

# CHAPTER 7: WITHIN LIVING MEMORY

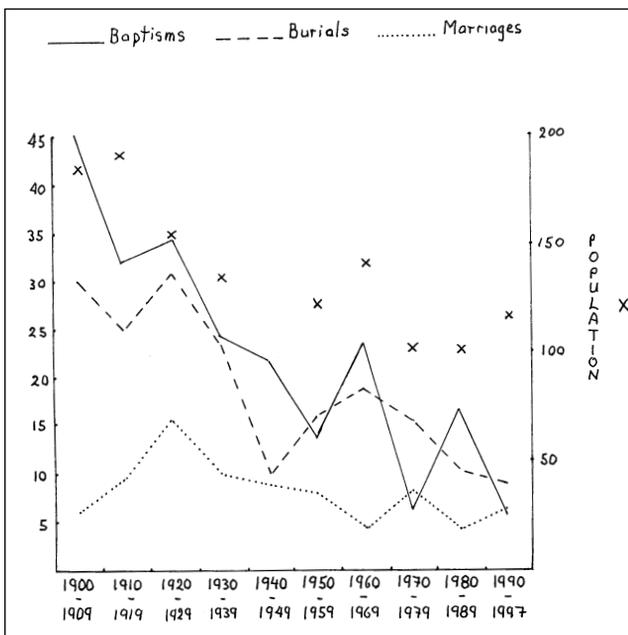
## Introduction

Wadenhoe changed little in the first half of the 20th century. The loss of 10 men in the First World War, including the Lord of the Manor, Captain George Ward Hunt, who was listed as missing presumed killed at the battle of Auber's Ridge on the Western Front on 9 May 1915, must have had an impact on the village, although this tragic waste of life was accepted more stoically than in later wars. With three working farms and the large houses there was still plenty of employment for agricultural labourers, woodmen, gardeners, grooms, house servants and estate workers, all tenants of Captain Ward Hunt, and then his son George Edgar, when he inherited the Estate at the age of 21.

Electricity came to the village in 1931 (it is not known when the gas supply ceased, although a reference in an Estate ledger for the period 1908-11 held by the Wadenhoe Trustees refers to 'gas house repairs'); each cottage was supplied with two lights, and tenants were charged 1 penny a light. Water was installed in about 1950. Mains sewage is still for the future.

The personal accounts that follow describe life as it appeared to a young girl who holidayed with relations mostly during the 1920s; to Mary, George Ward Hunt's young sister, who in 1998 is the oldest resident both in age and in the number of years spent in the village; to other youngsters here during the Second World War; and to a family who bought the first house sold by the Estate - for the princely sum of £400.

At the turn of the century, the population was 185 but by 1921 it had dropped to 131. The number continued to fall until it had reached a low of 90-100 in the 1980s. However, new life was brought into the

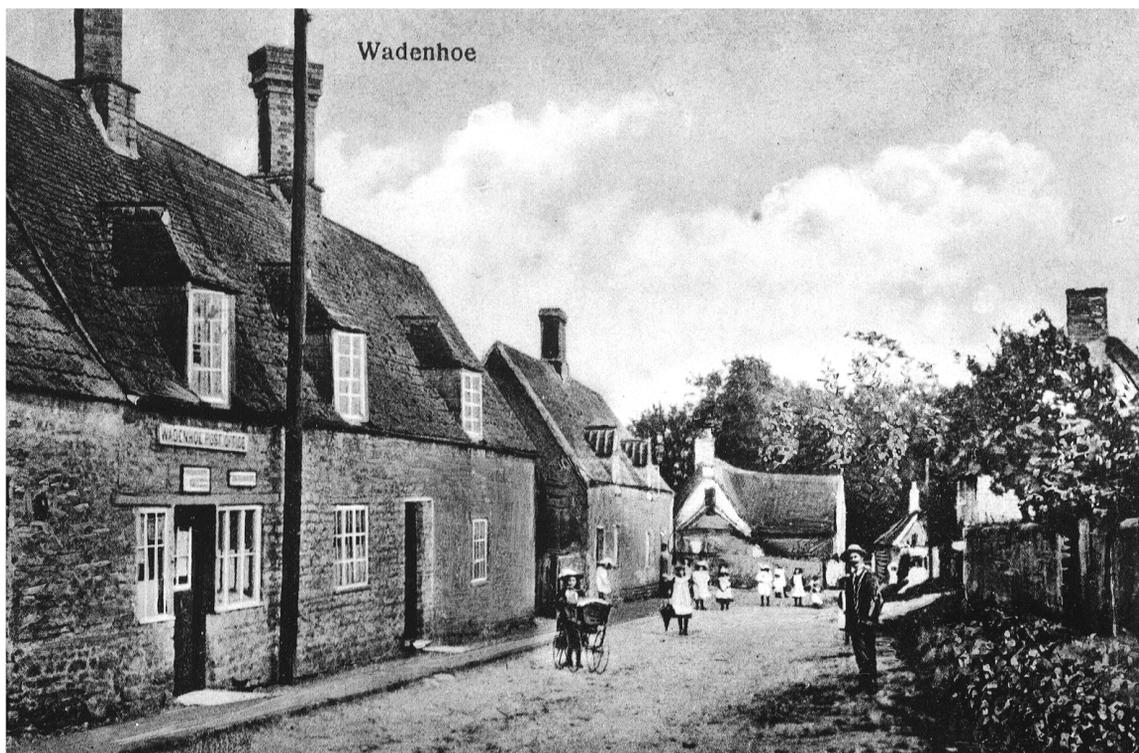


*Fig. 1:*  
The population of Wadenhoe during the 20th century, showing the numbers of baptisms, marriages and burials

into the village with the conversion of Glebe Farm in 1993 bringing the total to 118. The older tenants, who often occupied houses on their own, were gradually replaced by young families, and by 1997 there were 124, including 21 children of school age and under. This compares with 204 and 66 100 years previously, in 1891. *Fig.1* shows the population by decade, and also the numbers of baptisms, marriages and burials. There was a general steady decline between the 1900s and 1950s in all figures, except for the 1920s - following the First World War. Baptisms peaked in the 1960s and 1980s but only 10 out of 23 children baptised in the 1960s, and six out of 17 in the 1980s, were actually born in Wadenhoe. Five of the 1980s babies were grandchildren of residents whose families live elsewhere but want to maintain close links with the village, and this has also brought about an increase in the marriages, now at a similar level as at the beginning of the century.

The accounts show that until the beginning of the Second World War Wadenhoe had its own shop in addition to the Post Office cum forge (*Fig. 2*), and until the 1970s had access to a large number of mobile shops and services. Memories passed down the generations recall one or even two butchers' shops in the village, and way back, judging from its architecture, possibly another pub (in *The Cottage*). Amps and the International Stores from Oundle delivered groceries; George Cooper came round on his bicycle to collect orders for the Co-op; butchers Brown from Aldwincle and Chamberlain from Titchmarsh; Wallace from Titchmarsh had a mobile grocery in a converted bus; the Co-op and an Aldwincle baker (at first on pony and

*Fig. 2:*  
The Post Office and Main Street in the early part of the century



trap) brought bread; Booth the greengrocer came from Titchmarsh on Wednesdays; hardware from Goodmans in Oundle; fish and chips on Tuesday evenings and wet fish from Oundle; on Mondays G. Baker brought shoes from Cottons in Thrapston. Occasionally a knife-grinder called. One familiar face for over 40 years was Roy Sumner, the milkman (*see Chapter 9*). In the 1990s there are still a few villagers who rely on the Post Office shop and deliveries, particularly for groceries and greengrocery - and newspapers, from Trevor Watts in Aldwinckle. 'Reg the Veg' and a fishmonger call, and frozen gourmet oven-ready foods are bought by a few. However, most villagers rely on stocking up at the many supermarkets in the area.

Although the village was earlier regarded as being less pretty and 'desirable' than it is in the late 1990s, it has always been a close-knit community; the spirit of the 1970s and 1980s, when fund-raising for the new village hall was at its height, must have been matched 75 years earlier when 'The Hut' was erected. The great differences have come from without: first, an influx of residents with no long-established family ties, as existed well into the 20th century, with cottage tenancies being passed down through the generations; secondly, the enormous increase in the numbers of tourists. Up to the late 1960s villagers recall few 'outsiders' visiting the Kings Head. Now at weekends Church Street is bursting at its seams, although mid-week it usually subsides into something akin to its sleepy old self.

Let the following speak for themselves.

## PART I: 1914 TO THE 1960s

MABEL  
SCULTHORP

### Memories are made of this...

When I woke up I was lying on my back on a rug in the grass, looking up at the sky through the summer leaves. My mother was near, reading. My baby cousin Boykin slept in the large-wheeled pram, so I must have been about three years old. That is the very first memory I can recall. We were in Wadenhoe, where my roots are.

Daughters tend to be the repositories of family history and stories passed on by mothers in companionable chat. So it was with me, born and brought up in London. World War I was on, fathers were absent, young mothers perhaps talked all the more to their children. To me, Wadenhoe was where food parcels came from and where my mother took me to the lovely country where there were no noisy Zeppelin raids and you could wake up in the afternoon under the lime trees on the Green.

