

## REMINISCENCES OF

### A CHILDHOOD IN JORDANS 1924 – 1941

**INTRODUCTION** Having lived some 60 years in the village, with a gap during the latter years of the War, I thought that it might be interesting to record my memories of the early days of Jordans. Arthur Hayward has, of course, written an excellent history but I hope that this short record will give a more personal and less formal account of the activities of children and others at that time. The notes that follow are set out in brief paragraphs with memories as they come to mind. They will not necessarily be in date order but will, I hope, make clear the dramatic changes that have occurred in one lifetime.

**THE EARLY DAYS** I arrived at the Village in my mother's arms at the tender age of 2 days in 1924. My parents first lived in one of the Cottages in Green East Road soon after they were completed. For obvious reasons I cannot claim to remember anything about that time! Old photographs show the village very open with hedges just planted. All around the land was either farmed or neglected and fallow. In the village itself it seemed that there was always some building going on.

The roads were unmetalled and in a terrible state with potholes everywhere! They were finished in Hoggin which was dug out from pits in the wood and in the garden of Spindrift with access from the Bridle Path below Downfield. Over the years the roads were gradually improved and tarred. Latterly, road maintenance was carried out by Mr Gray and his assistant. They used wooden barrows and would be seen anywhere around the Village. Mr Gray had a waxed mustache carefully groomed to give two very sharp points!

I only very vaguely remember the shop being in the Estate Office, but I well remember the wooden shed that followed it. It was sited quite close to the site of the future permanent shop. Mr Hughes was the benign shop keeper, always dressed in light brown overalls. The shed smelled of paraffin which was needed by villagers for "Valor Perfection" cooking stoves etc. (I don't think that anyone had central heating so open fires provided the heating but in most houses there was a coke or anthracite boiler for hot water.)The timber shop with its creaky floor boards was eventually taken down and sold to Ernest Polge for his chicken farm. When the new shop was completed Lilian Pickstock

joined her father in serving at the counter. Most people relied on the shop for the greater part of their needs. Otherwise one would take the train to Wycombe or Beaconsfield for shopping. Library books were available from the library over "Boots the Chemist" at Wycombe. There was also a small library in the Village Hall, but it was little used.

Most people did their own laundry by hand. Many had a coal fired "Copper" which was lit on Mondays which was "Washing Day". There, all the sheets and towels could be boiled up with soap flakes. (No washing powders at that time.) There was, however, a laundry opposite the White Hart at Three Households which did do sheets etc.

Kitchens were very primitive. They had large ceramic "Belfast sinks" with teak draining boards. Any cupboards were not floor units but high Dressers which were dark stained like all the doors and other woodwork in the houses. The kitchen floors were finished in red Quarry tiles which had to be scrubbed. There were no detergents so washing up fatty plates was difficult without washing soda or soap.

I don't remember ever attending a Doctors Surgery. If absolutely necessary, the doctor was summoned from Farnham Common. We had more choice of Dentists. We attended one at Wycombe. Teeth were extracted under gas.

At the back of the shop there was the Hall which has been enlarged but is substantially the same now as in the early days.

Other timber buildings were used by Wilton & Co, the builders and by Bert Ryan, the plumber. The former were next to 12 East Green Road by the footpath. It was surrounded by a high vertically boarded fence. Ryan's yard was at the back of Lyndhurst. Later Roger Borns built a timber building on the grass above the present site of Chalky Field Flats. This housed a fruit canning "factory". The business failed after a year or two.

In the very early days, a brick works had been built built between Crutches Lane and Puers Lane. The clay was dug out from a very big pit below what is now Puers Field. It was stored in a huge long heap along the hedge opposite Kisdon. This provided a fine but dirty playground for the children! We would take sides of the heap and throw balls of clay at our hidden opponents on the other side! The pit was quickly used as a rubbish tip by the builders but again was a magnet for children. The walls of the brickworks were demolished and used as hardcore, but the concrete floor lasted many years. People with new gardens broke the concrete up and used the blocks in their rockeries instead of real stone. When it came to building the Flats, expensive piling had to be carried

out over the area of the pit. Mr Morallee was the site foreman at that time. (He at one time reared fox cubs in his cottage!)

