Newbold Verdon

1920 - 1950



Recollections and Reflections

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RECOLLECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

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Additional Contributors

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2016

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Dianne Finney, Alan Frost, Mike Preston

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In Memory

During the course of the writing of this book one of the oldest members of our group of contributors, Ron Gilliver, died. Ron's recollections and reflections were both extremely colourful and insightful, belying his great age. As with all the contributors, it was a pleasure and a privilege to have been able to sit and listen to Ron as he provided a glimpse into Newbold Verdon's past.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people for help in the preparing and writing of this book, not least those whose recollections and reflections I have sought to record. Their enthusiasm and desire to share their memories has been an incredibly rewarding experience for the author. My thanks to:

Nancy Biggs (née Johnson), born 1920; Ron Gilliver, 1925; Janet Webb (née Hill), 1926; Joy Brearley (née Hill), 1929; Derek Wilkinson, 1931; Michael Preston, 1932; Norman Gilliver, 1934; Christine Hill (née Causon), 1934; Brian Hill, 1934; Mick Hill, 1935; Fred Hodges, 1936; Brian Cheshire, 1937; Des Hill, 1937; Margaret McSherry (née Statham), 1937; Janet Poole (née Shaw), 1938; Kathleen Caunt (née Twigg), 1939; Nora Freeman (née Freeman), 1939; Robert Freeman, 1939; John Hill, 1939.

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Thanks are also due to fellow colleagues in the Newbold Verdon Community Action Group and Newbold Verdon Parish Councillors for their continuing support of Heritage Group projects.

A special thanks to my wife Marilyn for her support and patience throughout the writing of this book.

Front Cover Picture

Nancy Biggs (née Johnson) aged about five (1925), haymaking with her Aunt Elsie, brother Eric and cousin Ron in the fields alongside Bosworth Road.

Preface

> *For the local historian, the subject is not a place, a village, a parish or a town, but a group of people.'* [1]

Many of you reading this book will be familiar with the village of Newbold Verdon. You may well have been born here or arrived in the 1960's, or 1970's and raised your children within the parish. For others it may be a passing acquaintance, a brief stopping off point before pastures new are sought. The book invites residents and non-residents to spend a little time reading the accounts of those born and raised in the village during thirty years of the mid-20th century - a time of great change both nationally and internationally. It is a period, though within living memory of a few villagers, unknown to most people living in the parish today.

On first sight Newbold Verdon does not present itself as a place with any kind of significant historic merit. The Battle of Bosworth passed it by - even King Richard's coffin did not have time to stop. It has not been blessed with splendid architecture or many people of worthy historic note. Over the centuries its people have undertaken mainly low paid, relatively mundane occupations in agriculture, coal mining, hosiery and shoemaking. Today, it serves predominantly as a commuter village for those working in towns and cities of the east midlands and beyond. However, Newbold Verdon does have a history of merit, one unique to this village and rooted in the lives of the people who have lived here.

Many of our eldest residents have shared their recollections of growing up and beginning their working lives in Newbold Verdon in the 1920's to the 1950's. They describe what it was like as a child and young adult before, during, and after World War Two and provide a fascinating insight into how the village has changed since that time, not just in terms of housing and occupations but also as a community of people.

We discover how Newbold Verdon during most of the 30 years of our study was very much pre-occupied with itself; getting on with making a living and raising its families. It was a place where the outside world, including neighbouring villages, impinged only fleetingly upon it. Gradually, over time, the nature and purpose of the village began to change and with it the community. Initially not very fast, but incrementally, until the advent of World War Two when the outside world came rushing in and things were never quite the same again. Introspective Newbold Verdon began to look outward.

Introduction

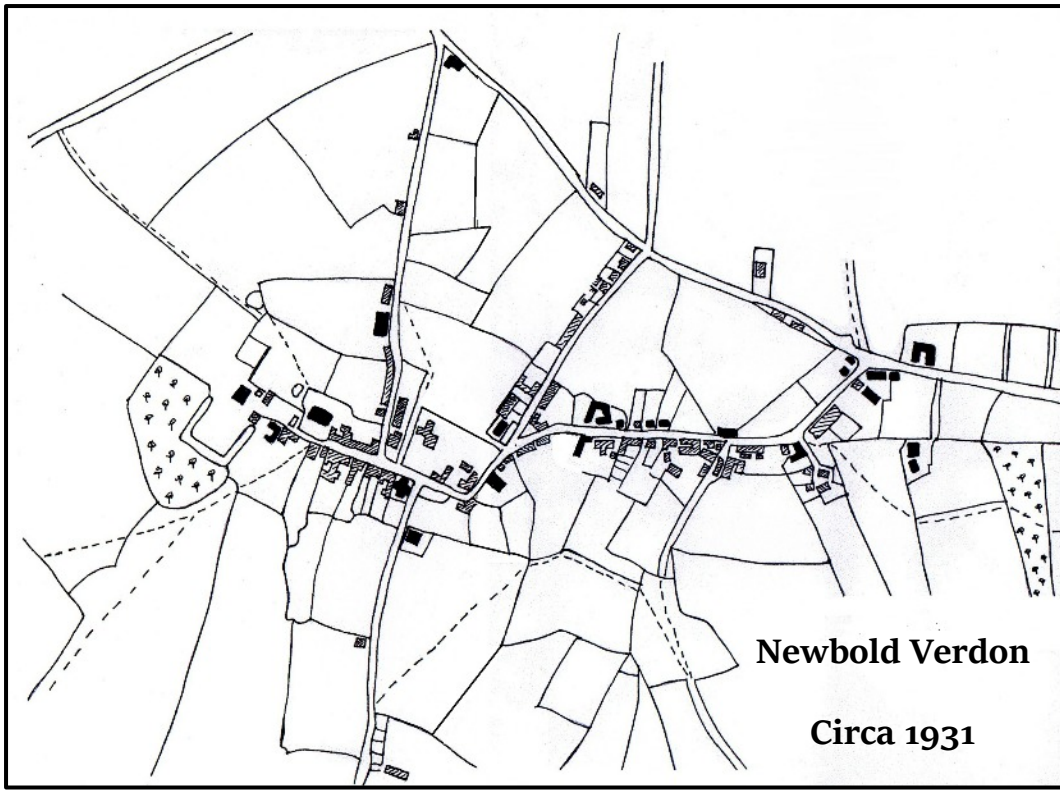
Newbold Verdon of today could be described as a fairly vibrant village of some 4,000 people and it has been this way since the late 1960's when the large housing estates to the south of Main Street were built. Contrast this with the 1920's when the village had a population of just over 1,200 and remained at that size for the next thirty years (even declining in numbers in the 1930's) until the beginning of the 1950's and the onset of the Sparkenhoe and Preston Drive council house developments.

The map of Newbold Verdon overleaf,[2] was drawn up around 1931 and shows the skeleton of a village recognisable in shape today. Main Street weaves its way through from off the Desford Road and the three arteries of Brascote Lane, Mill Lane, and Dragon Lane branch out as they do now. Look closer however and the reader will see very few houses on Dragon Lane, only houses on one side of Mill Lane and just a farm on Brascote Lane. If one turned back the clock another hundred years to 1831 the map of the village would have looked almost identical to that of 1931, for little had changed in those preceding hundred years.

The changing purpose of the village over time

Newbold Verdon has for much of its existence been predominantly an agricultural settlement, recorded as such in the Domesday Book of 1086. This began to change in the mid-18th century as hosiery working in the form of cottage based framework knitting became a significant source of employment. There were other occupations including shoe-making and, for women, working in service for local landowners as cooks and maids. If the men were not employed on the land they were often in occupations that supported those who were: plying their trades as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carters and carriers.

By the 1850's and 1860's, coal mining had become the primary source of employment as first Bagworth (1828) and then Nailstone (1861) pits were sunk. The opening of the pits coincided with the decline in agricultural employment due in part to new technological innovations in farming which required fewer and fewer men to work the land. Framework knitting had also disappeared by the mid-1800's, overtaken by the construction of large hosiery factories in the surrounding towns and Leicester. Consequently, by 1901 and the opening of Desford colliery, Newbold Verdon had become in many respects a pit village, helping serve the labour needs of the three local mines.



Throughout the 1920-1950's, the Newbold Verdon of our contributors existed to provide for the needs of those working in the mines, factories and fields. It had cheap rental accommodation, shops supplying virtually all the villagers' needs and work places close by within a short walk, bike ride or bus journey. Long established, extended families and the close knit village community created a safety net in times of hardship. Institutions and societies, both formal and informal, catered well for the social and spiritual needs of villagers. But it was a village not without its problems, lagging a long way behind other similar settlements in the county and the country when it came to the quality of sanitation and access to basic utilities including running water, gas and electricity. Much of the housing stock was also in a very poor state.

Newbold Verdon: insular and isolated

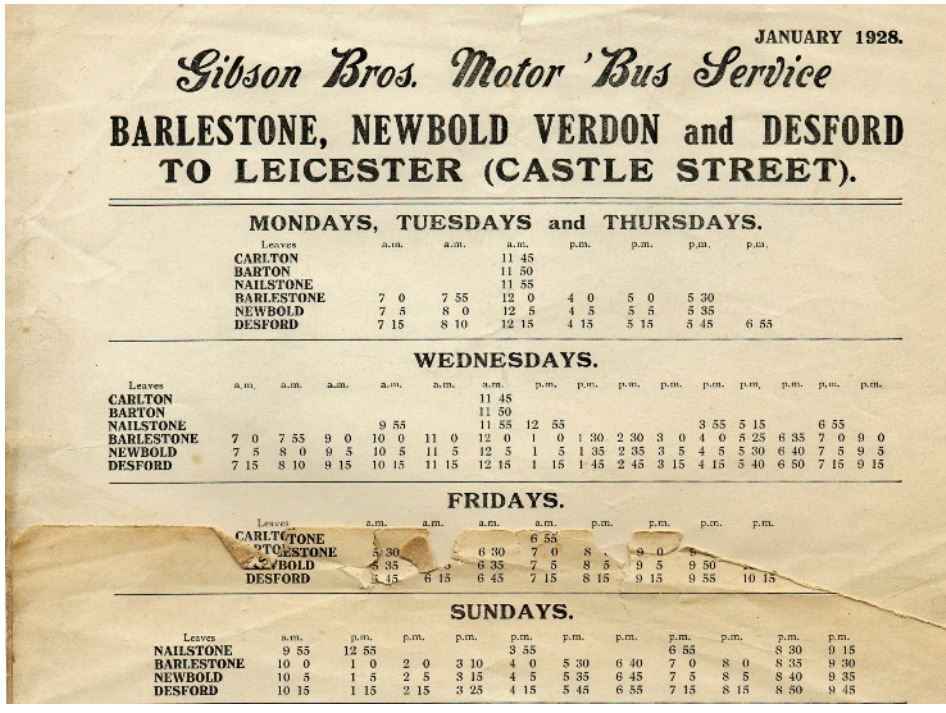
> *'We were isolated. We were a country village.'* Derek Wilkinson

> *'You never got to know much about other villages. You just kept to your own community.'* Nancy Biggs

Our contributors, whether born in the 1920's, 30's or 40's, spoke of a sense of isolation, of insularity, of being concerned mainly with their day-to-day life rather than the wider world. This may of course have been due to their age - young children having a very narrow world perspective. Their parents may not have felt this sense of separation quite so strongly. However, Joyce Brearley offered the following explanation for the villagers' limited horizons. *'The main thing people worried about was keeping a roof over their head and food on the table.'*

The limitations experienced by villagers in their opportunity to travel was also a factor. At the beginning of the period covered by this book, the forms of transport people in Newbold Verdon employed had changed little from the preceding fifty years. The most used mode was walking, followed by cycling. Motor bikes became more popular as time went on, but only a very few people in and around Newbold Verdon had a private motor car right up until the mid-1950's.

It was not that there was no form of accessible public transport. Regular bus services into Leicester were available, as the 1928 timetable of Gibson Brothers' buses below shows. Villagers also had access to railway stations at Desford, Bagworth, Market Bosworth, Coalville and Hinckley that linked them into the national rail system. Few, however, made long journeys, partly because they had no need to travel and because their poor wages would not allow.



JANUARY 1928.

Gibson Bros. Motor 'Bus Service

BARLESTONE, NEWBOLD VERDON and DESFORD TO LEICESTER (CASTLE STREET).

MONDAYS, TUESDAYS and THURSDAYS.

Leaves	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
CARLTON			11 45				
BARTON			11 50				
NAILSTONE			11 55				
BARLESTONE	7 0	7 55	12 0	4 0	5 0	5 30	
NEWBOLD	7 5	8 0	12 5	4 5	5 5	5 35	
DESFORD	7 15	8 10	12 15	4 15	5 15	5 45	6 55

WEDNESDAYS.

Leaves	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
CARLTON						11 45									
BARTON						11 50									
NAILSTONE				9 55		11 55	12 55				3 55	5 15		6 55	
BARLESTONE	7 0	7 55	9 0	10 0	11 0	12 0	1 0	1 30	2 30	3 0	4 0	5 25	6 35	7 0	9 0
NEWBOLD	7 5	8 0	9 5	10 5	11 5	12 5	1 5	1 35	2 35	3 5	4 5	5 30	6 40	7 5	9 5
DESFORD	7 15	8 10	9 15	10 15	11 15	12 15	1 15	1 45	2 45	3 15	4 15	5 40	6 50	7 15	9 15

FRIDAYS.

Leaves	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
CARLTON				6 55				
BARLESTONE	5 30		6 30	7 0	8	9 0	9	
NEWBOLD	5 35		6 35	7 5	8 5	9 5	9 50	
DESFORD	5 45	6 15	6 45	7 15	8 15	9 15	9 55	10 15

SUNDAYS.

Leaves	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
NAILSTONE	9 55	12 55			3 55			6 55		8 30	9 15
BARLESTONE	10 0	1 0	2 0	3 10	4 0	5 30	6 40	7 0	8 0	8 35	9 30
NEWBOLD	10 5	1 5	2 5	3 15	4 5	5 35	6 45	7 5	8 5	8 40	9 35
DESFORD	10 15	1 15	2 15	3 25	4 15	5 45	6 55	7 15	8 15	8 50	9 45

A Quiet Place to live

The lack of motorised transport in and out of the village is illustrated in the following recollection by Janet Webb (née Hill) who has lived many years of her life in Ivy Cottage, Main Street, and as a child in the 1920's and 30's played for many hours with her friend Billy Granger who lived in the farm across the road.

> *There used to be a churn stand outside Grange Farm and Billy and I used to sit waiting to take the numbers of cars and we used to sit for the longest time waiting for a car to come along, but they didn't.'*

> Nancy Biggs (née Johnson) lived at 1 Desford Road at its junction with Main Street and she recalls that in the 1920's, *'When it was Bosworth Show Day we would sit on the wall outside our house and take all the numbers down of the cars. This was the only time in the year when many passed by.'*

Both stories illustrate how quiet life was in the village in the 1920's and it did not appear to have changed much during the 1940's. *'You could play whip and top from the Swan to the Jubilee, right down the street, without any fear of being run over.'* recalls Fred Hodges.



Grange Farm, Main Street in about the 1930's
The little boy is believed to be the owner's son, Billy Granger

1. Roots and Nicknames

Long Established Families

Like many country villages of that time, Newbold Verdon families tended to be long established. This was underlined in conversation with all our contributors, many of whom were related either by marriage or through family ancestry lines to other villagers; the ancestral roots of families often reaching back well over a hundred years or more. For example, the 1841 National Census Return[1] for the village includes family names that were also very familiar to the residents of the village in 1941, like Gilbert, Vernon, Priestnall, Ball, Statham, Beck, Bevins, Wrask, Price, Prime, Hill, Bates, Hardy, Barrs, Orton, Towers, Freeman and Kent. Some families could trace their Newbold Verdon ancestry back into the 18th century. The wedding photograph below is of a member of a well established village family, the Primes and newcomers, the Toveys of Leicester.



5th November 1921, the marriage of Walter Tovey, aged 22, to Lovis Prime, aged 19.

The Statham Family

The 1,200 people living in the village during the thirty years covered in this book belonged to one of 200 families and by far the most common surname of those families was Statham. In the 1901 National Census, 18 households in the parish had as head of house a Statham and by 1931 Newbold Verdon Co-op registered 32 Statham households as members. The Statham family name went back at least 200

years in village records and by the 1920's there were many other families in the village who, through the female line, had strong Statham connections.

So common was this surname that villagers developed nicknames for several branches of the family to avoid confusion. There were the Whisky Statham's, the Merkins, Tuppennys, Sixes, Trilbys, Vampers, Shocks and Dockets, to name but a few.

One of our contributors, Margaret McSherry, was a 'Whisky' Statham: so named, she was told, after her grandfather Albert once declared his need for a whisky after a particularly long Sunday afternoon walk. She lived with Albert and her grandmother, Margarita, and Albert's many brothers in a two-up-two-down house on Main Street opposite the Swan Inn. Margaret can trace her Statham lineage back to her 2nd great-grandfather, John, born 1815 in Newbold Verdon. It is possible that he was related to the earliest recorded Statham living in the village, Thomas Statham, who was resident in 1760, when he was registered as father of Elizabeth, baptised at St. James' church on the 13th January of that year.

Brian Hill has a payment ledger from his grandmother Ruth Hill's newsagent shop. In it are recorded the names of villagers owing and making payments for newspapers - several of those families are Stathams and their debts and payments are recorded under their nicknames. Even the primary school used the nicknames as a means of keeping track of the children, as Janet Poole recalls, *'I remember coming to the school and there was this big, long sheet with all the nicknames of the Stathams. It was a roll of wallpaper with all the nicknames going down.'*

Confusing Stathams: Ron Gilliver's Story

The proliferation of people called Statham in the village caused shop assistant Ron Gilliver and his fellow workmate, Arthur Smith, a real problem. In 1939, fourteen year-old Ron was newly promoted as a senior shop assistant at Newbold Verdon Co-op. He had started in the March of that year as an assistant, but a more senior member of staff had been called up to fight and Mr Sperry, the manager, gave the post to a keen but somewhat naive Ron. Part of Ron's new responsibilities was to serve the customers. He tells the story of how his eagerness to please, combined with his ignorance of the Statham families in the village, got him into trouble and a telling off by Mr Sperry.

In the 1930's times were very hard and many villagers were unable to pay for shop goods until their husband's wage came in at the end of the week. To help, shops like the Co-op offered credit to customers and the monies owing to the shop were recorded in a large register on the shop counter. After every sale credited items had to be recorded against the person's name, together with their Co-op membership number. Failure to do this properly could get a young shop assistant into trouble and, thanks to one of the many Stathams living in the village, this is exactly what happened to Ron.

Ron takes up the story.

One morning a lady came rushing in, sleeves rolled up, obviously very busy she were. "Hey up me duck, I want a copper dustpan'" she calls. I said, "Well there's two sorts, one with a wooden handle and one all steel." And she says, "Well which one is the bloody cheapest?" and I said "The all-metal one." She says, "Al hey one of them. How much is that?" I says, "One and tuppence." and she says "Right, stick it in the book." and she had gone.

I go to the register and the manager comes in and he says, "Ronnie, what are you doing?" I tell him that I am looking to book in a copper dustpan for a lady. "What lady was it?" he asked. So I told him she said she was Mrs Statham. He asked what did she look like and how was she dressed. I told him she wasn't particularly dressed but she had a pinafore on, her sleeves rolled up and she was sandy haired. He said, "Mrs 1702." - the number being her Co-op number. He knew every one of the Statham families in the village by their Co-op number and he hatched a plan so that we would too.

The next Monday morning he called me and Arthur into his office and said, "Over the weekend I have produced a card for you both." He told us he had written a list of all 32 Statham families together with their Co-op number and he told us we had one week to memorise them, which we did. And I can still remember most of those numbers now over 75 years later.

Arthur and I grew up together and on occasion we would talk about the various Statham families, always referring to them by their membership number.

In this picture two friends pose for a photograph: Perce Statham (crouched) and Malc Statham.

Perce being a member of the 'Shock' Statham family and Malc a member of the 'Tuppeny' Stathams.



Many people in the village, especially the men, seemed to have a nickname, for example: Cocky Poole, Titty Bevins, Wacky Ball, Snuffy Frearson, Winky Freeman and Baggy Shaw. Norman Gilliver recollects that four of the men in the Whales' family had nicknames - Badger, Fatty, Tiggy and Brunty.

Nicknames are not uncommon even today, but the desire to assign so many in Newbold Verdon suggests they served a purpose which went beyond just distinguishing one branch of a family from another. They would have certainly helped to distinguish sons from fathers or uncles - the range of first names for males was still limited in choice - but it would also suggest a strength of connection, not just within families, but also right across the village.

Nicknames are about familiarity, commonality and often, but not always, friendship. They are awarded as much as terms of endearment as they are to distinguish one person from another. These nicknames hint at a close-knit community of people comfortable in each other's company.

Contrast this abundance of nicknames with the use of such epithets in 21st century Newbold Verdon. Some villagers may well still be ascribed nicknames by friends, family, neighbours or work colleagues, but there will be few people out of those immediate groups who will know them by that name. In Newbold Verdon of the 1920's, 30's and 40's, the whole village was likely not only to know your nickname but also to use it.

2. Work and Wealth

Britain in the 1920's and 1930's was a time of great hardship for most of the population. Soon after the end of World War One the economy slumped and it did not begin to recover until the early 1930's, and even then the recovery was not uniform across the country. There were few welfare safety nets for those who fell on hard times and families would often find even the basic necessities of life difficult to afford, including food. By 1926, miners had seen their wages fall from £6 a week to about £3 in the space of seven years. In May of that year they went on strike to protest at their circumstances and were joined by workers from other industries, leading to over 1.7 million people withdrawing their labour. The General Strike, as it later became known, lasted only nine days, but many miners refused to concede defeat and remained out for several months. A Newbold Verdon school log book entry at the time,[1] implies that Newbold's miners stayed out longer and, as a consequence, the children were suffering, so the school decided to help.

9th June 1926	*The school children had a free dinner provided today. The Parochial Children* (at the old school) *had theirs on the lawn and the Juniors and Infants in their own classrooms.* *This will happen every school day until the end of the strike.*

Attending school at this time was six-year-old Ethel Hart (née Statham) who in later life wrote a poem[2] about the free meals she received in June of 1926.

Memory Lane

I've been down Memory Lane
My thoughts have gone back through the years
Back to when I was young again
With my childish joys and my fears.

To the strike of nineteen-twenty-six
And the meals we had given free
Of suet pudding and treacle sweet
Potatoes, dumplings and sometimes meat
And on Saturdays, tea as a special treat
Oh, how I remember those days.

I remember those wonderful women
Who gave up so much precious time
To cook for the hungry children
Whose dads were on strike in the mine
It's funny how things in our memories stay
Just as if it were yesterday

At the same time the miners were out on strike the Gloucestershire Echo[3] reported the following. Friday, 4th June 1926:

> *'It was stated at a meeting of the Market Bosworth Rural District Council meeting that a Newbold Verdon man, his wife and 12 children were living in a house with only two rooms – one up and one down.'*

Though only a very short piece, it does seem surprising that a newspaper over 90 miles distant from Newbold Verdon should deem it newsworthy to record the event unless it believed it to be of some interest to its readers.

This was not the first time that news about poverty in the village had appeared in newspapers some distance away. In September 1920, the Western Daily Press[4], based in the Bristol and Bath area, reported that, *'Ten residents of Newbold Verdon, Leicestershire have been exempted from payment of rates, on the score that they were too poor to pay.'* Three years later on the 28th April, 1923, the Cheltenham Chronicle[5] was reporting:

> *Ratepayers of the Leicestershire village of Newbold Verdon have had to pay extra rates amounting to 2½d in the £ in order to meet the deficiency caused by a number of residents having been excused from payment by the Market Bosworth magistrates on the grounds of poverty.*

These could have been the same poor families who had been excused the payment of rates three years earlier, though we cannot be certain. Exceptional as these three reports may have been, Newbold Verdon was probably not very different from its surrounding villages - poverty and its associated ills was always close at hand.

