

The Little Comberton I Have Known

(“Warts And All”)



By David Parker

For Dawn, and in Memory of Andy



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Introduction

I was born in Little Comberton, the year 1945 and I have lived here for over sixty years, and this is a record of my life in the village, establishing how my family came to be living in this wonderful part of Worcestershire, in the shadow of Bredon Hill.

I wanted to put into the written word past events, acknowledge the people known to me and to describe village life as experienced by me personally. I never set out with the intention of having this record printed, it was more of a record for my daughter, Dawn, but Margot, my wife, thought it ought to be printed as a sequel to "*Little Comberton – A View of a Village*", and after speaking with Edith Powell, I was persuaded to "to go to print". I have had to alter certain reminiscences and withhold names as I did not want to cause embarrassment or hurt to anyone, and have added a few items to make the record of interest to the reader, but basically, the following work is the village and its life, as I have known it to be.

I feel that we are custodians of this village whilst we live here, and our lifespan is just a minute part of the evolution of the world, however very important to us. Past generations have not had the opportunity to record their life stories in the way that we now can, thus it is hard to ascertain the facts of lives of ordinary people who came before us. How often have we wished that we asked more questions about the experiences of our parents, relations and their friends? I would encourage anyone with a story to tell to write it down as things are often postponed indefinitely and are often lost forever, and we know that history can give a sound foundation for the future.

I may not be the right person to compile this record, as others have been in the village longer than I. I was only educated at Pershore Secondary Modern School, which I considered very good, but had no further education in college or university, apart from attending Worcester Technical College for a three year course as a bricklayers' apprentice. There I gained Bricklaying Qualifications and also a U.E.I in English for builders and I am proud to say that I was the only one to gain that qualification that year!

I would like to thank old friends, who through their endless reminiscences and chats with me about events and happenings have helped to keep the past alive and in my memory. I wish to thank Edith for all her help and encouragement, for retyping and editing this work of mine; without her it would not have been possible to go to print, and my thanks to her husband, Julian for his help and advice. I also express thanks to the publishers and photographic archivists, Frances Frith, and to the Evesham Journal for giving permission to use their photographs. Lastly, I thank the villagers, past and present, who have made Little Comberton what it is, a good place to be, and I hope that they feel as fondly about the village that I have called "home" for so many years.

David Parker 2011

1. Fond Memories

“Do you remember the time when a barrage balloon broke free from its moorings and drifted towards the village?” I remember my father reminiscing to a neighbour. All of us were called out to shoot it down as they thought it was German paratroopers.”

“Aye,” replied his friend, “and the time we was on the hill and we thought a tree was moving towards us, and we was ready to shoot at it ‘cause we thought it was a German, too!”

“And,” said Dad, “the time I was on patrol up Endon Hill and I heard a rustling the other side of the hedge. ‘Stop! I shouts, who goes there?’ There was no reply, so twice more I shouts, ‘Stop, who goes there’ and still no reply, so I lunges my bayonet through the hedge.

‘Stop, stop!’ shouts a voice, ‘it’s me, Ray Stephens.’

‘What the hell are you doing through there’ I says, ‘them’s not your fields.’

‘It’s alright, Sid, he replied, ‘I’m just checking something.’

Ay, he was checking something OK, either crops he’d no business being on, or sumut else!”

The two of them carried on chatting idly as people did in those days.

Village folk seemed to spend more time chatting and telling tales then, and the older folk were only too happy to tell stories of their escapades and experiences. Whether they were all true or not I really cannot say but I sat and listened, sometimes eavesdropping on these stories, and it helped to weave a wonderful picture of the village where I was to spend most of my life.

