



The Otford Society Newsletter

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MORE MEMORIES OF OLD OTFORD

Elsie Browning was a keen observer and recorder of the village scene. During her life at Hildrop Farm, she came to know many people. Here is her story of "The Village Milk Round" as it was between the years 1919 and 1950, when Cecil Browning delivered milk around the village from his horse and cart.

*Cows on the twice daily milking trip from Bubblestone Meadows to Hildrop Farm -
unconcerned about traffic*

Cecil showed an appreciation of art and music at an early age, and a talent for drawing, but he was destined to help his father and brother on the farm. When he was seventeen, he took over the milk round and dairy work, and Charles milked the cows and worked at his father's side rearing the calves and pigs, and helping with the cultivation of the land. A village man was also employed. After the houses were built at the Greenhill estate, the round was extended to Shoreham Road, Hillydeal and Greenhill Roads.

He was a familiar figure on his round for nearly thirty years. His customers, many of whom had known him since a boy, regarded him as a friend as he watched their children grow up, and in many instances become his customers after they married and set up homes in the village. In later life, when an old customer passed away, his comment often was "I served her mother with milk".

During these years he did his round in an open milk cart, seven days a week, in all winds and weathers. When snow lay deep he roped the milk churn to a sledge and did the whole round on foot.

Quiet Otford village presented a different aspect at the time he took over the milk round. The pond was more useful than ornamental then. The tap which faced Knight's, the grocers shop [now Willow Tea Rooms - Ed] was used as the water supply by some of the cottagers nearby. The passing horses drank there and the water was made use of in many ways. Motor vehicles were rare in the street. Farm carts and horse-drawn tradesmen's vans pursued their leisurely way with a few people on bicycles and tricycles, or in pony carts. The one dread on the milk round was an encounter with the Dartford Brewers steam-driven wagon, which had once caused the mare to bolt, overturning the cart and scattering cans and milk. A steam roller at work on a patch of road was also a hazard.

After the six o'clock morning milking, the milk was strained into the churns, and large metal hand cans with brass trim and the name "E.C. Browning and Sons" cut into the lids, all ready to be loaded on to the milk float. Some of the milk, still warm from the cow, was carried on foot to the nearby houses on The Green, and to the gabled cottages in Leonard Avenue which were demolished by the bomb in 1940. Jugs would be ready on doorstep, tables or kitchen dresser, and the milk was ladled into them from the half pint brass measure, suspended from a brass nail fitted inside the hand can. The mare was then harnessed up and backed into the shafts and they clip-clopped and rattled their way down the village street. The mare, of course, was familiar with her stops and starts, and knew where the tastiest hedges could be nibbled, which sometimes caused an altercation with the householder who took a pride in its carefully trimmed shape.

The mare was hitched to a post near "The Woodman" whilst Cecil carried his can there and to the nearby cottages. John Booker, retired from Hilldrop Farm, lived in the lovely cottage since converted to the chemist shop. His front garden covered what is now a paved forecourt. Mr Knight's greyhounds, which he kept for coursing, yelped and barked as the milk was measured into the jugs. Mr Knight's shop was stacked with a variety of merchandise besides groceries. He sold books, boots, pots and pans, haberdashery, snuff and chewing tobacco. His sons, Cuthbert and Victor, worked in the business, Tom went to sea, and he had four charming daughters. Gladys became a teacher and travelled abroad, Irene worked at the Sevenoaks General Post Office. She married a naval officer

and spent most of her life in the village. These two sisters taught me the old fashioned craft of lace making called Tatting. The elder daughter, Mrs Langham who lived in the bungalow her husband built on land bought from Ernest, was a sweet personality. She mothered all the family, and kept open home for them after the parents died.

The next call was at the Crown Inn, where the Pearce family lived. They had strictly brought up sons, school friends of Cecil. The three boys enjoyed many a game of marbles and top spinning on the roadway outside. Mr Pearce made a small wooden truck and sent his two boys collecting the horse-droppings from the street for the cultivation of his garden at the rear of the inn.

The cottages from the Crown Inn down to Park Lane are, with the exception of two, converted to shops today, but at the time of which I write, two or three rough stone steps, mostly whitened, led to the front doors which led straight into the living rooms. Roses climbed the walls, and flowers grew beneath the windows. Some large families were reared in these two-bedroomed homes. Cecil visited each one.