Things did not appear to be much better in 1929, when the Parish Council's Minutes[6] of the 9th January that year recorded consideration being given toward contributing to the Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire's Miners' Relief Fund, required due to the depression in the coal trade, which was also placing many families in the parish into rental arrears. Times were hard.

How aware were the villagers of any poverty?

The response to the question, 'Was Newbold Verdon a poor village?' evoked a range of comments. Some contributors initially denying the village had been poor but, on reflection, acknowledging there was poverty, though stressing that even those who were poor generally got by. There was little absolute poverty (i.e. not having enough money for an adequate diet or to be able to afford enough clothes) apart from a couple of large families, where it was not unknown for the parents to beg for food and clothing for their children from neighbours. Despite the lack of absolute poverty in the village, for a miner bringing home about £3 per week and the agricultural worker even less at £1 12s (£1.60), it could not have been easy.

The British Medical Association in 1933[7] calculated that, to maintain good health, 5 shillings per week (25p) would need to be spent on food per person. For a family of four this would mean between 15s and £1 per week on food, depending on the age of the children. For a family with a coal miner at its head it would mean up to 33 percent of his wages being spent on food, and for an agricultural worker almost 66 percent. Compare that with today where an average family spends £58.80 per week on food and non-alcoholic drinks while taking home £417 in wages - just 14 percent of their income[8].

PRICE OF FOOD ABOUT 1930	
1 pint of milk	1d
Loaf of bread	2d
½ dozen eggs	3d
1/4 lb tea	2d
240d in £1	

Living in the countryside helped villagers survive. Most families had a plot of land, a large garden, allotment or even small holding, where they could supplement their food by growing their own. At the bottom of most properties in Newbold Verdon was a pig sty with a pig in it and this would be a valuable food source. When a pig was killed (sticked) it was expected that neighbours would receive a 'fry', a collection of meats, from the dead pig's owner (see also page 9).

A Child's Perspective

When asked how it felt to grow up in a village where many families had to work hard to make ends meet, our contributors all expressed similar sentiments.

Brian Cheshire: '*We didn't know any different.*'

Mick Preston: *'We didn't know what we didn't know. We were all about the same really.'*



A typical back yard. Main Street 1920's

Joy Brearley: '*As children you accepted what was there.'*

Derek Wilkinson: *'Our parents never talked about their difficulties in front of us.'*

Had their parents been asked how it felt to be raising a family at this time it is possible they would have seen it somewhat differently. The welfare safety nets taken for granted today existed in much more limited forms in the 1920's to 1940's. There was a limited unemployment benefit and a basic form of health insurance, but these provided the bare minimum. The state pension was also in place and a man of 65 who qualified could expect to receive 10 shillings (50p) a week. All helped, but steady employment and a reasonable wage was what kept families secure.

Mining and agricultural work was, in part, seasonal. In the summer, when the demand for coal dropped, miners could be laid off or made to work part-time, while the winter had its effect on the number of agricultural workers retaining their jobs. Injured miners received little when laid off work and there was hardly any financial compensation for men who had to retire from work due to occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis. The precarious nature of their employment and limited state support, meant villagers had to look to themselves, their family and neighbours for support, as demonstrated in the following recollection by Janet Webb.

Sticking a Pig: And a fry for the neighbours

The following story by Janet Webb captures the significance of the occasion of 'sticking' a pig.

Nancy and Janet were not only cousins but great friends. Nancy lived in the first house on Desford Road whilst Janet lived with her mother and grandparents in Ivy Cottage on Main Street. On this day, Nancy was calling in on Janet because it was the day when the family's pig was to be sticked. Sticking a pig was the description given to it being slaughtered.

Nancy was used to seeing the pigs being sticked, her father did this himself. Others chose to ask the butcher to do it and he would visit the house or they would walk the pig down to him. On this day, the pig was to be killed by the butcher in the back garden at Ivy Cottage.

As the pig was brought out of the sty he sensed danger and began to squeal and screech and tried pulling away from his owner, but to no avail. Janet, like all the children in the village, was very familiar with what was happening and knew how the pig would react. She hated the sound of the distressed animal and placed her fingers in her ears to try and muffle the sound.

Once the pig was dead and bled, it was placed into a copper of boiling water until its bristles began to soften and loosen. Family and neighbours set to and scraped off the more resistant patches of bristle and before long, hams and flitches were hanging from the wall in the back room of Ivy Cottage with enough pork to keep the family going for several months.

To keep it fresh, saltpetre had been rubbed into the skin and this would preserve the meat throughout the coming months. Fries, made up of the innards of the pig, were then taken by Nancy and Janet to the neighbours so that they could share in their good fortune as well. It was something expected by the local community when a pig was sticked.

As unpleasant as it may seem to those of us living in the 21st century, the slaughter and then communal preparation of a pig for eating was just an everyday fact of life for our older villagers. Near neighbours provided support which led to mutual benefits and no doubt contributed to what sociologists today would call 'community cohesion', though then it was seen as just being a good neighbour.

Shadow of the Workhouse: Joy Brearley's Story

Joy's grandfather had worked down the pit since a youth, but after becoming ill with a form of blood poisoning, he was too weak to go back down the mine and was laid off work permanently. He was aged only 50 and there was no prospect of work for him ever again, his heart being too weak. He received no support from the state and would not do so until aged 65 when he would get 10 shillings (50p) a week state pension. It was left to the family to help him. Joy describes how this affected him.

I can remember him pleading not to be sent to the Workhouse.

This did not happen, but mother had to take on full-time work in a boot and shoe factory and this just about kept us going.



Market Bosworth Union Workhouse

Examples of this form of family or neighbour self-help and mutual support are recollected on a number of occasions throughout this book and demonstrate how the community had to look first to itself to meet its needs.

The Local Government Act of 1929 finally abolished the system of the Poor Law Union and the responsibility for the destitute and infirm was passed on to local councils. The workhouses became Public Assistance Institutions, providing accommodation for the elderly, chronically sick, single mothers and vagrants. For Joy's grandfather, the building at Market Bosworth would always be associated with the deprivation and humiliation of the workhouse, regardless of a change of name. Ironically, life became somewhat financially easier during the Second World War. Wages for miners increased and jobs down the pit were plentiful. This upward improving trend continued into the late 1940's, tempered somewhat by the retention of rationing into the 1950's.

3 Everyday Living

Bringing up a family in many parts of Britain between the wars and for some years after was very challenging. Not only was it financially difficult to make ends meet but poor housing stock and a lack of basic amenities, especially in the countryside, meant hardships for many. Newbold Verdon was not immune, in fact it was worse off than most. For example, in 1939, 75 percent of England's houses were wired for electricity,[1] while in Newbold only a few had it. The table overleaf shows the lengthy timeline for the introduction of amenities and utilities into the village and this chapter looks at what their absence meant to families and individuals.

Running Water

> *'To this day, one of my great delights in life is the turning on of a tap and seeing the water come flowing out.'* Ron Gilliver

It is difficult for many of us to imagine a time when all that we now take for granted in and around our homes did not exist - the switching on of a light, flushing of a toilet, turning on of a tap. In the following account by Brian Hill of his home, it is possible to gain some understanding of what having no mains water meant and how this affected everyday living.

Brian lived at 66 Main Street where his father ran an electrical shop. It was a larger home than many in the village - a more typical house having no more than four rooms - but despite this, and the fact that his dad had wired the house, a lack of running water and basic sanitation led to a very different kind of living experience for a child of the 1940's compared with a child of today.

Brian Hill's Home

> *The house, of which the shop was an integral part, consisted on the ground floor of the shop, a kitchen, a living room and a sitting room. Upstairs were three bedrooms and a fourth room which served as storage for some business stock.*
>
> *There was, of course, no central heating, no running hot water - or cold for that matter. Each room, if heated at all, was by a coal fire, or possibly by a small electric fire. Bedrooms were unheated. Hot water had to be heated as required, from water drawn from the pump from the well at the rear of the house.*

There was no such thing as a bathroom. We washed hands, faces, necks, legs etcetera at the sink in the kitchen. Once a week, the long galvanised bath was brought into the living room and placed in front of the fire. During the week it had hung on the rear wall outside the house. Water was heated in pans and the kettle in the kitchen and brought in for the bath, together with cold water from the pump. There was a further small pump in one of the outbuildings, the wash-house, which was soft water. Each pump drew from its own well, the soft water pump providing rain water for washing.

There was a range of out-buildings facing the house at the rear, comprising the wash-house, a coal house, and outside toilet, with wooden seat and pan beneath.

At the bottom of the longish garden was a foul smelling ditch into which waste water, mainly kitchen waste, collected.

In 1939 the percentage of parishes in the country without running water was 25 percent,[2] Newbold Verdon was one of these. All of these deprivations brought with them challenges for the villagers but not all were aware that things could be better. Brian Cheshire explained, *'It wasn't until we were older that we realised how badly off we had been compared even with some of our neighbouring villages.'* Joy Brearley recalled her first experience of a flushing toilet. *'Mum had some friends in Leicester who we visited once and when I saw their flushing toilet I was quite astounded at that.'*

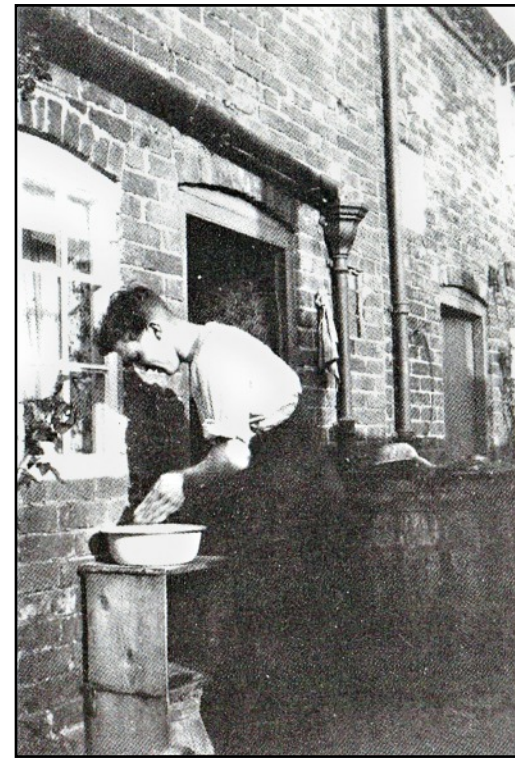
Date	Timeline of the Establishment of Amenities
Early 20th C	Flood drain down Main Street
Mid 1920's	Mains Electricity
1929	Street Lights
1920's	Some houses wired for electricity: others use gas, oil lamps or candles
1930's	Mains Gas
1932	Trade Directory [3] records the Co-op having a telephone. **Desford 49**
Up to 1940	Human waste collected by night soil man
Mid 1940's	Rural District Council begins to remove human waste by tanker
1948-1955	Establishment of mains water supply and waste disposal drainage

Kitchen Sinks, Baths and Bathrooms

As with Brian Hill's home, the kitchen sink was where the ablutions of the day took place. Water was either carried in from outside or, as in Brian's case, there was a hand pump over the sink which was connected to an external water butt containing rain water. A whole family would have to take its turn to wash in this manner.

Baths were mainly taken using a tin or zinc bath tub and usually only once a week for the children. Brian Cheshire described how his and his brother's weekly bath was determined by the day his mother washed the family's clothes.

> *'We didn't have a bathroom, we had a bath tub hanging on the wall outside the back door. Monday was my mother's wash day because we were the first house of a row of five and each house had access one day a week to the wash-house at the back of our houses. It was a room which contained a large coal-fired copper for boiling the water and we used to have to cart our own mangle and washtub into the wash house before we went to school every Monday morning.*
>
> *Wash day was a big day because my mother did the washing and we had to have a bath on wash day because that was the only time we got enough hot water from the copper.*
>
> *She used to drain the water from the copper and it went into the bath, which today doesn't sound very good but the dirty water from the washing was the only time we had enough hot water.'*



A man washes himself outside the backdoor of his house using water from the rain water butt behind him.

In the 1930's, there were some houses being built with bathrooms despite the fact that there was no mains running water. John Hill lived in such a home, Grange House, Main Street and the fixed bath served a different purpose to what it had been designed for, as John explains.

> *'Ours were a brand new house upstairs with a bathroom and we never actually used it as a bath. We had an old zinc one in the shed and my dad, being a miner, would have his bath on a Friday night in the kitchen. All the doors would be shut and you weren't allowed in until my dad was dressed and that was a ritual. But the actual bathroom upstairs became my bed when we had a visitor!'*



A bathtub similar to that used by John's father in the kitchen every Friday night.

Water would have been heated up using the coal-fired range, similar to the one in the picture. The door to the right of the range was an oven for cooking.

Waste Management

Up at Newbold Heath things were no better than in the village, except for one or two families. Derek Wilkinson was born on the Heath and he describes the fortunate situation that he found himself in at the start of the 1930's.

He was born in 1931 at 5 Bagworth Road in his grandparents' house, but within a week of his birth his family had moved into a newly built house at 29 Bagworth Road. For the 1930's, Derek's new house had many features other local houses did not have. Having been an electrician in the navy, his dad had wired the house himself and so there was electric lighting rather than the gas lights or oil lamps used elsewhere throughout the Heath and in Newbold. His dad also had dug the deepest well on the Heath which guaranteed water even in the driest of summers. Derek could remember many people calling at the house during dry summers asking for a bucket of water because their shallower wells had run dry.

To obtain softer water for washing and bathing, Derek's dad had a steel tank erected which was piped direct into the kitchen and through to a tap at the sink. The soft water in this tank came directly off the roof along the gutters and down pipes of the house after the rains had fallen.

Of all these refinements the toilet was the most innovative. There being no running water in the village or on the Heath, all the toilets were placed outside the house in the backyard. The most rudimentary privies consisted of a hole in a plank with a pan beneath which collected all the waste. Derek's toilet was different: not only was it a single seater, it could also be flushed. Not from a water closet filling up and a handle being pulled, but by a bowl of water poured after use and the effluent being directly piped to the mains drain pipe that ran down the centre of Bagworth Road back to a sewage tank in a nearby field. This was indeed luxury.



Row of original toilets and coal sheds at the rear of Church Row

The Night Soil Man

For Derek and his family there was no need for a visit from the night soil man, whose job it was to collect the waste (the soil) each night from each of the pans in every toilet in the village. The content of the pans would be poured by the night soil man into his horse-drawn septic tank which would in turn be emptied on to designated fields within the parish. In later years, many houses were built on these designated fields and householders, unknowingly, would benefit from the nutrient rich soil.

Our contributors do not remember the night soil man or the pans with any fondness. A typical response was that of Margaret McSherry (née Statham). Speaking about the toilet arrangements:

> *'That was horrible. That was the worst thing. When they used to come round for the waste. You only had pans and it stank foul. There was pink powder we had to spread after going to the toilet. It was terrible.'*

The night soil man for a good number of years was Bill Culpin who lived along the Merry Lees Road away from the village. Below is an extract from a piece of writing by Mrs Pat Hunt undertaken as part of a project for the Women's Institute: in it she describes Bill.

> *Bill Culpin was a very tall man with a long beard. His job was night soil cart driver, collecting lavatory pans throughout the village, a smelly job but essential. He was once subject to humiliation when his horse reared up and tipped him into the cart at the back. Kind folks threw buckets of water over him and wrapped an old blanket around his bent shoulders till he could get home and change.*
>
> *Home was a caravan in a secluded spot beyond Newbold Heath, called Foxcover Lane. If his job was not enviable, his surroundings must have been, a haven of flowers, trees and little creatures. He kept goats and folk would buy his milk. He had bird songs to wake him and the rustle of trees to send him to sleep. He spoke very little and children were scared of him as he rode his bicycle into the village for groceries. He must have been on one such errand when a sudden illness overtook him. He was found on the grass verge not far from his home, his cycle alongside his body.*

During the mid 1940's the Market Bosworth and District Rural Council took over the role and a motorised vehicle was used to collect the night soil until, finally, mains water and an accompanying sewage works were established from 1948.

Typical Housing

Christine Hill (née Causon) lived at 206 Main Street in a house built in the 1920's, which by village standards was new. Despite its relative modernity, Christine and her family were deprived of the most basic of amenities.

We lived in a terraced house but it was only attached to one other. This meant our 'front' door was at the side of the house and there was another door at the rear.

As you entered the house through the front door, on your right was the Front Room which was kept for best and only ever used on a Sunday and at Christmas.

The rest of the time our family lived in the living room at the rear of the house where we had a table, dining chairs and a small three-piece suite. Leading from that room was the kitchen and a pantry. There was a gas cooker in the kitchen and a copper which was used to boil up the water. On Friday night we took the tin bath down off the outside wall and had our weekly bath. I went first because I was the girl, followed by my brother.

*Upstairs we had three bedrooms but no bathroom, which I wanted so much. The toilet was in the backyard next to the coal shed. This and the shed was knocked down in the late 1940's (*when mains water arrived in the village*) and replaced by a bathroom complete with bath and flushing toilet. We had arrived!*

In contrast to Christine's relatively spacious and comfortable family home, her grandparents lived in a rudimentary 19th century cottage, typical of much of the housing in Newbold until the 1950s.

My grandparents lived in the first cottage adjacent to the Baptist Church in Vera Row. It was very small. As you stepped in through the front door, you walked straight into a small living room. Opposite the doorway was a door opening onto an enclosed staircase which led up to the one bedroom.

In the living room there was a small inglenook fireplace complete with a small oven and stand for the kettle. On a Sunday the joint was cooked in the oven. On either side of the fireplace were small built-in cupboards where all the crockery was kept.

There was a table in the middle of the room and one chair next to the fireplace. Under the window was a very old fashioned chaise longue couch covered in a throw for protection and on the opposite was an old fashioned sideboard. I can't remember what the floor was made of, but there was a peg rug.

There was a door leading into the tiniest of kitchens at the rear of the house, but you could hardly call it a room.

The toilets were along a path and some distance from the cottage.

Communal Living

Christine's description of her grandparents tiny cottage and the communal space at the rear was typical of many houses in the village at that time. Most of the houses were small and packed closely together in rows: the longest being Church Row, consisting of seventeen cottages sharing three water pumps and a row of toilets and coal sheds, still evident today. This was a long row , others were comprised of between four and eight cottages. There were also 'yards', small rows of terraced cottages set back from the Main Street.

Living in a small, two-up-two-down terraced cottage often as a member of a large family and then sharing the communal backyard, where coal houses, toilets, water pumps and wash houses were sited, meant a lot of people living in close proximity to each other.

The photograph opposite is of one such terrace, Abell's Row. In it can be seen a group of people sharing the backyard, sitting out on what appears to be a warm day. Each householder's door only a few feet away from the other. A pram in the yard is looked over by family and neighbours. Two water pumps for the use of all five houses can just be seen beyond the pram. No table and chairs, no sun loungers, just the cobbles and what looks like an upturned bucket to sit on.

Perhaps for many of us today - who value highly our own space and privacy - being so close to our neighbours is something not to be desired. But it did have some advantages as Brian Cheshire, who lived in a similar row of terraced cottages further down Main Street, explains.

We lived at the first house on a row of five terraced cottages and everyone came past our house to get to the rear of theirs. You knew everyone and they knew you. You could leave your door unlocked and never worry about anything being taken. It is something I can't come to terms with, even to this day, that you have to lock everything up and make it secure.



The rear of Abell's Row, Main Street about 1920

Living so close to others I suppose meant that you knew a lot about them and they knew a lot about you, but we never gave the idea of privacy much thought. It also meant that if you did have a problem you could go into each other's house and talk about it and help each other.

Close, enforced, communal living drew people together. They had to be neighbourly because space and resources were shared. Family and individual wants and desires would often need to be sublimated in order for the community to work. Privacy, as we know it today, did not exist. As Brian said, not only did people share a space they also shared confidences. Consequently, within the relatively tight-knit community of Newbold Verdon, there were even tighter knit communities based on the terraced rows and yards.

4. Self Reliance

'You hardly needed to go out of the village.' Janet Poole

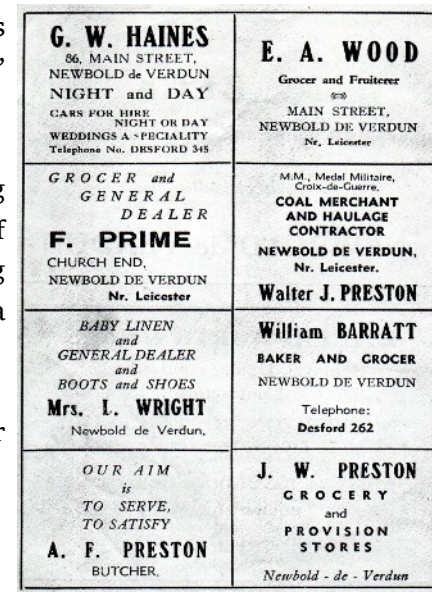
Newbold Verdon on a Saturday morning in the early part of the 21st century can still feel like quite a bustling place. The Co-op and NISA stores serve many of the local needs for groceries and provisions, while the newsagent's ensures people get their daily and weekly dose of printed news and tabloid gossip. There are three fast food outlets and one or two specialist businesses such as the cob shop, chemist, carpet store, funeral directors and Statham's shoe warehouse. The village is also well served with hairdressers and beauticians: fourteen businesses in all providing much for the village. Not bad for a settlement of approximately 4,000 people, but paltry compared to the number of shops and variety of traders available to a village of only 1,200 throughout the thirty years covered in this book.

Newbold Verdon in the 1940's could boast upward of thirty shops supplying a diversity of goods and services from cobbling to cycle repair. Often they offered more than one service. Les Hill's business (J.R. Hill and Son) was primarily an electrical shop selling electrical goods and repairing the like, but he also stocked wallpaper, paint, toys, Hornby train sets and cycle spares (number 21 on the map overleaf). Just down Main Street from Mr Hill was his mother Ruth Hill's shop, a newsagent's that also sold grocery and hardware. (No 20)



Les Hill was fairly typical of many of the shopkeepers and small businesses in the village. He had developed an existing family business, in this case by branching out into electrical contracting as well as selling and repairing electrical items. Much of the early mains wiring of houses in the village was down to Mr Hill.

This page advertising local shops and businesses in Newbold Verdon is the back cover of St James' parish magazine for September 1948.



Joy Brearley summed up what all our contributors felt about that time.