I remember my childhood as being very free and at the same time safe. We would be out a lot of the time in the fields, woods and Dells, often making campfires and Dens.

For children, one of the highlights of the week was when the Ice Cream man cycled up from Chalfont with his special tricycle with a box like container at the front full of ices. He rang his cycle bell to warn kids to be around with their pennies!

At various times little Nursery schools were started in peoples' homes. I went to Mrs Roake's, in one of the Cottages in Copse Lane below the wood. Then I went to Mrs Leila Sparkes' at the top of the hill on Pot Kiln Lane. (There I learnt about "King George the Fish" and probably little else!) After that I went to "Woning" in Copse Lane and last of all to Long Dean School (now called "Long Dene House"). This was before The County Primary School was built. The school was properly run by Miss Clark with formal classes and was the usual springboard for those going on to Gayhurst or Thorpe House at Gerrards Cross. Prep school was a rude shock! We even had homework! We normally cycled to Gerrards Cross or went by train.

As mentioned before, the roads were appalling. Very few people had a car but there were two taxis. They were driven by two ladies named Miss Crook and Miss Elms. Miss Crook was very short and had to drive her Rover looking through the steering wheel. She was gruff and taciturn! Miss Elms had an open Austin with hood and appeared to wear men's clothes. She was definitely the safer choice. They both did the Station run. Otherwise there was a large Austin at Stone Dean driven by Mrs Bigland's chauffeur named Mr Inskip. You could often see him waiting at the station since Mrs Bigland frequently missed her train in London. The few other cars that we saw were parked outside the Meeting House on Sundays where there was an array of splendid early classic vehicles such as Armstrong Siddleys and Bentleys attended by their chauffeurs! They had massive radiators and very bolt upright seats. As a family, we occasionally had visits from a London family. They arrived in an open Bentley with the large family hanging out on all sides!

The roads outside the village were the first to be tarred and the great excitement for us children was when the Steamroller arrived. Occasionally the driver would relent and let us ride on board. Needless

to say, our mothers were not best pleased when they had to wash the coal dust and oil off our clothes.

As the Village was new, it attracted several families with small children. We would often go to friends' houses to play.

A favorite activity was Bird Nesting. We would follow the hedges and look for nests. I am glad to say we were well schooled to be careful not to cause the birds to desert their nests.

We saw Red Backed Shrikes, Wryneck, Hawfinch and up at Hodgemoor you could hear the Nightjar and Nightingale. All these birds have virtually disappeared from the area. I even remember seeing a Red Squirrel in the trees near the Burial Ground above the Meeting House. Wildflowers were everywhere. To my horror, I now remember picking large bunches of Bee Orchids in the fields towards Seer Green. (Later, we were to find Green Veined Orchids in the fields near Whan Cross and Fly Orchids, Bird's Nest Orchids and White Helleborine in Stone Dean Woods.)

Before leaving the subject of birds, I remember magpies nesting at the very top of a pine tree in our garden at Downfield. When most of the young had flown, I climbed up and found just one remaining baby. We decided to bring it down and treat it as a pet. It very soon established a routine of flying off after breakfast and returning in the evening to roost on top of an open door to a bedroom upstairs. It also soon twigged that our Dalmation dog was not allowed to harm it. Sometimes it would go and peck the end of the dog's tail provoking growling but that was all. In due course the bird became bolder and it would fly over to the Green. Once, a friend was working upstairs in one of the cottages in front of an open window. "Maggie" flew in and went off with a packet of 20 cigarettes. That was not popular! If she was bored, she would sometimes sit in a tree in the garden and repeat "Come on Maggie, Come on Maggie" ad nauseam! At long last Maggie felt the call of the wild and was last seen by a friend in Jordans Way flying off to join a group of other magpies.

One other bird related story, many years later, was when the owner of "Spindrifft" had a number of white pigeons housed in a Dovecot. They were often seen flying together round the Village. Not many people knew that they were helping themselves to goodies left for wild birds in one of the gardens. The patience of the bird lover finally snapped and he went off and bought a supply of different coloured dyes. He managed to trap all the pigeons on one of their visits to his garden and dunked them in different coloured dyes....vivid pinks, blues and yellows. He then released them. Very soon there were cards appearing

in the shop reporting the sighting of very strange rare birds! Their owner was not best pleased.