For my mother, history began with her grandmother, Kerenhappuch Briggs. If you are curious about the name, see the *Book of Job, Chapter 42, verses 13-15* - and wonder at Job's regard for women. Kerenhappuch Briggs gave her daughter Sarah's daughter Ellen (Nellie, my mother) John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* inscribed: 'It's a very good book and Granmother (*sic*) hopes you will read it till you are an old woman.' I have it now and, as an old woman in my turn, can read it still.

As children, my mother and her brothers and sisters used to stay with their grandmother in Wadenhoe, in her cottage on the corner of Pilton Lane - one of two cottages that eventually fell down (*Fig. 3*). Great-grandmother was evidently sparing with her sugar, but when the children asked for more she inventively assured them she had this spoon, bought in 'Harborough market, that had magical qualities. If you stirred your tea with it, it would sweeten it. Apparently the trick worked!

*Fig. 3:*  
The cottages that were  
demolished, Main Street



Kerenhappuch was the herbwoman of the village (*Fig. 4*), forever gathering quantities of selected wild plants with which she made brews to help neighbours when they were ailing. She would sometimes be called upon to nurse in Lord Lilford's family. She was

finally found dead on the Pilton Lane, where she had been picking wayside flowers or berries. Hers was the last generation of women to be seen sitting outside their cottages in order to have light enough to make pillow-lace. The shuttles they used would often have mottoes engraved on them, and it was quite the thing to collect those that recorded the names and dates of murderers hanged in Bedford Gaol.

Kerenhappuch had one son, William, my Great-Uncle Bill, and daughters Ellen and Lucy, my Great-Aunts, and Sarah, my Grandmother. Great-Uncle Bill spent all his life in Wadenhoe, living in the cottage just past the Post Office, with the smithy at the back - an interesting place for us children to hang around, watching the blacksmith building up his furnace, seeing him heat a piece of iron until it was white-hot before being beaten on the anvil into horse-shoes to be hammered on to the horny hoofs of the shire horses standing by. There was a sizzling sound, smoke rising, the pungent smell of burnt horn as the shoe was deftly applied to the underside of the hoof and the nails hammered home so that it sat correctly. Uncle Bill was head horseman to Farmer Reggie Childs, so I got to know all those shire horses well as they worked in the fields. I had a favourite to ride home bareback - Captain. At village funerals Great-Uncle Bill cut an outstanding figure, for he wore a frock-coat of another era. The long black garment (with tails) had by then turned green with age: it was a hand-me-down from the old king, Edward VII, via Bill's son Horace, who had been a coachman to His Majesty.

Great-Aunt Lucy married one of the French family and lived in Aldwinckle. Their children were wild, and grew up strikingly gypsy-like. After three generations I can still identify the French features. Jack was a well-known poacher: his hares, rabbits, pheasants and partridges fed his family, neighbours gave him good money for them, and the landowners never begrudged him.

Great-Aunt Ellen (Nell) married Joseph Julyan of Aldwinckle. When they moved to Wadenhoe they lived in the double-fronted cottage next to the School House. Joe was a bespoke shoemaker. He gave my mother (his niece) six pairs as a wedding present. He worked in the window of the big room on the right of the doorway in order to have the daylight. I loved watching him at work, specially fascinated to see him spit out the nails he kept in his mouth, always ready and handy. He was an avid reader and a political firebrand, it was thought, much respected by the men who still had little or no reading ability in spite of the Education Act of 1870. They would come to the shop and go through to have news read out to them by Joe, particularly at the time of the Boer War, 1899-1902, which was the cause of great anxiety and interest. At that time news would have been stale by the time newspapers were delivered in Wadenhoe.

Great-Aunt Nell had the corresponding room on the left as the village shop (*Fig. 5*). It had stone flags, and a store area before you reached the back door. There was a counter at rightangles to the window and shelves to the right. Naturally, she kept everything housewives needed, hugger-mugger. The foodstuffs - sugar, tea and so on - came in big sacks, somebody bringing them round once a month



*Fig. 4:*  
Wadenhoe's herbwoman, Kerhappuch Briggs, by the front door of one of the demolished cottages in Main Street, 1920s

with a van and horse. Salt also came by the stone in sacks and there was always a lot of soda - even today I believe in soda! As well as household goods there were toys, little dolls - girls were much occupied with dolls in those days. The shop opened every day except Sunday, but didn't stay open late, nor did Great-Aunt Julyan open upon demand if someone had run out of sugar. [The till from the shop is still in use in Henry Watts & Son at Aldwinckle, and contains a till receipt dated 1897.]

*Fig. 5:*  
Ellen Julyan's shop in  
Church Street



As a young child I was only interested in the big jars of boiled sweets (bonbons), licorish all-sorts, stripey bulls'eyes, sherbert, gobstoppers, little round flat sweets bearing mottoes and messages such as 'Love is blind', 'True to you always'. Temptingly, there was a barrel of broken biscuits, but even as one of the family I had no privileges, and with no money I was not a customer. But her youngest grandchild, my second-cousin and best friend Connie, lived with her and sometimes the two of us would do a little job for her and might be rewarded. 'Thou shalt not steal' was just one of the Ten Commandments we well knew we were committed to, but just occasionally it may have been broken - like the biscuits!

Kerenhappuch's youngest daughter was Sarah, my grandmother. She married Cornelius Britten, who came from Little Billing. His first job was as a nurse in Northampton Asylum, where, years before, the observant and sensitive poor John Clare, the Northamptonshire poet of the countryside, was detained. But Cornelius (Neal) had the ambition to better himself, and was accepted into the Metropolitan Police, so the family moved to a police-house in the East End of London. By 1888 he was in the C.I.D. in the hazardous and unsuccessful hunt for the original Jack the Ripper, disguised as a good-for-nothing frequenter of pubs. He took retirement at an early age on a good pension, moved back to Wadenhoe with my grandmother to live in the left-hand house of the middle pair in the 19th century row on the Green. They had three sons and four daughters, of whom my mother Ellen (Nellie) was one. This was my family connection with Wadenhoe. My father William (Will) Sculthorp came from Kettering. He met my mother at a birthday party for a schoolfriend in Aldwinckle, Horace Julyan; also at the party was Horace's Wadenhoe cousin Nellie. At the time my parents met, my

father was 16 and my mother 14. In their day teenage parties were certainly not raves, but were truly jolly affairs.

The young men of Kettering in those days found employment with good prospects in shoe-making, then in its heyday, and Will had been an apprentice, rising to status of clicker, one of the 'aristocrats of the craft', they have been described. He too wanted to better himself, so found his opening in London. I was therefore a London child. But from the infants' school on I spent all my holidays, and convalesced after childish ailments, in Wadenhoe (*Fig. 6*) in that house on the Green. The journey took several hours. The first hour was spent walking (with our suitcases) to catch the tram from the High Cross to Liverpool Street Station. A steam train took us to Northampton, where we had to wait for another train to Thorpe, the nearest station for Wadenhoe. Outside was a neat little pony and trap, Mr Musk the Aldwinckle baker, at the horse's head. As I stepped on to the small round iron step at the back the whole cart tipped down so that I could climb in. There was a bench on each side for us, and Mr Musk sat up in front, reins and whip in hand. We never minded the weather although the trap was open to the elements. The drive started well with the ups and downs over the little bridges, on between trim, well-layered hedges and verges a riot of flowers. We had to splash through the ford on the road past Aldwinckle, and then there was competition to see who should be the first to spot Wadenhoe Church across the fields. Only once did Mr Musk fail us. That was Christmastide 1928. I was 15, and I was to be my Uncle Frank's bridesmaid when he married his Scots bride. In those days the Nene flooded the whole countryside in winter, and that year Mr Musk was himself marooned in Aldwinckle. We had a frightening walk ahead of us, made just possible thanks to the waist-high white planks set up on the side of the lanes, some to be seen to this day. It was already dark, and my father, my mother and I each had a suitcase to carry. The memory is sharp still. The black waters swirled menacingly, almost lapping the boards. With only a shoulder-high wooden rail to guide and help us balance, we managed the nightmarish walk.

Wadenhoe was deep in snow, but the village lads worked in gangs to dig out a walkable path for the bridal party to reach the Church for the wedding. The next day the bride and groom took the corrugated iron roof off the chicken house and we all went up the Church Hills and tobogganed down to the river. Exhilarating! In those days there were no bushes on the lower slope, but the trees by the river were the ones there today, now grown very considerably.

Christmas in the village was just an extra-jolly time - nothing was elaborate. The home would have local holly tucked behind the pictures, a good bunch of mistletoe inside the front door. Few cards were sent or received: the mantelpiece sufficed for the display. Families with children would have paperchains hung across the room, made by the children from strips of coloured paper. My favourite event would be the waits, the group heard singing carols as they approached. At the sound, the front door would be opened wide and the children would stand there and listen to a whole carol before the waits were



*Fig. 6:*  
Mabel Sculthorp in 1921  
with the Briggs's cottage  
behind

invited in and given home-made wine and a mincepie. I don't remember any collecting-box. The village owned a set of handbells (what became of them?). The handbell ringers had a bell on its leather thong slipped over the fingers of each hand, and they read from sheets of paper with bell-numbers on it for each tune. I was allowed to have an easy bell, my number would be 2, and I would come in when it was my turn. As I think of it now, my mind recalls the tuneful harmonies, with their clear, sharp timbre. Great-Uncle Bill was known for his folk-songs, and was easily prevailed upon to give a solo, eyes closed and a hand cupped behind his ear.