Milk was delivered to Miss Butcher. She had a lodger, a keen chapel-goer who sported a long white beard and was always known as "Bishop Bye". [A memorial plaque to Robert Bye is in the Methodist Church. - Ed.] The Uptons had their jugs ready. This was a family with a romantic background. Papers which had passed down the generations to the eldest sons, came eventually into Ned's hands. An interested person had them examined and they gave proof that the Uptons had descended from the Lords of Tonbridge Castle. Miss Upton, in her seventies, still lives in her childhood home [Miss Upton died in 1976 - Ed].

Beer then was cheap, and with four pubs at close quarters in the village, some of the working men indulged over much. Cecil recalled opening one door in this line of cottages and finding the occupant lying drunk on the floor and crying out "The Lord have mercy on my soul!" Cecil found his jug and made a hasty retreat.

These cottages and some in Leonard Avenue belonged then to George Kipps, who lived with his daughter Gwenny at Park Farm. He had a butchers shop in Sevenoaks and was a friend of Ernest Browning, buying and slaughtering some of his bullocks and pigs. His daughter fell in love with a young Sevenoaks man, but her father forbade the marriage on the grounds that the young man was not "good enough" for her. She never married when this romance ended. She loved animals and was a devoted worker for the R.S.P.C.A. After she left Park Farm and went to live in Sevenoaks, she returned to Otford every day to feed the large family of farm cats she had left behind. As a schoolgirl, I remember seeing Miss Kipps drive past in a trap, seated very erect beside her father who drove the smart outfit. This handsome young woman was all in black, her beautiful red hair tied back with a broad black ribbon bow. She had a rebellious expression, and reminded me of Queen Elizabeth the first in my history book. George Kipps was on the Council then, and strongly opposed the idea of refuse collection in Otford.

The milk cart made its next stop at the end of Park Lane and Cecil crossed the street to Boddington where he found Mr Shilling's jug ready on the doorstep. Mr Shilling spent his leisure hours chasing butterflies.

OUR VILLAGE MATTERS

Traffic problems

The slow progress in implementing suggested traffic speed control measures was reported and commented on at our April AGM. It is two years since the SDC Highways Department promised action. The Parish Council has written to the Society expressing surprise that we had not reported the latest Highway Report in our April Newsletter, although I had asked the OPC (in February) to keep us informed so that we could let members know of any developments. We always hope that Parish Councillors will be present at our AGM to keep residents aware of latest developments – but none attended this year.

The Highway Report of the 26th March is as follows:

Over the last year OPC has had numerous discussions with SDC on highway and traffic issues and in November the Chairman and I met with SDC in an attempt to expedite a number of matters. I am pleased to say that progress is now being achieved.

Station Road The signage has been improved at the approach to Russell House School in an attempt to reduce traffic speed. SDC are still looking at ways of reducing the speed generally along Station Road and improving the safety for pedestrians using the Station.

High Street KCC have now indicated that they are keen to progress the 20mph speed limit initiative and the Otford scheme is the sole scheme that has been put forward in the Sevenoaks district. Land surveys have been completed and SDC are now working on the design and location of a number of width restrictions and associated works which will slow the traffic and improve pedestrian safety. It is hoped that this work will be completed by the end of April, beginning of May. The proposal will then be formally put to KCC for funding approval in August and if approval is given public consultation will begin in September.

Rye Lane The long-running problems with surface water on Rye Lane are to be tackled in April when SDC hope to install two more gullies to take the excess water.

St Michaels Drive SDC are attempting to arrange a site meeting with representatives of St Michaels Drive so that gullies may be installed to take the surface water from this private road and prevent the flooding in PWE.

Pilgrims Way East Which many of you know is in a deplorable state has now been programmed for resurfacing in the financial year starting in April, although we are still waiting for confirmation that funding has been agreed.

(This Report was from Cllr. D. Whitbread)

At our AGM, District Cllr. Jack Malan reported that some funding for traffic calming in Otford had been approved by the SDC.

