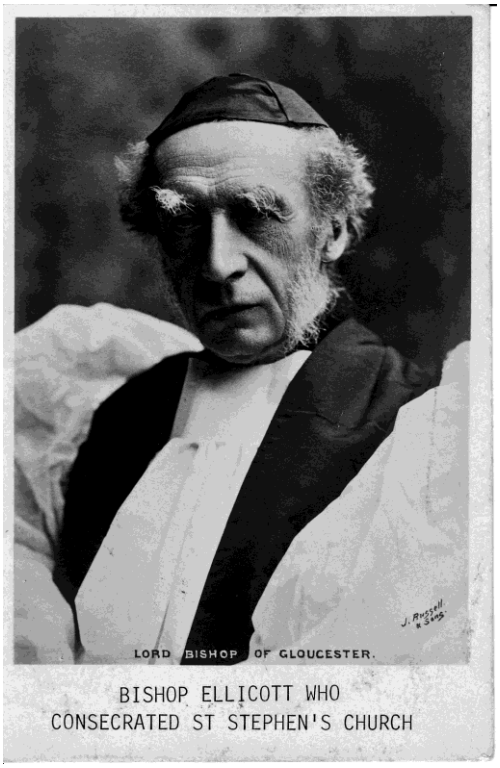
I have been rather detailed in my description of these early days of mine, for ecclesiastical furnishings are not the normal run of the mill work experiences. This process of fuming and wax polishing was to become the safeguard against death-watch beetle and woodworm for many years hence. These particular pews and there were many of them, were for a new church in Penarth, South Wales. I was surprised to learn in later years that this work had resulted from that ecclesiastical stone mason's yard in the old Whaddon Lane to which I referred earlier. In later years I again came into contact with this firm and its owner. Actually this job and many others began what turned out to be a sequence of coincidences that brought together in a remarkable way, my association with the Forest of Dean, Whaddon, Tivoli and St Stephen's Church.

Over the period of that first year as a shop boy, there were many other menial jobs that I was given to do. These included burning the shavings during the winter months in the Robin Hood boiler which heated the premises; preparing the old cowheel and scotch fish glue and preparing the endless pink primed door and window frames before they were delivered to a building site. There was also a lot of truck pushing to be done. Cheltenham at that time still abounded with many horses especially those pulling the heavy loads of railway goods and goods belonging to the Cheltenham Original Brewery. There were also many Cheltenham Traders' vans and coal merchants' horses. It was not unusual to read in the Echo of cases being brought to Court of firms overloading horses or ill treating horses on the hills leading out of Cheltenham. Well it so happens that upon completion, there were two new, big and heavy staircases with newel posts, balustrades and handrails destined for two newly built houses at the very top of the Leckhampton Road. From Albion Street this was a long, uphill journey approaching three miles. Together with another lad, we pushed one of those staircases together with all its loose elements to its final destination. The next day, we started off with the second consignment. Like the day previously we stopped to rest outside the Gentlemen's College in Bath Road. We then moved on to our next resting place, outside the Leckhampton Road Police Station. We had rested but two minutes when from behind someone rested a hand upon my shoulder. I was startled on turning round to see that it was a police sergeant. In those days, if a policeman came near you as though he wanted to speak to you, you were left in fear of what you might have done wrong. I was relieved in this instance when he said, "It's alright lad, don't get up. Stay there for as long as you like and have a rest." He then asked our names and who we worked for. I gave him the information and was surprised when he said, "And you're taking that load to the top of the Hill aren't you?" I agreed and was relieved when he told us not to worry and that everything was alright. "But you won't be taking any more truckloads up Leckhampton Hill I can assure you," he added as he left us.

The sergeant must have admonished the joinery manager for he avoided my eyes for a day or two and we were not sent on any long truck hauling excursions for some long time afterwards. The manager was basically a very good man and through the years we shared a mutual respect for one another. He could however, be very thoughtless at times but he offered me much that enabled me to advance my skills. He was very efficient in all joinery work and a business man to the tip of his toes. Most strangely though, he hated to be confronted by architects or surveyors , who as he admitted to me on one occasion, put him ill at ease. He had great difficulty in expressing himself and I got used to him saying, "We've got the architect coming in today. I have to be out so I'll leave you to attend to him."

My first year as a shop boy ended in July 1928 and I became an Indentured Joiner and Carpenter Apprentice for the next five years. My father did not have to pay a premium, but my wages dropped from seven shillings and sixpence to five shillings (25p) a week. There was a three shillings (15p) rise each year for the next five years bringing my weekly wage to seventeen shillings (85p) in my final year. Apart from being given an initial list of immediate tools required, which my father bought for me for between five and seven pounds, there were also individual items to be added regularly until I had a full set of joiners' tools – in all, over one hundred pounds of equipment, a small fortune in those days.