For Christmas dinner we had a goose and dumplings, followed by the plump round pudding, numbers of which had been boiled in the copper. Only home-made wine was ever drunk. The men would be challenged to drink the parsnip wine, potent as any whisky. Flowers made lighter wine. Wines were made in the copper, where maybe yesterday the family wash was boiled. The next stage would be storing the wine in large open-topped earthenware pancheons standing on the cool stone floor of the walk-in larder, topped with squares of yeast-spread toast until the leaven had worked to render the wine ready for bottling. An exciting event might then alarm the women and children when corks could pop and bottles shatter.

Before the 1920s there was no village hall, so gatherings of family and friends were held in the bigger cottages, where furniture was pushed to the walls and the hand-made rag rugs taken up to leave the stone-flagged floor free for dancing. Our family always had a piano (with a pair of brass candle-holders on the front), very often used to show off the children's 'pieces', to accompany the parents' Edwardian ballads or to lead hymn-singing on Sundays. For dancing the waltz or the veleta - or for the very latest, the charleston - the piano was used. For the older round-dances like Sir Roger de Coverley or the lancers, it could be the fiddle played by Joe Chew from down the lane. In the lancers there was the exhilaration of a fast-skipping circle where the exertions of the men could literally sweep the ladies off their feet. We loved that.

When people came to tea or for the evening, ladies were taken upstairs to leave their coats on the bed. Below the marble-topped washstand, the ornate china chamber-pot needed no explanation. Ladies calling would never be expected to take the walk up the garden path to use the privy. For none of the cottages had running water, let alone bathrooms. Children like me enjoyed using the pump on the village green or going to the spring down the lane, where you had to kneel to take off the flat stone cover, lower your bucket the length of your arm to catch the bubbling water at the bottom, then heave it up and carry it home. At my grandparents' house the privy was across the brick yard at the back, next to the barn. It was a two-seater with a low-level child's seat next to the grownups' one. The plain deal tops were spotlessly scrubbed, but the bottomless pit noisome. It was the children's task to cut squares from newspapers and string them up to hang on a nail. Every so often there would be a secret happening in the night. Someone from the village (I never knew who) would come

round with a cart and dig out and take away the 'nightsoil'. I think this must have been a free service, but the man would be given a packet of cigarettes before he started the job.

Yet Wadenhoe had had some up-to-date facilities back in the 19th century: a telegraph office was installed in the little Post Office by the Squire Ward Hunt when Chancellor of the Exchequer, making Wadenhoe the first village to have this modern facility, and a gasholder was constructed at the bottom of the village by the gate to the Church Hills, with gas pipes running up through the village street to provide lighting. Some of the iron brackets are yet to be seen on some of the old houses, but by my time, although old people still called Church Street 'Gas Lane', there was no street lighting at all, and the cottages were lit by candles and oil-lamps. The size and design of your lamp and its glass chimney and shade was used as a status symbol.

In my parents' time Admiral Culme-Seymour lived in Wadenhoe House (although he owned Rockingham Castle), and in my young days it was rented by Mrs and Miss MacQueen. As a Girl Guide from London, I was welcome to join in the activities of the Guides in Wadenhoe, run by one of the two ladies, and meeting in the Big House.

Mr Newby counted as 'gentry' too, as he was the parson. He and his wife lived in Pilton Rectory, and from their maids I heard of the secret underground tunnel used by Catesby and Tresham, Northamptonshire landowners, and leading members of the Gunpowder Plot, who sometimes visited the house. To be in service at the Rectory was a very desirable placement for Wadenhoe girls on leaving school. Mrs Newby demanded the highest standards and the housekeeper, cook and chambermaid trained the young girls who would eventually succeed them. The master and mistress were benign employers, respected, even remembered with affection. When the servants married they would be given table silver - and could themselves run a home efficiently.

Mr Newby was an easy-going churchman, conducting with simplicity the orthodox services of the Book of Common Prayer, well-known and comforting to all who had been through the village school system. Some of the men might well have been deviants politically, but few would wish to depart from the church's teaching or practice. I always enjoyed the morning visits the Newbys made to my grandparents. If 'Parson' Newby came alone, he would be on horseback, throwing the reins over the pump outside on the Green. If Mr and Mrs Newby both came, it would be with their horse and open carriage, Mrs Newby taking the reins. Dressed as she was in a fine full-skirted black satin dress and with a black wide-brimmed hat secured to her abundant hair with a jet hairpin, she was to me Jane Austen's Lady Catherine de Bourgh. On their arrival, my grandmother would bring out fruit-cake and madeira wine - she knew what was fitting.

In the 1920s the school prepared the pupils appropriately for the limited life that lay ahead. Mr Newby was a frequent visitor: it was his duty to see that the children were taught the scriptures and knew their Catechism. Old Miss Brittle also taught social manners. The children knew that when they met the young Ward Hunts they should greet

them as Master George and Miss Mary and the girls should make a little 'bob' (curtsey). The next teacher was Miss Jones (teachers never had Christian names), who capably took on single-handed some 20 or so pupils of all ages. Before they left they could reckon in their heads and read and write. Miss Jones's discipline was so good that just before noon she could nip across to the School House to put her potatoes on.

At some time it was agreed that a second teacher was needed, and the younger Miss Childs from the Mill came. It was a very sad day when the school closed. Much of value was lost, much more than education.

Schooling was imposed on all children in 1876, but I was told that long before that Great-Aunt Nell held a kind of dame-school in her home, apparently only for girls, whose parents paid a few coppers a week for them to be minded and to learn the rudiments of reading so as to be able to follow the reading of the First and Second Lessons at Matins on their Bibles.

Enjoyable activities that could absorb everyone were folk songs and dances or a school play. There was a pantomime for Christmas, and for Mayday a May Queen and maypole dancing. I can remember when Rose Morehen was Queen of the May (*see Chapter 5*). The flowers came from the fields and cottage gardens, and boys and girls danced round the Maypole to the tune of 'Come lasses and lads, Take leave of your dads, And away to the Maypole hie'.

In summer there was the fete at Pilton Rectory, with a flower show and a few stalls. And there was cricket down by the river, the ball often being hit into the water! Sid Smith was the captain, a fine upstanding man and a good bowler. All the youngsters swam in the river. The big boys swam in the lock, and I would undress to my knickers and climb down with them. The small boys were taught how to swim the hard way, by throwing them in by the Black Bridge. We also swam near Lilford Bridge, where there was a kind of shed where one could change.

My knowledge and love of nature stemmed mainly from my grandfather, who let me share his walks from a very early age. The summer when I was eight we had been given a holiday task: to produce a collection of wild flowers, pressed and mounted and named. My exercise book won the prize, a proper grown-up book of wild flowers. Grandpa called all umbels keks - as Shakespeare did. He did not seem very knowledgeable about the less common trees and birds, but a rare treat was when he took me up the lane out of the village to the spinney at dusk to hear the nightingale. A favourite walk was up the Green Lane leading to Wadenhoe Woods. There were often gypsies with their caravans, stopping for a few days before moving on, horses tethered nearby and tripods with cauldrons suspended over their fires, full of bubbling stews. The villagers did not look kindly on gypsies, and Great-Aunt Nell watched them like a hawk if they came into her shop. But my grandfather, always more the countryman than the former policeman wise to all their knavish tricks, would stop and chat with them, and I might be taken to see inside a well-kept and colourful traditional caravan-home. Real gypsies had their own values. The last

time I saw a real gypsy family with their horse-drawn caravan was in 1995. They were camped by the wayside on Dr Miriam Rothschild's land at Ashton, and hoping to sell a few pegs and bunches of heather. I was glad to pass the time of day with them. A dying breed, they have little in common with the modern New Age 'Travellers'.

I was the only grandchild privileged to go with Grandpa when he went fishing, with his rod and tin of carefully-tied flies, on various stretches of the local Nene. I was not the least bit interested in fishing, but it was very pleasant for me just to sit quietly watching, or maybe reading my book. I got to know well the water-meadows over the bridge at the Mill. To the left along the river, before you reached the fence to the next meadow where the Black Bridge is, there used to be a small island in the stream where you could get across if you knew how. It was there that I saw for the first time a very damp duckling peck away from the inside of the eggshell until the hole was large enough for it to struggle out. A big experience for a town child.

Natural selection determined the two or three groupings of friends among the village children. I was absorbed by second-cousins and their friends. We were free as the air - after we had done the small tasks expected of us: pumping and carrying the water, feeding the hens, running errands, fetching the milk, being home in good time for meals or bedtime. We knew these were duties and responsibilities not to be shirked. And we often banded together to help each other and to enjoy the company.