> *'You could get everything you needed from inside the village or it was brought to your door.'*



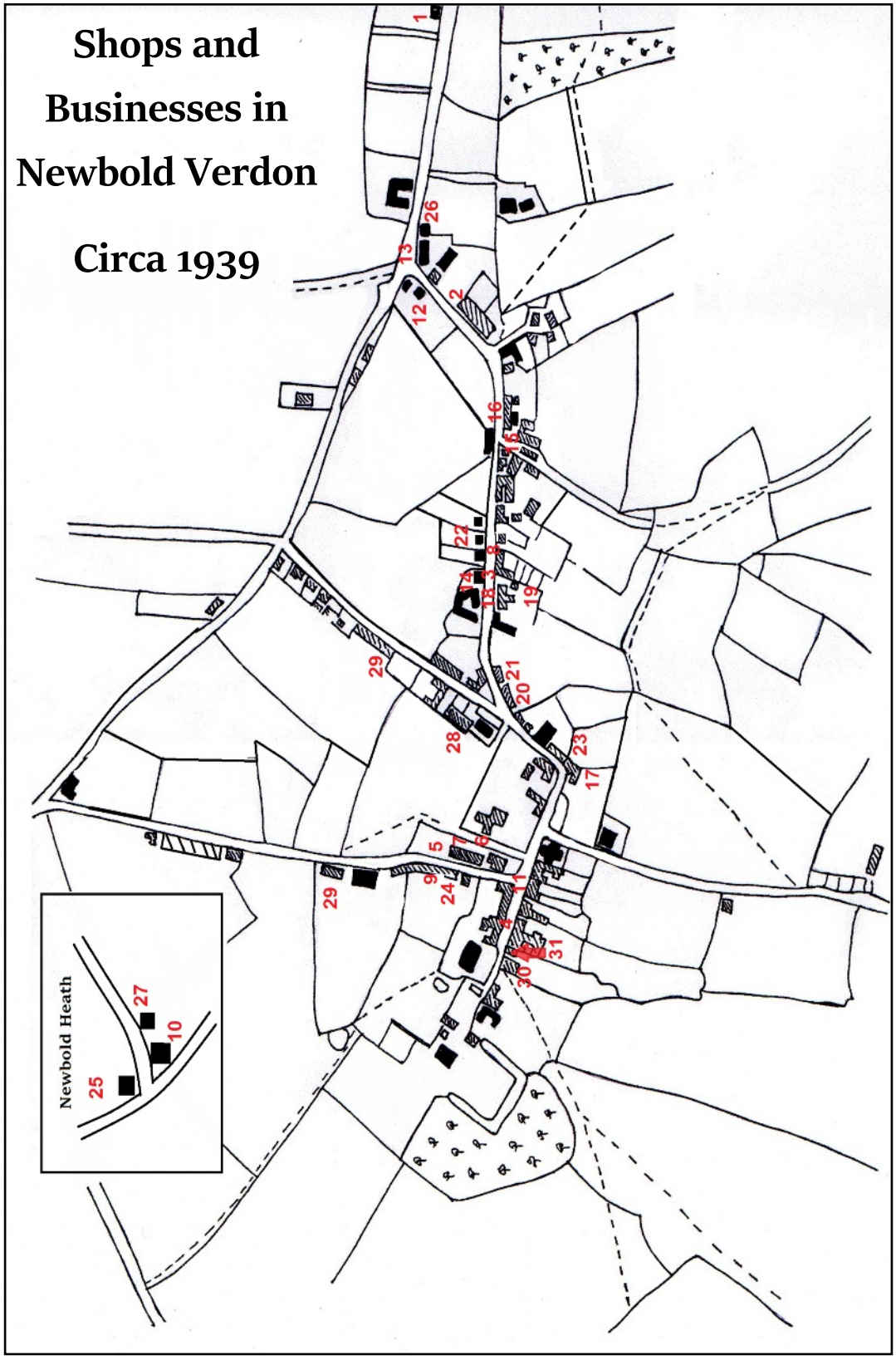
Mr Walter Preston, coal merchant and haulage contractor (circa late 1920's). He ran his business from the rear of his property on Dragon Lane. (No 24 on the map overleaf)

Haines' car hire business (19) also had a coach that carried workers to and from the shoe factories of Earl Shilton and Barwell. His yard was behind the old post office (presently the fish and chip shop), and the private petrol pump used for his bus and taxis can be seen on the shop corner. The post office had once been a shoe shop run by Mr Haines' wife. (No 18)



Shops and Businesses in Newbold Verdon

Circa 1939



	Owner	Business		Owner	Business
1	Mrs Ball	Grocer	17	Albert Preston	Butcher
2	Spitter Starbuck	Carpenter	18	Mrs Haines	Shoe Shop
3	Mrs Thompson	Grocer	19	Mr Haines	Bus and Taxi Company
4	Mrs Polly Prime	General Store	20	Mrs R. Hill	Newsagents, General Stores
5	Mrs Finney	General Store	21	Mr Les Hill	Cycle Spares, paints, wallpaper, toys
6	Mrs Potts	General Store	22	Co-op	Groceries, Drapers, General Goods
7	Ernie Emerson	Cycle Repair	23	Mrs Jordan	Post Office
8	Ernie Owen	Barber	24	Walter Preston	Carrier and Coal Merchant
9	Mabel Bates	Grocer	25	Harold Wilkinson	Carrier and Coal Merchant
10	Mrs Clarke	General Store	26	Mr Cis Sumner	Garage Proprietor
11	William Preston	General Store	27	Roland Statham	Coal Merchant
12	Mrs Wright	Haberdashery	28	Mr Statham	Chimney Sweep
13	Alf Gilliver	Drug Store	29	Alec Statham	Boot and Shoe
14	Beat Brown	Grocery	30	Mr Farmer	Boot and Shoe Repair
15	Mrs Wood	General Store and Fish and Chips	31	Tommy Rowbottom	Blacksmith
16	Mrs Barrett	Bakers			

Why were there so many shops and services available?

It is important to point out that what today we think of as a shop – a well-stocked establishment, purpose built for the selling of goods – could not be said of most shops in Newbold Verdon at that time. Many of them would have offered no more than a limited number of goods, sold in the converted front rooms of their house. The shops of Mrs Finney (5), Mrs Potts (6) and Mr Emerson (7) on Dragon Lane (see page 22) were front room establishments of this kind.

The shop would not necessarily be the main stay of a family's income but one supplementing the earnings of the breadwinner, invariably the husband. It was a working arrangement repeated throughout the country, as historian Martin Pugh explains, *'Shopkeepers had the advantage that the business could be run initially by a wife while her husband retained his job until the business became secure.'* [1]

The ancillary nature of some shops meant that the village could sustain quite a large number. Also, the slow transport links between villages, towns and city ensured that villagers looked to have their material needs met within the streets in which they lived. They did not have the time or need to shop elsewhere.

Brian and Christine Hill, growing up in the 1940's and early 1950's, made the following observations as to why there were so many shops.

> ***Brian**: For shops, you need people to spend money; and in Newbold when we were growing up there wasn't a problem of employment so there was money to spare, and, of course, people didn't travel very far.*
>
> ***Christine**: A lot of the shops sold the same thing: groceries and bits of hardware. There was a certain loyalty amongst the villagers as to which shops they went to and there were so many spread around the village you didn't have to travel very far to get what you needed.*
>
> ***Brian**: The prices for goods were printed on the packets and so shops were not competing on price but on customer loyalty. There was no advantage in going anywhere else.*

Meeting the Villagers' Needs

The map on page 22 showing the shop and business type and distribution reflects what Brian and Christine expressed. There was a cluster of shops at the east and western ends of he village and a cluster in the centre.

As well as the shops, there were also several regular visitors to the village. Fred Archer of Desford sold paraffin and general hardware goods but he would also take away accumulators used to power radios, returning them fully charged the next week. From Barlestone came Johnsey Cave with a mobile fruit and vegetable shop. Add to these, twelve local farmers, some of whom sold fresh milk and eggs, and it would not be difficult to conclude that the village was well served.

The shops and what they had to offer reflected the life of the villagers. Paraffin for heating and lighting was needed for those with no mains electricity and limited sources of heat. Cobblers repaired footwear several times over before new boots or shoes were replaced. Haberdashers' shops supplied everything a family needed for making or mending clothes because new clothes were bought only on rare occasions. Cycle repairs helped keep most people mobile: cycling was a cheap form of transport. Carbide was sold as a source of light in the miners' lamps to help light their way down the pit.

As well as the small shops, there were several significant shopping establishments such as Albert Preston's butchers with its own slaughter house; his brother William Preston ran a large general store next to the Old Swan pub and, of course, there was the Co-operative – a very significant emporium both then and now.

Newbold Verdon Co-operative: Tesco of its Day

In July 1929 branch number 17 of the Coalville and District Working Men's Co-operative Society opened in Newbold Verdon. This would have been a significant event in the village, though not necessarily received with great enthusiasm by some, in particular the shopkeepers with whom the Co-op would be in direct competition.

The national Co-operative Movement had been established for over 80 years by the time a branch was opened in Newbold Verdon and the Movement's purpose was to allow working class people to co-operate together within their 'societies' to purchase goods and services. Individuals joined as members and they were

rewarded for purchasing from their co-operative by receiving at this time a dividend of 2s 6d for every £1 spent - a 12.5 percent return. The 'divi', as it became known, meant the members were shopping at a significant discount compared with other retailers. Not only that, but by this time the national Co-operative Movement was producing much of its own food, baking its own bread and buying in bulk – all to the benefit of its members but not necessarily the local shopkeepers.

By 1939, nationally, the Co-operative controlled 25 percent of the milk distribution, 40 percent of the retail trade in butter and 20 percent in tea and sugar.[2] It could, therefore, be described as the TESCO of its day – loved by its members, hated by its rivals.

'You Shop – We Drop' Co-op home shopping and credit arrangements

Ron Gilliver worked in Newbold Co-op from 1939, when he joined as a 14 year-old shop assistant. He describes how the Co-op provided several free services.

Every Wednesday afternoon I would be sent up to Newbold Heath, the local farms like Halifax and Chater and to households who didn't want to come into the Co-op and I would collect their order book. We would make their order up on a Thursday and deliver it on a Friday morning and on a Friday afternoon someone would go round and collect the money. We had a baker's van that came out from the Co-op bakery in Coalville and we also had milk deliveries. You could even have someone come out from the town with suit patterns, measure you up and have a new suit ready for you within two weeks, and for £2 10s (£150 today*).*

We also provided credit, if required, and it was by about 90 percent of the customers. They paid about 15s for a week's groceries and at that time a miner would be getting £2 10s 6d per week. If a customer couldn't pay, we would give them some time, but we would have to have the debt settled in time for the quarterly reckoning or we would be in trouble.'

The convenience, range of goods and services, not to mention the 'divi', must have posed a threat to the shopkeepers in the village selling similar goods and services and yet none of our contributors could recall a shop closing because of the Co-op being in the village.

Other Businesses

On Main Street (No 16) was Barratt's the bakers and grocers. The family had run the shop for many years and Mr Barratt was a familiar sight on his horse and cart delivering bread and groceries within the village and beyond.





At the other end of the village was Polly Prime's shop, (No 4) a general grocers. Her husband Frank also helped out. When eventually they gave it up, the shop became Newbold Verdon's first pharmacy.

Newbold Heath also had a general store. Run by Mrs Clarke (No 10), it stood on the junction of Bagworth Road and Merry Lees Road.

Houses at the Heath were also visited by local shopkeepers in their mobile vehicles.



5. Health and Welfare

The preface to this book described Newbold Verdon as a village pre-occupied with itself, somewhat inward looking and focused on its everyday needs. There was a very good reason for this and that was if the villagers did not look out for themselves and each other, hardly anyone else would.

Babies were brought into the world with the help of neighbours. People facing hard times were supported by their family and friends. The sick looked, initially at least, to homegrown remedies or cheap, patent medicines sold over the counter. And when a villager died, it would be the 'friend of the parish' who would prepare the body for burial, while the local wheelwright would undertake to make the coffin.

The Parish Council and Market Bosworth Rural District Council were the two public bodies responsible in the main for the delivery of what government supported health and welfare services there were. It was their responsibility to help the poor, old and destitute and in the early 1920's the workhouse at Market Bosworth was still meeting those needs, but no one wanted to end up behind its doors. A series of voluntary hospitals were scattered across the country but few people sought to use them. They could be very costly and did not have the best of reputations.

There was some medical service provided by mutual district nursing associations. Members of these societies would pay small amounts of money on a weekly basis so that, if they needed medical care, a district nurse could be called on. For the men in the mines there was free access to doctors because they were part of a national health insurance scheme started in 1911. But this service did not include their spouses and dependents, who had to pay for doctors' treatment, nor did it include agricultural workers.

By the 1940's, there was an increasing acceptance by the state that people's health and welfare was its responsibility and government involvement in these matters increased during the war years, culminating in the reforms made by the newly elected Labour government in 1945. The reforms had been prompted by the report of William Beveridge to Parliament in November 1942 into poverty in Britain. Beveridge referred to a war on Want but that this was only one of what he described as the five social evils, the others being: Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness, all of which, he said, had to be overcome for the whole nation to prosper.

Nurse Greaves and the District Nursing Association

The picture below is of the Newbold Verdon Baby Show on the 9th September 1934 held at the Miners Welfare Institute. There are approximately thirty-two babies and toddlers in the picture which suggest a healthy birthrate for a village of just 1,200 people and about 200 families.



Fast forward 23 years and the photograph below captures the moment of Nurse Ada Greaves' retirement. Nurse Greaves (front row 1st left) was responsible for the delivery of many of the babies in the picture above. She and other nurses around the country were part of the not-for-profit voluntary body, the District Nursing Association. It had been started in the 19th century to provide basic health care to



communities who otherwise would have had none or very little. By 1930, there were 8,000 district nurses in the country[1] and each one was funded by the community within which they lived and Newbold Verdon was no exception. Families paid 1s per week to the local Association funds and this paid the wages of the nurse. The very poor and the very old of the village were exempted from payment.

Sitting next to Nurse Greaves, and presenting her with two fire-side chairs, was Mrs Beryl Holder (née Moore) who, the article states, was the first baby to be delivered by the nurse when she came to the village. Before the introduction of district nurses, the birth of a child had to be managed by other villagers. Few went to hospital to have a baby or even have a doctor attend the birth - this would cost money. Instead, they relied on each other and especially the more experienced women in the community.

Self-reliance, whether in Newbold Verdon or nationally, had not been good for the survival of the newborn and the national statistics for 1901 showed that out of every 1,000 babies born, 141 died during or soon after birth[2]. The emergence and spread of the District Nursing Service throughout the country helped to reduce the level of infant mortality to 58 deaths for every 1,000 births by 1937[3]: still an exceedingly high level compared with the 2011 figure of 4.2 deaths per 1,000 births[4] but a great improvement on 1901.

Since her arrival in the village in 1929, Nurse Greaves and the villagers of Newbold Verdon had seen a transformation in healthcare for them and the nation at large. Not just in terms of infant mortality but also life expectancy. A man in 1930's Britain could expect to die aged 58 while his wife lived three years longer, dying aged 61. By 1961, a man could expect to live to 68, while his wife could expect to live until she was 74.[5]

Nurse Greaves, together with her colleagues locally and nationally, was partially responsible for this increase in life span. District nurses helped more babies survive, children to overcome debilitating and often fatal diseases, and adults to stay healthier longer. She was fondly remembered by all our contributors and she undertook her duties with real professionalism, as the following tribute by Pat Hunt demonstrates.

> *Rather portly, she rode her 'sit up and beg' bicycle to the aid of anyone who needed her. We would knock on her door for advice. She would come back with you when we were in real trouble, navy coat and hat thrown over her uniform. The doctor from Desford would be sent for if things*

looked serious, but she must have saved him many hours by seeing to the problems she could solve herself. She was proficient in bed baths, puffing a little when heaving patients over to make sure every place was washed. She spread cheer, comfort and cleanliness everywhere she went.

She was certainly very busy. One year in the Newbold Verdon Nursing Association's annual report she was recorded as having made 3,139 home visits to 274 cases - an approximate average of eleven visits for each medical case and nine visits a day. She never married and by all accounts was very much dedicated to her vocation, as these statistics and comments of contributors testify.

Childhood

Despite the efforts of the district nurse, it was not possible to protect children in the village from some illnesses, which today have been virtually eliminated or are now treatable. The following three entries from the primary school log book of the time shows the types of medical conditions a child could be subjected to and the possible consequences, as in the case of Dulcie Poole. These three entries in the log book spanning a 20 year period show that the children of Newbold Verdon were continuously exposed to a range of life-threatening or potentially debilitating illnesses (see also Chapter 6) .

Date	School Log Entry
1st November 1920	Epidemic of whooping cough and measles. School closed straight away
28th January 1931	Smallpox, measles, and ringworm was rife in the school
24th August 1940	Diphtheria death at Markfield Hospital (sanatorium) of infant, Dulcie Poole

Additional to the above log book entries, there were also recorded cases (often described by the head teacher as epidemics) of tuberculosis, mumps, rickets, scarlet fever, anaemia and polio, not to mention influenza. The medical profession did not have the range of drugs or the understanding of the conditions and their causes to provide the healthcare expected today. This led to forms of treatments that were in some ways as harsh as the illnesses they were intended to treat.

Ron's Scarlet Fever

In 1933, aged eight, Ron Gilliver contracted scarlet fever. Though not as life threatening as diphtheria, the disease was highly contagious. Children could become very ill with a high temperature and a fever. There was no medicinal treatment, antibiotics were still some years away, so the principal treatment was isolation; allowing time for the immune system to fight off the infection and to limit the spread of the disease. So Ron was sent to the County Sanatorium and Isolation Hospital at Markfield.

He had to spend six weeks in the hospital as his body fought the infection. His parents were only allowed to visit on Saturday and Wednesday afternoons for two hours and they could only speak to him through a sealed glass window. Back at Ron's house, the health inspectors arrived. Ron describes what they did, *'Special people would come and stove your house out. They would come and tape all your windows and doors and disinfect the house.'*

In some parts of the country, the Health Inspectors were even more ruthless.

> *'The child's books and toys were to be destroyed, its bedroom disinfected by the application of concentrated solutions of powerful germicides to the floor, bed, walls and furniture. Wallpaper must also be stripped and burned. These procedures caused much disruption and discomfort for the household.'* [6]

Doctors

Doctors did serve the village throughout the thirty years, but in the early years the nearest doctors' surgeries were in Desford, Earl Shilton or Barwell. In the late 1920's, the village was served by Doctor Taft of Desford and Joy Brearely remembers his visits well.

> *The doctor's surgery was in the first house on Church Row. I think it was Mrs Ball's house. He was called Doctor Taft and he came twice a week from Desford and he used the back room of the house.*
>
> *The men who needed to see him would sit across the road at Tommy Rowbotham's , the blacksmiths, warming themselves by the fire. The women would sit in the front room of Mrs Ball's.*

Number 1 Church Row, Mrs Ball's house, used as the doctor's surgery during Doctor Taft's twice-weekly visits to the village in the 1920's.



The Chemist

Back in the 1920's and 30's, healthcare was very limited and costly. Should a villager become ill, the first option would often be traditional remedies concocted by the family or neighbours. They might also resort to pick up a tonic from the local shop, or call on Mr. Alf Gilliver at 4 Desford Road who sold patented medicines and made up tonics himself, helped at times by his nephew, Ron Gilliver.

> *'I used to help him by filling up the medicine bottles with Parish's Food* which made the liquid go pink. The doctor would then call and take his twelve bottles of tonic for his patients.'*

* Parish's food was a red syrupy liquid containing iron phosphate. It was sometimes mixed with liquid malt.

Dentists

Visits to the dentist were rare. It was not until the NHS introduced dentist visits in schools that the children of the village had their teeth examined and treatment given but it was not popular. *'They were butchers'* was Mick Hill's assessment, echoed by many others. Some described how they would do anything to avoid having treatment, including hiding letters intended for their parents. '*It put me off going to the dentist for a long time.' w*as Margaret McSherry's comment. This was not surprising when treatments were often administered without any form of anaesthetic. At a later date, a dental practice was established on Main Street by a dentist appropriately named, I. Mendham.

Living with Death

In many matters the village was self-sufficient and the taking care of the dying and their subsequent burial was no exception. It was usual for people to die at home in their own bed and not in a hospital, unlike today where for every five deaths in the UK, only one of those is at home.[7] People rarely died in hospitals and there were very few nursing homes, except the old workhouses for the elderly. Janet Webb was typical of our contributors when she talked of seeing both her grandparents die at home in Ivy Cottage and there they remained until the day of their funeral.

The deceased would remain in the home for a few days before the internment and a 'friend of the parish', at one time it was Mrs Prime, would come along and lay out the body; cleaning and dressing it to the satisfaction of the relatives. After this, the body would often be placed in an open coffin in a bedroom or, if you were lucky enough to have one, a parlour, for visitors to come and pay their last respects. This necessitated a very early visit from the undertaker who in Newbold, in the late 1920's and 1930's, was Frank Gilliver.

Mr Gilliver was not a full-time undertaker or as he would be known today, funeral director. His main source of income was as a wheelwright, but he also undertook glazing and the fixing of gates and gate posts. The Gilliver family had been wheelwrights in the village for many years and undertaking the making of coffins for the village would, because of their skills in carpentry, have fallen to them.

Preparing a Coffin - Ron's Story

Ron Gilliver was the grandson of Frank Gilliver and as a boy he helped his grandfather make the coffins. Ron's account describes how pressurised the making of a coffin was and how this often led to tensions in his grandfather's workshop.

> *There were probably only five or six deaths a year in the village, so making coffins was not grandad's full time job, but when someone did die he would drop everything and get on with making the coffin.*
>
> *Making a coffin demanded a high level of skill. The body had to be carefully measured and the elm, but sometimes oak, would have to be cut and shaped to fit. Then it had to be sanded and polished before the handles were put on. All of which had to be completed within a matter of days.*

It was my job to collect the bier with my grandad from the church where it was kept. It was a four wheeled wagon mounted with an ebony and glass case with fine brass fittings. It was my job to polish up the brass whilst grandma polished up the ebony. Grandad was busy making the coffin.

Once he had put it all together it was time for me and grandma to help him line the bottom and sides of the inside of the coffin with pitch. It was Gran's job to boil the pitch up in the kitchen and when it was bubbling away she had to rush across the yard with the boiling pitch to his workshop where he and I were waiting.

Gran would hand the pitch to grandad and then get hold of the top of the coffin and I would be at the bottom. Grandad would shout 'Pol, Up!', that was his name for Gran. She would lift the top end up and he would pour the pitch in from the top to run down. As it began to roll down he would then shout, 'Ron, Up!' and it would be my turn to lift the end up. 'Roll It' was the instruction to swill the pitch around the sides. The pitch would flow down and around the sides and seal the bottom and the lower part of the coffin. This had to be done so that those carrying the coffin, the pallbearers, would not be covered in fluid from the body. But, if for some reason the pitch did not flow in the right place, he would go mad, throwing things around the workshop and swearing. And it would always be Gran's fault.

Making and preparing a coffin in such a short time must have been a tall order, even for the most skilled of carpenters. Frank Gilliver's reputation as a craftsman was very publicly tested each time a villager died and so it had to be right.



A bier very similar to the one used by St James'

6. Childhood

Thirty years is a long time, long enough for the children born in the 1920's to have a very different childhood experience to those born in the 30's or 40's and yet this does not appear to be the case. Our contributors seem to have had very similar experiences during their childhood - even those living through the war years and after.

The relative isolation of the village during all of these years was a constant factor. Even in the the early 1950's, travelling out of the village for children was not a regular occurrence. Consumerism was yet to take hold and the desire to shop for shopping's sake would only begin in earnest from the mid-fifties onwards. Few families owned televisions and their external entertainment was limited to the radio and the weekly film matinees that played first in Newbold's own picture house and then later at the Miners' Institute and the Baptist Chapel. Children entertained themselves.

Derek Wilkinson described his childhood in the 1930's on Newbold Heath as very happy and carefree. Many families had children of a similar age and they ganged together to roam the fields and woods of the eight or so farms that were spread about the Heath. Mostly, the farmers welcomed them and often the children would help with milking and even calving.

One Saturday morning, Derek recalls, a young farm worker at Craigmoor Farm just down Merrylees Lane from the Heath asked him if he and his friend would like to ride down on the farm horse to have it shod at the blacksmith's in Newbold village.

*'Well, what fun for two young lads to get on the back of a horse and ride down to Newbold to watch Tommy Rowbotham (*man on left in picture) *shoe the horse and then to ride all the way home again. Who wants anything better than that!'*



Helping on the farms voluntarily or for pocket money was a common occurrence. Whether it was on a daily or weekly basis or seasonal when, for example, potato picking was required, helping around the local farms was quite common. Consequently, even though many of the children's parents did not work on the land, they still felt a strong connection with farming and would describe themselves as country folk.



Nancy Biggs as a young child in the 1920's, helping with haymaking

This sense of being 'of the country' was also reinforced because the children would spend long hours away from home playing in the fields and woods. Nancy Biggs recalls spending many hours damming the stream that ran past the field known as the Man's Foot. *'There was a brook down there and we used to bank it up and paddle. It was great fun.'* Kathleen Caunt (née Twigg) remembers the Man's Foot field for its flowers. *'This field was awash with wild flowers in the spring, with cowslips, May blobs, wild orchids (yes, wild orchids) and lady smock, to mention just a few.'* Nancy was a child of the 1920's, but even fifteen years or so later the children of the village were doing much the same. Brian Hill recalls, '*We would take a 6d bottle of pop and we would be off for half a day; round the footpaths and we walked for miles.'*

When not out in the fields, the children would be much closer to home either in the back garden or on the street or road outside their house playing with their friends. They possessed few toys or play equipment that was purchased, but relied instead on those toys made for or by them. Fred Hodges recalls how they would spend hours bowling an old bike wheel up and down Main Street, hitting the wheel with a stick.

Some Popular Games



Two-year-old Norman Gilliver (right) holds his stick and hoop outside his house, ready to play Bowlers down Mill Lane. The hoop was rolled and then struck with the stick to keep it going. Norman could do this without fear of being run over in the road.