I have often been asked whether class distinction was an issue at St Stephen's and the answer to that question depends very much on what one means by class. Oh yes it existed alright but no more than it did on Cheltenham's Promenade – of which more to follow – and of course differences between the lives and customs of the classes was far more of an accepted thing in those early days of the twentieth century than it is today. We most certainly had a good cross section of all social classes at St Stephen's – the very wealthy, the rich and the working parishioners of Tivoli. After all, it must be remembered that St Stephen's was built to serve the 'ever growing population of working people in the outlying districts of (Christ Church) parish.' Yet at the same time, Bishop Ellicott when laying the foundation stone in 1873 said that the intention was to provide a church in this part of Cheltenham 'for our poorer brethren and for our richer brethren.'9



(16) Bishop Ellicott who laid the Foundation Stone of St Stephen's Church in 1873

Certainly there was no obvious concern about class amongst those who constituted the congregation in my time even though many of the pews were rented – all those in the centre aisle and many in the side aisle too. It did not seem to matter over much to those who came to worship, that some people sat in 'their own' pews, the rent for which provided the Vicar's stipend, or that the vast number of pews in the side aisles were reserved for the girls from the Ladies' College boarding houses such as Bunwell, St Hilda and later, Hatherley Court. They came to worship, and their number made up a very large percentage of the Sunday 10am congregation. Of course there was a complete mixture of both retired, professional, artisan and domestic population residing within the parish boundary and much of the congregation of the twenties was made up of worshippers from outside the parish, who came because of the distinctive style of worship, as I mentioned earlier. Right up to the time of the first World War and even later, the congregation was made up of a large number of Colonels, Majors, an Admiral, a Major-General, Lieutenant-Colonels, Commanders, a Surgeon-General, several Ladies and one or two Mesdames, all sharing in worship alongside cobblers, chimney sweeps, coal merchants, shopkeepers, coachmen, carpenters and those in domestic service.

On entering or leaving church everyone, regardless of status used whichever door was most convenient to them, including the external door to the Lady Chapel. The choir and servers used the external door to the vestry and the clergy used the external door from the sacristy into Oakfield Street. The bell was tolled for precisely ten minutes before the beginning of the service which always started promptly on the hour. For some years, one choirboy was the official paid bell ringer and I have often heard the verger, Mr Hawker, tell him off quite sharply – "The bell seemed to start before time again this morning!" In those days Mr Hawker always remained in the north porch before and after the services to receive messages for the Vicar or to pass on any from him. Only Mr Hawker, in his capacity as Verger, was allowed to move about the church during services. **(17) Mr Hawker, the Verger.**

I suppose it is due to the efforts of the Reverend Robert Hodson who came from the small parish of Staverton, that any differences in social importance or status were welded together. Not only in the church itself, but in the parish and beyond, whatever was required or needed to be achieved was met with good will, hard work, and respect from everyone. This surely had moved St Stephen's on from the days of the 1884 magazine which carried the following information: ***married persons of the working class, living in St Stephen's Parish and living orderly lives, may become members of the Provident Clothing Fund. The working classes are meant to include weekly wage earners, laundresses, disabled, or widows of any of the above.*** Mention was also made of the aged poor of the parish.

I have mentioned above, the Promenade, the haunt of the well to do, the retired military, especially the colonels. Obviously the shops in this area of the town were the main attraction for this class of person. Their design, their size, their ornate furnishings and the quality of the merchandise which they provided, made them exclusive to the well to do. Similar comment can be made about the many hotels in and around Bayshill and St George's Road, which were, with the Queen's, the temporary homes of rich visitors to the town. But such people brought much needed employment in the way of shop assistants, bath chair and coach personnel, domestics who lived-in above their place of employment and other services to which these retired and seemingly well off persons had been accustomed. Nobody of the working class would ever have dreamed of entering Madame Wright's, Cavendish House or Aris Gowns, even had they been able to afford the prices. They would have been embarrassed to encounter a liveried doorman or an immaculately dressed floor-walker who would descend upon them from his elevated position in a conspicuous part of the store. Finally there would also have been the sales assistant who would ask, "Have you an account with us Madam?"
There was little cash passed over the counter in the Promenade of seventy years ago, except of course by visitors to the town. Conversely it would have been unheard of, and acutely embarrassing for a real lady or gentleman to have attempted to obtain their requirements from any High Street outfitter or dress shop such as Lipton's, Home and Colonial, the International Stores or the London Supply Store. Yes, the Promenade was the playground of the rich and the High Street was for the working class. Anyone of this latter class who said that they were going to town, meant that they were going to the High Street.

In a like way, the Lower High Street was the shopping domain of the really poor and was commonly known as Dockem or Lower Dockem. I can only assume that Dockem referred to the poor conditions experienced in the dock areas of the big cities the world over. When my father was a postman one of his rotating rounds started in the Lower High Street, continued into the Tewkesbury Road and included the whole Dockem area. The people were extremely friendly and the 'postie' was regularly offered a cuppa. However the policeman on the other hand was like a red rag to a bull, and treated quite differently. I remember one notorious character who was a frequent visitor to the Law Courts, usually on a charge of drunkenness or violence. He was a big man known as Long Tom, whose dignity and pride would not allow him to be arrested by less than two policemen. The sole exception to this was a sergeant

Fluck, who like Tom was an exceptionally big man and very well respected in Cheltenham. If sergeant Fluck arrested Tom, and Tom was sober enough to recognise him, Tom would go along without any more trouble.