Fetching the milk was my favourite chore. Round about four in the afternoon we would call for each other, and girls and boys together would saunter down to the Mill, each carrying an enamel or tin milkcan with a fitting lid, that would swing on a wire loop handle. At the Mill we would go up the steps at the back and wait our turn for the elder Miss Childs to fill our can. We were rather subdued, for that Miss Childs had a waspish tongue and would brook no disorderliness. On the way back we must be careful not to spill one drop. Imagine, then, when I was first challenged to swing my can full circle at arm's length. The boys showed me how, but I was scared and knew not the mysterious laws of physics. What a marvellous trick - and I could do it too!

Occasional shopping in Oundle was a bit of an adventure on foot - there was no bus and we had to wait until we were 11 or 12 before we earned or deserved a bicycle. We would set out with shopping baskets and list. With friends, the four-mile walk could be enjoyed, but the walk back with heavy baskets, less so. But the thought of a substantial mid-day dinner was spur enough.

Until we had bikes we only knew as much of local geography as we could walk, but that knowledge was detailed and thorough. Even just outside on the Green we found simple amusements; picking daisies and making daisy chains to wear as long necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings or coronets. We 'twizzled' over and over the rails around the Green until we were dizzy. The railings are exactly the same now as they were in the 1920s. Then the Green was a short cut, through the posts in front of the two houses at the end of the Victorian row and

down to Pudding Lane - only in my day it was never called Pudding Lane, but Back Lane. Perhaps 'Pudding' had some association with the very good cook living there, who I called Aunty Alice (Morehen). Another amusement was climbing trees; when I wanted to be alone I would climb the hawthorn tree and read - out of sight to passers-by - occasionally teasing them by little remarks. Only the boys managed the tall walnut tree.

Picnics arranged by the big girls caused anticipatory excitement, yet often the long walks would seem like fatigue-marches to young stragglers handicapped by their provisions, which often enough led to disappointment when they proved to be the standard jam-sandwiches, slice of cake and an apple. Thirst was a threat, as bottles were too heavy to take. But when we went to my favourite picnic spot, after we had gone through Farmer Childs's two large fields at the top of the lane out of the village, we came to Wadenhoe Lodge, a usual port of call. We were always welcomed with refreshments and a sit-down before going through Wadenhoe Woods to emerge in the field where was our goal, the ruins of Lyveden Bield. We were sure that it was a secret nobody else knew. That was before the National Trust labelled it as Lyveden New Building. Only cows shared our ruins, and, idly scratching one day in a recess between the stones, I found a Roman coin.

Sometimes the picnics and the Oundle shopping were arranged for us by our families, who wanted us well out of the way when a pig was being killed. The pigs in a sty at the bottom of the long garden and a piece of ground at the back of cottages were important to the family. Cured hams often had to be hung from the ceiling round the kitchen walls, shrouded in newspapers. My grandfather told me that pigs were *not* dirty animals, and as a little child I remember being put on the back of ours for a short ride.

Bicycles to us were quite as emancipating then as the car became to us all later. I had dreamed of the day when I could go to Little Gidding, where Nicholas Ferrar established his community, to Helpstone to see John Clare's cottage, to Wansford for the source of the joke of the boy on the haycock, to Fotheringhay where one of my romanticised heroines Mary Stuart ended her days. When we cycled to Fotheringhay, we would go to the back door of Castle Farm to ask permission to go up the Castle Mound. The very old lady who came to the door would say 'Yes, if you're good'. That 'very old lady' died only very recently, and I now always stay at the Castle Farm, where her grand-daughter makes most welcome visitors who enjoy the quiet places listed in 'Staying off the Beaten Track'. During World War II I was evacuated to Cambridge and my bicycle enabled me still to get to Wadenhoe. But now my car allows me to come every year from my home in Devon.

Through memory I feel as Martial wrote in 86 AD: 'To be able to enjoy one's past life is to live twice.'

## Mary Ward Hunt's story

In the early part of this century, Wadenhoe was very different from what it is today, for then it was a working village, the population was larger, and formed a very close-knit community. But just as now, it was a very lively place. Socials were held regularly in the village hall, an ex-army hut erected on the site of the former gasometer constructed in my great grandfather's time when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer in Disraeli's Cabinet. At Christmas, the handbell ringers would come round, and on occasions the 'mummers' or ploughboys. Hounds used to meet each year at the front of Wadenhoe House. At the bottom of the Wadenhoe House Park was a well-kept cricket pitch complete with pavilion, and matches were played on Saturdays in the summer (*Fig. 7*), wives and mothers helping with the teas. There was also the occasional gymkhana and other events in the park. Before the advent of the village hall in 1924, the school was used for village affairs, and Childs' Barn cleared for larger events, like theatricals.

## MARY WARD HUNT

*Fig. 7:*  
The Wadenhoe cricket team  
in the late 1920s  
*Back row:* Charlie Smith  
(Aldwinckle);  
Reg Curtis; George Evans;  
Harold Bigley; Reg Wagstaffe  
(umpire, Thorpe);  
Percy Briggs; Peter Andrews;  
Jim Head; Tommy French;  
(Aldwinckle);  
*Front row:* Ted Upchurch;  
Bert Bonner; Sid Smith  
(fast bowler)



In the Chancellor's day the village had street lighting from the gasometer, barges carrying the coal down the river from Thorpe Station. The Chancellor built several new cottages and pulled down others that were dotted about, in his desire to make Wadenhoe into a model village. What is now Dovecote House was a very well-equipped Laundry for the use of Wadenhoe House - though Mrs Evans the laundress in the 1920s would always obligingly wash and iron any special fabrics taken to her. The Chancellor also built North Lodge, and the row on the Green, enclosing the green paddock and planting the avenue of lime trees. Thankfully the 17th century Pudding Lane cottages were spared as he died suddenly before his plans were

completed. Even so, many old cottages have since been lost - those in the paddock where Cergne House now stands, others behind the Post Office, and the beautiful thatched cottage on the corner of the Pilton Road turning. Way back a cottage stood on the corner of the Green, and another opposite, a George III penny being found in the foundations when the council took part of the paddock to widen the road.

One curious factor of village life in the early days was that the men of the village were known by their nicknames; as so many of them were either Briggs or Morehens, I suppose it was a means of identifying them. Bird names were widespread in the area: Morehen, Pheasant, Partridge. Wadenhoe itself was known locally as 'Wadna' and down the ages it has been 'Wadenhoo' and 'Wadenhowe'. I have also seen it written in an old book as 'Wadenho' or 'Wadna', so maybe the locals were not so wrong after all. In my youth, the streets were 'Up Street' and 'Down Street', the latter the present-day Church Street. In the last century a fair was held in this street, but there seems to be no record as to when it died out.

I was born at the Old Rectory on the Pilton Road in 1913, a house haunted by the sound of footsteps on the front stairs. I would lie awake in terror until my mother came up to bed. Since then I have heard of another child who also heard footsteps, so it was not a figment of my imagination! The house was very primitive - no bathroom, no electricity, just oil lamps, and water pumped from a well in the back yard. My brother and I shared a tin bath filled with rainwater full of 'wrigglies' (mosquito larvae). A Valor oil stove which made lovely patterns on the ceiling was used to warm any cold rooms, and a fire with a high guard graced our playroom. Clothes would be aired on the fireguard, and the garden provided most of our food. Like the other villagers, we too kept pigs and poultry, and grew all our own fruit and vegetables.

Like most children, we had no pocket money, but if I was given the odd penny, I would spend it at Mrs Julyan's shop down Church Street, a veritable emporium in miniature [the Post Office only sold sweets and cigarettes], Mrs Julyan's motto being 'if I haven't got it, it will be here next day'. Each week the paraffin man came round, and a very smart grocer's cart. There was a local butcher and baker, and a carrier's cart. Later, this was followed by a bus once a week to the nearest town, Oundle.

Next to Mrs Julyan was the School House, or St Giles Cottage as it was known, where Miss Brittle, and later Miss Jones, lived. As children, we used to get our spaniel dog as muddy as possible and then push him through the front door. A favourite trick of the village boys would be to attach a piece of string to her door latch, as described by Violet Mills (*Chapter 5*). At that time there were some 60 children in the school, and I can still remember, at a very young age, sitting at a little desk being taught to write by making 'pot hooks' on lined paper, Wadenhoe being the only village that took children in school as young as two or three.

Most children had to leave school by the age of 14 to go to work, the boys on the farms or under head gardeners at the big houses, and the girls into service or to live with relatives who had no children. A few bright children obtained scholarships to Grammar Schools at Kettering or Wellingborough, going on the local train each day from Thorpe. Where parents could manage it, their children would be sent to boarding school, where the unfortunate inmates (myself included) were entirely cut off from home - letters had to be left open to be read by the staff, and the sleeping arrangements were cramped and primitive. As for the food, the treat for tea was broken biscuits from Huntly and Palmer's factory in the nearby town!