Other popular games included the following:
Tin-a-Lurkey, Football, Hopscotch,
Kick Back White Horse, Hide and Seek
Whip and Top, Skipping
And Huskey Bum

Up to Mischief

Not all games were approved of by the adults of the village and there were many tales told of pranks played. Joy Brearley talked of 'Stinging Nettle Day', when the boys would rub stinging nettles on unsuspecting girls' arms or legs, causing much pain and discomfort. Joy explained, *'The only way you could protect yourself is if you wore an oak leaf pinned to your clothes. The boys were not allowed to nettle you then.'*

Often grown-ups would be the target, with games of knock-a-door run or window tapping; when, on dark nights, a washer would be hung from a thread against a neighbour's window and they would be subjected to an irritating tap-tap sound. Despite checking the window, the householder was unable to detect the cause. Meanwhile, mischievous children, hiding behind the hedge, would giggle and snigger. Sometimes the tricks could be threatening to life and limb, as this story by Mick Hill demonstrates.

> *'It's 1947 and we are in the middle of the worst winter this country has ever had. Down Harry's Lane (*opposite Mill Lane*) the drifts are up to six feet high and the only way down the lane is to walk on top of the drifts. And every day poor old Percy Goacher would walk on top of the drifts down the lane to feed his chickens with the buckets of mash he carried in either hand. We decided to dig a deep hole in the drift and then to cover it over, knowing Percy would be along soon, which he was, and straight down the hole he went, just leaving his two buckets of mash on top of the snow.'*

Newbold Verdon: The Village with Three Ends

It's Saturday morning just after the war and the boys of the village have arranged a football match or, to be exact, several matches - not with other villages but within the village itself. Three teams stand ready to play on a small piece of cleared ground at the top of Mill Lane. It has been left vacant by the Market Bosworth Rural District Council during the war but eventually, after the conflict is over, new council houses will be built on it. But this Saturday it is where the three village teams - Top, Middle and Bottom End will play.

The village has been described in this manner for many years: Top End being the upper part of Main Street, Brascote Lane and Dragon Lane; Bottom End taking in the lower part of Main Street, Desford Road and Red Lion Lane; while Middle End is the central part of Main Street and Mill Lane. No one knows why the middle of the village is still an 'end', it just is. It could hark back to a much older period of time, perhaps even to the village's origins in the Saxon period when the word 'end' would refer to a defined space, such as Church End.

The boys are not interested in where they got their names from they just want to play football, but there is a problem. The leather ball has gone flat because the bladder inside has split. Brian Hill suggests a trip down to the local butcher, Mr Albert Preston. It's only a short distance away, next to Cob Cottage on Main Street. He and his brother Des scuttle off to the butcher's while the rest of the lads hang around playing faggies and bowlers in Mill Lane.

They have no need to worry about traffic. There may be the odd horse and cart and possibly Mr Walter Preston with his coal lorry, but Newbold Verdon is a very quiet, safe village. Apart from the unofficial Recky that the boys are playing on, the streets and back yards are the only playgrounds in the village. It will be a few years before the parish council and community raise enough money to buy the fields opposite the school and establish Dragon Lane Recreation Ground.

Brian and Des have returned from the butchers, complete with a pig's bladder fully inflated and placed inside the football. But they had better hurry. The bladder is not very robust and is likely to go down or even burst before the matches between the three Ends are complete.

May Day

The May Day celebrations by the children of the village was an enduring event throughout the 1920's to 1950's and continued to be so for some years after. It was a tradition that stretched back into the 19th century and the village even had its own May Day rhyme, sung by the children as they went collecting pennies from house to house with their hoops and trays. The hoops would be carried by the boys and decorated with posies of flowers, while the girls placed a doll on a tray and surrounded it with spring flowers. Joy Brearley explained; *'The tray was covered with a tea towel because if you didn't get any money, you didn't show them your tray.'* Nancy Biggs could also fondly recall the trips round to neighbours' houses.

> *We used to go Maying. We would have a doll on a tray and flowers all around it. We would take our tray around the houses singing, "Here we come a Maying." We would be given pennies to put into our box.*

The school also held May Day celebrations every year, including dancing around the maypole. Even during the height of the war, the school continued with the festival, as the head teacher's log book entry shows.

1st May 1944	*This afternoon, following our usual custom, we crowned the May Queen, held the Ceremony and Maypole Dances etc, which followed. The children were watched by a number of parents and friends in the school yard.*



May Day celebrations in the school yard, now the front car park of the school

Childhood Freedoms

Despite not having anything like the toys and games children would have in the wealthier late 20th century and today, the children of this time were very contented with their lot. They knew nothing other than what they were experiencing and, while it had its deprivations, in many other ways it proved to be a time full of riches.



Seven-year-old Michael Preston, walking down the centre of Main Street, 1939; passing Grange Farm and what would eventually be the entrance to Hornbeam Road

They were much freer than later generations. Protected somewhat by the isolation of the village and by the watchful eye of other villagers, there was far less fear of children coming to any serious harm by, for example, abduction. Ironically, the lack of a state welfare system - where today the responsibility for child welfare has to a significant degree been handed over to the state - meant that villagers had, in effect, to create their own. Child protection was the responsibility of the extended family and neighbours. Adults were not afraid to chastise children for their misdemeanours or to call on their parents should matters be more serious. This atmosphere meant children not only felt safe but also watched. Derek Wilkinson summed this up very well.

> *Everybody knew everybody. If anyone saw you they would say, 'Oh you are Harold's lad. How's your dad? How's your mum?' So you couldn't get away with anything.'*

Free of the fear of strangers meant that children were allowed to explore beyond their homes and to get out into the countryside. The public footpaths would take them to their favourite ponds, streams, woods and fields. Farmers, though not all, were happy to see children on their land as long as they behaved by closing gates, leaving livestock alone and not damaging fences. The countryside was the children's extended playground, a place for childhood adventures.

Education

In 1921 the children of the village attended one of two schools, dependent on their age. The youngest children aged from 5 to 11 attended the infant and junior council school on Dragon Lane which had been built eleven years earlier in 1910. The four classrooms helped relieve the overcrowding in the Parochial School (today's St James' church hall) where the older children aged 11-14 years were based.

The Parochial School was described by Leicestershire Education Authority as a 'mixed senior' school and it offered a limited secondary education. By the middle of the 1920's about 50 percent of all pupils in Leicestershire were taught in schools of this type, sited mainly in the rural areas. However, things were changing and new 'secondary' schools were being built throughout the county that would offer a much broader, more practical, curriculum. The more academic students could attend 'intermediate' secondary schools, provided they scored high enough marks in what was the forerunner of the Eleven Plus, the Annual Secondary Examination. Only 12 percent of pupils in the county achieved a sufficiently high grade to do this.

By 1930, due to falling numbers, the two village schools had merged and all children, including 39 from the old school, began attending the council school. This did not last long and three years later the school log book recorded that children aged eleven were transferring to secondary schools in Market Bosworth, Ibstock and Coalville.

Market Bosworth Grammar was the designated 'intermediate' school for the area and accepted only the very ablest of pupils. The curriculum at the grammar school was rigorously academic and included a modern language. Most of the other pupils went to Ibstock Central or Broom Leys Central in Coalville. It was possible also to attend King Edward VII Grammar School at Coalville, though a pupil would need to meet the qualifying standard and termly fees were charged.

The primary school log book entry of July 1933 recorded three pupils from Newbold Verdon qualified for Market Bosworth; Broom Leys Central took five, while Ibstock Central accepted 18, the majority of children. These newly built 'central' schools were so named because they provided centralised secondary education for children from surrounding villages. They were modern, purpose-built schools providing practical subjects such as domestic science, woodwork, metalwork and gardening as well as English and mathematics. Ibstock Central had been built in 1925 and was one of the county's new 'H' type designs based on two wings, one for the boys and one for the girls, joined at mid-point by a domestic science room reached only from the girls' wing[1].

The Council School

> *'I went to the old school which is now the Church Rooms* (St James' Church Hall). *I went on to the other one* (the council school) *and then Ibstock School. At the old school the headmaster was Mr Gulliver and he used to pop into the Swan for a drink at lunch time. If the boys were naughty he would pinch their cheeks and give them a slap.'* Nancy Biggs

It is funny what we all remember about our school days: the things our teachers hoped we would remember rarely seem to be mentioned. Like the quote above, our most vivid memories are often of the people we met and the impression they made upon us and these are what seem to count the most. Our contributors were no different; when asked about their school days, they often recounted stories that made a deep impression on them to this day, over 70 years' later, as in the following two accounts by Janet Webb and Joy Brearley.

Janet Webb started school in 1931 and left for Ibstock in 1937. Her recollection of her time in the council school at Newbold was generally positive except for the winter time.

> *I, sadly, had asthma as a child, which deprived me of much of my winter school days. I can remember my mother going up to the school and asking Mr Cadle if I may have some work to do at home because I just wasn't well enough to go, but he said no and she was very disappointed that he didn't pick it up.'*

Joy Brearley attended the council school from 1934 until 1940 and though she generally enjoyed school she recounted an incident where her return to class after being ill was not a happy one.

> *I got near to having the cane when I couldn't do my sums. I was in Mrs Jordan's class and I had been away - I had a lot of illnesses as a child. And they had done putting numbers into columns to add up. Instead of me moving the numbers across the columns one way (carrying ten) I moved them in the wrong direction. And I got told off and told to stand away and I was expecting to get slapped, but I didn't.*

The school log book for the whole of the thirty years recorded significant absenteeism of children due to ill health. The following log book entries overleaf recorded the cases of several school-wide illnesses in less than one year.

Date	School Log Entry
4th December 1936	*Jaundice epidemic in the school. 71 children out of 113 attending (63%)*
11th January 1937	*Jaundice epidemic has abated, to be replaced by influenza. 32 children absent.*
15th. January 1937	*Influenza outbreak - 50 children present out of 113 on roll - 56%*
8th October 1937	*Measles outbreak. 40 children absent. Attendance 58.9%*
12th. October 1937	*Attendance 48%*

Five years earlier, in 1931, the head teacher recorded the following.

28th January 1931	*A further drop in attendance - 83 present i.e. 63%. Notifiable epidemic cases comprise 5 Smallpox, 2 Chickenpox, 13 Measles, 15 Influenza, 1 Ring Worm*
2nd February 1931	*During the epidemic period the times for recreation will be extended for 5 minutes... to ensure the rooms being flushed with air.*

By the 13th February, there were '*60 cases of measles, 8 smallpox. 23/148 attending.*

Smallpox, whooping cough, diphtheria, influenza, chickenpox, measles, and scarlet fever were all recorded (some more than once) as being of 'epidemic' proportions in the school during the thirty years of our study caused, in part, by limited drugs to prevent or treat the illnesses, poor sanitation in the homes and the school, and a general ignorance of how to stay healthy.

In 1938, the headteacher recorded in the log book the following:

7th September 1938	*The son of Mr Gilliver, who supplies milk, has been taken away suffering from diphtheria. This information came after milk had been consumed. The milk ordered to be stopped. By the Authority.*

How easy it was for children to acquire a serious illness. These whole-school absences must have had a major affect on the children's education and on the school's overall performance. Absenteeism, whether legitimate or otherwise,

was a contentious issue for the head and this frustration occasionally spilled out onto the pages of the log book by Mr Cadle.

Date	Log Book Entry
28th July 1937	*The attitude of many parents to school attendance in this village leaves much to be desired.*
5th December 1937	*26 children absent this morning. I am convinced that many of them could be at school and have telephoned the Office for assistance in this matter. The attitude of some parents is inexplicable.*

Discipline

'You had to behave yourself. You couldn't get up to any tricks.' Joy Brearley

Joy's sentiments were echoed by all contributors who talked about their school days. It seems that corporal punishment was common throughout the period and ranged from a slap on the legs or a wrap on the knuckles with a ruler, to being struck by the lathe (a leather strap) or thrashed with the cane.

Mike Preston received the lathe from Mr Cadle for tripping someone up as they came in off the playground. Mick Hill recalled being 'whacked' on the hand by his class teacher if work was incorrect. The punishments were not confined to the playground or classroom. Derek Wilkinson from the Heath would stay at school for lunch and eat his sandwiches at his desk. '*If you were talking whilst eating your lunch Mr Cadle would give you the cane.'*

Despite the rather Dickensian forms of punishment, all said how much they enjoyed school. For some, receiving a whack was seen as a *'badge of honour'* and something of which they could be proud.

The 3 Rs and a little more

Literacy in the form of reading, writing (composition as it was then described) and mathematics (mainly arithmetic) formed the backbone of the children's curriculum until age eleven. The day always began with assembly and there was time during the week for P.T. (Physical Training) as well as practical and creative subjects including: needlework, art, music and handcrafts. The head teacher took the boys for gardening - a subject deemed to be very important.

The school log book entry at the beginning of each year stated the specialist subjects each teacher would provide during the year, in addition to their general teaching skills. Below is the log book entry for 16th. August 1943.

Teacher	Specialisation
Mrs Jordan	Music/ Art Handiwork
Mrs Spencer	Needlework
Miss Catlow	Full time Infant
Mr Cadle (Head teacher)	Gardening/ Crafts

Mr Clinton Arrives

On the 7th January, 1948, Mr Benny Clinton was appointed to the school. He was an ex-soldier and, before the war, a professional footballer. He remained at the school until his retirement in 1979. In this photograph he is standing with Mr Cadle, the head teacher, and the boys from his first team in the 1947-48 season. Several of our contributors feature in the photograph: Mick Hill, Brian Cheshire and Des Hill. His enthusiasm for the game of football and his skill in passing that knowledge onto the school teams led to Newbold Verdon being crowned Leicestershire Rice Bowl Champions on several occasions in the early 1950's.



Quality of Education

By today's standard, the quality and certainly range of the children's educational experience may well be deemed to be wanting. Compared to the current educational opportunities and technological aids now available to schools, the curriculum of a village primary school in the 1920's, 30's and 40's could be seen to be rudimentary. It should, however, be judged on the expectations of the time and in this respect Newbold Verdon School by the mid to late 1940's was judged to be a good school by Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMI), though this had not always been the case.

Part of H.M.I. Report on Newbold Verdon Primary School

4th September 1931	*The children generally come from somewhat poor homes with a low standard of speech and intellectual interests and they depend more than most on their teachers for information and training.'* F.V. Millington H.M.I.

The comment of the HMI is more an indictment of the homes from which the children came rather than the school itself. In fact the HMI sees it as something of an oasis in the desert of intellectual interest and restricted speech. The report went on to recommend that the school focus its efforts more on improving the quality of children's speaking and listening.

Sometime later, the HMI returned and criticised the school for not having done enough to improve these skills. A change of head teacher in 1936 signalled a gradual improvement in the school's performance and by 1939 the HMI report was fulsome in its praise, noting that the '*limitations in pupils' speech*' had been successfully addressed.

By 1945, Mr Cadle, the head teacher, could record with some pride the following.

> *'Head teacher to Market Bosworth Grammar School Speech Day. It is interesting to note that in his report the Headmaster of the Grammar School congratulated two schools on A.S.E. Results. One of the schools was Newbold Verdon.'*
>
> Tellingly, he does not mention the name of the other school.

The A.S.E. acted as the filter by which children were designated a secondary school. Within the exam there were several grades, A1 being the highest then A2, B, and finally a catch-all category of 'did not score.' Grade A pupils were offered a place in a grammar school - Market Bosworth or King Edward VII in Coalville. The rest to one of the central schools at Ibstock or Broom Leys. One year later the 1944 Education Act introduced the 11+ exam to replace the A.S.E. but to achieve the same goal. In the following log book entry of 1948, the head teacher did not seem to think those failing to achieve a grammar school place were unduly bothered.

27th July 1948	*4 to Market Bosworth Grammar, 1 Coalville Grammar, the rest 'cheerfully' to Ibstock, and 5 to South Charnwood Modern.'*

Secondary Education

As the war ended the government published the 1944 Education Act establishing, for the first time, a national system of free education for children aged five to fifteen. For the secondary-aged pupils in Newbold Verdon, it affected them in two significant ways. First, children were expected to remain at school until they were fifteen - one year longer than previously. Secondly, there was a greater opportunity for more of the academically able pupils to go to grammar school.

To gain access to a grammar school education the children had to undertake the 11+. An exam incorporating tests of intelligence and attainment in English and mathematics. Those who passed (about 20 percent) were able to go to grammar school where an academic curriculum would prepare them for exams at fifteen (General Certificate in Education O Levels) and, if they stayed on at school ,GCE 'A' (advanced) levels, with a possibility of achieving a free university education.

Market Bosworth Grammar school was designated as the grammar school for the surrounding area, including pupils from as far away as Leicester Forest East. Numbers rose from 120 before the war to 400 not long after[2]. An increasing number of children from Newbold Verdon were able to attend. The records from the school log book showed that in the twenties and thirties, only one or two pupils per year qualified for Market Bosworth. It was an endowed school and was only obliged to take a quarter of its pupils from non-fee paying families. After 1944, this ended and there were opportunities for more pupils.

Those who failed their 11+ continued to attend either Ibstock Secondary Modern (renamed from Ibstock Central) or the Broom Leys Technical Secondary which

catered for the brightest of those who had failed, but who it was believed would benefit from a practical education. No access to any type of final secondary examination was available to secondary modern children at that time.

Impact on the Children

> *'If you didn't pass your 11+ you went to Ibstock. If you were a little bit cleverer than that you went to Broom Leys which they called the technical school.'* Brian Hill

In some respects the new secondary arrangements did not look that different to what had been happening before the war. There had been the opportunity to attend grammar school and if that route was closed off children would move to a secondary school. The act reinforced this structure by extending the number of places open to those able to achieve the standard for a grammar school education.

When asked what impact either passing or failing their 11+ had on individuals, the response ranged widely. Overall, those who passed welcomed the opportunity, though they recounted several stories from Market Bosworth Grammar that suggests a harsh disciplinary regime by the headmaster at that time. *'At Dixie it was very stern.'* was the view of Joyce Brearley and others agreed.

Moving not only to different schools, but also different types of schools based on selection was seen to affect the relationship between those who had passed and those who had failed. '*They drew back a bit. Their attitude altered'* was Joy Brearley's experience, while Brian Hill described it in the following way:

> *Sometimes you were treated unkindly by those who went to secondary mods. The common phrase was, 'There go the grammar bugs.'*

For those who failed there was, for some, a real sense of disappointment while others just accepted it without seemingly too much concern.

Impact on the Village

It is difficult to quantify how the new secondary education system affected the village. For the children it suggests that a certain amount of distancing in their relationships may have occurred between those who passed and those who failed the 11+, though for some, this did not appear to be the case. For those who went to grammar school it provided an education which led to the possibility of being the first in their family to achieve a university education.

Norman Gilliver was one of these children. He passed his 11+ aged ten and went to Market Bosworth a year in advance of his schoolmates. He profited greatly from his education, achieving high enough grades in his 'A' Levels to be offered a scholarship place at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. To be able to claim this place he was expected to stay on an extra year at Market Bosworth, but his parents (his father was a miner) were unable to afford this expense and so he went to the newly established Nottingham University instead.

Even those in secondary school received a longer education and the opportunities that this availed. Some could not wait to leave, even those who attended grammar school: Des Hill was one of these.

> *'I passed the 11+ under age at ten and went to Market Bosworth Grammar School and when I went there I didn't bother a lot to be honest. I probably knew what I wanted to do and I didn't like the headmaster.'*

In the 1930's, students had left the village for their secondary education just as they did in the 1940's and 50's, but the difference in these latter decades was that they were being exposed to more opportunities after they left school. Many still ended up working in the mines and hosiery and boot and shoe factories, but there were new horizons a little further afield.

7. Pints, Play and Prayer

Lacking the sophisticated technology of today, or even later in the 20th century, and limited in time they could spend socially together - most worked a 6½ day week - the village looked mainly to itself and its institutions for entertainment, socialising and spiritual reflection.

Places of Entertainment

For a village of only 1,200 people, Newbold Verdon was well endowed with drinking establishments throughout the 1920's to 1940's. In 1939 the village had four public houses: The Swan, The George and Dragon, The Jubilee and The Mill (Windmill as it is now called) and, together with the Working Men's Club and Miners' Welfare Institute, they were the main sources of entertainment for the adult villagers, outside of that provided by the churches and chapel.

The Lost Pub - The George and Dragon

The pub stood where Dragon Lane meets the Barlestone Road, on the site of today's Doctors' Surgery. It was a long established public house dating back to the beginning of the 19th century and in 1939 it had a long serving owner, Mrs Flo Starbuck, who had taken on the licence of the pub after her husband Charles had died.

At that time the pub stood in almost splendid isolation from the village centre, there being only a handful of houses close by. The Preston Drive estate was yet to be built and Dragon Lane had less than half the houses it has today. The pub did have the passing trade from those travelling along the B582 and it would have been a convenient starting and finishing point for the miners as they set off on their shift at the pit or on their way home. The consumption of alcohol before, as well as after, a shift was a regular occurrence for some men.

The pub, like all in the village, would also try to create a loyal clientele by running darts, dominoes and cribbage teams. It could not offer a skittle alley like the Swan or the Working Men's Club, but Mrs Starbuck owned a field which was used as a football pitch for 'her' team and, by all accounts, the support she provided often got the better of her. Brian Hill explains:

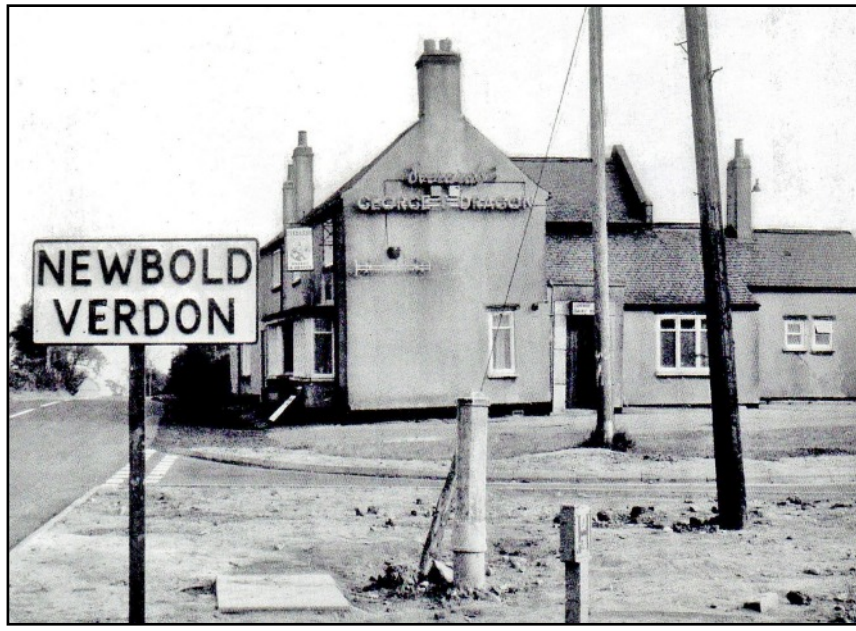
There were two football teams in the village, each based at a pub. These were the Dragon team and the Jubilee. The Dragon played on a field owned by Mrs. Starbuck next to her pub, and she was notorious for her excitable and often wild (and vulgar) shouting in favour of her team.'

The photograph below is taken some years later showing the pub just prior to its demolition due to severe mining subsidence caused by a collapsed coalface being worked by miners from the Merry Lees Colliery. John Hill recalled that the noise of the machinery being used at the coal face could be heard on the surface in the pub and that Mrs Starbuck would joke about their proximity.

'Mrs Starbuck declared that it was probably easier for her to reach down and pass the beer to the miners whilst they were working, because they were so close to the surface, rather than wait for them to come into the pub after their shift.'

Villager, Fred Hodges, was working at the coalface under the George and Dragon when it collapsed, causing subsidence and irreparable damage to buildings above.

I was working right underneath when the Dragon come in and there was two houses on the other side that came in an all. They just couldn't hold the roof up in the mine because of the water rushing in at too fast a rate.'



The George and Dragon Public House

What an irony that the very men who drank at the Dragon were, in part, responsible for its demise.