We were up to other pranks. At the time of one election some of us went out after dark and swapped the election posters outside the houses. I never learnt how neighbours with opposing affiliations sorted out their posters.

In the 1930's the fields between the Village and Seer Green were fallow and unused. This meant that the long, dry grass was prone to catching fire in the summer. When a fire was spotted the Village Fire Brigade together with the other Villagers turned out to beat the flames back. The Polge's house above Twitchells Lane was particularly vulnerable as the fields were very close to the house and it could have easily caught fire. After such fires the hedges and fields were left blackened and sad. Jordans had its own hand drawn fire engine, kept in a shed by the Hall. Henry Dalton was the "Captain". Once a year it was trundled out with the volunteer fire crew for a practice. It meant connecting hoses to the various hydrants, rolling them out as quickly as possible and turning on the water. The greatest pressure was by the Meeting House. I remember being allowed to hold the hose there. It was difficult to handle as it was liable to "snake" about!

As children we were often lighting camp fires and begged a few sausages from our mothers to fry up. We also made mini-braziers out of cocoa tins that we punched holes into. We then fitted wire handles to them and lit "Touch wood" fires in them. Touchwood could be found in old rotting fruit trees near Austins Farm. It was dry rotten wood, coloured bright brown, which could be pulled out of the tree and snapped into small chunks. The stuff was easy to light and it would glow in the brazier. The smoke it gave off was very pleasant. We then carried these fires around and even climbed trees with them. The wire handles meant that the braziers could be suspended from the branches.

Hodgemoor was a great place to explore. We walked up via Butlers Cross and over the fields to the Pest House. On the way, at weekends, we often saw groups of men illegally "Gaming" well out of sight of the Police! At one entrance to Hodgemoor there was the "Pest House" (so named because it housed plague victims in the 17th Century.) It was inhabited by a housefull of striking girls, probably of Gypsy stock. At that time Hodgemoor was regularly coppiced in blocks and pea and bean sticks were prepared for sale.

At the top of the hill at the back of Hodgemoor we frequently visited the brickworks. We were allowed to see the kilns and watch bricks being made by hand. They also made large tiles for baker's ovens. The clay was dug in large pits and sand was also available nearby. The

newly moulded bricks were left to dry in low roofed little “sheds” open on all sides. When dried they would be fired.

Another childhood activity was watching trains. These were the days of steam and as well as passenger trains, there were lots of goods trains. We would count the coal trucks as they passed. Sometimes there might be over 100 wagons. The coal trucks were painted with the names of the collieries that had mined the coal. Many were from South Wales but they could be from anywhere as they were shunted around in Goods Yards so that they could be delivered to the correct destination. Both Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross unloaded coal in sidings for delivery by local coal merchants. As well as train spotting from the embankment, some of us made friends with Mr Vockins at the Signal Box which was located just to the east of the railway bridge by the station.

Mr Vockins had a fairly easy time in the signal box and would read First Editions of books that he had bought at auctions. The signals were pulled by long handles in the Box. Wires alongside the track connected the signals. “Distant” signals were difficult to pull and needed a fair amount of strength! We were allowed to pull them if we wanted. It was exciting to see the steam express trains pass the windows of the box.

Mr Vockins was a mine of information. He taught us how to snare rabbits and also how to jump on them when they were lying hidden in long grass. He was also on the lookout to hear a stoat catching a rabbit in the plantation on the other side of the lines. He would wait until the stoat had had it fill of blood and then go off and collect the rabbit to skin and take home to eat. It sounds gruesome but that is what he did!

One day, when walking to the signal box, I found a rusty old single barrel 12 bore shot gun in a hedge! It had a beautifully carved stock. I took it home and with a friend set about cleaning it. In order to clean the inside of the barrel we attached an old stocking to a piece of string and pulled it through. Unfortunately the inevitable happened and the stocking got jammed and wouldn't budge. We decided to tie the gun to a tree in Crutches Wood and fire the stocking out! We attached a string to the trigger and at a safe distance pulled it. Amazingly, in spite of all the rust on the outside of the barrel, it withstood the treatment and shot the stocking out! This procedure would be regarded as highly dangerous even with a new gun!