The village was not as pretty as it is today. The road verges were rough grass, and there were no front gardens - with the amount of livestock passing up and down they would soon have been trampled upon. Cottage gardens were strictly for vegetable and fruit growing, and nearly every household had a pig and a few hens, and sometimes rabbits as well. Pig sties and hen runs took up a lot of space, and the allotments in Pilton Road were available to everyone, each 20 poles in size. When the produce was ready, small boys from the large families would trundle down with little wooden trucks running on pram wheels to bring home the vegetables. Formerly, I was told, the allotments had been behind North Lodge and a road led through the field to gravel workings by the river, the remains of which can still be seen. All timber was grown on the estate, and woodmen were employed to look after the woods, the house now known as Wadenhoe Lodge being originally three woodmen's cottages.

There was no water laid on in the houses, no bathrooms, and indoor sanitation was practically unknown. Every cottage, and indeed the bigger houses as well, obtained drinking water from a well or spring, and the fields and farms were supplied with water from the reservoir on the top road, fed by the ditches bounding the fields. Oil lamps and candles were the source of light in the winter and all food was cooked on open ranges. The village had its own nursing association, and the babies were taken to Wadenhoe House to be weighed. Some families had lived in the same cottage for up to two centuries. Where there were big families life must have been very cramped, but there was little illness among the children, and if they lived largely on a diet of bread and dripping, fat bacon, and milk straight from the cow - foods which today are supposed to give us heart attacks - all I can say is that most of the residents lived to a ripe old age.

Surely the answer must be that children had to walk everywhere. From the outlying keepers' and woodmen's lodges they walked two or three miles to school and back in all weathers. Sadly, those lodges and houses, like the village school, are no more and the freedom of woodland walks on their own can no longer be enjoyed by today's youngsters. The fields were crisscrossed with footpaths where the men took short cuts to work. Cattle bought at markets had to be walked home and there were special drovers' routes, hence names to fields like *Northampton Way* [outside the parish, between Tresmass Corner and

Bearshanks Lane, *see Chapter 1*]. The roads were made up of crushed stone rolled in by great steam rollers, and a roadman was employed to clean the roads and mow the verges. The railway station at Thorpe was a lifeline to most of the County, the train stopping at every little village en route. To get to the station people walked across the meadows. There was so much to see as the seasons came and went: abundant wildflowers, bird nests, the ploughing teams and steam engines that used a wire hawser between two engines to pull a plough up and down on the heavy land. The same engines worked the chestnut paling fencing machine in the Estate Yard, which also housed a bier to convey coffins up the Church Hill. One custom, thankfully now no more, was to invite everyone, including children, to view the body when someone died. Afterwards the funeral cortege would struggle up the Church Hill path with the coffin on the hand-pushed bier.

The farms were occupied by resident farmers. There was a Shire Horse Stud at the Home Farm (*Fig. 8*), and the stallions used to be taken up to London to be shown at what was then the Shire Horse Show at Islington. Old Sir Michael Culme-Seymour (The Admiral) was the tenant of Wadenhoe House and also of Glebe Farm, and kept up to 13 hunters. He was a great character, going about in shorts in all weathers, and refusing to have any form of heating in the house, except for the odd fire for the benefit of visitors. The Admiral, and his old stud groom, when they were both well past retirement age, decided to bike to London one day, though whether they ever got there history does not record! The Mill Farm provided butter and milk - at a penny a can. After the Second World War I became the milkman and supplied the village with Jersey milk, butter, and Devonshire cream.

*Fig. 8:*  
One of the shire horses, with  
William (Button) Briggs,  
early 1900s, outside the  
South Lodge (Round  
House), Wadenhoe House



Following the Jersey herd (*see Chapter 1*), and their eventual sale, came the Riding School. This grew into quite a large establishment with a house (No. 10) for resident pupils. It lasted for around 30 years, until I replaced it with a studfarm with the prefix 'Wadenhoe' (*Fig. 9*). After a few trial years, a chance meeting resulted in an agreement to specialise in Welsh driving ponies, of top breeding, and all in matched pairs. They became internationally known, and



*Fig. 9:*  
Mary and her prize-winning  
Welsh stallion, "Charles"

appeared regularly on television and at Wembley - a far cry from the days when at the age of ten I used to drive my pony, given to me as unridable, in a borrowed trap, and learnt the hard way! I even sometimes drove myself to school, as after leaving the village school I graduated to one in Oundle run by a Russian. She was a brilliant teacher, and believed in the cane. The only time I felt the ruler was for not being able to do a long division sum, as the village school did not run to mathematics! Her teaching was so good that I arrived at boarding school a year ahead of my time, and took care never to default again. My mother also made me have elocution lessons to stop me lapsing into the Northamptonshire accent, spoken by all the children in the village.

My mother, having lost her second husband, decided in the 1940s to restore the Manor Farm House, which was in a bad state and used partly for animal feed sacks. It was also very much a working farm with bullock yards adjoining the house, and a large bullock shed backing onto the paddock behind, remaining like this until the 1980s. The stonemason, who lived in Titchmarsh, uncovered the beautiful Tudor fireplaces, along with the timber struts and cubby-holes, one of those in a bedroom having a hole in the wall to take a musket. There were also hollow-sounding walls, obviously priest holes, and a beam with 'Jehovah' carved upside down, and the date 1593 - indicating that there may have been religious persecution at the time. At one time it was the most important house in the village, complete with deer park.

The Mill in my childhood was put back into working order by Captain Wilfred Ward Hunt, to provide stoneground flour and pig meal (*see Chapter 1*). Mill Lane was therefore a busy stretch of road, and the mill remained in operation on and off until the outbreak of the Second World War, when the machinery was removed and the old place sadly fell into disuse. The children of the village used to play in the Mill Tail, where the reeds were kept cut, and the water clean and clear. In hot weather we would swim or fish in the Kingfisher Pool or between the lock gates, or, when we found an old boat with a hole in the bottom, see how far we could go before it sank. A great delight was to see how many eels we had caught after setting the eel trap in the Mill Race. A few people had rowing boats, otherwise all was peace - that is, until in his twenties my brother and his ex-navy Estate man built a motor boat with an Austin Seven engine in it, to roar up and down the river. Sadly it met its demise on Jubilee Day, when 'dressed overall' it came majestically down the river and sank in full view of the village hall where a dance was taking place. That was the end of our boat, as it could not be repaired; how we missed it, though I'm sure other river users were delighted to see it go.

One house that has had a chequered career is The Cottage on the corner of Pilton Road and Mill Lane (*Chapter 3*). Once a farmhouse, it then became a butcher's shop, and when no longer needed as such an extra room and short passage was added by the Estate stonemason. It was then divided into two cottages, the front half being the home of the Wadenhoe House butler, and the back half the cowman's cottage. Finally, it was turned back into one house, only to be pulled apart again when it was finally sold in the 1970s.

Like most villages, Wadenhoe was full of characters. One old chap who lived in the other half of School House, when it was divided into two single cottages, always dressed in a frock coat, and rumour maintained that he ate rats! Another old fellow living in a tumbledown cottage where Cergne House now stands used to sleep, it was said, on the floor on sacks and old coats, and when carted off to the Workhouse came back again in the night. These old villagers were a law unto themselves, and I have a faint recollection of a man found living in our tool shed up the garden. Presumably he only appeared at night! The estate office and the adjoining room, later to become the Reading Room for the men of the village, and then a craft shop, was occupied for some years after 1900 by an insane woman and her daughter. She was rather a dangerous character, and one day threw a rice pudding over the parson's wife, and also attacked a neighbour going to the shared well for water, ripping a new blouse off the poor woman. As a child I was terrified of passing her garden.

The parson, the Rev. Newby, who lived at Pilton, was a great character, and always came to Wadenhoe Church in an old-fashioned cab. I can still recollect its musty smell when we were offered a lift home. His wife, who was great fun and full of wit, always wore a Gainsborough hat, and never changed to fashion. She used to write amusing skits on the rural world about her (*see Chapters 1 and 5*), and never chided her husband when he sold her jewelry and valuables to

antique dealers and had fake copies made! He had a wonderful collection of birds' eggs in a beautiful cabinet, and I often wonder what became of it. He was quite an ornithologist, so I imagine the collection went to a museum.

One memory from the First World War that has never left me, even though I was only about three or four at the time, was of waking to hear men's voices in the garden and seeing, out of the window, some large snuffling dogs. On asking why they were there, I was told they were searching for a German prisoner of war. I was horrified and hoped they would never find him. During this war nearly every able-bodied man in the village was killed, including my father. Their names are recorded on the memorial at the corner of the Green. This left a terrible hole in the village and it was never quite the same again.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, there came a change to village life. The countryside around was circled by anti-aircraft batteries and searchlights, and soon there were American troops everywhere. In addition, Lilford Hall was turned into an American hospital and regular dances were held in Wadenhoe village hall for the airmen from Molesworth and patients and staff from Lilford. Wadenhoe House was leased to provide flats for Service families. This arrangement continued until the 1970s, many of the tenants in the later days playing a full part in village life.