The Working Men's Club

The Working Men's Club we see today was built in 1936, but it was not the first in the village, a much smaller clubhouse had been sited adjacent to the Jubilee Inn - it would later become a shoe factory. Anyone visiting the club cannot fail to be impressed by its size. As well as a large lounge and skittle alley, it has a 200 capacity concert hall complete with stage and bar. For a village of just 1,200 people, it seems overly optimistic that a building of such magnitude could be sustained by its membership, but our contributors assured us that it did, particularly in the first 25 years or so of its existence.

John Hill's father was a committee member throughout the war years and beyond and John often attended with family and neighbours during this time. On reflection, John offered the following reason why, despite there being a war on and people having little money to spare, the club was so popular.

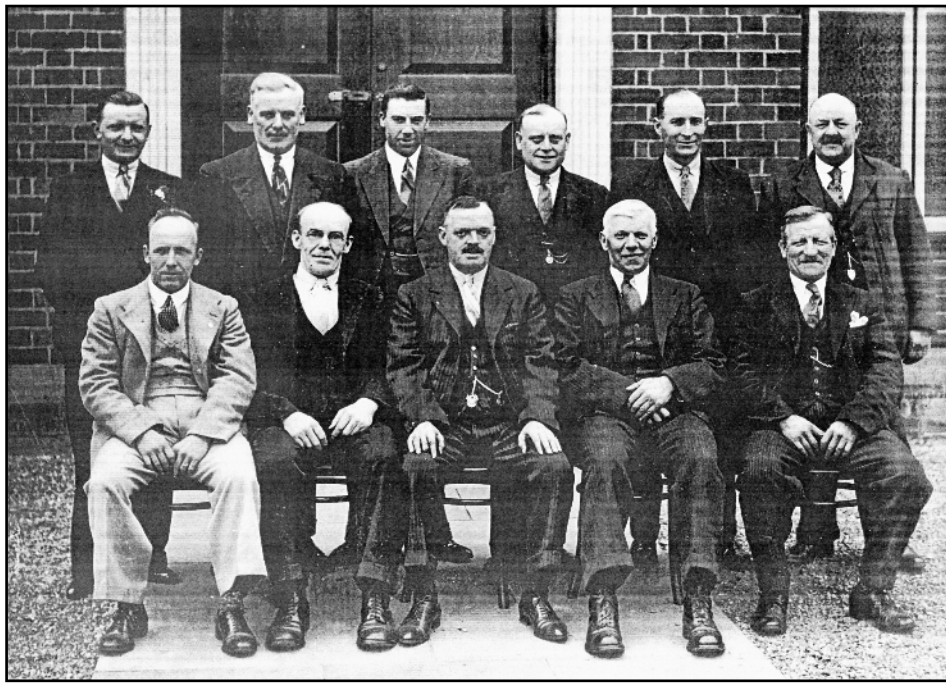
During the war years the club was packed at weekends. I think it was because it was a place to gather during a crisis. People needed each other.

As a small child, I was always fascinated by the way the women would dress up for a night in the club. They all had on fur coats and lots of jewellery and big handbags. And years later, when I brought up the subject of the jewellery and handbags, my Mam would say they needed big handbags to keep their insurance policies in and they wore all their jewellery in case there was no house to go back to!



Even after the war, the club provided the villagers with an excellent night out, especially on Saturdays. John's father acted as the MC and, sitting high on the stage above the audience, he would strike down his brass gavel, call for best of order and introduce each act. All members were issued with a membership card like the one shown.

During the week the club ran darts, dominoes cribbage and skittles teams.



The Club committee outside the newly built Club House, 1937

The Miners' Welfare Institute

At the time of writing this book, there stands on Dragon Lane a sad looking derelict building boarded up and fenced off, which in its day was a vital part of Newbold Verdon's social and cultural life - the Miners' Welfare Institute.

The Institute was erected in 1927 and many of our contributors remember it with real fondness. Like all Miners' Welfares that had sprung up in and around the British coalfields, its purpose was a place for miners and their families to meet: sometimes to socialise at dances, whist drives, and annual celebrations such as Christmas, but also for self-improvement by listening to speakers and taking classes. The larger welfares would often have sporting facilities. Newbold's Welfare was small compared to some and confined to one largish room about the size of a tennis court. Our contributors remember it as a place for all members of the community and not just the miners. It appeared to serve almost like a village hall.

Nancy Biggs remembers attending the Saturday night dances during her teens. *'There were dances almost every week and bands would come and play. We did the ballroom dances like the waltz and the fox trot.'* The Saturday dances continued on through the war and beyond.

It was at a Miners' Welfare dance that Nancy met her future husband, Bernard Biggs. Bernard lived in Enderby at the time, but such was the popularity of the Welfare Saturday night hops, he and his friends would travel across to Newbold.

Joy Brearley also had the Saturday night dances to thank for giving her the chance to meet her future husband.

> *In my late teens and early twenties I used to go to the Saturday night dances at the Welfare. It was there where I met my future husband. He came down with a group of lads from Coalville each week and we would dance to the music of local bands, but there was no alcohol.*

Not only did Nancy and Joy meet their future husbands at the Welfare, but their wedding receptions were also held there. Well into the 1950's, the Welfare was being used for wedding receptions.

Other Uses

There was also a full sized billiard table in the room, which was very popular with the men. Des Hill explained:

> *The Miners' Welfare opened from 5.30p.m. to 9p.m. for the playing of snooker or billiards and if you didn't get there at that time and put your name down for a slot on the table you didn't play that evening, it was that popular.*

On Thursday evening, the snooker table served as the stand for a portable film projector when the Institute held the weekly film night. John Hill and Fred Hodges have very fond memories of those nights, more because of the tricks they got up to in the half-light than the films they watched. John:

> *Oh the Miners' Institute was the bees knees. That's where we went to the pictures each week. The projectionist would set up the projector on the billiard table and a screen at the other end.*
>
> *One night Fred would not stop making shadow puppets on the screen with his hands. Eventually he was thrown out of the Institute by the projectionist but the audience began chanting 'Fred, Fred, Fred' and he eventually had to let him back in!*

The 'Stute', as it was sometimes called, served the village well, right from its erection in 1927 up until the 1990's and its closing.



Newbold Verdon Women's Institute New Year's Eve Party: 1939



Another event held at the Institute in the late 1940's

The famous herringbone dance floor can be seen. On dance nights it was sprinkled with chalk to ensure the smoothest of dance moves could be made.

Newbold Verdon Picture Theatre



Long before they were showing pictures at the Miners' Welfare, Newbold had its own cinema. This map[1] shows the site of Newbold's first, and last, dedicated picture 'theatre'. The building is long gone, but it was set back off Main Street on the right-hand side just before the junction with the Desford Road.

It had been set up by an enterprising gentleman named Tom Chesterton and his wife Lillian. The exact date of its construction is not known but is likely to be sometime after the end of World War One. He later went on to open a second cinema in Barlestone called The Cosy Cinema. The cinema, according to Barlestone historian Keith Hextall,[2] was built in 1921.

Two of our contributors, Janet Webb and Nancy Biggs, had direct knowledge of the Newbold's Picture Theatre and the proprietors, Mr and Mrs Chesterton.

Nancy : *It was our Uncle Tom and Aunt Lilly who ran it.*

Janet: My mother was the cinematograph projectionist.

Nancy: The seats cost 6d, 9d and 1s and there was a double seat at the back for courting couples. Our Cousin Dorothy used to play the piano and Cousin Mont the violin to accompany the films because they were all silent.

Janet: Then Tom went on to build a cinema in Barlestone and one in Enderby.

Nancy described the experience of going to the cinema in the 1920's and 30's.

> *It was very popular, we used to really look forward to it. There were often queues to get in and we had to sit on wooden benches. It was big enough for about 100 people. I think it opened Fridays and Saturdays and after they had shown the films in Newbold, Aunt Lilly used to rewind them and they were taken to Barlestone to show.*

A cinema every Friday and Saturday showing first silent and then later 'talking' films demonstrated, by its popularity, the hunger villagers had for outside entertainment. It is therefore surprising that Newbold's cinema closed down when, nationally, cinema going was at its highest.

In 1934 there were 4,000 cinemas and 18.5 million customers each week[3]. By 1939, the Miners' Welfare and the Baptist Chapel offered a film night each week and some villagers went off to Barlestone at weekends to Mr Chesterton's other cinema, which continued to operate until the late 1950's.



Newbold Verdon 'Picture Theatre' after it had been converted into a private dwelling. It was later knocked down for the erection of another house.

Football

It has not been possible to determine exactly when the two village teams of the Jubilee and George and Dragon were first established, but judging from newspaper entries in the 1930's, the Jubilee had been going for some years prior to then. The Jubilee played on a field close to School Farm on the Desford Road before moving to the Dragon Lane Recreation Ground when it was opened in 1949; the George and Dragon played in a field close to the pub.

During the war years, the Jubilee was one of only eight football teams that continued to play in the Coalville area: the rest having been disbanded owing to most players being called up for active duty. Though we cannot be certain, it is likely that the team's continuing existence was due to most players being retained as miners for the duration of the war.

Not all players remained at home and Mike Preston recounted a story of the return of several players from the war and the impression it made upon him. He was a teenager at the time and just starting his football career with the Jubilee. Mike:

> *I was playing for the Dragon not long after the end of the war and we got changed in the Miners' Welfare before walking up the lane to play our game. On this particular day, some of the lads who had been in the forces were playing: Les Kent, Stan Kent, Eric Gilliver, Arthur Towers and Bill Dowell.*
>
> *I was walking behind them and I remember thinking how strong they all looked. Their time in the army had obviously helped with their fitness.'*

Mike was also likely to be looking at mature young men who, six or so years earlier, had left the village in their late teens, barely men at all.



The Jubilee 1st and 2nd team in the 1930's, possibly 1936, after

The playing and watching of football, especially Leicester City, was an all consuming passion for several of our contributors and it appears to have been so for many of the young men in the village for the whole of the thirty years and, for some, continues to this day.

Cricket

By the 1920's, cricket had been a feature of Newbold Verdon's sporting life for at least seventy years and continued to flourish in the 1930's. In 1939, the Newbold Verdon Working Men's Club Cricket team was playing in the South Leicestershire League.

By the late 1940's and early 1950's, there were two teams playing in the village. As well as the Working Men's Club, the Methodists also had a team. The Methodists played their games on a field beside Dragon Lane, while the Working Men's Club played in a field up at Newbold Heath owned by Chater Farm.

Des Hill played both football and cricket for the village teams, starting as a teenager in the early 1950's. He tells of a time when large crowds would come to support their team and of the interest in football throughout the county being so high that half-time amateur football results were printed in a special sporting edition of the Mercury, followed by a second edition with the full-time result later in the evening.

Cycling Speedway - Verdon Vultures

In the early 1950's, a cycling speedway team was set up at Newbold. The oval track was built by the cycling enthusiasts on ground now occupied by the bungalows on Sparkenhoe. Des Hill rode for the team. Des:

> *'I think Ray Prime started it in Newbold, there already was one in Desford. I was still at school when I first joined and was about fourteen. We set it up ourselves and joined a league, travelling to matches on the back of one of Mr Wilkinson's lorries.*
>
> *There was not much safety. We had no helmets or gloves and our bikes were very basic, but we sometimes got upward of a hundred people coming to watch us, though I don't think we were very successful.*

Whether due to the eventual building on the cycle track as Sparkenhoe was completed, or due to a loss of interest, Des believes that the team only lasted a couple of years before it was disbanded and Verdon Vultures was no more.

Youth Clubs

After the war, Newbold Verdon could boast three youth clubs, one in each of the churches and the chapel. Running on separate nights, it meant that the youth of the village had somewhere to go to socialise and play games for a significant part of the week and, though they were in separate religious establishments, there was no barrier to who could attend. John Hill was an Anglican, but he attended all three clubs.

> *Three nights a week we had a youth club for young and older kids. We all went to each others. They even laid on a bus every Thursday to go to Coalville baths and the bus was that full you had to sit three or more to a seat. I can't remember paying anything for that or the clubs. I should think there was a lot more for us to do then than there is for the teenagers of today.*

Christine Hill (née Causon) was a member of the Baptist Chapel, but her dearest youth club memory was that of the Methodists.

> *The Methodist Church had a first-class youth club and lots of us would go. And the highlight of the youth club was Mrs Wilkinson's delicious cheese sandwiches, served with the hottest tea you could drink and all at a cost of just 6d.*

Today, parents may well take their children to similar evening events, but in the 1940's and 1950's this was not deemed necessary. John Hill recalled that there was no such thing as 'stranger danger' in those days and even in the dark winter months children and teenagers felt safe enough to walk to the clubs in often poorly lit streets. John:

> *'Nobody worried about being accosted. You were in more danger from your mates who would play pranks on you in the dark!'*

All our contributors enjoyed their time at the youth clubs and appreciated the opportunities they provided for somewhere to go and something to do. Friendships were made there and romances struck up, some of which led to marriage. They also provided, for some, the opportunity to broaden the mind. One occasion in particular must have challenged the preconceptions of Newbold's youth about the people of Germany, who only a few years earlier had been the country's bitterest of enemies.

The photograph below was taken in 1953 and features the combined youth clubs of Newbold Verdon and Barlestone, together with visiting teenagers from Alsdorf in Germany. This was part of a scheme aimed at reconciliation between the two countries through their youth.

Mike Preston was one of the youth club members to make the return visit to Germany.

> *The exchange visit had been organised by a Mr Holdsworth from Coalville and the Germans came to us first. They were from a coal mining town called Alsdorf, similar to Coalville. We had a great time when they came to us and when we went there and everyone was very friendly toward each other. You wouldn't have thought there had been a war.*
>
> *The boy who came and stayed at our house had lost his father in the war - killed on the Russian front. I still have the letters written by him and his mother thanking us for our hospitality.*



Members of Newbold Verdon and Barlestone youth clubs with their German visitors outside Barlestone Village Hall

Spiritual Sustenance and More: Church and Chapel

Newbold Verdon's two churches and chapel acted as a focal point in the lives of many villagers during the three decades associated with this book, though perhaps less so for some after the war. The Anglican church of St. James, the Methodist Church and Baptist Chapel all made a significant contribution toward individual villagers' spiritual needs while also providing opportunities to socialise, be entertained and to entertain others.

At one time all three organisations had also played their part in the broader education of the children of the village by establishing Sunday schools which, in their original form, provided basic literacy and numeracy education as well as teachings in the Christian faith. By 1920, the state, in the form of local education authorities, had taken full responsibility for the overseeing of the teaching of literacy and numeracy, while the Sunday schooling focused on developing children's understanding of Christianity.

The statistics are not available for the three churches, but national figures for church attendance over this period showed numbers attending Anglican or Non-Conformist churches and chapels beginning to decline. This decline accelerated after World War Two.

Brian Hill, who attended the Baptist Chapel, made the following observation about the faith group to which adults in the village ascribed to in the 1940's, despite an increasing non-attendance.

> *We grew up during the war and a lot of people then had lost the habit of going to the churches, but the indications were there that they were either Baptist, Methodist or Church of England because they all sent their children to one of the Sunday Schools.*

Sundays and Sunday School

Baptist Sunday school, during and after the war, took place in the upper schoolroom at the Chapel and Brian Hill, along with other children, attended. He described a little of his experience.

> *Sunday school at the chapel was twice each Sunday, at 10.30a.m. and 2.30p.m. This assembled in the upper school room and divided at times into smaller classes for lessons. The Superintendent was Andrew Statham, and co-teacher was Perce Wright, who was also the choir master at Sunday School anniversaries.*

At Sunday School, we sat on wooden benches, which were of the ingeniously made kind, which were able to be used in reverse direction by merely swinging the backrest forward. At the front of the room was a wooden desk, with a bell on it calling for order; a piano and, at some time, a hymn sheet on the wall which had hymns printed on it in large type which could be turned to an appropriate hymn.'

Janet Poole also attended the Chapel Sunday school at this time.

I had to go because my mum was a Sunday School teacher there and my Sundays were taken up with going backwards and forwards to the chapel. We always had a Bible story and lots of singing, which I loved.

There were similar activities going on at the Methodist church and St James', where the village's children were subject to religious teachings while many of their parents stayed away. Brian Cheshire was one of those children; '*Most of us as kids, our parents insisted, went to one of the churches or chapel. Our parents didn't go. Most kids were sent to Sunday school - morning and afternoon.'*

A Different Kind of Sunday

Whether young or old; church, chapel or a none attendee, Sunday was a very different day to the rest of the week. Attendance of one of the churches or chapel, at least once, sometimes twice, on a Sunday was very important to many villagers. Most places of work were closed on this day, shops were not open and licensing hours were restricted. There was some public transport to and from the village, but few people had their own transport so many spent their 'day of rest' at home.

For children, there were often restrictions on what they could do, not just because they attended Sunday School, but many parents expected them to refrain from active play, to stay clean and to keep close to home. Sundays were a time for visiting relatives, or to do something together as a family like a country walk. Janet Poole recounted a popular walk for her family and many others.

In the summer, after an evening service at the chapel, we would go for a walk out toward Naneby and then back down Brascote Lane. There were often lots of other families doing the same.

For the men it would also be the time for some to get up onto their allotments, dig their garden, read the paper or have a sleep after the Sunday lunch, cooked by their wives whose Sundays remained far less restful.

Non-Conformist Anniversaries - The Sermons


BAPTIST CHAPEL,
Newbold Verdon.

SUNDAY SCHOOL
ANNIVERSARY
ON SUNDAY, JUNE 2nd, 1935

TWO SERMONS
will be preached by
Miss O. Vesty,
of Whitwick.

Afternoon, 2.30 ; Evening, 6 o'clock.

Special Hymns and Anthem by the Scholars & Choir.

Collections in aid of School Funds.

Your presence and support are earnestly solicited.

Jas. R. Hill, Stationer, etc., Newbold Verdon.

The highlight of the year for both non-conformist churches was their Sunday School Anniversaries or, as they were more commonly known, the Sermons: so named because the usual wording of the hymn sheets printed for the occasion would say, ' Sermons to be preached by...' Similar wording is on this copy of the Baptist Chapel 1935 Anniversary hymn sheet cover.

The Sermons for both Baptist Chapel and Methodist Church were held at the Baptist Chapel - the large room at the rear of the Methodist church having yet to be built.

Weeks of practise of hymns and readings ensued. Wooden tiered platforms, to hold both the Sunday school children and the enlarged choirs, were erected and the chapel would be packed, not only with their own congregation but that of each others. The tiered platforms also became something a right of passage. Margaret McSherry described it as follows, *'You started at the bottom row and worked your way to the top as you got older.'*

Others remember the Sermons because it was the only time of the year when they received new clothes.

> *The day of the Anniversary saw everyone dressed in their best clothes and children usually had new dresses or suits for the occasion. At that time, only boys wore trousers and these were short ones until they were 'britched' - that is, had their long trousers. This usually happened for the Sunday School Anniversary.'* Brian Hill

Mick Hill had new clothing bought for him each year, though this seemed to be something of a mixed blessing.

> *Our Service was always held on the first Sunday in June and I always got new clothes for them. The problem was they were usually made from Harris Tweed to see me through the winter.*

Janet Poole talked of the Services as being a significant social event; a time when people who perhaps had left the village would return for the day, both to take part but also meet up with friends and family. The respective church or chapel was closed in order to allow both congregations to attend. There was also a certain amount of friendly rivalry, as Methodists and Baptists sought to claim each year that they had the most children on their platforms and the most money from the collection, thus demonstrating their superior popularity and generosity.

St James'

Though there was less formal interaction between St James' compared to the two non-conformist churches with each other, the relationship between the three faith groups was generally amicable. Some contributors, who described themselves as non-conformists, talked of feeling the Anglican church saw itself as somewhat set apart, while others did not perceive much of a difference at all. One of our Anglican contributors did admit that, as a youngster, he felt the non-conformists seemed to be having 'more fun' at their services.

Rarely did the Anglicans hold a service with either the Baptist or Methodist congregations, except at the annual Hospital Sunday Service and Collection in aid of the Leicester Royal Hospital. On one of these occasions, Church and Chapel were brought closer together by the enthusiasm of one man.

In the mixed denomination congregation on this particular day was Mr Andrew Statham, a stalwart of the Baptist Chapel and a man very fond of a good hymn. The rector, Reverend Legg, chose a particularly uplifting hymn for everyone to sing and at its conclusion Mr Statham stood up and declared that the hymn was so good, *'Could it be sung again?'*. Mike Preston, who was recounting this story, explained that this was very unusual and not in keeping with the more solemn Church of England service, but to everyone's surprise the rector duly obliged and everyone joined in with gusto. It was a cherished moment of ecumenical harmony.

Something More

The churches and chapel, then, as now, were something more than purely religious organisations. They were also social institutions providing for the physical and emotional needs of their congregations, whether it be in formal or informal ways.

In the 1920's to 1940's, their capacity to organise and run activities such as youth clubs, Thursday night swimming at Coalville Baths, film nights, whist drives, and cricket teams, as well as looking out for the very young and the old and infirm, meant they played a far greater role in the whole of the village than perhaps they do today. Two events that demonstrate their village-wide impact were the Outings and the Carnivals.

The photograph below records an outing that took place a few years after the period covered in this book, but one which was very familiar to our villagers. Brian Hill explains:

> *The Sunday School Outing followed shortly after the Anniversary. This was a great occasion. At the time, a day's outing was a rarity, indeed for many children and their parents it could have been the only time in the year when they had a day out to such destinations as Alton Towers, Drayton Manor Park, Chester Zoo, Wicksteed Park and, very occasionally, the seaside.*



Sunday School Outing to Trentham Gardens 1958

John Hill described the outing as an occasion when many in the village got together.

> *The Baptists had an outing, and everyone went. The Methodists had an outing, and everyone went, and the Church. We used to go to places like Wickstead Park and Trentham Gardens, but the pinnacle was Skeggy. If you were going to Skeggy - Well!*

Derek Wilkinson explained why the days out were so important to the people at Newbold Heath.

> *A lot of people up here on the Heath as far as I can remember never went on holiday. My family got as we could afford to go when my dad's business began to pick up, but a lot of others up here never went on holiday until their children had grown up and left home and they were then alone and could afford to go.*
>
> *The churches had the Sunday School treat of a day out and we always organised the Methodist trip on the Whit Tuesday. Now at that time (after the war) we had something like 120 in the Sunday school and we took so many people we used to empty the village. Some of the shop keepers said it was not worth opening up on that day, there were so few people around.*
>
> *We would book upward of eight buses and they would all line up in the morning along Church Row. Baskets and baskets of sandwiches would have been made for the kids' tea and we were away all day to places like Alton Towers and Wicksteed Park.*

For some, it was not just money that stopped people from going on holiday, it was also the occupation of their fathers. Robert Freeman lived with his family at a farm in Brascote and the opportunities for farmers to holiday were limited.

> *My dad never went on holiday. I think I was nine (1948) when we went to Blackpool. They took us there because my mam had been quite poorly and the doctor had persuaded her to go. The Rowbotham family, the village blacksmith, had taken a boarding house there and that's where we stopped. My grandmother came and we travelled by train from Nuneaton Station. It was a wet week.*

Carnival

An annual carnival took place in the village right up until the turn of the 20th century, when a combination of health and safety regulations and people no longer keen to organise such a big event, led to its end after over 70 years.



Jean Kirkland, Carnival Queen, and her maids of honour, 1940's

In their heyday, the carnivals served as the biggest social event of the year for the whole village. At one time the Methodist Church organised them, with the monies raised going toward paying for the erection of their church hall.

Derek Wilkinson and his family were heavily involved in planning these occasions.

> *Our youth club ran a carnival in the village for years. We were raising money for the big school room. We had bands come and lead the parade and as many as thirteen or fourteen lorries in it. We used to shut the village roads - something you can't do now. The carnival then took place in a field at the rear of St James' church, just off Dragon Lane.*



1952: Jean Prime, May Queen, and her entourage on the steps of Hall Farm House

8. World War Two: Early Days and Air Raids

Something of an adventure

On the 24th July 1939, the head teacher of the primary school, Mr Cadle, recorded in the school log book.