For nearly thirty seven years apart from those during the war, I passed through the Promenade twice daily on my way to and from work. I always found it a great pleasure to do so and as a result I saw many famous or well known people. I recall one in particular. He was small and a very doleful looking man, and I noticed him as I returned to work after my midday meal. He sat alone on a seat on the side of the Promenade facing the New Club. He looked straight ahead and appeared to be in deep thought. His attire comprised a round type of pit helmet and a loose fitting coat which reached down to just below the knee. Who was this man who made such an impression upon me? He was known throughout the world as 'The Lion of Judah', and was none other than the Emperor of Abyssinia, King Haile Selassie, who had fled his country - nowadays Ethiopia – after its invasion by Italy. If he was acknowledged by anyone he would return the compliment and then resume his attitude of deep thought. Although he was in Cheltenham on this occasion, he spent most of his time in this country in Bath.

The Promenade has been a great asset to Cheltenham but I think it reached its best in the thirties. The huge trees had reached their full growth and in summer it was like walking through a leafy tunnel from end to end. Since the last war many of these trees have had to be

removed due to disease, the shops have metal window frames which bear no resemblance to their original glory and the Winter Garden has long ceased to exist. The unique bandstand has gone from where in the summer months the Regular Army Military Bands of every regiment including the Guards, used to attract an audience from every class and community within the town and beyond. Finishing on that point, it will be realised that although the shops gave Cheltenham's Promenade its exclusive reputation, it was still a place which gave pleasure and enjoyment to everyone.

In the parish itself, St Stephen's Social Club catered for the many social interests of the residents of Tivoli as well as for the members of the congregation. As its popularity grew, it attracted members from the other parts of Cheltenham as well. The committee was composed mainly of members of the church organisations – Mothers' Union, Sunday School, Servers Guild - and willing members of the congregation and the PCC. The membership card was prefaced with the wording: ***But for the generosity of the Incumbent and Churchwardens of St Stephen's, this Club could not operate***. Even so we were a self-funding and self-organising association and paid an annual rent to cover the heating and lighting expenses. The season began on the first Tuesday evening in September and continued until the last Tuesday in March. On each Tuesday evening from 8pm until 10.30 pm we held a dance and enjoyed for the season a local band of four musicians. We were lucky to have among our club members professional and competitive dancers who dictated the standard of our weekly dances. For several years we had to close our membership when it reached 150 persons. One of the most outstanding and memorable events in the annual calendar was the New Year's Eve dance which of course was allowed to continue until midnight. It was enhanced by a Corps de Ballet of professional young lady dancers from Miss Evelyn Courtney's Dancing Academy. Miss Courtney and her sisters were members of the congregation, daughters of a parson and they lived at Walcote House on the corner of Tivoli Road. Miss Courtney left Cheltenham many years ago and went to live in Scotland where she had inherited a Scottish castle. Her local Dancing Academy was close to Montpellier Rotunda and she was always delighted to present her troupe for these New Year dances when St Stephen's Hall never looked more attractive. The committee was busily engaged during the whole week preceding the festive occasion, buying, renewing or erecting streamers, balloons, decorations and motifs, which with the array of coloured spot lights on the back gallery and footlights on the stage, turned the Hall into a veritable fairy land. There were competitions, spot prizes, and raffles.

Not least popular was the refreshment room with its abundance of foodstuffs bought by the committee or made by the ladies. Most of the members donated prizes to make this one of the most enjoyable events of the year.

(18) St Stephen's Hall

On ordinary Tuesday evenings we included Old Tyme Dancing which meant that we danced the Barn Dance, the Lancers, the Shotteese Pollka, the Gavotte and of course the ever popular Military Twostep. The dances were very much enjoyed by our older members who never failed to take the floor thus revealing their dancing ability. There were also strict tempo ballroom dances to be watched and admired, for as I said earlier, some of our members were of a very high standard when it came to tripping the light fantastic. Our Tuesday evenings were no village hall hop, skip and jump efforts. We even held dance contests for which a Major Crayshaw was the professional adjudicator. In addition to all these activities we were always available to render service to the church. Two particular events raised enough money to completely re-tile the roof over the south side of the nave and the grand piano that stands near the entrance to the Lady Chapel/meeting room, was purchased by the club to replace an old upright one. It was bought at a sale in Lansdown Road and when the Club closed in 1947, it was given to the church where it has proved useful on the occasions when the organ has been inactive or in need of major repair. I could mention so many people who worked so hard for the success of the club and its contribution to the life of church and parish. Suffice to recall just a few: Mr Claude Townley who was the Chairman; Frank Herbert who preceded

me as Secretary; Mr H Farr who was Treasurer and his mother, who was one of the most industrious of the committee members.