To add to the hazards of wartime life in the village, the RAF had a practice bombing range near Wadenhoe Little Wood. Unfortunately their aim was sometimes not very accurate, and Wadenhoe House and Pudding Lane were among the sufferers. It all added to the various excitements in the village, which during the early years between the wars had been provided by the occasional bolting Shire horse colliding with another in the street, a bull breaking loose, and small aircraft running out of petrol and landing in the meadows, their pilots asking if anyone owned a car and could give them a can of petrol. Obviously there was no such thing as aviation fuel!

It cannot be said that Wadenhoe has ever been a quiet backwater this century, even if earlier it was not the picture postcard village that it is now!

## TED BRIGGS

(taped interview  
between Trevor Hold  
and Ted in 1972)

## Village traditions before the First World War<sup>1</sup>

**TB:** I'll tell you one tradition they kept up for years: Plough-Witching Night. Have you heard talk of Plough Monday? On the first or second Monday in January, the boys that worked on the farms used to take a plough with them - one of single thorrows [furrows] on wheels - and they used to go up to the door: 'Please remember the poor old ploughboys.' And if they didn't get nowt, they'd put the ploughshare under the scraper or under the slab until it were removed. But people always put something in the box so that you didn't do that! They used to go round at night carrying an old candle-lantern with them. So they wouldn't know who they was because they had all blacked their faces.

**TH:** Sort of blackmail!

**TB:** To a certain extent. But it were all in good fun. They also used to keep the firework night up. There used to be several places in the village [where] they used to go and play folks up. They used little fireworks - we used to call them 'keyhole fireworks' - and you'd buy them in bunches. They just fitted the keyhole - they used to be big keyholes in them days. Just put one of them in the keyhole and when it were alight we used to run off. And they used to come tearing out and someone would lob one of these jumping-jacks at them. They wouldn't fetch the police out like that. They'd chase you with a frying-pan! At that time of day, the farmers used to trim their hedges and they always cut some heaps somewhere safe for the old boys to burn on Bonfire Night (*Fig. 10*). Never used to have to get your own bonfire; the farmer would say: 'Leave so and so; the old boys'll come and burn it then.'

*Fig. 10:*

Agricultural workers on  
Church Hill with a  
celebratory bonfire (not for  
November 5th, judging by  
the foliage on the bushes)



*TH: What about Christmas carollers?*

**TB:** They always used to go Christmas-singing. The choir used to do that. There was one old folk, he were a big choirman, he used to play a fiddle. And it were done in the proper manner. Never go Christmas-singing till midnight Christmas Eve. They would start off from his house.

*TH: Who was this?*

**TB:** Jim Smith. He used to play by ear. We only used to go round to the big houses. They'd sing in the village down the street; then down to the Mill, sing there; to the Rectory (the Hunts lived in the Rectory at that time); go to Pilton and sing there; go to the old parson's at Pilton Church and sing there; and then that used to finish it. Then on Christmas Night they used to have an invitation to visit all these big houses: Admiral Seymour's [Wadenhoe House], they used to go down there; the Hunts, they used to go there. They used to go down to the Mill, then up to the farmers [Home Farm and Manor Farm] and used to have mincepies and a drink of lemonade or beer.

*TH: And Jim Smith used to play the tunes on his violin?*

**TB:** Yes. I'll never forget one night - it were midnight - we started off down the street and struck off opposite the pub. You know what damp does to violin strings. Well he got coming up the street and, 'Cling!' - one went. It was th'E. He carried on. We got half-way round; 'Ping!', the second one went. He finished up with the G-string. But he could still get the tune - he was a good fiddler.

*TH: Did he play the fiddle on any other occasions?*

**TB:** Not as a I remember. The fiddler we used to have come to our dances, he came from Pilton. His name was Curtis. A Miss Neal [the School monitress] used to play the piano and he used to come and accompany her. Well he keep coming and playing dance-tunes and then clear off down Wadenhoe pub. Well come turning-out time he'd come back and they'd expect some dances. He'd walk in the room, put his foot round the leg of the chair and kick it halfway across the room, and then he'd sit down on the floor. And, boy, couldn't he play! He'd play there the polka and he wouldn't half make 'em do it. And there were some of the old gals what were getting on for 60!

*LILY SMITH* **Before the First World War<sup>2</sup>**  
[1909]

Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour was greatly respected for his acts of kindness to the villagers. One, Mrs Lily Smith, remembered: 'Each year on 13 March from when I was five Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour of Wadenhoe House sent his footman down with a large iced birthday cake - I happened to have my birthday on the same day as him. It was my mother's unenviable task to divide the cake up so that each child in our street [and there were 22 in Church Street, where Lily lived] had a piece. Each year the Admiral also gave me half a gold sovereign - real treasure, when the most we could earn was a penny a week for collecting milk from the Mill for the old people who could not go themselves. But one penny was something to us - and incidentally bought more milk than 20p does today [1982].' Lily adds: 'I never took much to school and was delighted when we were allowed to leave at the age of 12 to help the [1914-18] war effort on the land. I learned to milk cows and to drive the working horses, and I think the most striking difference I notice in the village now is the lack of animals in the streets - there were always hens and ducks scraping about, the noise of pigs and cattle, and although there are still some horses now, tractors haven't the charm of the old work horses. The war came to an end; the men returned, and I was out of a job. So for just three years I left Wadenhoe to try my luck in London.'

*GEORGE* **The writing on the wall<sup>3</sup>**  
*WARD HUNT*

During the early years of this century we used to have working on the Estate a stonemason by the name of Joe Mitchell, who lived in Aldwinckle. Some of his more notable achievements can be seen today and probably will still be seen many years hence; for instance, the building of the kitchen extension at The Cottage, the extension at the Weather Vane, Main Street, and the extension to the stable block at The Old Rectory which was originally used as a fruit store. There may be other examples of less prominence.

Rather than cycle back to Aldwinckle, Joe used to eat his sandwich lunches in what was then the Cement Shed at the Pilton Road end of the Estate Barn. When we were planning to repair the plaster on the walls, we noticed some faint pencilled notes, and so the plastering scheme was abandoned. Doris Chapman and I made an attempt to decipher the notes. Those items written before 1920 would have been by old Joe, but we were not sure who wrote those of later dates. Many of the notes relate to jobs he had in hand and are of no particular interest, but here are some other examples. They are not by any means complete as, sadly, some of the writing has become obliterated with the passage of time.

*Wet August, 1910.*

*Cricket, Saturday May 24th, 1911*

*Snow fell all day, April 11th, 1913*

*Mr Childs straw stack fire, June 17th, 1914*  
*George Gascoigne killed by lightning, July 1st, 1914*  
*Stack fire (in Glebe Farmyard) August 25th, 1914*  
*New shoes, March 18th, 1916*  
*First two swallows seen on March 6th, 1917*  
*Thunderstorm, December 4th, 1919*  
*Snow fell all day on November 19th, 1919*  
*Snow fell all day on March 15th, 1920*  
*Fire at Wadenhoe House, February 19th, 1924*  
*Snow, March 15th, 1930*  
*Snow, March 9th, 1931*  
*Alf Gray laid water at Wadenhoe, 1950*  
*Undated entries: No. of Bike 36894*  
*July 15th, Go to Station [probably Thorpe Waterville, on the old Northampton/Peterborough line]*

It would seem that Joe was very concerned with the weather which, perhaps, is not surprising bearing in mind that, as the stonemason on the Estate, most of his work would have been outside.

## **The 1920s**

*ANNIE WITTEN*

My father [Sid March], mother, brother and myself moved from Islip to Wadenhoe in 1926 when Captain Wilfred and Mrs Ward Hunt came to the Rectory. The Captain and my father started the mill working again, grinding corn for flour and cattle food (*see Chapter 1*). I very well remember the opening day - all the eats were made from flour from the mill.

There was plenty happening in the village in those days. We played quite a bit of whist; dances were on Friday evenings in the Recreation Hall - my Dad loved ballroom dancing and first taught me the lancers when I was about 12. We had a flower show in July in Wadenhoe House, with exhibits from miles around. Mrs and Miss MacQueen did a great deal for the village: they started the Girl Guides for Wadenhoe, Aldwinckle and Titchmarsh; they ran a clothing club, to which we contributed 6d each week, and it would be drawn out before Christmas. We paid our rent twice a year (the first Saturdays in March and September), to Mr Southam the agent. If you paid on time you were given 5d back.

## **Early days of the Recreation Hall<sup>4</sup>**

*FLORENCE  
LINNELL*

In its early days the Recreation Hall was known to us all as the 'Hut'. Mr Horace Julyan, who was the wheelwright, cabinet maker and undertaker in Aldwinckle, had the job of erecting the First World War

ex-army hut in about 1924. Incidentally, it was his mother who ran a shop in the house where I now live [1970s] - in the days when you could buy cigarettes for 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d.