I have so many memories from the years that I have lived here, although one’s mind can be a little selective in what it recalls. We do tend to forget some of the bad things, however while I am still able to recall the past, I have attempted to describe life over the years. I may not be quite as accurate as I would hope, and so apologise if others remember things differently. I must say that I feel very privileged to have known so many past villagers and events, and feel that some attempt is made to record as much as possible



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Little Comberton, the Village c1955



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2. The Early Years

The Little Comberton I was born into was a very different village to the one we know today. The Second World War had just ended and its aftermath was very evident. The men who had fought in the conflict came home and they were changed men, for example, Reg Bartlett returned from a prisoner of war camp with his wrists and ankles raw from being manacled. The mental scars for these men stayed with them forever, and common were the tales about the atrocities of war. Food rationing was still in place, refugees occupied the barns that had housed the P.O.W.'s during the war, and there was a mistrust of strangers, especially if they came from a foreign country. Having said that, houses were rarely locked during the day, probably due to the fact that any strangers were usually watched to see where they went and what they were doing. However, there was not a great deal worth stealing in most villagers' homes, and granny's possessions had not been recognised as valuable antiques then! Most of the people who lived in the village worked on the land, although some people were going further a-field to work, mainly into Pershore. It may be hard to believe now, but in those days not many people owned a car so journeys to work were by bicycle.

Gardens were not the showpieces they are today; they were used to grow vegetables, house pigsties and chicken houses. Generally people in the village worked together and played together, helped each other and looked after one another. Most people had very little money so they mainly rented houses, many being tied cottages that went with the job, and often these properties were in very poor condition, with no indoor toilets but a "loo up the garden" and were usually quite primitive bucket toilets, or just holes in the ground. These toilets were either of brick, wood, or corrugated iron construction and conditions were damp, dark and chilly so the chamber pot in the bedroom saved having to make the journey up the path during the night!

It was because of tied houses that my parents came to the village in the 1930's. My father worked as a shepherd/stockman for a farmer at Woollas Hall Farm, part of his job being to look after the horses, ridden by the farmer and his family. One lunch time, the farmer came home from hunting, was in a foul mood having had too much to drink, and thought that dad was not treating the horse in the right way, so started hitting my father with his hunting crop. Once at home dad told my mother what had happened and she told him not to go back to the farm but to look for another job. That afternoon the farmer's wife, having heard what had happened, came to apologise and said that it would not happen again. Mum told her that it certainly would not happen again because dad was not going back to work for them and would be looking for another job. At this the farmer's wife became very offhand and said that if that were the case then they would have to out of the house in two week's time.

(That was the way of things in those days, workers having few rights, especially if they lived in tied cottages, however, after the war much of the changed). Thus my parents came to Little Comberton, dad getting a job with Mr Ray Stephens and living in one of his house, the roadside one of Lupin Cottages. Mr Stephens owned approximately ten workers' cottages at that time



Roadside Lupin cottage

As I have said before, people in the village were all very friendly, talking to each other across the gardens, there being no fences nor hedges between the properties, and folk popped in and out of each others' houses for a cup of tea and a chat. It might seem strange today, but due to rationing, it was quite common to take your own milk and sugar when having a cup of tea with a neighbour, only the tea was provided free! Jam and cakes were homemade and tasted delicious, so much better than those bought in shops these days.

Washday was always on a Monday and lines full of washing could be seen in most gardens on the day. Garden bonfires were definitely "out" on Mondays although there was often quite a lot of smoke around as the houses were heated by coal or log fires. The washing was often done in the washhouse, with a fire lit under the boiler so heating the washing water, but this was a different kind of smoke, which went up the chimney, not smelling the same as bonfires!

The working day for farm hands was long, with them working from seven thirty in the morning until five in the evening, five days a week, often on a Saturday morning with a possibility of evening and weekend overtime required, all this for under £5 a week. Of course things were cheaper to buy than they are today, or so it would seem. There was little or no electronic equipment to be purchased, and very little entertainment outside the village to spend money on. The men drank locally brewed cider whilst the women favoured stout, and it was said that you could buy a packet of cigarettes and a couple of "pints" for a shilling (just five pence in today money) and still have some change left over! Most of the groceries were brought from R.J.Derretts, the village shop in Manor Lane, although I remember this lane only being referred to as "up the street". This then was the village of my infant and early childhood days.



Pool cottages

I have no recollection of the inside of Lupin Cottage, where I was born, my earliest memories of a family home was in 1, Pool Cottage, where my parents moved to so that dad was not in a tied cottage, the Woollas Hall Farm incident having had a lasting effect. I have vague recollections of the terrible snow and cold weather of 1947, and I also remember being in a pram while my mother worked in the pea fields, on a casual