Sadly in the aftermath of the war, things changed considerably and in the midst of apathy and despair which prevailed at the time, the Club was forced to close.

Tivoli 1923-1939

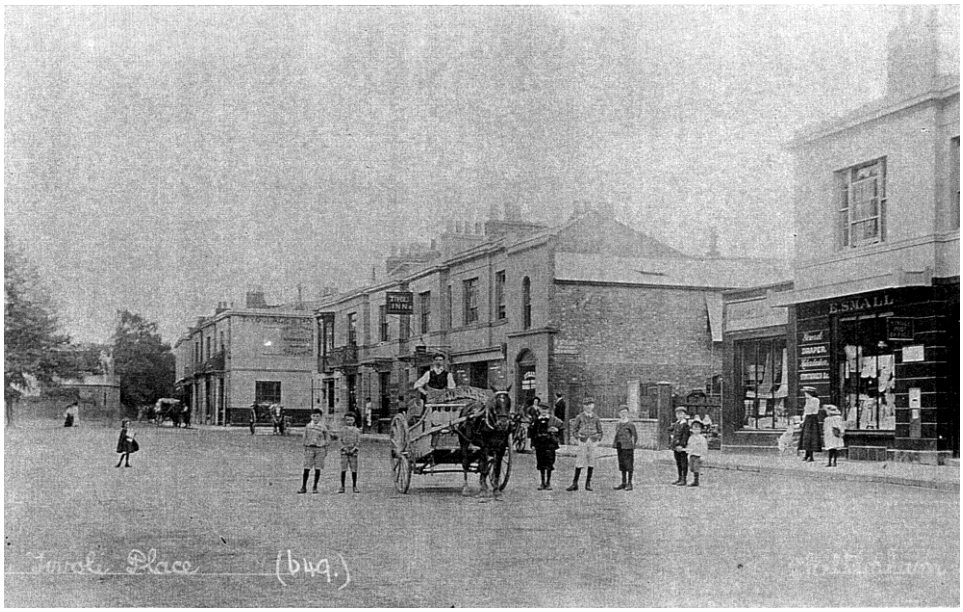
Andover Road, as the approach road to Tivoli, remains much the same today as it was when I was a boy. The large house on the north side almost in line with the Tivoli Lamp was then the Vicarage. The shops along the south side of Andover Road were then very attractive and provided a much wider range of provisions for the parishioners than they do today.

(19) A view of Andover Road c 1920.

Our biggest loss was the Post Office with its pillar box outside. It was for some time at the end of the new buildings where Tivoli Trading now is. Some years later it was moved, together with the pillar box, to the centre of Tivoli Buildings, which starts where Tivoli Lane begins. On the other side of the entrance to Tivoli Lane was Mann's the coal merchant and on the opposite corner, where Tivoli Buildings begins was a high class grocery and wine store named Saddlers, which was patronised by the gentry from Lansdown, The Park and the Christ Church areas of the town. There were at least three people serving full time and also two cyclists were employed to deliver to people's homes. In the same row was Waghorn the butcher shop. Mr Waghorn lived in Princes Road and was assisted in the shop by a colleague. They too employed a cyclist delivery boy. Then came the most important supplier at the time – Sewels the corn merchant and animal feed shop. Mr Sewel was a very popular member of the Men's Club which met at the Tivoli Institute in Tivoli Street. He used to deliver with his horse and dray cart, bales of hay and straw to the aforementioned gentry who possessed their own horses and carriage. Those who did not own their own would call upon the services of Park Mews and Stables in Lypiatt Street. Mr Hall was among their employees and he was a coachman who lived in Hatherley Street. With his wife and daughter he attended St Stephen's where he was a sidesman. Within Tivoli Street lived another coachman, Mr Bell, and at number 19 lived Mr Bullingham who was Mrs Drew's coachman at Hatherley Court. For his convenience she had a coach house and stables built at the rear of number 19 both of which have since been demolished. Moving on then from the corn shop was the Post Office and at the end of Tivoli Buildings was the present Phoenix Inn (The Tivoli) which continued round the corner into Tivoli Street. For many years this hostelry was known as the Tivoli Ale and Porter Stores.

(20) The Tivoli Ale and Porter Stores.

Across the road on the opposite corner of Tivoli Street was another butcher's shop where the hair stylist is today. This was named Whitmores and later, Proberts. The next premises was the Tivoli Inn followed by a double fronted shop accommodating Rouse the upholsterer. The site of this shop is taken up by Tivoli Trading today. Incidentally this row of shops had a peculiarity which existed until 1991. On the right hand side of the shop next to Tivoli Trading there used to be a little recess which was in fact a lane which ran down to Stranges, the iron and heating firm's workshops. They moved to Montpellier Walk after which the double fronted shop became Enstones, another grocery and general store run by Mrs Enstone and her husband. Next came the entrance to Morris' building yard and next to that was the final shop, selling in the 1920s silks, lace and other soft furnishings.