24th July 1939	*School closed for visit to Dudley Zoo*

Six weeks later, on the 6th September, and the very next entry after the 24th July, Mr Cadle wrote:

6th September 1939	*'School re-opened. Not re-opened on the September 4th owing to war breaking out between England and Germany. The school was used for the reception of evacuees. 107 scholars. 9 evacuees = 116 (1 class I; 7 class II; 1 class IV)'*

The two entries could not be any different in what they had to convey. The first, marking a joyful occasion for the whole school - a day trip out; something eagerly anticipated and enjoyed by the children not accustomed to holidays. Contrast this entry with the stark chronicling by Mr Cadle of the school's response to the announcement of war and the subsequent receiving of unaccompanied children from one of Britain's threatened cities, in this case, Birmingham. The evacuees were part of a mass exodus of 1.9 million children and 'other vulnerable people' code-named 'Operation Pied Piper' by the government. It was executed with incredible efficiency, only three days after war was declared and must have been something of a shock to both evacuees and those receiving them.

Most of the contributors to this book were young when war broke out and could be described as war children. Their reaction to the coming of war, and those early days of 1939 and 1940 and even beyond, was not what perhaps the reader might expect. The fear and foreboding one might assume being replaced, or partly tempered, by an excitement at the proposition.

Joy Brearley, Mike Preston and Derek Wilkinson offered the following observations.

Joy Brearley, aged 10 in 1939

> *The grown ups were anticipating war. They thought it was coming. I can remember the announcement on the radio. I can remember where I was. I was sitting on my bicycle, back peddling against the fence. I listened to it and I don't know what the grown-ups thought, but as a child we had had history lessons about great battles and the Commonwealth* (Empire) *and in my mind we couldn't lose. We were top of the tree. And I can remember feeling excited that I was going to live through a war. Not at age ten did you think of people dying or terrible things happening, but to me it was a piece of history that I was going to live through.*

Mike Preston: aged 7 in 1939

> *It was a big deal for us youngsters. We thought it was great. We saw all the activity of the Home Guard and of the Air-Raid Wardens. I can remember the Home Guard running past here (St James' Church Hall) one Sunday morning and there was one chap who had a bag of flour and he threw it at another chap, and of course he had a white patch on him. And the other chap said, 'You're out. You're dead. Get inside.' This bloke was really miffed because he couldn't take part any more. It was just like Dad's Army.*

Derek Wilkinson: aged 8 in 1939

> *My first memory of war was when we were on holiday in Portsmouth. It would have been the end of June 1939. I remember Rex and myself always used to sleep in the same room in this lady's house. Lying in bed one night, we watched Tiger Moth planes flying about as the search lights followed them. We asked, 'What is happening?' and they said that there was going to be a war. That is my first vivid memory of thinking something is going to happen. I must have been a bit frightened but you couldn't imagine the consequences. In fact, most of the time, it was a little bit of fun.'*

Not everyone interviewed felt so excited about the prospect of war. Janet Webb (aged 14 in 1939) heard the news sitting in Ivy Cottage with her mother and grandparents and she listened with great foreboding.

> *It was announced over the wireless and my mother had had a brother killed in the 1914 war and I can vividly remember the sombreness of it; to hear that now we are at war again after such a short time. That is a memory that comes over very distinctly - that, and the atmosphere in the house.'*

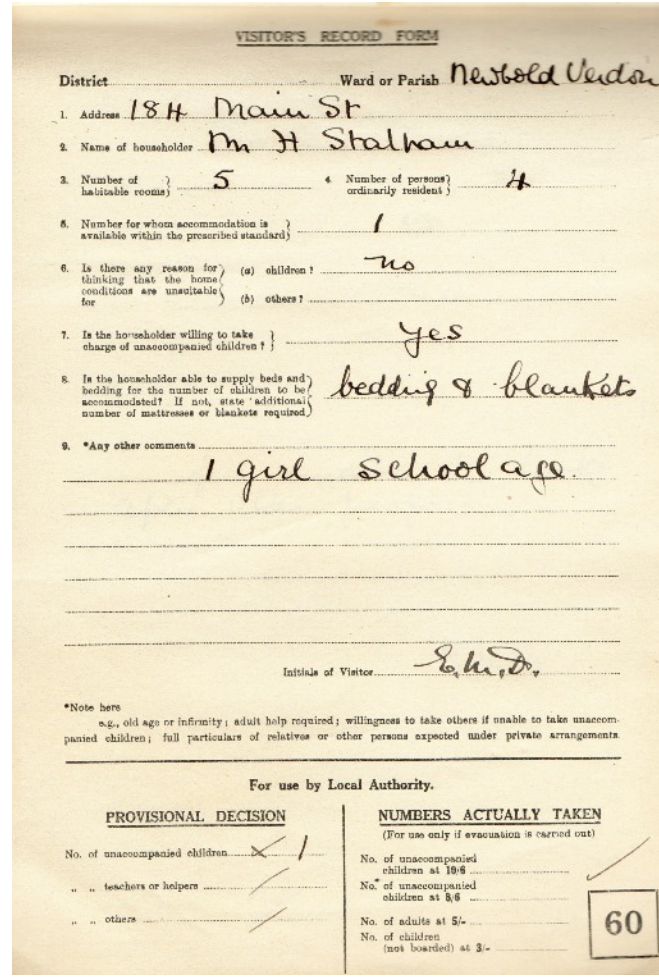
Earlier Preparations

Preparations for war had been going on for sometime before the final declaration in September 1939. As early as 1937, air raid precautions had been discussed at the Market Bosworth Rural District Council[1] and as the war loomed ever closer, in 1939, three members of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) in the village were asked to visit every house to see who would be able to take evacuees.

Residents were required to answer a series of questions to determine if they could take children and, if so, how many, and what sex. Should a villager say that they could not take anyone, they were asked to state the reason or reasons why. The WVS was also expected to note whether it would be a suitable residence, regardless of whether the householder was willing or unwilling to take anyone. Presumably, at some later date, if need was great, the authorities could use the information to force people to take children.

The following Evacuee Visitors Record shows Mr Statham of Main Street willing to take one girl of school age to live with himself and the three other people of the household.

For his troubles the government would pay him 10/6d per week .



VISITOR'S RECORD FORM

District ..... Ward or Parish Newbold Verdon

1. Address 18 H Main St
2. Name of householder Mr H Statham
3. Number of habitable rooms } 5
4. Number of persons ordinarily resident } 4
5. Number for whom accommodation is available within the prescribed standard } 1
6. Is there any reason for thinking that the home conditions are unsuitable for (a) children? no
   (b) others? .....
7. Is the householder willing to take charge of unaccompanied children? } yes
8. Is the householder able to supply beds and bedding for the number of children to be accommodated? If not, state additional number of mattresses or blankets required } bedding & blankets
9. *Any other comments ..... 1 girl school age.

Initials of Visitor ..... E. M. D.

*Note here
e.g., old age or infirmity; adult help required; willingness to take others if unable to take unaccompanied children; full particulars of relatives or other persons expected under private arrangements.

For use by Local Authority.

PROVISIONAL DECISION

No. of unaccompanied children ..... X 1
" " teachers or helpers .....
" " others .....

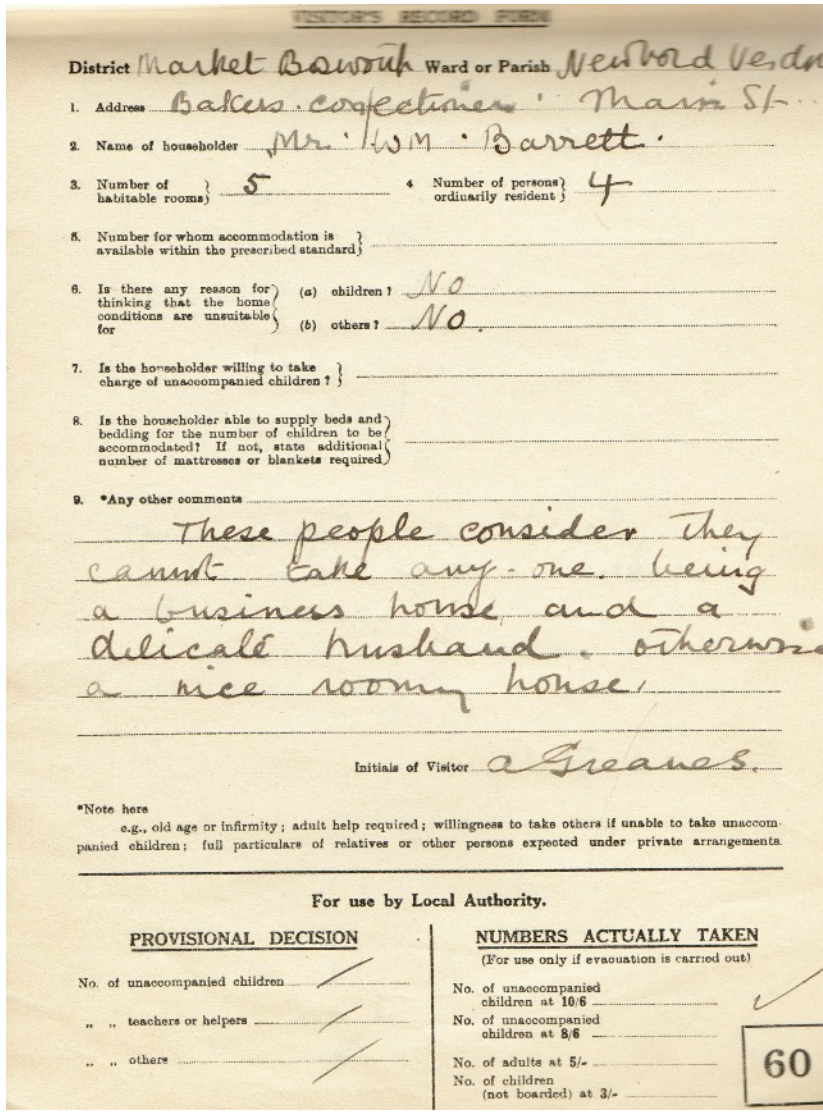
NUMBERS ACTUALLY TAKEN
(For use only if evacuation is carried out)

No. of unaccompanied children at 10/6 .....
No. of unaccompanied children at 8/6 .....
No. of adults at 5/- .....
No. of children (not boarded) at 3/- .....

60

Not everyone was either willing or able to take evacuees. People disqualified themselves on a number of grounds, including: the unsuitability of their accommodation, personal infirmity, or where the nature of their occupation meant there was no one at home to look after a child or children.

In the case of Barratt's the bakers and confectioners on Main Street, a 'delicate' husband and the house being a business as well as a living space, were the two reasons cited for not being able to accommodate evacuees. There is no reason to question Mr and Mrs Barratt's explanation, but there certainly were for others. Some just did not want the problem and expense (the government did not pay enough) for taking in children. Fortunately, enough people were willing and able to take the evacuees in.



VISITOR'S RECORD FORM

District Market Bosworth Ward or Parish Newbold Verdon

1. Address Bakers. confectioners. Main St.
2. Name of householder Mr. Wm. Barrett.
3. Number of habitable rooms 5
4. Number of persons ordinarily resident 4
5. Number for whom accommodation is available within the prescribed standard
6. Is there any reason for thinking that the home conditions are unsuitable for (a) children? No (b) others? No.
7. Is the householder willing to take charge of unaccompanied children?
8. Is the householder able to supply beds and bedding for the number of children to be accommodated? If not, state additional number of mattresses or blankets required
9. *Any other comments

These people consider they cannot take any one. being a business house and a delicate husband. otherwise a nice roomy house.

Initials of Visitor a Greaves.

*Note here
e.g., old age or infirmity; adult help required; willingness to take others if unable to take unaccompanied children; full particulars of relatives or other persons expected under private arrangements.

For use by Local Authority.

PROVISIONAL DECISION

No. of unaccompanied children /
" " teachers or helpers /
" " others /

NUMBERS ACTUALLY TAKEN
(For use only if evacuation is carried out)

No. of unaccompanied children at 10/6 ✓
No. of unaccompanied children at 8/6
No. of adults at 5/-
No. of children (not boarded) at 3/-

60

Gas Masks for Everyone

In April 1939, five months before war was declared, 1,350 gas masks were distributed in Newbold Verdon; the additional 150 presumably in anticipation of loss, damage, further evacuees and babies yet to be born.

Gas masks were provided for everyone including babies and the document below is part of a register recording the issuing of baby respirators in Newbold Verdon. The full records show 59 babies and toddlers each received a respirator.

REGISTER OF BABY RESPIRATORS.

WARDEN'S NAME..... NAME OF ROAD

No.	No. of Babies	Name	Address	Date of Birth	Date attaining 2 years
	S.	[redacted] Adrian James	19 Church Row	8 Jan 1938	
	SS	[redacted] Pamela	1 Dragon Lane	20 April 1939	
	SS	Terrance Adrian [redacted]	22 Merrylees Rd	9 Dec 1938	
	S	Hazel May [redacted]	22 Merrylees Rd	26 March 1937	
	S.	[redacted] Kathleen Marjorie	15 Mill Lane	20 Nov 1936	
	SS	Palmer David W.	12 Bracote Lane	1st March 1937	
	SS.	[redacted] Janet	104 Main Street	28 Jan 1939	
H		[redacted] Baby.	104 Main Street	10 April 1940	
H		[redacted] Margaret Ann	15 Grain Street	15 April 1939	
	S	[redacted] Jerwick John	1 Cavs Lane	20 April 1938	
	S.	[redacted] Graham Frederick	4 Red Lion Lane	11 April 1938	



The picture is of a baby inside a respirators, while its mother pumps filtered air into the chamber.

The respirators were not easy to put on and there was a worry that in the time it took for an adult to place the baby inside the contraption, the adult would run out of breath before fixing on his or her own gas mask.

This gas mask was a standard issue for children during the war and it was issued to Michael Preston.



It has what looks like a piece of rubber, shaped like the end of a tie, hanging between two large bulbous eye-holes. The gas mask manufacturers were trying to create the look of a well known Disney character of the time, Mickey Mouse, in the hope that this would be more appealing to children. It failed miserably.

Evacuees Dilemma

There were three waves of evacuees housed in Newbold Verdon; first, from Birmingham, then Coventry, and, finally, London. The first wave arrived, as Mr Cadle recorded, within a day of war being declared. However, from September 1939, it was another eight months before the bombing of British cities began in earnest. Meanwhile, some parents were having second thoughts about sending their children away from home and there were those that travelled out to where their children had been evacuated and took them back.

This happened to two boys sent to Newbold Verdon, Freddy and Ronnie Dann. The boys had been evacuated from London and went to live with Brian Cheshire's Aunt Nora and Uncle Tom. Brian explained:

> *'The two lads found it difficult to stay in the village because there was nothing there. They went back home to their mother in London because she was worried about them being away from her. I believe they were later killed in an air-raid.'*

The contrast between a bustling city like London or Birmingham and the quiet countryside of west Leicestershire could not have been greater. It must have been a real culture shock for evacuees. One difficult for them to adjust to and therefore not surprising that their parents took a calculated risk in taking them back home.

School Preparations

The school log book at this time provides a little insight into what was happening to the children and staff.

30th October 1939:	*30 minutes knocked off the lunch to finish early (end of the school day) to assist the caretaker who is not able to use electric lights because of the blackout.*
'8th July 1940:	*Re-arranged air-raid precautions so that every child in the school has fairly reasonable protection.*

The children were regularly drilled in air-raid precautions, as Brian Hill (aged five at the start of the war) recalls. *' We went to school carrying gas masks in a box with a long shoulder strap, and there were frequent gas mask practices at school.'*

No doubt all this alien activity and the concerns shared by adults, wittingly or otherwise, would have led to some children becoming anxious, but the recurring comments of our contributors was that it soon became normal. Those who were very young knew nothing different, as Brian Hill explained.

> *'There were aspects to life in wartime which we accepted as normal, but only of course because I and my contemporaries were of an age when we could remember nothing other than what pertained then.'*

Casualty at school

The head teacher, Mr Cadle, made the following entry in the school log book in November of 1940.

7th November 1940	*While fixing protective netting in the Infant Department, the ladder slipped at the bottom, causing the headteacher to fall from the top window. Severe bruising was caused and some injury to the back. No absence from duty.*

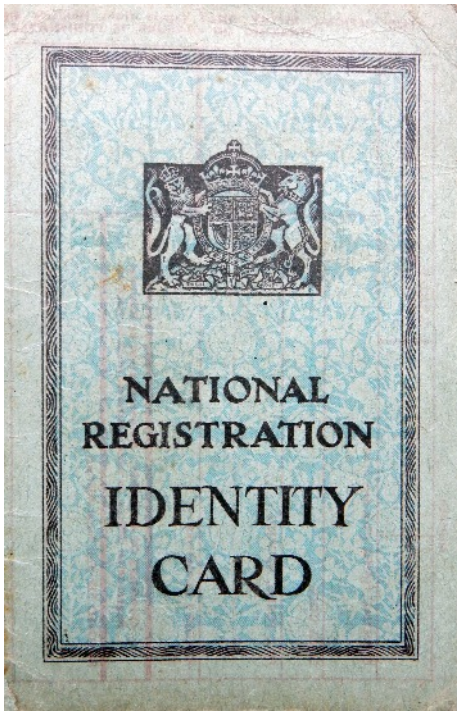
Stoical Mr Cadle carried on despite his injuries. War demanded no less.

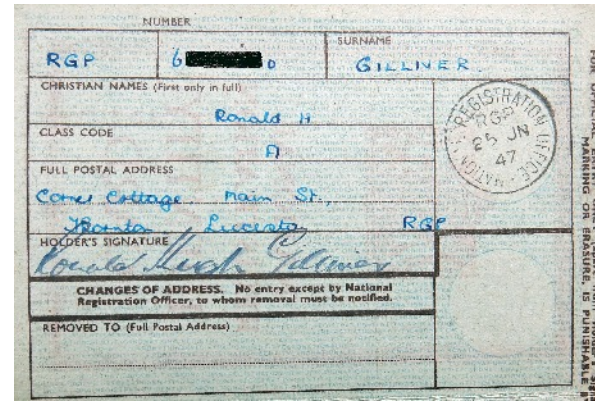
Identity Cards

On the 5th September 1939, and just one day after war was declared, an act of Parliament was passed to establish the introduction of national identity cards. All 46 million people in the country were to be issued with one and all adults were expected to carry their card with them at all times.

There were three main reasons for the establishment of identity cards. Firstly, to help in the control of the movement of people, given that mass evacuations were expected to take place. Secondly, to aid in the fair distribution of rations. And thirdly, to provide statistical information about the make up of the population, which was vital to planning.

Early in the war, Ron Gilliver, like everyone else, was issued with a card (see below), including his personal identity number. It would not be until 1954 that the issuing and use of the cards was discontinued. After the war, Ron's unique individual identity number would be used by the newly formed National Health Service as his National Health number. Anyone born before 1948 has a NHS number that originated from their identity card.





Ron Gilliver's final Identity Card, issued in June of 1947. His identity number would become his National Health number for the next 69 years.

Air-Raids

From September 1939 until May 1940, the country experienced what is generally described as 'The Phoney War': phoney in the sense that nothing appeared to be happening. Germany invaded Poland during this time, but there was little to trouble the people at home until the German air force began attacking military installations. This continued until September 1940, when their attention then turned to London and other cities including Coventry, Birmingham and, briefly, Leicester.

Head teacher Log Book Entry

21st August 1940	*First actual air raid warning during school hours. Children were in shelter in 30 seconds. Sandbagging, boarding up of windows etc. has been carried out making the cloakroom and staff room into good refuges.*

This entry in the school log book suggests air raid warnings had been sounded prior to the 21st August but not during the school day.

The sound of the air raid siren led to villagers taking a variety of actions to protect themselves and their children. Up at Newbold Heath, Derek Wilkinson described what some resorted to.

> *'My father was chosen to be the air raid warden for the Heath, so they gave him a big coat, a steel helmet and a whistle.*
>
> *When they started bombing Coventry the phone would ring and dad would say, 'Oh dear, no.' Then Mr Walter Preston,* (the head air-raid protection warden)*, would come on the phone: 'Air-raid warning red.' Mr Preston would say. So father would put his coat on and his helmet and walk outside and give two continuous long blows on his whistle to let everyone know there was an air-raid on. Later the phone would go again. 'Air-raid warning green.' And then he would go out again blowing one long blast on his whistle to sound the all clear.'*
>
> *As soon as ever you could hear the bombing, all the people here and on Bagworth Road would pick up their kit bags and walk up there (*pointing to the Heath farmland) *and go and sleep in the fields. My dad used to stand and watch them and say. ' They are just as likely to get hit in the fields as in the houses.' So we used to go to bed. Anyway, after about three weeks it stopped. They got fed up with it and returned to their beds..'*

Down in Newbold Verdon, villagers were facing similar dilemmas and coming up with their own solutions. Joy Brearley lived on Dragon Lane and her father's initial attempts at protecting the family during air-raids did not last very long.

> *The air-raid sirens were going off every night at one stage. We all went down to the pig sty at the bottom of the garden. There wasn't a pig in at that stage but there was later on. After a few weeks, we gave up and stopped in bed. In any case, we needed a pig to put in the sty so we had to come out to let the pig in.'*

Few recollect shelters being built in the gardens or of shelters being erected in their homes. '*We went under the stairs. We called it the bogey hole,'* said Mike Preston. He continued, '*It was regarded as the safest place in the house.'* Janet Webb described rushing underneath the dinner table when the planes came over.

Many remembered the Air Raid Protection (ARPs) wardens, especially Walter Preston, sounding the warning of the air-raids, and then later the whistle for 'All Clear'. It was also the ARPs duty to check to see that no light was visible from the houses - what was known as 'the black out'. The fear being that any chink of light from a house would help German bombers locate their target.

Margaret McSherry explained, '*Down Dragon Lane it was Walter Preston who would come down and he would blow a whistle and knock on the door and he would shout to say there was a light showing.'*

The wardens were all volunteers who were on duty most nights after finishing their day's work. Mike Preston described the arrangements.

> *'There were eight wardens all based at the Church Hall. They slept there, and at the far end of the hall there were stacks of blankets, camp-beds, dried milk and powdered egg.'*

For the duration of the war a telephone was placed in the Church Hall to allow incoming warnings of air raids and to give the all-clear when they were over. It was from here Mr Preston would have contacted Mr Wilkinson on the Heath.

Mike Preston's father retained some memorabilia from his time as head ARP.



1



2



3



4

1. Air Raid Protection Badge - worn by the eight ARPs in the village.
2. Air Raid Protection (women) worn by the likes of Mrs Preston
3. Civil Defence Badge - worn by male civil defenders, later to be known as the Home Guard
4. Salvage Steward - tasked with collecting salvageable materials including aluminium, steel and iron.



The air-raid warden's hat worn by Mr Walter Preston throughout the conflict and a familiar sight atop his head as he cycled through the village blowing his whistle (see below) to warn of an impending air-raid, or to give the all-clear.



A fully kitted out ARP warden complete with his stirrup pump, used for extinguishing small fires.

Norman Gilliver lived on Mill Lane and his father was an ARP warden assigned a stirrup pump ready to be used on the houses of Mill Lane or nearby.



The War Comes to Newbold

Head teacher's Log Book Entry

15th November 1940	*During the night and early morning, enemy aircraft were very active, commencing at about 7p.m. and lasting until 7.30 a.m. Attendance this morning was better than expected, though some children failed to be present owing to the raids.*

Mr Cadle's rather matter-of-fact entry was recording the devastating Coventry Blitz when, in a single night, over 400 German bombers attacked the city.

'In total the bombing lasted for 13 hours. 500 tons of high explosive bombs were dropped along with 30,000 incendiaries.'[2]

Whilst no bombs dropped on Newbold that night, the residents could not only clearly hear the explosions but also see the fires burning over twenty miles away. Norman Gilliver recalls standing in his back garden on Mill Lane as the bombs dropped on Coventry. *'I can remember the night sky being brightly lit over to the west.'*

Some parents of the children of Newbold were involved in supporting Coventry after the raids. Derek Wilkinson's father had a road haulage business and the lorries were used to help clear up after the bombing.