Later, Jon Miller gave me an old folding 4 10 shot gun! With friends I would go rough shooting along the hedgerows with little success! When walking along the roads, the gun could be tucked inside my jacket, invisible to Constable King, the local bobby!

Another character at the station was “Charlie”. He was the station master. He had one leg which didn’t help when he had to collect tickets from passengers coming from the London direction! He probably lost his leg during the Great War. It didn’t prevent him cycling home to Butlers Cross at the end of his stint on duty. He had an assistant named Bill who was definitely the underdog.

The railway cutting was, at the right time of year, a good place to pick wild strawberries. We would gorge ourselves while waiting for the next train! Sometimes if we were more energetic we would dig dens overlooking the tracks, especially near the Pot Kiln Lane road bridge where the cutting was excavated through beds of sand. This was very dangerous, of course, as we could easily have been buried if the roof was to fall in! Luckily no one was hurt in that way.

Most people who were not employed locally commuted to London, taking the 8.15. Some villagers left it to the last minute and had to dodge under the fence to reach the platform before the train left! Mr Greenwood once pushed it too far and managed to open the carriage door and throw his case into the compartment but failed to get on himself. (Carriages at that time were divided into “compartments” with a door at either end and sometimes a corridor on one side.) The case went on to Marylebone without him! Familiar faces on the train were Herbert Reed (art critic), Sir John Reith of the BBC, and G.K. Chesterton (then living at Beaconsfield). As a boy I was intrigued to know how on earth he negotiated the narrow carriage door! He was vast!

When we were very young, another pastime was “boating” on the “Village Pond” in Chalky Field. It was by the gate near the entrance to the Wood. At that time it was usually muddy and mixed with cow flap! Our “boat” was a galvanized laundry tub which could be paddled across the pond! We would also try our luck “fishing” with a worm on a bent pin. What a hope!!

Other regularly visited ponds were “Half Hour Pond” near Layters Green where a lady was reputed to have drowned and the lovely woodland pond in Pitland Wood. It used to be surrounded by high Beech trees but they were later felled by the Forestry Commission and replanted with conifers. It used to have small white bivalve shells in the bottom.

Before the war, there were a series of cold winters. All the ponds froze over so several of us found our old skates and fitted them on to boots. The ponds at Widmer’s Farm, Austens, Layters Green and up beyond Hodgemoor were all suitable. Our parents went further afield to Shardloes. Skating parties over there went on well into the night and they made bonfires on the lake’s bank to keep warm when not skating. If there was snow, Mr Morseman did a trade selling wood to those who

were making their own toboggans. One year we had a run from the top of Chalky Field, through a gap in the hedge and nearly down to Long Bottom Lane.

There was, of course, no public swimming pool in Jordans . In the early days we would walk over to the Misbourne between Chalfont St Giles and Chalfont St Peter. There was a footpath there crossing Narcott Lane. The Misbourne was a bit muddy and not terribly deep but it sufficed. Later the Bell House on the A40 was constructed and it had a good open air pool. That was easy to get to by bike or on foot. Further afield, we would cycle over to a pool at Burnham Beeches or to Odney Pool at Cookham where there was good swimming in the Thames. Alternatively, we went to Bourne End. We would spend all day there as a rule.

As we grew older, we all acquired bicycles and they were our main method of transport. As teenagers we would cycle great distances, even as far as the Cotswolds and Berkshire Downs. I would often cycle to Welwyn Garden City where I had relations. The lights on our bikes were either paraffin or acetylene. Dynamos came in later. If one had gears on ones bike they were three speed only. As there were much fewer cars, cycling was much less dangerous than today.

The Village Green was, as now, a great recreation area. In the early days there was a tennis court roughly in the middle. Our parents played there. There was also another grass court at the corner of Puers Lane and the Green, where "Green Meadow" was later built.

During the winter months, before the War, baseball was played on Sunday afternoons. The "Home Base" was close to the Shelter where we congregated. A good place to watch was up a tree in the hedge where "Wits End Cottage" was later built. Baseball was introduced by Mr Bevan Brown (B.B. for short), a New Zealander.