(21) Andover Road c 1920

Before leaving Andover Road mention must be made of the glazed stonework lamp and seat which adorns the road outside Tivoli Stores. It used to stand at the top of Montpellier near to where the traffic island is now to be found.

(22) The Tivoli Lamp

Where the grassed area behind the lamp is now, there used to be a house called Crossways which faced towards St John's Lodge, and whose rear was in line with Tivoli Lane. The house was demolished for road widening and certainly removed what was a dangerous bottleneck. This house was of particular interest to me for Mrs Bell-Howarth lived there. Formerly, she and her husband, who had been Vicar's Warden from 1927-1929, lived in the house at the corner of The Park, an Italian styled building then named Gonia. They had a daughter and a son who became a Priest. After the death of her husband, Mrs Bell-Howarth moved to Crossways – about 1930. I was asked by the Curate at the time, the Reverend RJ Keble, to visit Mrs Bell Howarth in respect of some matter which she wanted to discuss with me. It transpired that some crib figures had been presented to the church. She gave me their measurements and showed me a sketch and wondered if I would consider obtaining the necessary timbers and making a stable. I readily agreed to this proposition and after making a very large stable to accommodate the sizeable figures, I regularly erected and dismantled it each Christmastide until the outbreak of the war in 1939. The figures were always well wrapped up and stored at Trehale, the home of the Misses Jones who were staunch supporters of St Stephen's. I think that it was they who had presented the crib figures, if not all, at least the Holy Family and possibly the three Kings although these were a much later addition.

(23) The Crib Figures

And what of the remaining residents of Andover Road? At Ridgeway lived the Misses Hailstone. Miss May Hailstone was a missionary in Japan for the greater part of her life and for many years her sister was under-matron at Cheltenham General Hospital as well as being a Sunday School teacher at the Vicarage in my childhood. The stained glass window in the north aisle is a memorial to their brother killed in 1917. Another person deserving of mention is Miss Ida Harvey who was a nurse and lived with her mother in one of the final row of houses nearest to the St Stephen's Road entrance – Hatherley Villas. She was for many years Sacristan and meticulously looked after all the vestments.

Now to return to Tivoli Street in the 1920s. On turning into Tivoli Street, what is now the extension to the Tivoli was in fact two old buildings with shop frontages. For many years these were very popular for the simple fact that they sold fish and chips as well as wet fish off the slab. Called Owens, it was rather a quaint shop for it also displayed vegetable boxes outside. There was also an excellent fruit and vegetable shop in what is now Oliver's Antiques. When Mr Slater retired it was taken over by a Mrs Fletcher, not a Cheltonian, who I believe was a war widow. She had built, at the back of the shop, a sizeable bake house. She must have been a very capable woman for not only did she succeed with her high class cakes, pastries and confectionery in Tivoli Street, but before she left the town in the 1930s she had opened two more shops in Cheltenham.

(24) Mrs Fletcher's Bakehouse, Tivoli Lane.

I have already mentioned two coachmen living in Tivoli Street. There was also a third who although retired was very important. He was a Mr Flint and although I don't remember him, I gathered from his daughter whom I knew well, that he and his family moved to Tivoli a year before my parents did. The Flints came from the Duke of Beaufort's Estate where Mr Flint had been the Duke's coachman. At that time the Duke had become fascinated by the motor car and wanted Mr Flint to be his chauffeur, but Mr Flint was not kindly disposed to the suggestion so he left the Duke's employment and moved to Tivoli. In 1985, Miss Flint was still living in the small cottage between The Tivoli and Oliver's. To continue up Tivoli Street, at number 12 was a gents' barber shop run by a Mr Edward Lucas. Although it is now a private house, the fixing brackets for the barber's pole can still be seen on the left of the house to this day. On the opposite side of the street at the Andover Road end was part of Whitmore's butcher shop, next to which was Burrows the newsagent which served the parish and neighbourhood until it ceased trading but a few years ago. Continuing up the street was the Tivoli Coffee Tavern, a name by which it was well known in the 1920s. It was open in the morning and coffee was served by a Mrs Rutland who lived and had a well-stocked little shop at the top of Tivoli Street on the same side. Just before this shop was the stables of Mann's the coal merchant. These stables existed long before Mr Mann became the owner and I shall refer to them again later. Mrs Rutland eventually sold her house and shop and became the caretaker of the St Stephen's Institute, the former Coffee Tavern. Its new name became the accepted one after the property had been bequeathed to the Trusteeship of the Vicar and churchwardens of St Stephen's.