> *'When they were bombing Coventry it was terrible. It vibrated here and it was frightening. At the time it was horrific because my father owned four lorries and had the job of going over to Coventry each morning to help clear up the mess. Some of the scenes they said were horrible.'*

Newbold's Bomb

Only four days after the bombing of Coventry, Newbold had its own bomb dropped on the village, as the head teacher recorded.

20th November 1940	*Bomb dropped in Newbold. Attendance low, children having had a bad night. Register: 82/124 66%. Bombs blocked railway line from Coalville and no buses running. Mrs Hughes absent.*

The high explosive bomb[3] had dropped in fields just south of Red Lion Lane, where Peters Avenue is today. The explosion blew out the windows of nearby houses on Main Street and Pastures Lane but no one was hurt. Derek Wilkinson believed that the bomb failed to detonate fully and that houses had to be evacuated until the bomb had been disarmed. This led to three members of the same family having to go to stay at his house on the Heath for several weeks.

Janet Webb recalls what happened the day after, as she went off to her school in Ibstock on the bus.

> *'I can remember our chatter on the bus when we realised an incendiary bomb* (actually a high explosive) *had been dropped on Red Lion Lane. You see, that was a big thing for us. Fancy, a bomb had dropped in Newbold Verdon; in Newbold Verdon! You think of places like London or Birmingham or Coventry, but now they are coming to bomb us. It felt very personal.'*

The bomb was probably not actually destined for Newbold Verdon but may have missed its likely original target of Leicester. The 19th/20th November 1940 was known as the night of the 'Leicester Blitz' when the Germans targeted the city and over 150 high explosive bombs were dropped. Incendiary bombs were also deployed in an attempt to create a firestorm within the city. Compared to Leicester, Newbold got off lightly but it left an impression on villagers and meant the war had become that much more real.

Two more bombs

Our contributors recollect two other bombs falling within the parish boundary: one, an oil bomb, in fields at Brascote and the second, another containing high explosive, landing in the fields close to Bosworth Lane, leaving a sizeable crater. Brian Cheshire's grandfather kept a horse in these fields and Brian recalls what happened after the bomb exploded.

> *A bomb dropped on Bosworth Lane in a field where we had got one of our horses. And my grandfather was so worried about the horse that he said to me, 'Come on lad' and put my coat on and we left the shelter to see if the horse was OK. I later thought to myself, 'What about us grandad?'*

Derek Wilkinson's father, as the the ARP for the Heath, came a little too close to the very same bomb.

> *'My dad was about, blowing his whistle, when he heard this bomb coming down and he thought, 'Cor it's got me.' And he dives into a ditch on the corner* (Bagworth Road and Merry Lees Lane) *and it was full of water. It actually landed beside Bosworth Lane. Though we all had a good laugh about it, he was a little bit frightened I can tell you.'*

German Bomber Crashes in Peckleton

The photograph below was given to Mike Preston by Frank Folder who lived at Roes Rest Farm, Leicester Forest West which can be seen in the picture.



The plane, a Heinkel He 111, was shot down on the 9th April 1941, and had, before crashing, flown over Newbold Verdon[4] on fire . One airman had managed to parachute out while, miraculously, the second crew member survived the crash-landing and was found hiding in a drainage culvert. Initially, it was thought he was trying to evade capture, but he explained later that there was an unexploded bomb on the plane and he was sheltering from the pending blast.

Bombing Stops

By June 1941, the bombing of provincial cities had stopped and, though there continued to be air-raid warnings, the threat of being bombed in Newbold Verdon, as elsewhere, receded. Despite this, children were still expected to carry their gas masks around and drills continued at their schools. The villagers were still in for another four years of war.

Why bomb Newbold Verdon ?

In his book, Bird's Eye Wartime Leicestershire, Terence Cartwright[5] writes of the area around Hinckley receiving a considerable number of bombs in the war, despite there being little that the German Luftwaffe would want to destroy. He concluded:

> *However, the geographical position of Hinckley did put it at the crossroads of the activity centred around Birmingham, Coventry, Nottingham and Derby. As a result, the whole area was at considerable risk from aborting or damaged aircraft looking for and unloading bombs on opportunistic targets.'*

Silver from the Sky - a young child's view

John Hill and Fred Hodges recalled how, sometimes, when the German planes came over, silver foil would fall out of the sky.

> *'We remember when the silver paper came down and we all used to run around collecting it. It was something to do with radar. We used to run about the playing field. We found it very useful because if you took it to your mam she would make Christmas trimmings from it.'*

John and Fred were witnessing the dropping of chaff from German planes. Chaff, named Düppel in Germany after the place where it was developed,[7] was made from aluminium strips which, when dropped from a plane, would confuse the enemy radar and make it impossible for them to track the approaching planes.

For the young children of Newbold Verdon, the sinister reason for the use of bright, shiny objects floating down from the sky would have literally and metaphorically gone over their heads but not for their parents. For though later in the war, (the Luftwaffe only used it from 1943) and most of the bombing having stopped, falling chaffe was a chilling reminder that the village was still at war.

9 The Home Front

It is hard for any of us born since World War Two to imagine just what it was like to live through. Most of our impressions will have been gathered through the films we have watched, books we have read, or stories we have been told. Cinema and television focused more often than not on the war itself and the stories of battle and heroism, but throughout the six years there was a different kind of battle going on at home. Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, called it the Home Front.

It was a phrase originally coined during World War One to emphasise the importance of what was going on back in Britain to the success of the battle fronts in France and Belgium. Politicians and military leaders acknowledged early in the conflict that the efforts of the general population to supply not only troops but their weapons and munitions was fundamental to their success. Twenty years later, the Home Front was to play just as significant a role in the winning of the war and every city, town and village would have to play its part, including Newbold Verdon.

Coal or Combat?

Energy supplies in the form of coal were vital for the war effort. The hewing of coal was hard, dangerous, manual labour and not one which could easily be passed on to the ever increasing women's workforce, no matter how willing they might have been. At the beginning of the war, miners were allowed to leave the pits and sign up for active service or even to move to other, better paid, occupations. Many chose to stay. Derek Wilkinson explains:

> *Not many people went off to war from the Heath because, in the main, they were miners. There was no stigma attached to being a miner. In fact some chose to go into the forces rather than down the pit because they knew it was a hard job.*

By 1943, the government determined that coal mining should be classified as a reserved occupation, meaning that those working in the pit were not only exempt from joining the forces but were forbidden. It also decided that 1 in 10 of all new conscripts would be sent to work in the mines, such was the shortage of miners nationally. The government minister who led this change was Ernest Bevin and the young men conscripted to work in the mines were known as Bevin Boys. Derek Wilkinson described what happened in this area.

You could be a Bevin Boy. A lot of people my age had to do their national service and it could be in the forces or down the pit and a lot of them in this area chose mining. They left school at fourteen, went to the pit, and if they were already working there when called up (for national service in the forces) *they didn't have to go.*

The men of Newbold Verdon were mobilised to work in the mines as much as they were to fight in the forces. Unlike some areas of the country, Newbold retained a good number of its men during the war, with only an estimated twenty to thirty going off to fight. For some of our contributors it was their view that, as a result of this and the relative insularity of the village, it did not feel as if much changed during the war years. Joy Brearley summed it up in the following way:

The village seemed to carry on much the same. I suppose you couldn't do anything different. Not a lot were called up. Mainly they were miners and they needed them down the pit.

Perhaps things did appear superficially to be much the same: fathers and brothers went off to the pit, sisters to the shoe factories and mothers stayed at home. The fields were still tended by the farmers and shopkeepers continued to go about their business. Schools still functioned, and for a child the war impinged only marginally on their life. However, the evidence would show that the war affected our contributors more than they perhaps realised.

Changes: Contributions to the War Effort:

As soon as war was declared, the government moved to mobilise the general population to support the war effort. Metals were needed for, amongst other things, the construction of war planes and the making of munitions. Farmers were instructed to bring into production as much land as possible and every piece of available land, including gardens, parks and playing fields, was turned over for food production. Every item of food grown at home would mean less having to be imported by sea, where ships were having to run the gauntlet of the much feared German U-boat submarines. It was not just land that had to be better utilised, scrap metal was highly sought after. In Newbold the head teacher recorded:

23rd September 1942	*The salvage people removed division railings today. No boundary railings were touched.*

He was referring to internal metal railings separating parts of the school grounds, but the salvagers appeared to have recognised that the removal of the school

boundary railings would not have been such a good idea. On Main Street, at Ivy Cottage, Janet Webb's grandfather faced a battle to retain his metal railings at the front of the house. Janet:

I can remember grandad digging up both of the lawns at the front because he was told if it remained grass the iron railings would be taken. So he dug up both lawns, planted potatoes, and the iron railings are still standing!



The Railings Grandad Saved

Everyone began to get involved. Voluntary organisations were formed, including the FAP (First Aid Party) which Brian Hill's father, Les, joined, '*They would meet one night a week attending lectures and first aid practice, ready for if and when the reality of the conflict were ever to reach us.'* Mike Preston's mother was a member of the Women's Voluntary Service, where she played a very important role in the allocation of evacuees within the village, together with Nurse Ada Greaves and Mrs Dunkerley. Nineteen year old Nancy Biggs became a fire-watch volunteer for the village. She and her friend, Joan Wright, would patrol Newbold at night, checking for possible fires and helping support the eight Air Raid Protection (ARP) wardens of the village. Aged sixteen, Ron Gilliver joined the Home Guard and prepared for war using a brush stave as a substitute for a rifle.

The 'OK' Concert Party

Amateur concert parties made up of local people were common during the war and Newbold Verdon had its own, the OK Concert Party. The group would travel to local villages, providing light entertainment of music, songs, and comical sketches for the audience, while at the same time raising money for the war effort and raising the spirits of the people.

Children played their part

On the Heath, a 'Spitfire Fund' was started with the aim of contributing to raising enough money to purchase a Spitfire fighter plane costing £5,000. Derek Wilkinson's older brother, Len, got involved. Derek:

> *We had up here a Spitfire fund. My elder brother made a wooden thermometer like those you see outside churches to show how much money we were raising, and it stood in our front garden so that everyone could see.'*

At the primary school, Mr Cadle was in charge of gardening lessons for the boys while Mrs Spencer took responsibility for teaching the girls how to sew - both sets of skills deemed very useful in the war effort.

On occasions, the children were actively involved in contributing toward the war effort, as three entries in the log book from 1941 demonstrate.

Date	Log Book Entry
16th September	*This afternoon the children went gleaning in Mr Milner's field.*
17th September	*More gleaning today. 6 tea-chests of wheat gathered*
26th September	*School closed tonight for fortnight potato harvest.*

Gleaning was the collecting in of the heads of wheat that had not been gathered by the farmer and his workers when harvesting. It would not have been economical to ask farm labourers to do this task, but a group of children could do it for free. Six tea chests of wheat were gleaned that would otherwise have gone to waste. Later that month, the whole school closed for a fortnight so that children could help with the potato picking. Derek Wilkinson remembers that he and some of his class mates were sent to a farm in Desford to help.

The 'potato picking' break only lasted until the war was over but the photograph opposite, taken in the early 1950's, shows the Tovey family potato picking at the rear of Hall Farm. This would have been a common sight during the war.



A break from Potato Picking

Sometimes young people were given tasks they were reluctant to undertake. Janet Webb described how she and her fellow teenage school friends were employed at her school, during lesson time, to record on to ration books the names of those being allocated each book. Janet:

> *'I can remember thinking, 'Why do we have to write these names in the ration books instead of having our own lesson?'*

Janet should have been undertaking a cooking lesson, which she had been looking forward to, and she and her friends had brought all their ingredients ready to bake some cakes. Janet:

> *'So, we girls got our heads together and decided to go to the classroom at lunch time and bake our cakes. We got our cakes in the oven, when the air-raid siren went off and we had to leave them. The headmaster, Mr Measures, found out what we had done and he told us that if it happened again we would lose our prefect badges. I felt awful.'*

Changes on the farm

On the farms life went on much as before, but directives from the government meant changes were expected. Robert Freeman was a young child growing up on

his parent's farm in Brascote during the war. He was too young to recall what changes were demanded of the farm, but he possesses a letter from the government representatives in Leicestershire, the War Agricultural Executive Committee, known as the War Ag. In the letter the War Ag notified his father that five acres of his land down by the Newbold Verdon brook would need to be drained in order to bring it into production and that, because this would benefit him, he would be charged £11.8s.5d. (£11.35p). Not an insignificant sum of money, given that the average wage at that time was £355 a year.

Italian prisoners of war (POW) were employed to improve the drainage by clearing the watercourse. From 1941 onwards, many Italian POW's captured in the middle east were transported to Britain and put to work, particularly in agriculture. When Italy surrendered in 1943, 100,000 Italians volunteered to work as 'co-operators'. For this they were given special status and considerable freedoms[1].

The Italians working in Newbold Verdon were stationed in Sutton Cheney and travelled each day from there into the village, calling in at the War Ag depot on Mill Lane, on a site opposite what today would be opposite the Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall, to collect the tools and machinery required to do their work.

Norman Gilliver lived on Mill Lane and he remembers the Italian soldiers.

> *The men would come each morning, supervised by Dick Ball from Church Row, and they would pick up their equipment and go off for the day. I remember them wearing thick donkey jacket type coats with a sign on their back, but I don't recollect what it said.*

Mike Preston's father had an Italian prisoner of war allocated to work on his small holding. Mike recalled that the soldier came across as very well bred with many airs and graces and a few peculiar eating habits. Mike:

> *He was very posh. He would be invited into our house during a break for a coffee and food and I can remember being astounded at the way he would break his bred up and dip it into his coffee.*

At Brascote Farm, Robert Freeman was told by his mother that he was taken down to see the men working as they repaired and improved the bridge that crossed the brook. She told him that one prisoner created a little flower basket out of the reeds and gave it to him. Though he can't remember the event, being only three years old, he does remember the basket because the family kept it for many years after the war ended.

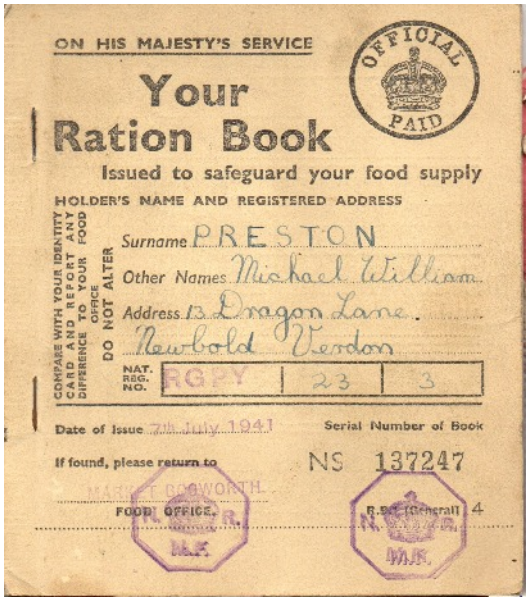
Rationing

The introduction of the rationing of food and other goods began in January 1940 and lasted until 1954. At the beginning of the war, the country imported 60 percent of its food, which meant there was a strong possibility of it being starved into submission should it continue to rely on imported goods. In response, the government mobilised the whole country to produce more of its own food and then took over the distribution of produce and other goods by a system of rationing. Newbold Verdon residents were subject to rationing, just like the rest of the country, and, just like the rest of the country, they found ways around the deprivations (legal and illegal) that rationing imposed.

Adult Weekly Ration 1943

- 3 pints of milk
- 3/4lb-1lb meat
- 1 egg
- 3-4oz cheese
- 4oz bacon and ham
- 2oz tea
- 8oz sugar
- 2oz butter
- 2oz cooking fat

Rationing was controlled by the use of ration books. Every person was allocated, within their ration book, a certain amount of food that they could purchase. When visiting a shop, the shopkeeper would either stamp the book to show that goods had been purchased or, later in the war, accept small coupons to the same effect. The adult weekly ration of food did not amount to a great deal. For example, two ounces of tea equated to about two cups per day. Some foods were not rationed, like bread and potatoes; neither were vegetables, fresh fruit and fish, but they were in limited supply.


ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

OFFICIAL PAID

Your Ration Book

Issued to safeguard your food supply

HOLDER'S NAME AND REGISTERED ADDRESS

COMPARE WITH YOUR IDENTITY CARD AND REPORT ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOUR FOOD OFFICE
DO NOT ALTER

Surname PRESTON
Other Names Michael William
Address 13 Dragon Lane
Newbold Verdon

NAT. REG. NO. RGPY 23 3

Date of Issue 7th July 1941

Serial Number of Book NS 137247

If found, please return to

FOOD OFFICE.

Michael Preston's ration book. The buff colour denoted that Michael was a child and, as such, he was entitled to children's rations.

The Impact of rationing on the villagers

'I must admit, I can't recall feeling any stress or worry about food'
Derek Wilkinson

Derek expressed a view with which many of our contributors agreed. Rationing, and the effects of rationing, did not appear to impact on the village in the way it affected others. Janet Poole explained why. '*Nearly everybody had got a garden and they grew their own food. They also reared pigs, rabbits, hens and bees.'* In Janet's case her father had a small-holding and so she was able to state; *'We didn't go short of anything. We would give food away or sell it.'*

Even if villagers did not have as much as others, they often knew someone who did. Derek Wilkinson described how the people of Newbold Heath supported each other.

> *We would go down to the farm to get everything; eggs, butter, whatever you wanted. We used to keep pigs. At that time I should think there were twenty-odd houses keeping pigs down at the bottom of the garden and these would be killed every six months. You could feed the Heath. My uncle kept two pigs at a time and he would kill one and we would share the meat between my family and his family. We could keep the rest of the family going that didn't have pigs.*

That is not to say that there were no shortages. Villagers, for example, could not get the more tropical fruits like bananas and if there was a delivery of such foods a queue would quickly form outside whichever shop had a delivery. Ron Gilliver tells how it was not only food that was in short supply.

> *Beer was rationed. And they would say, 'There's beer coming into the Jubilee on Thursday night and when it's gone it's gone.' And you would have a pint each until they got the next lot in. So, very few people got drunk - they couldn't get enough of it.'*

Chocolate, made from imported cocoa beans, was in very short supply and so confectionary often came in the form of boiled sweets. As a child, Joy Brearley felt this deprivation keenly. *'Sweets were out. I can remember the first time I had a little bar of chocolate all to myself. It was marvellous.'* Mick Hill looked forward to his dad coming home on leave from the army, when he would sometimes bring a treat. *' When dad did come home he would occasionally bring chocolate, Belgium chocolate. It was always dark chocolate except right in the middle where there was probably one milk chocolate. I used to fight my cousin, Jim, for that.'*

The Black Market

Newbold Verdon, like every other settlement in Britain, was not averse to some wheeling and dealing on the black market. Mick Hill recounts a story about his own family, as an illustration.

My Uncle Tom had a grocer's shop during the war in Earl Shilton. I had moved in with my grandma and she had a pantry at the bottom of the stairs. I would leave my mum and grandma downstairs as I went to bed, and, later in the evening, I could hear furtive whispering and the moving of things. In the morning, I would come down the stairs and in the small pantry would be a leg of lamb, butter, cheese - everything else we needed. Uncle was keeping his mother supplied. We never ever went short of anything.'

In a similar vein, Robert Freeman also had a story to tell.

In the war, if you kept bees you were allowed an additional ration of sugar to feed them. Well, they had always kept bees at Brascote Farm and so they increased the stock and this meant we got more sugar, which arrived in 28lb bags. They accumulated quite a lot of sugar,so they decided to move some to my grandma's at Halifax Farm for some (illegal) *jam making.*



Baby Freeman and his pram

I was only a baby at the time, and to get it there without being seen, they placed the sugar in a false bottom of my pram and put me on top. Mum set off to Halifax Farm, about 1.5 miles away up Harry's Lane. Well, the lane came out next to Chater House Farm and, unfortunately, there was a stile and mum had to get me and the pram over it, which she had done regularly, but not with all that sugar in it. Mr Bates, from the farm, came out and he said to my mother, ' I'll help you. You get one side and I'll get the other and we'll lift it over.' Which they did. And he remarked, 'You aint half got a heavy baby in here!' Mum never did tell him until a few years after the war about him helping to transport the sugar. I should think they had plenty of jam that next winter.

Off to War

The passage of time is such that we have only been able to interview two people who lived or worked in Newbold Verdon as war broke out and who then went on to serve in the forces. Their experience, though unique to them, would in some ways have been the experience of many who left the village: that of young men and women who had seen relatively little of the world up until this time, suddenly being exposed to a completely different way of life.

Our two contributors, Ron Gilliver and Nancy Biggs (née Johnson), describe what to them would be some of the most significant years in their long lives.

Nancy's Story

Nancy was eighteen when war broke out and though eligible to be called up for the first three years of war she was not conscripted because she was employed in 'war work' in the boot and shoe factories of Earl Shilton.



24 year-old Nancy in 1944

Eventually, this work ended and one day in November 1942 she received her 'call up' papers in the post.

> *My mum was really upset. She cried. It was just before Christmas and of course I wasn't going to be there for it. My dad wasn't very happy either but these things happen don't they.*
>
> *I was the youngest in the family and the only one to be called up. My brother worked down the mine and my sister at the telephone exchange and she didn't have to go. Bernard (*Nancy's boyfriend and future husband) *had already gone by then. We were the same age and he was in the far east, Burma, in the artillery.*
>
> *I was quite excited at being called up. I didn't want to go into munitions but I didn't know what I was going to do. I had never been away from home before but I was never homesick.*

Nancy was conscripted into the Women's Royal Air Force, the WRAF. Her first posting was Gloucestershire to be kitted out before moving to Morcambe for training. *'We did our drills, marching up and down Morcambe promenade.'* Nancy was then assigned to train as a cook in Wakefield and then on, coincidentally, to cook meals for the airmen at Leicester East Aerodrome at Stoughton. After a short posting in Litchfield, she was moved to Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire where she remained until being demobbed in 1945.

'It was an adventure and we enjoyed it, but it was hard work. We worked shifts; 6a.m.-2p.m., 2p.m.-10p.m. or nights. At Upper Heyford they flew Wellington bombers.

I was in the officers' mess at Upper Heyford and the officers would come in for their meals and then go off again, but some of them you would never see again. They never came back, which was very sad.'

In 1945, the war was ending and Nancy returned home in the August. Bernard proposed to her and they were married in November of that year.

I found it difficult to adjust when I first got back. It had been quite a good life really, but sad in some respects when some of the people you had got to know did not come back.

Ron's Story

Though not a native of the village, Ron had been brought up in Newbold from the age of three before moving with his family to the small village of Batram near Coalville. Aged fourteen, Ron had secured a job at Newbold Verdon Co-op where he worked until March of 1942, when he received his call up papers.

I came in from work and I spotted the letter behind the clock on the mantle piece over the fire. It really upset me Mam. I didn't mind being called up. I didn't know what I was going into.

Little fuss was made at the Co-op when Ron announced he was being called up.

You see, it was expected and it was happening all around. Customers wished me well and some brought cake or a mince pie but there was little fuss because it was happening to everyone: somebody knew somebody who had been called up. And somebody knew somebody who had lost a father or son.

Soon after, Ron joined other new conscripts at the barracks situated on what is now Leicester Racecourse, Oadby .

They were there to try and kill you! To toughen you up. Everything had to be done at the double and each week things got tougher and tougher. I felt really bad, but I couldn't ask me Mam for an aspirin and I cried myself to sleep, but not for long.

During the initial six weeks of training, Ron's father suddenly died aged only forty-three.

'They wouldn't let me go home to the funeral. My Mam got the vicar, local policeman and postman to sign a letter to vouch for me but they wouldn't let me go until ten weeks later.'

On passing out after his sixteen weeks of training, Ron was told to report to Warwick to join an infantry regiment. He was waved off in Hinckley by Emily Attfield from Thornton, who he would eventually marry when the war was over.

For the next three years Ron saw action in many battles across Europe and was part of the British 'D' Day Forces that landed on Sword Beach in Normandy on the morning of the 6th June 1944.

From there, he fought alongside his comrades, many of whom he lost during the next year, as they pushed the German forces back until their final surrender on the 2nd. September 1945.

Ron's recollections of the war reveal a time for him of extremes. There was the excitement of the new: new places, new people, new experiences, but all tempered by the tragic loss of comrades and good friends and the sense of the random unfairness of war and that he was one of the lucky ones.