Telecomm Mast, Telston Lane

This 15m high lattice tower at Hopgarden Farm, Telston Lane, has received planning permission from the SDC, despite objections from the Parish Council, the Otford Society and other residents. We understand that the Case Officer, Mrs V. Baxter, said that she believed it to be a “permitted development”. This seems to highlight the protection given by such designations as “Green Belt” and “Special Landscape Area”, both of which apply to this part of Otford! Whether mast sharing was considered, as suggested by the OPC, we do not know. There are already masts in Otford at the top of Greenhill, Otford Station and Bartrams Farm. There are two others close by. One overlooking the Darent Valley at Polhill, and another at Dunton Green.

Under our present planning laws appeals are only allowed by applicants, not objectors.

The Pond

No further news yet about repair work. The Society has written to the landlord of The Woodman thanking him for supplying two more ducks. One of the pair of the previous residents was unfortunately run over and killed.

Palace Field

Some members have expressed concern at the unkempt appearance of Palace Field this year. The cutting programme has been disrupted by the very wet Spring. The OPC has said they wish to maintain it as a flower meadow, but at times litter has been more apparent than wild flowers. However, at the time of writing, the Field has been cut and it looks much better. The Historical Society has been carrying out a special survey with young archaeologists to locate the underground remains of the Palace, and has met with some success.

What the Otford Society needs if it is to make constructive suggestions about Palace Field, is for someone to keep a regular record about its condition, possibly with photographs. Is there a member living nearby who might volunteer?

Uncut verges

The wet weather has also disrupted the cutting of verges. PWW has been positively dangerous due to the length of the grass at the corners. The grass has been mown at last, but looks very untidy. We hope that the contractors will make a better job of it next time.

The grass near the bus stop/shelter at Rye Lane was so long that it made it difficult for passengers boarding the bus – but a nearby resident got out his own lawn mower and kept the area short for the benefit of his neighbours. Well done.

London Marathon

Stan the Barber, and Len the Post not only completed the Marathon this year, but collected around £6,000 for charity. The charity they were supporting was ICR – Internation Care & Relief, which helps to provide education for children in Third World countries, building schools, laying on water, and so on. It's not too late if you want to add your support.

THE PALACE APPROACH

For some years we have attempted to keep the border of the Palace Approach under control, but it has defeated us now. We have had several long absences when nothing was done. Meanwhile, to add to the general scene of desolation, several trees have been taken down and the ivy cut away from the wall. The result is not a pretty sight. Especially as the border at Bubblestone Cottage, which is maintained by the Women's Institute, looks superb.



We are appealing for help from members of the Society in an attempt to get the weeds down and the side into some type of order. There are a lots of shrubs there, most of which have been donated by residents, and can look very attractive. At the moment they are difficult to see through the weeds. This is a very central part of the village and seen by the many visitors we get sauntering past.

We thought of a working party on Saturday the 16th June, starting at 10am and would be very grateful for any help at all. Refreshment break on us. Please let us know if you will be able to help by telephoning Otford 525205 but if you don't get round to ringing don't worry – just turn up. Please bring gardening gloves and any tools that can conveniently be carried with you. Parking in the Vicarage Car Park by kind permission of the vicar.

Doreen & Brian Wright, Chantry Cottage

Village folk: continuing our series

OTFORD'S DARBY FAVOURITE

Barbara Darby's renown as a video film maker reaches beyond the confines of Otford. It has led to a commission from an American society to produce a 15 minutes video on the making of a replica of the famous "Liberty Bell", in Philadelphia, at the Whitechapel Foundry where the original bell was made over 200 years ago.

Barbara Darby - "the cakes" as she has been called to avoid confusion with the other well-known Barbara Darby, the popular Parish Clerk - was born in Essex, as was her husband Gordon, and the newly-married couple moved to Otford in 1957. She brought up three sons, but found time to be an active member of the WI, developing her artistic talent all the while. For 15 years she ran a decorating business with her friend Dilys Goodman. One customer remarked that they were the only decorators who not only kept an eye on the casserole, but took in the washing if it rained, or even walked the dog.



Barbara inherited from her father his skill at decorating and icing cakes, so another string to her bow came easily. Her sugar decorations became famous, an art form she displayed at numerous craft exhibitions. Many weddings and special occasions have been graced by one of her cakes, and she still continues this work.