The Green was also used for Cricket until players got too good and sent balls over the roofs of nearby cottages. The screens could not shield houses from such hitting! The Guy Fawkes Night bonfire was also always on the Green and enjoyed by everyone. Sports days and Fairs were also annual events. As long as I can remember the Swings, Seesaw and sandpit were in the same place and a meeting place for children and their parents. For May Day, Miss Mary Hankinson looked after May Pole dancing for the little ones. She was friendly with George Bernard Shaw and was told that she was the only girl who never thought that she was the model for St Joan but actually was.



During the war, Mrs Wheen brought her Guernsey cow over each morning to spend the day grazing on the Green. The cow was tethered and was just part of the scene!

When we were young there were few radios. The Polges at Innisfree had one of the first. It was a big black Bakelite affair with headphones and a long aerial out to a post in the garden. Later, several people had them and if invited out to tea it was a treat to listen to Childrens' Hour introduced by "Uncle Mack". On Children's Hour they always announced birthdays and if appropriate, they sang "Hello Twins"! For Childrens' Parties we would often settle down to a Charlie Chaplin film after tea and games.

Drinks parties were virtually unknown before the war. It was only afterwards that we went to our first "Sherry Party".

We would always listen to Christmas broadcasts by the King. They were transmitted all over the Empire, and there was great satisfaction if contact was made with some far off place like New Zealand even if you could only hear some incomprehensible speech above the cracking and hissing!

The First Television in the village was at the Wellington's house. He was a BBC executive and had to have a set. It had a large veneered box, perhaps four foot high and towards the top there was a tiny black and white screen. There was great excitement when a few of us children were invited to watch the live transmission of King George VIth Coronation in 1937. They only covered the procession back from the Abbey and even that was massively delayed. The commentator had a job to keep talking.

The Jordans Players and Social Guild were always active over the years. The earliest dramatic performances were staged in the Wood in a gravel pit which had been cut to provide stepped seating on three sides. ( rather like an amphitheatre.) Later around three major stage productions were put on each year in the Hall. At the annual TMC supper there was usually an entertainment preceded by an annual topical song by "The Village Bard," Jim Cavett. He called it "Jocular Jordans" and he accompanied himself (extremely badly) on the piano. Having got through the new verses he continued with some more of his well known ones to popular acclaim! Such simple unsophisticated entertainment went down well. Whist drives were often held in the Hall too. In 1935 there was a very ambitious pageant at the Hostel. A stage was constructed outside a pair of doors to the Barn leading on to the lawn. It was called "The Penn Pageant" and many villagers including children took part. The audience came from far and

wide and was seated on the Hostel lawn. (Luckily the weather was fine the whole time.)

After the War, at the time of the Festival of Britain, Neville Stafford & Ken Morgan produced an adaptation of the "Pilgrim Progress" in the Barn. Again many from the Village took part and the audience was even able to buy tickets in London.

The Barn was also used for Badminton on Sunday afternoons. Many shuttlecocks got lost amongst the beams.

Between the Wars, on two occasions we heard airships passing with a deep drone. The first time, we could see this massive airship flying over Seer Green. On the second occasion it turned up again and we dashed up to the top of Hodgemoor and could see it land somewhere in the distance near London.

On another occasion a small biplane landed in a field at Butler's Cross. The pilot took people for flights "around the block" in this most rickety plane! There were cracks in the floor boards of the open cockpit! My mother was terrified when my father allowed us three children to go up.

On probably an annual basis a brass band marched up to the Village from Chalfont St Giles. We all turned out to listen at the top of the Green. Who they were, I don't know.

In the early days "Paper Chases" were popular. Trails were laid out towards Penn Street, around Hodgemoor etc. People were obviously pretty fit at that time. Many young couples took part.

I also remember that there were regular visits from Gypsies and tramps. We children were scared of the Gypsies. They would set up camp on Twitchells Green and where Seer Green footpath crosses the Bridle path. They might stay for a fortnight or so and make clothes pegs from hazel. These would then be sold around the Village. At the same time they would beg for clothes for the children etc. On rare occasions they would also arrive with caravans. One splendid high wooden one was parked for a long time in the dell below Kisdon. When we checked it out, all we found was salt! When the Gypsies were around they always had horses tethered by the roadside.