Ron and Emily on their wedding day

Casualties

Both Ron and Nancy regarded themselves as being very fortunate in surviving the war fit and healthy. And although many in Newbold Verdon could have said the same about their experiences, there were also those who did not come back.

Our contributors, being very young at the time and with no immediate family members killed in action, saw themselves as bystanders as they watched adults receive the news of those killed or missing. Mike Preston (aged 8 at the beginning of the war) remembered such an incident.

> *'I can remember the first chap that got killed. They thought he was missing, but he had been killed, and that was at Dunkirk and it was Arthur Ward. He was only 19 and he worked for Mr Barratt the baker.*
>
> *We lived next door to the Miners' Institute on Dragon's Lane and he lived opposite in the row of terraced houses, next to Mrs Finney's shop. I can remember the ladies coming out of the houses and standing on the street talking about Arthur having gone missing, believed killed. And that's the first time I remember feeling anything sad.'*

Ron Gilliver, being somewhat older (14) when war broke out, can recall gloom falling over the village as others were reported dead. *'There was a lot of sadness as well when Peter Marriott got killed and then Phillip Freeman and it spread throughout the village.'*

The names of the men from Newbold Verdon who died during the war can be seen on the war memorial in the village.



10. War nears its end

Bombers over Newbold

As the war drew to its conclusion and the allied forces began to relentlessly bomb the cities of Germany, Derek Wilkinson witnessed, with his friends and family, an awesome expression of military might as allied war planes gathered overhead. Derek:

> *When we used to come home from church every Sunday night - it was always about the same time - we would stand and watch in amazement.*
>
> *First, you would hear a low drone as our bombers, Wellingtons and Lancasters, approached and then began to fly over; congregating before going off to mass bomb Germany over night. You just stood there counting: one, two, three, four, ...one hundred, two, three. All flying at the same height, and the noise they made: Well!*
>
> *And we would just stand there and watch and ask, 'Where are they going tonight?' We didn't feel excited, more very sad I suppose. We knew what was happening. Eight or nine adults and the same number of children just standing and watching. No doubt the adults were thinking about it more than us. But to see it was magnificent.'*

V.E. Day Celebrations

School Log Book entry, Tuesday 8th May - V.E. Day

8th May 1945	*School closed for Victory in Europe celebration, the holiday to last for two days.*

After nearly six years of fighting, the war in Europe ended on May 7th with official celebrations including a two day public holiday to begin on the 8th, though many had started before then. Brian Hill remembered the occasion as the family sat around the radio set to hear Winston Churchill announce Germany's surrender. He described how the village began to celebrate.

> *'My father made simple brackets of metal tubing, which was flattened at one end and then bent. The flattened end was drilled and screwed to house*

walls, and Union Jack flags were held in the open end. He did this for a number of houses in Main Street.

The celebration event was a bonfire in the street near the Old Swan, and at the junction with Brascote Lane. The fire they built was enormous, and it was stoked by several men, chief amongst them Walt Salisbury who at the time worked at Hall Farm.

There was literally dancing in the street, and it was an eye-opener to see the people dancing the Lancers and other dances for many hours.'

Janet Webb was also there. *'I remember dancing outside the Old Vicarage at the Swan. I can remember dancing around with lots of people and celebrating.'* Janet's cousin, Nancy Biggs, was at Upper Heyford still conscripted into the WRAF, but this did not stop them celebrating; '*We went down to the little village near the barracks and had a good night out drinking and dancing.'*

John Hill and his friend, Fred Hodges, lived on Main Street near the Co-op and both vividly remember the celebrations. John:

Everybody had a red, white and blue 'V' for Victory sticker on their door throughout Newbold. And then all up Main Street the men built bonfires right down to the Swan and back. There was a lot of boozing and I can remember Fred's dad and my dad running and jumping through the flames of the bonfire. It was a lovely time back then.

The Last Word



The final words of this chapter are taken from a self-published autobiography of Charles Bacon, a native of the village who became a very successful businessman in Leicester, having originally been born and raised in Church Row - the second youngest child of a family of eleven.

Always an enterprising young man, he began his working life as a farm hand in Osbaston, but by hard work and entrepreneurial endeavours he eventually left a very successful transport business to his two sons.

Close to the end of the war, aged 73, he made a visit back to Newbold Verdon. He recollects meeting with an old friend of his and describes the time they spent together. In this very moving piece, it can be seen how at least one villager was profoundly affected by the war as he prepared for his son's return.

> *Today I had another trip to my native village. I saw several old faces and talked of old times. I called on my old school pal, Joe Brown. I had not seen him for years.*
>
> *Joe had soon put the kettle on over a stick fire, and while it was boiling he took me out into the garden. This and his house too was all painted and trimmed up. After I had looked around I said to Joe, 'Are you expecting the lad soon, Joe?' It was then that he let a tear fall. And rubbing it away with the back of his hand, he told me how he had had no news for two years, and that he was in a German prison camp. And as he had no one left now, he was determined to get everything that was ugly out of the way before Joe came home. For, by what he could hear, "All our lads and others too, are seeing some horrid things out there and I feel now that the war is over, he will soon be home and I want to make him really welcome."*
>
> *We had tea together and talked of old times in the garden. It is only a 300 yard plot, but what a pleasure it was for me and my old pal Joe. He had told me that first he pulled the old fence down and replaced it with a privet hedge. He then made a grotto bank at the top of the garden and planted bulbs and mosses. He then pulled the cinder path up and made a new path two feet wide with coloured stones laid in the cement: all the stones forming "WELCOME HOME" from top to bottom.*
>
> *We were both proud of our talk together and I came away feeling that the war and all its horrors had caused not only me and Joe, but many others, to see that there are better things in life if we only look for them in the right place.*[1]

Six years of war had ended. Six years in which many of our contributors had lived through their childhood and some had entered into their teenage years and where our two eldest contributors had returned from war and married. In the next five years they would be witness to changes, both locally and nationally, that would set the village on a very different course and lead, eventually, to the village we know today.

11. New Beginnings

Charles Bacon's Final Visit

> *Today, March 12th 1945, is a warm day. As it is a year since I was there, I have been on a service bus to my native home. It all seemed very strange. The old tree under which I used to play under was gone and in its place two houses built. I only saw three of the old familiar faces. Two boys passed me and I suppose they would go home like I used to when I was a boy and fetch Mother to the door for her to pass an opinion; then to Father to say they had seen a stranger. Many have died in the village and some are on foreign soil. It seemed grand as I walked along to hear the bird song, and to see other forms of nature as they used to be.*[1]

In this rather wistful account of his final visit to his birth place, Charles Bacon yearned for the Newbold of his childhood: where, as a child, he once played around his tree - now replaced by housing - and looked on familiar faces, most of which had gone. Only the traces of 'his' Newbold were to be found in the familiar bird song and 'forms of nature as they used to be.'

Newbold had changed from the one Charles Bacon grew up in during the 1870's, but the rate of change in those 70 or so years would be nothing in comparison with what would befall the village at the end of the war and which had already begun during the war years.

What led to the village changing from a small, semi-rural community - self-contained and close-knit - into a much looser affiliation of individuals and their families? A suburbia surrounded by fields. Jeremy Black [2], in his book on Britain since 1900, writes of a national phenomenon that swept the country after World War Two where, '*....there was an effective erosion of any significant boundary between rural and urban society in large parts of the country.*' Why did this happen?

The impact of the War on society, extended educational opportunities for individuals, new technologies, improved housing and changing social attitudes, including the rise of consumerism, all had a hand in driving these changes. But these agents of change did not impact on the village overnight - indeed, the first five years saw the villagers pre-occupied, along with the rest of the country, with recovering from the War: nevertheless, the seeds were there.

A Wartime Marriage

Standing smartly to attention on their wedding day at the entrance to St James' Church in Newbold, the photograph shows Reginald and Ethel Hart. Reginald was from Bradford and Ethel a Newbold girl, living at 37 Main Street with her mum and dad, Matilda and Walter Statham.



How Reginald and Ethel met, courted and then married is a story not atypical of what happened to many couples during the six years of war.

When war broke out in 1939, Ethel volunteered for the ATS, the Army Territorial Service, which was the women's branch of the British Army. Initially, the ATS' role was to provide clerks, cooks and storekeepers for the army which then freed up more men for active service.

Ethel began her training in Beverley, Yorkshire and while there she attended a clerical course in nearby Bradford where she began learning secretarial skills including short-hand, typing and book keeping. It was during this time that she met Reginald.

Ethel had gone out for the night to the cinema with her friends when, on the way home, they decided to get some fish and chips. Standing outside the chippy was Reginald and they began chatting. Things progressed from there and they started courting, but it was not long before Reginald had to leave with his regiment to fight first in North Africa and, during the rest of the war, throughout the middle-east and Italy. The couple kept in touch by letter and Ethel did not see Reginald again until close to the end of the war.

After gaining a special licence to marry, the day was set for the 27th February 1945. They married in their military uniforms as they were both serving soldiers - Ethel by this time having achieved the rank of lance-corporal.

Soon after the wedding, Reginald was posted oversees to Palestine, before finally being demobbed in 1946. The couple began their married life in Bradford, but there was little work to be had in the area just after the war and so they decided to try Newbold Verdon. Reginald soon found work in the boot and shoe factories of Barwell and Earl Shilton, while Ethel concentrated her efforts on bringing up their two children, Lyndsay and Barry.

Ethel and Reginald's story illustrates just how much of an impact the war could have, not only on the individual but also the communities in which they lived. For Ethel it provided her first with an opportunity to travel, to meet people from different walks of life and acquire new skills for future employment, as well as meeting her future husband. All this may have happened even if war had not come about but it is probably fair to say that, given the traditional working opportunities open to women before the war in a village like Newbold Verdon, the chances were much reduced.

Outside Influences

There was also the villagers' exposure to the consequences of war: directly through the air-raids and the death or injury to relatives, friends or neighbours, or more subtly in the form of rationing, imposition of the blackout, restrictions on travel and the ever increasing government involvement in people's lives. Whether the villagers liked it or not, the outside world was imposing itself on them.

For some the need to know what was going on beyond Newbold Verdon became very important. Brian Cheshire tells a story that illustrates this very well. There was no mains electricity in Brian's house on Main Street and so battery charged radios were used. The batteries, referred to as accumulators, were taken away each week to be recharged at a cost and so for Brian and his family the radio had to be used sparingly.

> *During the war, there were radio progammes like ITMA we used to like to listen to, but my mum wanted enough battery to be able to listen to the news each day. And so we could only have the radio on for so long. She would have a piece of paper recording how much time we had used and how much was left over, so that she could make sure she listened to the news every day. It was very important then.*

The war established a hunger for news and information, and the radio met that need and by doing so it brought the world into people's homes.

A Slow Start to Recovery

> *'We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead.'*
>
> Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Radio Announcement 8th May 1945

For the next five years, the country set about trying to emerge from Wartime Britain into Peacetime Britain; not an easy transition to make. The whole country had been on a war footing for so long it was very difficult to make the readjustments necessary to begin meeting the peacetime needs of the populous, as well as begin paying back the enormous war debt Britain had incurred.

Sacrifices would still be required and patience needed. People understood that things would be difficult, though there was a hope that the deprivations of the war years, such as rationing, would soon be a thing of the past. Regrettably, this was not the case and in some respects rationing worsened. Bread was rationed in 1946 for the first time and this continued for two years. Clothing was rationed until 1949 and petrol up to 1950. It was not until 1954 that rationing stopped completely.

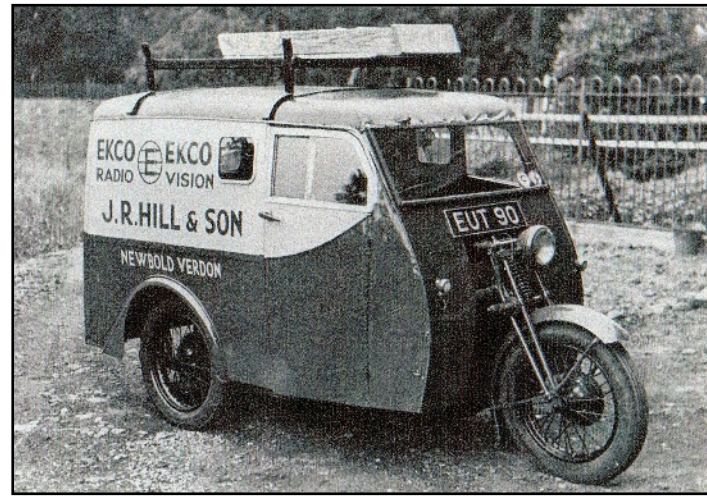


Ration books for clothing and petrol and the associated vouchers. These and other restrictions made life very difficult for people after the war.

Newbold experienced such deprivations and delays in getting back to normal. An example of this was the dearth of new motor vehicles available after the war. Factories were having to switch from arms manufacturing to goods for the

peacetime, and motor vehicles were one such category. Brian and Des Hill's father, Les, began to revive his electrical business and he needed a van for the job. Brian recalls what happened.

You could not get new vehicles just after the war. The only place you could get a new van was Reliant, the three-wheelers. So he bought one and had Bostock and Barsby, coach builders at Barwell, do some work on the doors and paint the signage. It then became a very familiar sight around Newbold for some years.



Problems at the School

The 6th November, 1945, entry shows the frustration of governor and head at the state of the school. The governor was not pleased at what he saw and neither was the head, pointing out that the war had undermined what could be done. Even when the school was decorated a few months later no painting took place, which makes one wonder what kind of decorating it was.

Date	School Log Book Entry
6th Nov 1945	*Mr Statham* (school governor) *visited the school and criticised the 'very dirty condition' He suggested redecoration and floors to be refurbished.* *The Head Teacher added that owing to war conditions, no painting and decorating had been done for nearly eight years.*
9th Jan 1946	*The school has been emergency decorated but not painted.*

Two years later, the head teacher was reporting a problem of a different kind. In September of that year he recorded that there were only 98 children in the school, down from 130 in 1947, and, as a consequence, he had to return to teaching full time.

Date	School Log Book Entry
27th July 1948	*This terrific drop in numbers is the largest in our history and is due to (1) the policy of building houses for this village in Desford and (2) a very large age group leaving*

His predicament only lasted a couple of years, when the fall in pupil numbers was reversed following the erection of large numbers of new houses in Newbold Verdon. Mr Cadle's reference to the house building at Desford was in relation to a number of houses erected to re-house those living in some of the poorest accommodation in both villages. John Hill believed that this wholesale movement of families out of Newbold was, for him, the moment when the village began to change.

New Housing Required: Sparkenhoe and Preston Drive Estates

Below is a newspaper cutting from the Leicester Daily Mercury of Thursday, 3rd March, 1950[3] and it reports the approval of the building of fifty houses in Newbold Verdon at what would be later known as Sparkenhoe, with a further two hundred to follow at what is now known as the Preston Drive estate. Neither development would take place without the establishment of mains water and the related sewage works.

Development at Newbold Verdon

Because of the necessity of building off the coalfield in areas that are safe from mining subsidence, Market Bosworth Rural District Council have selected the village of Newbold Verdon for extensive housing development.

Councillor Edgar Beckett revealed this at a meeting of the Council yesterday, when a contract for the erection of 50 houses at a cost of £63,714 was sealed and it was decided to apply for a loan of £25,880 for sewage works.

The Council is also negotiating for an additional site of 22 acres for the building of up to 200 more houses in Newbold Verdon together with a shopping centre.

It is expected that the present population of the village, 1300, will be doubled and Newbold Verdon will become one of the largest villages in Leicestershire.

By the end of the war, half a million homes across the country had been destroyed and thousands more severely damaged, leading to a severe housing shortage. Over the next five years, four million council houses and flats were built, and by the mid-1950's nearly three million people had been re-housed. However, it wasn't just the war that prompted the building of houses - many of those whose homes had not been destroyed or damaged lived in squalid conditions.

The newspaper cutting also explained that Newbold Verdon was chosen because it had not been subjected to subsidence arising from mining. A somewhat ironic observation, given that only a few years later the north-eastern corner of the village witnessed considerable subsidence.

Once the houses were under way the process of selecting who should have one began. Market Bosworth Rural District Council invited people to apply for a house. In their submission applicants had to give reasons why they believed they deserved to be re-housed. The records of their submissions provide a telling insight into the sorry plight of families, both within the village and the surrounding district, for the need of decent housing.

Though the largest number of applicants came from Newbold, there were applications from virtually every village in the area, as well as further afield, including Melton Mowbray and Leicester. The two primary reasons given by applicants were either overcrowding or very poor living conditions and in many cases both reasons were cited.

One applicant from a nearby village explained that there were seven adults in his two-bedroom house and because of the overcrowding his 30 year-old son had to sleep in the same bedroom as himself and his wife. Two applicants were living in caravans with their family and another man and his family of five from Ratby were living in a converted cowshed.

Three other applicants were living at Lindley Hall Farm on the Fenn Lane near Fenny Drayton. The accommodation was World War Two huts that had been used by servicemen stationed on the nearby Nuneaton airfield and had, after the war was over, temporarily been turned over to civilian use. This 'temporary' situation lasted for five years.

Families Move In

Sparkenhoe was opened in 1950 and the picture opposite shows the Chairman of the Parish Council, Mr Walter Preston, holding the ribbon for Mrs Lizzie Wildman, who, aged 78, was the oldest resident in Newbold at that time and so was asked to cut the ribbon. The residents of the new houses received their keys at the ceremony.



Mick Hill was a member of one of those families as he, his mum, dad and sister moved into number 31 Sparkenhoe. For Mick, aged fifteen at the time, moving from his house on Main Street was something of a mixed blessing.

Mick:

We were living in a large, old, thatched-roofed farmhouse opposite the Co-op on Main Street. My dad had bought it and two other connected houses some years earlier. There was also a half an acre of orchard, a three acre field, nine pig sties and two stables. Unfortunately, the local council had insisted that dad put mains plumbing into all three properties and re-wire them - something we couldn't afford and so we had to move.

I was really upset at the move into Sparkenhoe. I had loved that old house and all the grounds, though the new house did have a lot of advantages.

There were three good sized bedrooms; a large modern L-shaped lounge and a big hallway: two flushing toilets - one outside and another upstairs - and an outside wash house. We also had a bathroom, and for the first time in my life I was able to have a bath with hot, running water. The rooms were also very spacious and although we didn't have central heating the house was much warmer than what we had been used to, but I still missed the old one.



Sparkenhoe in the early 1960's

Preston Drive soon followed and by 1952 the village had almost doubled in size from the pre-war figures of 1,200.



In this picture a young child sits in his toy car on a newly laid path to his house. Across the road the pavement is yet to be laid and the whitewashed marked windows of the houses opposite confirm that not all new residents have moved into Sparkenhoe.

The little boy's name is Keith Freeman and he is the proud owner of a toy car made by his dad. The family have moved from the damp and cold terraced cottage on Abell's Row to a brand new house, complete with mains water and inside toilets that flush.



Preston Drive, 1965

13 years after it had been built. Notice the absence of cars



Main Street Houses

Demolished following the building of Sparkenhoe and the Preston Drive estates.

Newbold Verdon 1920 - 1950

In the course of researching this book, the author was struck by the number of times our contributors commented on the fact that nothing much had happened in Newbold Verdon during those thirty years. Perhaps they meant that nothing much had happened to them or their family, or to the fabric of the village, or in terms of memorable historic, local events. Physically, until the late 1940's, the village would have changed little. There had been a couple of local authority housing developments –Mill Lane and Dragon Lane –which contributed twenty or so houses to the village. There was also some new private housing built along the Desford Road and along Main Street, but, until Sparkenhoe in 1950, that was about it.

In the late 1940's, Newbold Verdon people went about their day-to-day life much as they had done for the whole of the preceding thirty years. Water continued to be drawn from pumps in yards and back gardens. Toilet pans were emptied at night. In the winter, hot oven shelves were placed between cold bed sheets in damp bedrooms. Most men worked down the mines and working women in the local boot and shoe factories. There were about the same number of farms and farm workers, and the methods of farming had hardly changed: horses pulled ploughs, potatoes were picked by hand and everyone helped at the harvest. Children went to the same school and attended the church or chapel their parents had attended. They played in the same quiet streets and roamed the same fields and woods as others had thirty or more years earlier. Familiar family names, going back several generations in the village, were so common that some individuals and their family could only be distinguished by their nicknames. So, yes, nothing much happened, but 1950's Newbold Verdon was not the same as 1920's Newbold Verdon.

A Changing Community?

What is a community? H. Newby in his book, *Country Life; a social history of Rural England*[4] offers this definition.

> *'Community..... is a local neighbourhood bound together by the common historical experience of family, work and place.'*

Newbold Verdon in the late 1940's and early 1950's could be said to reflect, fully, Newby's definition. The strong ties of long established village families remained robust; neighbours shared the same occupations they had for several generations, and the ebb and flow of people moving into and out of the village was, as yet, nothing more than a ripple on the pond.

Throughout the book, our contributors have provided many examples of the strength of the community and the ties that bound them together. Brian Hill described the trust neighbours had in each other: *'Nobody ever locked their doors.'* Derek Wilkinson at the Heath talked of *'Everybody knowing everybody.'* Mike Preston of '*....all of us being about the same.'*

It is possible that our villagers' view of the past has been somewhat coloured by the rose tinted glasses of nostalgia and that their community was less cemented than they describe. However, setting aside their testimony, the evidence of the existence of the three key components that make up a community, of the shared common experiences of family, work and place, is very compelling. But, as strong as the community was in the early 1950's, there were the first signs of a different kind of community emerging - one more familiar to us today.

Agents of change

Driven by a number of factors, the ties that bound people together were beginning to loosen. New housing developments were bringing people into the village and new housing developments elsewhere giving rise to families moving away. The subsequent doubling in the size of the population in less than five years meant villagers had to adjust to a sudden large influx of newcomers. The rows of cottages were beginning to be torn down and in their place a very different kind of housing was being built - homes that allowed people greater privacy.

The coal mines and the shoe and hosiery factories continued to provide the bulk of working opportunities, but a better educated youth were looking to work further afield in the local towns and cities, and in other occupations. Brian Hill, talking about his wife Christine, and the opportunities afforded to her after the war, captures this very well:

> *One thing after the war, in our time, that began to put people into other employment and therefore travelling to other places, was Education. Chris was trained as a shorthand typist; now that would not have happened in my mother's day. So she trained as a shorthand typist and began to meet other people from outside the village.*

The State was also beginning to take greater responsibility for the individual and to provide much more comprehensive systems of support. The Welfare State had emerged: providing the National Health Service; extending social security; offering free education up to, and including, university, and a personalised social service.

All this meant that, throughout the country, people became less reliant on each other. Consequently, the need for a close-knit, supportive neighbourhood was less crucial to families than it had been and would be in the future.

Perhaps not in the early 1950's, but as the twentieth century progressed and more houses (predominantly private) were built, the village and its purpose and function changed, and with it the community.

Newbold Verdon in the 21st century

The village is now in essence a commuter village, with most workers leaving the parish for their daily employment. Few will travel with others to the same place of work as they did in the past. And when they return home, if they so choose, they have little need to interact with neighbours or the village at large. They do not have to use the shops or other services, or even to send their children to the local school. Ease of communications and individual ownership of transport, mean families can go elsewhere for their entertainment and to socialise. There are now many more factors with the potential to distance people from their immediate community and not so many that draw them back.

And yet, despite the loosening of the ties that bind a village together, it is still possible to see villagers today showing a strong community spirit. A brief reading of the Graphic magazine reveals the wide range of events held on a weekly basis that demonstrate people's want and desire to remain connected.. The churches and chapel continue to work hard on behalf of the parishioners, as do a swathe of voluntary organisations. It is a different type of community, not so much bound together by family, work or a shared history, but by the mutual need of people to feel part of something, no matter how loosely.

Our contributors were born and grew up at a time when 'The Village' was all important. It helped sustain them through the economic depression of the 1920's and 1930's; a world war and the subsequent austerity of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Their contributions within this book have, hopefully, provided the reader with a window into the past; a chance to understand a little about the way things were and how they shaped those who lived through those times.

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