

Recollections of Sydney George Ivens

I was born in 1913 in a small village of about 400 people.

On reaching the age of 5, I was sent to the village school. There was a Headmistress helped by an infant teacher. The head was very strict, wielding the cane if one misbehaved in the slightest way. On Sundays we had to assemble to go to church. Our vicar was elderly with failing eyesight. I joined the choir when I was eight where one of my duties was to fetch the vicar a glass of water which entailed going to the vestry, the full length of the church.

On going to school, I passed a pond on which the vicars ducks swam. I suppose I must have thrown a stone at them for the vicar brought a small mug for me in the hope I would not do it again.

The roads at this time were very rough. When they needed repair a lorry load of stones was tipped as adjacent as possible, then transported to where they were needed by horse and cart. The stones were then spread by hand, watered, by a horse drawn water cart and rolled by a steam roller. Later it was decided to use chipping-s. These too were brought to where they were needed, spread by hand, the base of tar, which , was boiled in a heater, the tar being spread by means of a tube affixed to brushes. The chippings were then spread by hand and rolled as before. Much later still macadam was used as it still is today.

As a village we made our own entertainment. We had a Drama Group. a Choral Society a Woman's Union, a Football also a Cricket Club. There were three Public houses. One served the passing traffic on the main road, another served the users of the Canal, it had stabling for the horses. The other was in the middle of the village and was mainly used by the locals. The beer was delivered in large barrels, which stood on a brick thrall. The beer was drawn off into large jugs, then poured into the glasses. Many jovial evenings were passed , the beer was strong and cost a mere penny or so. Talk was mainly of local doings with quite a lot of good humoured leg pulling. I remember one old gentleman who, of a stranger entered would accost him, offering him a drink. He then put his hand in his waistcoat pocket which seldom had much in it. The stranger often replied, "You have one with me ", this ruse oven worked.

We held dances on most Friday nights alternating with a village a mile or two away. The dance here being held in the schoolroom, necessitated the desks and chairs being moved into the playground.

We had a bakery and a village post office . We also had a shop at which vagrants could cash for food the chits of paper given them at the local workhouse as we were equidistant of two.

About the Autumn time a travelling fair was held . visiting most of the villages. This consisted of swings . roundabouts. coconut shies etc.

In the main the village was self sufficient. Everyone had a garden, milk was delivered from the farms. We also had our own undertaker. as those who died were burred in the churchyard. The undertaker would get four locals to carry the bier. I knew of one old gent, who kept a suit, hard bowler hat especially

for these occasions. The church bell signified a death being tolled, one for a child, three for a man and two for a female.

I was a farmers son, we worked seven days a week, mainly six or seven in the morning till dark. I still found time in summer to play cricket also tennis on a court provided by the Methodist church. We played our cricket against local villages, reaching them mainly bicycles and sometimes on the train. Life in general was very hard but quite rewarding from an achievement. point of view. Although life was hard this was made up in general by a job well done.

Work was found in various forms. As there were about six or seven farms, many were employed on the land. The railway too employed quite a number as plate-layers, porters etc. Some went to the neighbouring town which employed quite a lot at engineering also office work. Most of these travelled by train, some used their bicycles.

The `Big House' too employed quite a few as gardeners, grooms even washerwomen. The owners of this quite thought a lot of themselves. If they rode through the village in their pony and trap, they expected the menfolk to touch their caps and the ladies to curtsy.

At Willoughby- the station had its own Station-master, the house being adjacent to the station The road then was often flooded as was the lower part of the village, Moor Lane especially. We took great delight helping cars which got stuck.

A common meeting place was the village blacksmith's a Mr. Buckbv, who would parade us with broom handles imitating soldiers. He was a very busy man as there were many horses who came to his forge.

There were many houses in the village built of wattle and daub. They were extremely warm inside. I remember visiting one old lady who was treasurer of the Sick and Dividend Club. The house was very very warm with the small fire and oil lamp combined.

Opposite the chapel lived an old gentleman who did wood-work. He even made his own coffin. Most of those old houses have now been replaced. One of the oldest houses in the village is called Vale House. It has a cobbled yard and stands back from the road. Opposite Vale House was a field called Brooks Close. A stone wall which ran down to the church-yard surrounded this.

Next to the church is the Manor House which was owned by a Mr. Johnson. On May-day the children of the village went round singing may songs and Mr. Johnson then entertained us with sports and teas.

We farmed from Ivy House. Opposite was a pond which often flooded and I found it a constant job to rod the overflow, which ran through a stone drain down to the brook. I remember that the field at the top of the lane was an open field until, in 1939, a hedge was planted. Then, in 1973 , I planted trees along this hedge right down to the main road_

The village, in general, has not changed much with the exception of the building of the two cul-de-sacs Magdalen Road and College Road. We still have a Post Office, a pub and a church but unfortunately we now have to go elsewhere to buy provisions.

I was born in Red House. When I was about three .I had double pneumonia. A bed was placed in the kitchen where a fire was kept in night and day and a kettle was left boiling all the time to enable me to breath from the steam.

We had a well in the yard, which often ran dry, and we had to go elsewhere for water. There were many wells in the village, some of them sulphurous. Had these wells been developed Willoughby might have prospered but unfortunately wells were found in Leamington so ours didn't materialise. Most of these wells have now been filled in. Our baker often had to go to a well at the bottom of the village. He used what was called a sailor which was a large containers on wheels.

Opposite Red House lived an old gentleman who owned all the cottages. These were thatched until he died when they were bought by Mr. Johnson from Braunston who removed the thatch and tiled them . This same firm had built the old council houses and later the Village Hall.

Charlie Jarvis, who worked as a Jack of all trades at the vicarage, had a little workroom in the outhouses. We boys used to go, at nights, to watch him do his fretwork. He had a large fire and, when he tired of working, we played pontoon for matches while we roasted potatoes in the roaring fire.

A Year or so later we had a youth club in the Reading Room (adjoining the schoolhouse).

At this time Jimmy Malin served refreshments and teas to customers on the main road but his accommodation did not meet local government standards , so he decided to build a new café and the boys of the village went to help him by digging holes for posts. Unfortunately this do-it-yourself effort took so long to materialise that he lost his custom which he had built up. About the same time someone else tried to run a café at Hevwoods Lodge, but this did not take off at all. The old house was the sold to a firm from Dunchurch but, unfortunately a fire broke out inside the dwelling and the house was pulled down. The site is now used as an amenity for the village.

Over more than eighty years many changes have taken place but at this stage I have no desire to live anywhere else

Ivy House Farm

Ivy House Farm was one of the Willoughby farms owned by Magdalen College, Oxford: it was farmed by William and Frank Ivens whose father had been the tenant before them. William Ivens was for many years, church warden, a charity trustee and correspondent for the School Managers. Both brothers played cricket along with many of the other farmers at that time. Although both were interested in village affairs, Frank's activities were curtailed when he became a semi-invalid.. After William's death the farm was run for a time by Frank and when he died, soon after William, the farm was taken over by their widows. It then passed on to Sidney George, William's son. In 1952 the college sold Ivy House Farm to William Johnson of Market Deeping, an uncle of Sidney Ivens. Sidney farmed as tenant until 1974 .when, on William Johnson's death, the holding was split up and sold.