Tramps also walked along the roads and occasionally sought work from people in the Village. One fairly regular winter visitor was "Old John". One year he arrived during a cold December. We told him that he could sleep in the garage as we had no car at that time. As Christmas

approached it was obvious that he would not be leaving straight away so the parents thought that it would be in the spirit of Christmas to invite him in to join the family for Christmas lunch. John, of course, had not seen a bath for years and was very smelly! On Christmas morning we supplied him with two buckets full of hot water, soap and an old towel. Some time before the day it had become obvious that he would need a total change of clothes! We asked our friends and relations whether they could help out with clean cast-offs. People were generous and the one remaining item needed was a jacket. A very "with it" French cousin who was staying with us at the time supplied a garish check jacket which was suitable for a dandy in Paris but quite inappropriate in dear Jordans! In the meantime, John went to someone that he knew in Chalfont St Giles and had all his hair removed with Horse Clippers.

When Christmas morning arrived, the hot water was delivered with a razor, kitchen soap etc and in due course John appeared transformed! His face was free of stubble and pink. He still smelled but it was just possible to have him at the Christmas table. Shortly before the meal there was panic when we realized that we had no present for him. The problem was solved when we found a large unopened box of Chocolates that we could pass on to him!

John turned up again from time to time but not at Christmas time. A couple who lived in Hampstead unwisely took him on as a Butler! All went reasonably well for a week or so but there was an almighty row and he was shown the door never to be seen again!

#### SOME JORDANS CHARACTERS

Jordans was not without its characters. For many years **Fred Hancock**, the Secretary of J.V. was regarded as the unofficial Village Mayor. He would attend all meetings of the Management Committee and look after the day to day affairs of the Village. He would also often chair meetings and other activities. He could normally be found in the Estate Office, smoking a cigarette.

**Jack Morseman** was another resident who looked after Wilton and Co, the Builders. He was a first class joiner and could make anything needed in a new house without machine tools of any sort. He once gave me a moulding plane that he had used to make the skirtings in our house. He had made the plane himself.

**Bill Saunders** was the hefty Coal man. He originally came from Seer Green but then took a cottage on the Green. He had a flat bed lorry

with rows of tar smelling coal bags on the back. (Coke was delivered by the Gas Company using a steam lorry with chain drive and with an upright boiler in the front.) Bill had a 12 bore shot gun that he used when poaching along the hedges between Jordans and Seer Green. His companion was **“Bloody” Martin**. So nicknamed because of his swearing! He lived at the far end of Pot Kiln Lane and had regular employment at the pottery and brick works next door to his cottage. He would also help at Stone Dean doing a bit of ploughing etc. Martin poached pheasants in the woods south of the railway and specialized in picking them off as they roosted in the branches at night. He later also enjoyed spying on courting couples in cars parked along Pot Kiln Lane at night! It was as well to keep on good terms with him! We would sometimes walk over to the pottery and watch two men “throwing” plant pots. They used treadle wheels and a stick stuck in a pile of clay to provide a gauge to the required height of the pots. Their workshop was extremely dark and damp, with a low ceiling! From time to time they used a machine to make clay drainage pipes and these were, after firing, stacked in the yard with bricks and tiles.

**Ernest Polge** was an interesting person who ran a chicken farm at the north end of the village. He had been badly wounded during the Great War and had lost a large piece of skull on top of his head. This had affected his balance but nevertheless he somehow kept the farm going. He supplied the village with eggs and chickens to eat. He would come round and tell you that he had a “Grand Boiler” available! These were birds that were well past their sell by date! As children we helped at the farm, feeding etc. Later we would turn out in response to a three line whip to help with bringing in the harvest. It made us a little pocket money and taught us a lot. We would collect sheaves and make stooks. Later we would load the carts and build haystacks. I would also do the milking if he was away. He had three Dexter cows. (For those who have not milked them, they have tiny teats giving you very little to get hold of!) He also had goats to milk which are much easier. Sometimes I took Tommy, his bad tempered horse and trap to Beaconsfield to collect fish offal. Tommy was always reluctant to go to Beaconsfield but would hurtle back along the Bridle Path on the return journey! The Fish Offal was pressure cooked and added to the chickens’ mash. I wonder whether the eggs ever tasted of fish? Before Ernest acquired “Tommy” he had a donkey named Esme. She was docile and happy to allow children to ride on her at Village Fetes etc.