Turning from Tivoli Street, and passing along Princes Road until one reaches Lypiatt Street, an Off Licence and Grocery Store occupied the shop premises on the corner. Just further on in Lypiatt Street on the left hand side, was a baker's shop owned by Mr Dan Lewis who was a great friend of Mr Moon the chimney sweep. Mr Moon lived at 6, Hatherley Street and he was a church sidesman and rented a pew in the north aisle. As well as chimney sweeping which occupied him for most of the summer months, Mr Moon also ran a kennels from the back of his house from where he used to breed fox hounds. In the winter he was a very colourful man himself, for he owned a hunting horse and rode with one of the local hunts. He was also keen on badger hunting with his own terriers. Being connected by family, I accompanied him together with Mr Lewis the baker, on two occasions, to Dowdeswell Woods for a spot of badger hunting. Mr Moon had a pony and buggy carriage and as a lad of twelve, the prospect of a day's badger baiting was exciting. However the experience was not as

thrilling as I had anticipated, and I realised what a cruel sport it was for both dogs and badgers, the dogs often coming off worst and having to be dug out of the setts. Another character of the period was old Mark Tucker, the cobbler. Where the Royal Union skittle alley is today there used to be three small cottages, each of them 'one up, one down.' Old Mark's bench occupied the downstairs room and he always seemed to be very busy and happy. He had quite a parish reputation for at certain times of the year he used to collect, cook and eat snails. Sometimes he used to take them round to the Tivoli Inn which he frequented and if anyone was so inclined they were welcome to share his delicacy with him.

On some of the old guide books to Cheltenham which include maps, Tivoli, Hatherley and Lypiatt streets are often the only ones named, presumably because they were the first parts of Tivoli to be occupied. It must have been a problem for the builders and postmen and delivery boys of those days, for although not shown on these maps, there were and still remain, several cottages scattered along the lanes in what was to become the Parish of Tivoli. One of these has already been referred to, that occupied by Mark the cobbler. There still exist Fairlight Cottages between Hatherley and Lypiatt streets and on turning into Tivoli Lane, Autumn Cottage still stands occupied as does Field Cottage further up. A little beyond this was Linda Cottage, three rooms only one above the other occupied by an aged couple, Mr Mrs Trantor. Mr Trantor was I believe the last bathchair man in the town. This same house was occupied as the street Firewatching Post at the outbreak of war in 1939. Continuing up the Lane there was also a block of four small cottages with one room up and one room down to each, with only one washroom and WC to serve all four households. They were numbered 1-4 Field Cottages and like Linda Cottage, they were demolished when they became vacant in 1938 as being unsuitable for human habitation. When we first came to Tivoli a very aged neighbour and friend of my parents remembered these cottages being occupied by cowmen and farm labourers and being surrounded by open fields. (**25) Tivoli Lane, a former Packway.**

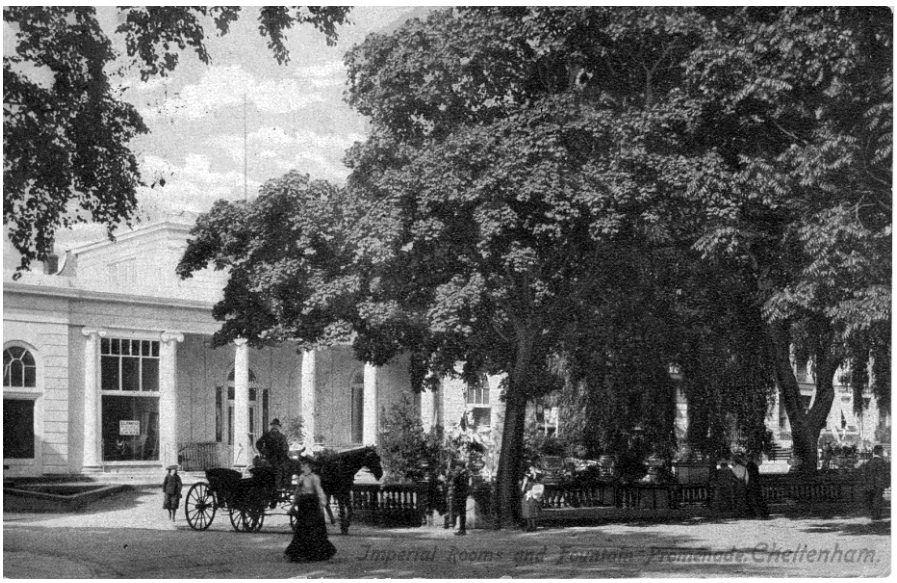
Tivoli Lane is different from all the many other lanes in Tivoli in that it was adopted whereas the others were not – lanes like Prin Box Lane,), Bakehouse Lane and Moon's Lane, the latter so called because Mr Moon owned so many properties on that side of Hatherley Street, the side on which he lived himself. These lanes still remain unadopted even today. I remember in 1930 my father going down Tivoli Lane one dark, wet and windy morning at about 4.30am. The Lane was a quagmire and deeply potholed. Father came off his bike and although he continued the journey to work at the GPO he could not remain there as one of his knees was grazed and very swollen up. The doctor put him off work for several days. From an old map in the possession of the GPO father saw that the road was marked 'route to Shurdington' so later on he called at the Borough Surveyor's Office and made a complaint about the state of the road. The official to whom my father spoke claimed that the road was not the Council's responsibility as it was unadopted, like all the Tivoli lanes. Father insisted that he refer to the map which he had seen at the GPO. Eventually it came about that father was contacted, received an apology and a few weeks later a steamroller picked up the lane and it was resurfaced. Moreover we had a road sweeper who came once a week to keep it clean. Unfortunately this was discontinued during the war years.