The 'Hut' celebrated its opening night with a dance. The floor was still sticky, perhaps with varnish, and great quantities of ballroom polish had to be sprinkled over it. The hall was packed to capacity and by the end of the evening there was a thick fog as the powder got churned up by the dancers. Dancing was a serious affair, with prizes for the best waltzers, and so on - and often with a band. I remember Henry Watts [who opened the Aldwinckle shop Henry Watts & Son on 4 June 1934] and his wife and brother had a band that was very popular in Aldwinckle during the 1930s. A crowd of us always came to Wadenhoe for dances, and the usual transport was by Shanks' pony - that first night I remember carrying our dance shoes in a bag, and returning home to Aldwinckle after midnight via the churchyard, all having enjoyed ourselves immensely. We also liked coming for the whist drives, all very cosy with capacity tables and 'fitted carpet' of coco matting on the floor.

## *ALICE BATES* **Times remembered<sup>5</sup>**

In April of 1997 Helen Attewell met Mrs Alice Bates, who was born at No. 6 The Green, in 1903. Her parents were Mr and Mrs Morehen. She was one of a family of 12 children. Their mother died when Alice was four years old.

Reminiscing of childhood brought back the happiest of memories. 'Our aunts cared for us and it seemed that the sun was always shining', she told me. 'As older children we looked after the younger ones in the shade of the lime trees. This area was known as The Playground. The boys carried water from the well and sat in the shade of the big walnut tree.' Before the First World War a travelling Fair came to the Green each year during St Michael's Feast Week. There were swings and roundabouts, various stalls, a shooting range and ball-throwing games.

Alice recalls the interest and excitement when the Recreation Hall was completed in 1924. The Hall was officially opened by Miss MacQueen of Wadenhoe House. She made a short speech which included the words 'Special thanks are due to Leslie and Bernard Bullimore who have worked like slaves'.

Later there was a Whist Drive followed by dancing. Taney's band from Oundle provided music - Wallace Stafford at the piano, the Taney brothers on saxophone and drums, and Percy Amps, violin. The Hall was crowded to capacity. There was consternation when the floor became so sticky that it had to be wiped over with rags wrung out in beer.

## The day the boat sank<sup>6,7</sup>

GEORGE  
WARD HUNT

It was the day of the Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary and Wadenhoe, like the rest of the country, was *en fete*. Included in our activities was a celebration cricket match, made up of a scratch eleven from the village and nearby who played a team from my old firm in Nottingham. As far as I remember they defeated us by a small margin.

Later in the day there was a social evening in the Recreation Hall which included the lighting of a giant bonfire on top of Church Hill and a dance. While this jollification was going on it was arranged that I should sail up the river in a glorified punt recently constructed in the Estate workshop by the Estate carpenter, Mr Balkwill, an ex-shipwright in the Royal Navy. He intended it for cleaning out the Reservoir. The vessel was equipped with a jury mast for this special occasion to enable coloured lights to be strung over the craft from stem to stern and so, it was hoped, enhance the general scene. The source of electricity for the lights was two 12-volt car batteries housed in the prow. Apart from myself, the crew consisted of Bert Askew who, with his sister, ran the village shop in Church Street, and Sidney Grix who brought some of the Nottingham cricket team down in his taxi, plus my springer spaniel, Peter.

As darkness fell and the bonfire was lit we set sail from what is now the Kings Head riverside park. The boat was powered by an inboard converted Austin Seven engine which was not very reliable and had a habit of breaking down, and so we carried with us a long pole with which to reach the bank should the worst happen. The vessel was driven from the stern and I could not see where we were going because the jury lights in front dazzled me. However, I could just see the pole in the hands of Bert Askew who was in the bows. He held this vertically and moved it to port or starboard to indicate the direction I had to steer. After a slow start to get used to this manner of manoeuvring we achieved mid-stream, by which time we were almost level with the junction of the main river on its turn to the locks. Bert shouted 'We can go ahead', so I opened the throttle. The next thing we knew was that, instead of moving the boat forward, the propeller pushed the stern up and the 'nose' under and we were sinking!

Bert Askew could swim and so could I but we found out too late that Sidney Grix could not. Although the craft sank in 12 feet of water, fortunately the lights stayed on and we could see Sidney floundering in the depths, so both of us grabbed him and landed him in a bed of nettles on the far (meadow) side of the river - which soon woke us all up! Meanwhile Peter, the dog, swam to the Recreation Hall side which, in those days, was a swamp. He went into the Recreation Hall looking a real bedraggled hound. The crowd were still at the bonfire and, as the boat did not appear, they must have thought 'Another breakdown, no doubt'.

During this time I took Sidney Grix home (the Home Farm House in those days), let him have a hot bath and change of clothes. Fortunately, as he was my size, they fitted him perfectly. Bert Askew

returned to his home and as it was nearest to the Recreation Hall he said he would let the people there know that we were alright and they could have a good laugh. Unfortunately he did not do so for some little time and when it was realised that the boat had sunk, panic set in, as it was thought that we had all drowned. However, all's well that ends well and, after the true story had filtered through, the evening's activities resumed in a happier atmosphere.

An aftermath of the event was a most amusing cartoon drawn by Bert Askew (he was quite an artist) of himself shouting instructions to the 'drowning' Sidney Grix and losing his false teeth in the effort. These sank to the bottom of the river and his picture showed them being chased by shoals of fish (*Fig. 11*). Later on the boat caught fire on a trip to Aldwinckle and we decided that it was not seaworthy. After repairs it was relegated to the Reservoir for the purpose originally intended.

*Fig. 11:*  
A reconstruction of Bert  
Askew's cartoon



## *DORIS CHAPMAN*    **The last of the Morehens<sup>8</sup>**

One of the most familiar villagers to visitors to Wadenhoe must have been Doris Chapman, as she stood at her garden gate at No. 21 Pilton Lane to pass the time of day (*Figs 12 and 13*). Doris came from an old village family, the Morehens. Her father, William, was a shepherd on the Wadenhoe estate and later worked at Lilford Hall as an aviary-man. Her mother, Lotte, came to Wadenhoe at the age of eight after her mother died, to live at 21 Pilton Lane with Doris' grandparents. Doris' grandfather was a millwright, wheelwright and carpenter, and his worksheds still adjoin the cottage (but now modernised). William and Lotte stayed at No. 21 until their own family expanded, when they moved to No. 1 The Green, where Doris was born in 1907. In 1910

when her grandfather died, the family moved back to Pilton Lane where Doris lived until her death in July 1992. She attended the village school until she was 14. School holidays and weekends she used to spend with the Langleys at Bearshanks Lodge, and when she left school she helped on the Langleys' farm. Much of her spare time was spent working for the Guide movement. She joined the 1st Aldwincle Girl Guides at its foundation (1922), was Tawny Owl to the Brownies and later a Guide Lieutenant. During the Second World War she worked as a landgirl. For many years she was a stalwort of the Church choir. In 1977 she became a Jehovah's Witness - the village's only member. She married Arthur Chapman in 1946 and their son, Arthur, was born in 1948, and was one of the last six children to attend the village school. Arthur Snr, a skilled signwriter, died in 1969.



*Fig. 12:*  
Doris Chapman outside  
No. 21 (Photo: *Evening  
News*)



*Fig. 13:*  
No. 21 Pilton Road in the  
early part of this century

## Looking back over the years<sup>9</sup>

*ANNIE BROWN*

As I sit in my chair now [1985] I often think how things have changed. When I went to work down at Wadenhoe House with Mrs Willmot and Mrs Watford we got sixpence an hour, and were paid once a month. We would walk across the meadows to Thorpe to catch the train to Thrapston to get things for the children - a reel of cotton would cost twopence. My husband would catch rabbits and pigeons. They would sell for 6d, 1s 6d or 2s. We had dances and social evenings in the Hut and Miss MacQueen had a Christmas party for the children every year with games, and we all had lots of fun. I have lived in the village for 50 years and seen a lot of changes, but it has been nice to see all my grandchildren grow up.

I had never heard of Wadenhoe before the Munich crisis of October 1938. Then, with the threat of war in the air, I was bundled into a train with Mother and set out from London for my ancestral village, Wadenhoe. I was just ten. This impromptu evacuation was the work of my grandfather, Thomas Wilson. Over a half century before he had sold his share in a pig, put a suitcase on his shoulder and walked over the meadows to Thorpe station. Thence to London where he became an ostler. But although he had left the village for good he kept in touch. He was still known as the 'boy Tom' even in old age. When war seemed imminent he arranged for Mother and myself to stay with a distant relative, Arthur Briggs, and his wife Amy. They lived in a tumbledown cottage sited somewhat out of the building line between the Post Office and the 'Weather Vane'. My stay was brief - the Munich crisis was soon over, the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, proclaimed 'Peace with Honour', and I went home to Hackney. But fate, in the form of Adolf Hitler, decreed that I was to return.

A year later Mother and I were holidaying at Pilton Lodge where Arthur Briggs and his family had moved after their cottage in Wadenhoe had finally tumbled down. It was September 1939 and we were there when war broke out. We stayed on and for two months I worked as an unpaid farmboy until I gained entrance into Laxton Grammar School, Oundle. In the summer of 1940 a cottage fell vacant in Wadenhoe and we moved in when the Battle of Britain was at its height.

Our arrival marked the return of the Wilsons to Wadenhoe, for there were none left there at that time. In the mid 19th century (*see Chapter 6*) they had made up half the village and they had been millwrights, wheelwrights, joiners, agricultural labourers, and one was the gas man. But by the turn of the 20th century they had declined to a mere handful and then disappeared from the village altogether.