**Ranulf Bigland** also played at farming at Stone Dean. His mother owned the place at that time. I went there regularly to help both with farming activities, and also with the small Kennels that he ran. The idea was to get the hard work done before “Elevenses”, have coffee and white bread and cheese in the old kitchen and then get out with a gun

to train the gun dogs to retrieve etc. There I learnt how to catch rabbits with ferrets. This became handy when I won a young ferret at a local garden fete. At weekends, I went off ferreting on the Saturday morning. Having caught a rabbit or two, I took great pride in skinning and gutting the rabbits and making rabbit stew for Sunday lunch. (My mother was only too glad to hand over the cooking as it was something she hated doing!

As well as having a great friend in Ranulf, I learnt a great deal from him. He allowed me to ridge plough a field of potatoes with a horse-drawn plough, lead horses to be shod by the blacksmith at Old Beaconsfield and I helped when threshing was in progress. (Steam traction engines arrived with threshing machine and caravans in tow. They would remain camped until all the grain had been dealt with.) I also dug a Silage pit. Silage was almost unheard of at that time. It was marvelous to have the run of the Stone Dean woods.

**Mrs Pinder** was the lovely cook at Stone Dean. She was very short but made up for it by being nearly as wide! She presided over the immense coal fired cooking range and was well loved.

**Mrs Edith Bigland** owned Stone Dean. She was a very busy person, often attending meetings in London relating to Quaker activities. Her husband, a painter, had died before I knew her. A converted barn had provided his studio. Mrs Bigland was very generous and invited us to a big Garden Party each summer. Her numerous relations came from far and wide and played tennis and had cream teas. During the war, she had a number of people living in the house. Some were Jewish Refugees, others were business men who worked in London but wanted somewhere safe to sleep. One Jewish couple arrived penniless and eventually Jordans residents arranged for them to give ballroom dancing lessons in the Barn for a small payment that provided them with some pocket money. They were called **Hans and Alice Meyer**. They were very well dressed and Classy! Hans eventually became an ambassador somewhere in South America and later in Australia!

**Wilfred Bligh** was a long standing resident of the Village. His speciality was growing fruit trees. He had an orchard below "Walden" in the Wood. He was always available to give advice on pruning trees. He was interested in fringe groups like the Woodcraft Folk etc. His first wife kept one of the Nursery Schools in the Village.

**Mrs Ormerod** was another charming person. She was the House Mother at the Ark when it was first built. She did a lot for the deprived children from the East End who spent much of their childhood at the Ark. The children there mixed happily with the Village kids and went to Jordans School. She set the tone for the establishment of a real home for these children.

## THE WAR YEARS

Before the war broke out, my father Edmund Cooper was appointed "Evacuation Officer". Children from London were to be temporarily evacuated to relatively safe places in the country. Those who came to Jordans didn't stay long as the Blitz didn't start in earnest for some months. Also, just before the war started, everyone was issued with a Gas Mask. One put it on so that it covered ones face. There was a plastic "window" to see out and one breathed through a sort of perforated tin drum at the front. The gas mask was carried in a brown cardboard box with a string so that one could put it over one's shoulder. We were supposed to carry gas masks all the time. . In fact the Germans never used gas.

The day that war was declared, most people were listening to their radios wondering whether there would be an announcement. In due course we heard Mr Chamberlain's devastating news. Many people left their houses and met up to talk about it on the Green and elsewhere. My Mother was in tears as she, like so many others, had already seen something of the horrors of the Great War. Very soon we heard the Air Raid sirens start wailing. In fact it was a false alarm.

Many women joined the Red Cross and worked at Whan Cross where there was a hutted camp. Nearby, just off Welders Lane, a search light was stationed. German bombers flying overhead were relatively common place. The search light did its best to pick them out but usually they were very high and out of range. There was a small group of Home Guard who marched up to a little range at the side of the Golf Course for practice. Young men joined the forces or worked on the land. (As a Conscientious Objector, I joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit. After initial training in Birmingham, I first went to Hackney Hospital. If I got a day's leave I visited Jordans which was quiet and free of night air raids!)