Tales of the Unexpected

Elsewhere I have made mention of several coachmen in Tivoli Street which reminded me that my paternal grandfather had himself once been a coachman. He also played the euphonium in the Salvation Army band. He was employed as a coach and stableman at St Philip's Mews where he lived over the stables and where my father was born over 95 years ago.

I recently remembered an experience of my grandfather's coaching days which my father related to me many years ago. I did not know my grandfather for he died when my father was but seventeen years of age. Grandfather had a brother-in-law and their respective wives were sisters. This brother-in-law was also a coachman and I have a story to tell about each of them. I am sure that after reading both stories which are perfectly true, you will agree that they are indeed ***tales of the unexpected*.**

As was usual with most Mews, apart from direct requests for a coachman and carriage, the coachman at various times of the day did a waiting duty at one of the various Hackney Carriage ranks in the town. A principal one in Cheltenham was in front of the former Imperial Rooms, in the roadway which encircled the Neptune Fountain. It was a prime position for promenaders and members of the New Club. Also, 'runners' were sent from St James' Station if a carriage and coachman were required. The so called 'runners' by the way, were not employed by anyone and the last one if I remember rightly, was one of the 'down and outs' who lived solely off the coachman's few coppers which they gave for his services. This was frequently supplemented by the travellers who sometimes engaged them to carry their baggage over the short distance from the train**.**



(26) A Coachman in waiting

To really begin my story. It was a very late duty one night, which for the coachman did not finish until after midnight at which time the train from London arrived. Circumstantial to the time of year, and the lateness of the hour, only one cabbie went round to the station in the hope of a fare. If other carriages were required, then the coachman at the station would send a runner round to the Imperial Rooms to make this known. Such was the case this particular night when the runner said to my grandfather, "There's a fare waiting for you." My grandfather tipped the runner and made his way to the station. It was very dark although dry and mild, and on arrival at the station, grandfather observed a man under the covered carriageway where by this time the lights had been put out. On driving up to the man, my grandfather said, "Would you be the gentleman requiring a cab?" The gentleman replied in the affirmative and asked him if he knew Rosehill House on the Evesham Road. Grandfather

replied that he knew it well and made to get down from his driving seat but the man forestalled him. “Don’t get down cabbie, for if you have no objection, I will put my case inside and sit myself up beside you. I found it rather stuffy in the train and would welcome a breath of fresh air.” The gentleman put his own luggage inside the cab, got up beside my grandfather, said “Thank you cabbie” and off they set. As I’ve already said, it was a very dark night and the gentleman relapsed into silence as he sat alongside my grandfather whose attention was given to the horse and the street ahead. Having passed along Clarence Street, North Street and Portland Street, they were soon in the Evesham Road and alongside Pitville Lake before the man spoke again. “Have we much further to go?” he asked. My grandfather told him that Rosehill was just on the right hand side of the road over the rise in the hill which they were just approaching. “Good,” replied the man, “and when we get there I will give you a picture of my mother.” At this remark my grandfather thought that he might have picked up a bad fare, so he did not reply until he began to turn off the road into Rosehill’s driveway. On doing so he said, “Here we are Sir, Rosehill.” The gentleman began fumbling in his pocket and said that he was trying to find that picture of his mother that he had promised to give my grandfather. Again grandfather made no reply and being out side the door of the house, he got down from his driving seat, and taking the man’s luggage from inside the cab, he carried it to the door. The gentleman followed behind. Grandfather pulled the bell wire and seeing him do so, the man from behind said, “You would like the photograph of my mother wouldn’t you cabbie?” To which grandfather replied that he would just like his fare as it was getting late and he had to account for all his fares to his employer. “Of course,” replied the gentleman and with that the front door opened. My father took a step inside and placed the luggage on the hall floor. He then straightened up and turned with outstretched hand to receive his fare and in the light of the hall he found himself face to face with King Teddy, Edward VII who was holding out to him a golden sovereign. You can imagine how dumbstruck my grandfather was, whereas the amused king just said “Goodnight cabbie and thank you very much.” When my father first told me about this he finished by saying that on backing out through the doorway, the Butler who had opened the door and had remained standing by it, looked into my grandfather’s face and with an equally amused expression merely said “Goodnight cabbie.” and closed the door.