When the Darby's youngest son

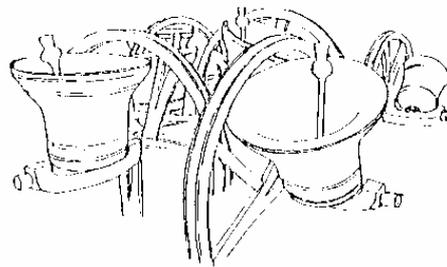
emigrated, she bought two Camcorders as a way of visually keeping in touch with family news. Her new interest typically led her to perfect the art, and she enrolled on a week-long course at the WI Residential College. At the end of the week she was invited to make a documentary about the College, and the result -



"The Denman Experience" - is still shown at WIs today. Her friend Beryl Cook helped in shooting the scenes and planning the commentary. 1994 was the centenary year of Parish Councils, and Beryl suggested making a video of the village. Barbara enthusiastically took up this idea, visiting Churches, Schools, Societies and events to produce "The Kentish Village of Otford - recollections during 1994". Beryl sadly died, and it is to her memory that this video is dedicated.

Barbara is a keen member of the Kensing Video Club where she has received much encouragement and guidance from Jim Morton-Robertson. Two years ago the South East Section of the Antiquarian Horological Society asked her to produce a video on the work of a local Otford craftsman, Martin Matthews, the fourth generation in a family of watchcase makers. The 75 minute record of his work has received international acclaim, and copies have been sent all over the world.

Other recent videos include one on the making of the village Mosaic in the High Street, with a working commentary. Following this, Gordon and Barbara produced an illustrated guide booklet, "The Story of the Otford Millennium Mosaic".



As well as her video on "The Chronicle of Millennium Events", she has also created the winning design for a village sign, which, it is hoped, will be placed on The Green later this year. The sign is in mosaic form, and she constructed it at Oliver Budd's studio in Goudhurst.

Another success has been a short video "Autumn in Knole Park" which Meridian TV is showing on Freescreen.

It was her video on the making of the new bells for St Bartholomew's at the

Whitechapel Foundry that led to the commission to film the making of the Liberty Bell replica.

What an asset the Darby family has proved to be for our village! With Barbara around we can be sure that any event of note in Otford will be recorded for posterity.

Videos for sale are available from Barbara or Gordon Darby (Tel. 523339). Donations from sales go to village funds.

MARTIN CORSON

It is with regret that we announce the death of Martin Corson, a member of our Executive Committee for many years.

He will be remembered as a steadfast, good friend of the Otford Society, always striving for the best for our community, and seeking to encourage honesty and high standards in our local and national administration.

The Otford Society sends it sincere sympathy to his family.

CHRISTINA OAKES

Mrs Christina Oakes has died. She was born in 1900, and would have been 101 years old in August.

Her hand-print appears on the Otford Mosaic surround as the oldest person living in Otford in December 1999. The Society was so pleased that she was able to attend and enjoy the opening ceremony on New Year's Day, and receive a replica of the plaque from Oliver Budd, the artist.

We send our sympathy to her daughter, Mrs Hammersley, and family.

Annual Members Garden Party 30th June 6–8 pm

*This will be held at the Oast House, Twitton Lane, by kind permission of Mrs Marian Wills, on Saturday 30th June. **All** members, their families and friends are invited. Tickets £3, which includes first glass of wine.*

This is the only social event held by the Society during the year, so please do come along and enjoy a pleasant evening in the company of your fellow members.

Dates for your Diary

St George's Day, April 23rd 2002

A suggestion made at the AGM that a coffee morning or lunch be held to celebrate this event was received with enthusiasm. The Executive Committee will be discussing this. Meanwhile ... keep the date free!

Autumn Meeting

18th October 8pm Memorial Hall Speaker to be announced.

The opening meeting of the Otford & District Historical Society is on the 17th October. The Otford Society apologises for holding its Autumn meeting during the same week, but unfortunately it was not possible to find another suitable date when the village hall could be booked.

OTFORD WEB SITE



The Otford Web sites are up and running well but do need constant updating. Please let us have any articles of interest, notice of events in or near the village and anything that needs publicity. If you have an event coming up what better way to give it wide publicity than on the Web site.

Please e-mail copy to OtfordSociety@aol.com or telephone Otford 525205 for further details.

Otford Society

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The Society is without a Secretary at the moment.
If you would like to join our Committee as Secretary, or know of someone,
please ring the Chairman.

The next Newsletter will be the October edition.
Contributions should reach the Editor by mid-September.

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