When the London Blitz took place we could look out towards London and the whole sky was glowing orange. We knew that something terrible was happening. In the early years of the war one could see overhead the vapour trails of the fighters tackling the German bombers. London commuters tried to avoid the trains as they were very often badly delayed. Some were members of a car sharing - group who often found the glass in their offices shattered in the streets below. If they were less lucky, their offices were in ruins. Petrol was severely rationed so few people had cars and ,If they did, they were laid up in garages.

Jordans had its ARP Warden. (Air raid precautions Warden) We had a rota of people who, as part of the job, slept the night in the Estate Office on camp beds. They could receive telephone calls warning of possible raids. They would then turn out and check that there were no chinks of light showing from peoples' windows. (Windows all had Black

out curtains and each pane had gummed paper glued across it to reduce the splinters if it got broken by a bomb blast.)

Car headlights were screened to make them invisible from above. It made for difficult driving. We also got used to poor lighting indoors.

Jordans escaped any bombs. Once, a Land Mine came down on a parachute which got caught in the creepers on the wall of Welders House. If it had landed we would have lost all our windows. On another occasion, I watched a V1 Flying bomb pass over the Village. These contraptions made a shattering , rasping noise. It apparently came down near High Wycombe.

During the War, and for several years afterwards, there was strict food rationing. This meant that service at the shop was slowed down while ration cards were checked. In particular, sugar, butter, cheese and meat were in very short supply. Many people kept chickens or ducks so eggs were used a lot. Clothes were also rationed but that was not such a problem. Nevertheless, silk stockings were almost impossible to find and skirts etc were short. Old parachute nylon was reused for underwear and leather "elbows " were sewn on jackets as patches when holes appeared.

Jordans at that time, being relatively safe, attracted many people normally resident in London. We had distant relations with us who asked us to have an air raid shelter built. It was later used as an apple store! Many of the residents and visitors at that time were most interesting and well known. **John Macmurray**, the Scottish philosopher and his wife Betty lived in the village and sometimes gave talks in the Hall. We had **Christian Darnton**, the Music Critic, refugees from Germany and Czechoslovakia, **Reginald Jacques** and his family (Founder and conductor of the Bach Choir) lived at Long Dean House. His parties were marvellous and attended by all sorts of musicians who set quizzes. **Ronald Selby Wright** ("The Radio Padre" to the forces ) was a frequent visitor and part time resident. **Arthur Wheen** and his wife **Aldwith** lived next to the School. He was the translator of "All Quiet on the Western Front" and keeper of the library at the V & A. **Arthur Hayward** was a long time resident. He was Editor of Cassels English Dictionary with the help of John Sparkes, another resident. At "Rest Harrow", there lived **Neville Stafford** and his family. He was Coroner for West London, in spite of having only one arm and three fingers ,having been seriously wounded during the Great War. He produced plays in the Barn etc. Then there was **Montague Fordham** with his long white beard. He was a writer on Agriculture and Land Tenure etc and lived next door to Innisfree. Another retiring but most interesting resident was **William Honey**, the author of numerous books on Antique

China and Porcelain. He was keeper of Ceramics at the V. & A. His second wife, **Julie Honey** did lovely wood cuts as illustrations for numerous books. Early in the life of the village, **Bernard Sickert** was a resident. He was a painter and brother of Walter Sickert. He was unfortunately constantly short of money and borrowed from everyone he could to fund his drinking. As you will gather, we were privileged to live amongst so many interesting people

After the war, there was a thriving Music Club which held approx three concerts in the summer in the Mayflower Barn. I remember concerts by Rosalind Turek (who had to have the piano keys warmed with hotwater bottles!); Poulenc; Peter Piers and Benjamin Britain; Elizabeth Schwartzkopf etc. All these top rate musicians came because Joyce Cook had good contacts with the well known agents in London. In fact they loved coming as the venue was so different!

In the early days of the Village, the inhabitants were probably more sociable. After all there was no television and the nearest cinema was at Beaconsfield . As now, there was no pub so if a drink was needed it meant a walk over to the "Cricketers" at Seer Green. We often had parties but "Drinks " were virtually unknown! There was more likely to be singing around the piano and party games. Later people with good record players had music evenings in their houses but that ended as more hi-fi equipment became available.

Giles Cooper. 2012