My second story concerns my uncle Albert who was a Bredon man. Shortly after he had married my auntie Annie who was my grandmother’s sister, he applied for what at that time was a well paid job with accommodation over the stables, at Merestone House in the Park. The house stood on the corner of Merestone Road. Albert considered himself fortunate in securing a job as coach and stableman but it was also but a short distance from where his wife’s sister lived at St Philip’s Mews. Both my uncle and aunt were very happy living over the stables at the rear of Merestone House and this happiness continued for a short time. But one night, my aunt woke my uncle and said in a startled voice, “Did you hear that terrible noise Albert?” My uncle was of a somewhat dour disposition but a very kindly man and I was very fond of them both. He had been in a deep sleep and was somewhat irritated when my aunt woke him, and he told her to get back to sleep as she had been dreaming. My aunt insisted that this was not so and that what she had heard was the most unearthly sound of someone wailing or groaning. Uncle insisted that it could have been cats marauding around the stable but my aunt was not convinced. Although nothing more was heard that night, my aunt had difficulty in returning to sleep and next morning she told my uncle that she most definitely had not been dreaming.

It was a few weeks later that my aunt was again awakened by those same horrible sounds and thoroughly alarmed once more, she shouted “Albert” and vigorously shook him. Fortunately my uncle was not in such a deep sleep this time and when she asked if he had heard anything he replied, “I certainly heard something queer which must have aroused me. I’ll go down below because it might be a rat that has got into the stables and startled the horses. He went to the stables and inspected the horses but found nothing wrong with them or with anything else

that might account for the terrible noise. He went back to bed and told my aunt that although he had found nothing he certainly was mystified by the noise he had definitely heard.

Nothing more was said about the matter for they sensibly decided to put it out of their minds and forget about it. But this was not to be. Some weeks later, they were both wide awake for they had been talking when once again this horrific sound started, a kind of wailing, moaning and vibrating noise. It sounded as though it was right beneath them. Uncle jumped out of bed and ran downstairs shouting, “In God’s name, what’s the matter?” There was complete silence and he found nothing. Returning to my aunt, he said, “Come on, we’re getting out of this place as soon as we can, - I’m giving in my notice in the morning.” He was very disturbed by what had happened and in the morning he carried out his intention, moving from Merestone House very soon afterwards. It was not long after leaving the place that he got another job as stableman at Arle Court with the Unwins. One day he was talking with another stableman who asked him how he was getting along in his new job. Uncle Albert told him how much he was enjoying the new job, and especially the nice cottage on the Gloucester Road which went with the job. The other man continued, “So you left the job at Merestone House then. You know, I could never understand you taking that job in the first place.”
“Why ever not?” asked uncle Albert.
“Didn’t you know about the place before you worked there?”
“Know what about the place?” he replied, and the man began his story. “It’s obvious that you now nothing about the stables nor the fact that the owners have not been able to retain the services of anyone since a man who used to work there hanged himself under the stable stairs.”

Shortly after I came to live in Tivoli, my father took me to Merestone Road and pointed out to me the stables. “Well John “ he said, “that’s the place where your uncle and aunt used to live, but not for very long though.” It was long after this that he told me the story that I have shared with you. Although Merestone House remains today, as part of GLOSCAT, the stables became derelict some years ago and were demolished. As a boy, I cannot ever remember those stable being lived in by anyone. Going back over sixty years, there was at that time no Hatherley Park to play in. The youngsters resorted to the Woodland Farm meadows and fields in which to play and from where to watch trains which went through them. I never told any boy or girl what I knew about Merestone House, for we often went down Merestone Road which terminated in the footpath that led into those fields. While there was always a childlike aversion to The Park after dark, for it was then a gloomy and dismally lit place with only one old gas standard, I myself had a greater dislike for that part of it. Like my father, I still retained that belief in the truth of what had happened there.

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(27) One man and is dog – Jack Crook and his companion Gip c1990

John started to write in 1990 at my suggestion when he told me that he had too much time on his hands. He was almost confined to the house as he looked after his sister Mollie who was unable to look after herself and this writing experience really gave him something challenging to occupy him during the lonely evenings and mornings. Every word was written in neat, small copperplate writing, on lined foolscap paper.

John, or Jack as he was familiarly known, was always reluctant to finish his diary and I had encouraged him to include some wartime memories of the parish and some of the post war changes that he remembered, but this was not to be. Knowing that there was still another chapter to write was one of the things that kept him going.

Gradually he became less active himself and eventually ceased writing. I had suggested to him that we might 'print off' his memories and he told me with an approving smile, to do what I liked with them. I edited what he had written and read that version to him which he seemed happy with and agreed that they might in some way be used to help with St Stephen's finances. The publication of the book, '**The Story of Tivoli, Near this Town'** was inspired by what Jack had written and all the profits were donated to the Church Restoration Appeal, as Jack would have wished, but sadly this happened after his death.

That book has completely sold out and still many requests for copies keep arriving. As a way of responding to these, I thought that it might satisfy the desire to know more about Tivoli, if I produced an edited version of what Jack had actually written which is of tremendous social interest not only for the residents of Tivoli but further afield. I have not been able to verify all of the facts as Jack saw them and which are contained in this book, but having known him well and appreciated his excellent memory I doubt that there is much that might be called 'fiction' within these pages.