Our cottage was thatched and one of a pair, since demolished, on the site of what is now the 'Weather Vane' garden (*Fig. 14*). Outside the back door was a small flower garden and beyond a large walled vegetable plot divided into two by a path (the other half belonged to our neighbours, Mr and Mrs Witten). This is still a well managed vegetable garden today. There were none of the amenities that we took for granted in London. The cottage did not have running water or main sewage. There was an earth closet at the end of the flower garden and a barn with a 'copper'. Cooking was done on a small black kitchener. There was no dust collection, and cinders were stored behind the barn in a great pile which a man came once a year to cart away. Water was from a pump at the end of the flower garden. In winter it froze up - winters in the early war years were severe - so first thing in the morning I would take a kettle of hot water and pour it into the pump. After a few minutes the ice melted and water could be pumped up from the well. In summer the well dried up altogether and I fetched buckets

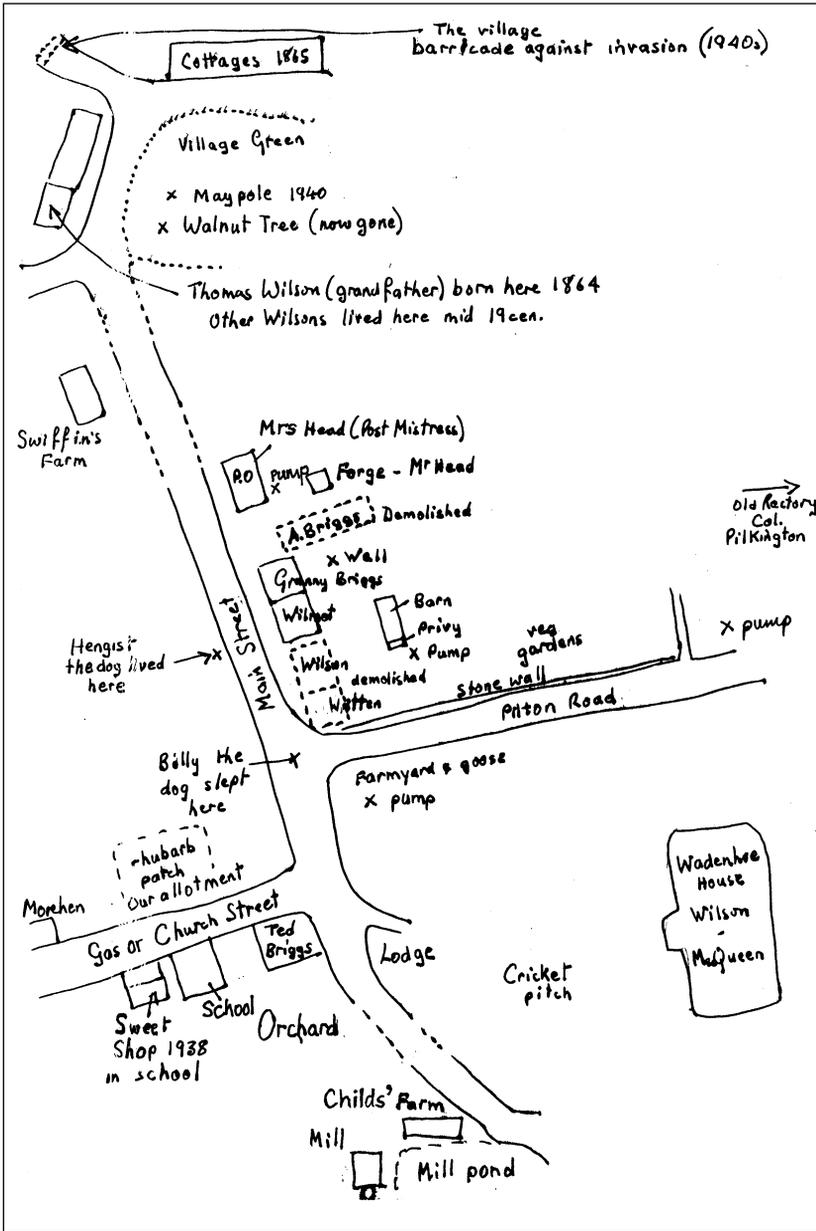


Fig. 14:  
Sketch map of Main Street  
in the 1940s before the  
cottages were demolished

of water from the village pump which lay just beyond the end of our walled vegetable garden - it is still in position outside the Wadenhoe Trust building, but alas it seems far from being in working order [the only other surviving pump, behind the Post Office (Fig. 15), is in better condition]. The one concession to the 20th century was electricity, but this was for lighting only. But that was a blessing, for at Pilton Lodge I had to do my homework under the feeble light of a paraffin lamp.

The Wadenhoe of 1940 was physically much the same as the Wadenhoe of today. The village green has changed little and the Post Office still survives with its red telephone box opposite. The Warren Hills [Church Hill] seem a little wilder and the mill pond, where cows once crossed to-and-fro from meadow to dairy, prettier. The mill has changed. Then, it was deserted and unused. Inside was dark and gloomy and infested with rats. And although the millstones



Fig. 15:  
The pump behind the Post  
Office, 1997

had been removed the mill wheel continued to turn and its clanking resonated throughout the interior.

I fancy Wadenhoe society is different. Then most of the cottages were occupied by farm labourers and there was surprise when some of the men started commuting to Thrapston and even Corby for work. The effect of mechanisation was beginning to be felt. Old Lord Lilford was still to be seen taking his daily constitutional walk from Lilford, through Pilton, to Wadenhoe and back. I seem to remember him wearing a battered straw hat. I remember the old-fashioned pigs short-legged and unbelievably plump, most attractive beasts; their like is not seen in these times of lean pork and bacon.

One of the biggest differences between then and now was the virtual absence of motor cars. Few could afford them - not that that mattered, for during the course of the war the petrol ration dropped to zero for all except essential services. Fortunately, in those days goods were delivered to the door. There was meat from Butcher Brown (Aldwinckle) and milk from Farmer Allen (Stoke Doyle). Bread, dry goods and vegetables also came round by van, but vegetables were bought somewhat shamefacedly, for this was a sign of incompetent husbandry.

Once a week there was a market bus to Oundle with an all too brief stay [as it still is today]. Shopping was hurried for if you missed the bus then there was a five mile walk home. Twice a week Alan Coles' coach visited Thrapston, once on market day and once on Saturday for the 'pictures'. The cinema was the Plaza and when I visited Thrapston in the 1990s I was pleasantly surprised to see that it had survived the ravages of time and still existed, as the Plaza Centre.

There was a charming railway station and level crossing at Thorpe Waterville, but I can find little trace of it now, Dr Beeching having done his work thoroughly [the part between Thrapston and the Titchmarsh Local Nature Reserve is now a pleasant public footpath]. The slow train from Northampton was very slow indeed for at each station waggon loads of sheep and cattle were either hooked on or shed with much clanking and shuddering. Journeys were interminable and time tables merely an expression of hope. For the most part we relied on our legs or our bikes to get around. A sit-up-and-beg all-black bike, with 28-inch wheels, could be bought for seven shillings and sixpence.

In 1940 Wadenhoe prepared to resist invasion. Like every village in those dark days it erected a road block. A large tree was felled across the road that runs out of the village from the Green and the central section was cut out to allow road traffic to pass through. Nearby an unwanted Victorian haywain stood by ready to be moved into the gap when the Germans came. A single strand of barbed wire was carried above on poles driven into the trunk. Each village had its own design of road block. I would argue with a friend from Stoke Doyle for the superiority of Wadenhoe's. That may have been so, but all the village road blocks were equally useless. Fortunately the Germans never came.

Wadenhoe formed its own Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) unit which later became the beloved Home Guard. My uncle, Arthur Briggs, became its leading light. He had been a regular soldier and saw service in India and the 1918 Archangel campaign. So it was natural that he should head the Wadenhoe Home Guard as Sergeant Briggs. He chose the Kings Head as his HQ, a good choice for him as he was a heavy beer drinker. The Home Guard met every Sunday morning. Attendance was good. Patriotic duty became the perfect alibi for the errant husband. My uncle was an enthusiast and exercised his troop regularly. On one occasion it gave a demonstration of its military prowess on the Warren Hills. It started with the usual bayoneting of hapless sandbags which led to no more than the spilling of sawdust. After this he deployed his troop in attacking mode. I was amazed to see the troop charge as a thin khaki line, an antique formation last used in the 1914-18 war with bloody consequences. Military tactics had moved on since then but my uncle was still imbued with those of his youth. The joke, however, was on the spectators, for we became the 'enemy' and were rounded up as a herd of 'prisoners'.

Wadenhoe was also mindful of the threat from the air. One Saturday evening in winter when Mother and I had returned from Thrapston we found the ARP Warden, the village policeman and a substantial number of villagers gathered outside our front gate. There was much shaking of heads and dark muttering. We were not approved of. The trouble was that a banked fire had flared up. This had caused concern and word of it had got round the village and was now providing Saturday evening's entertainment. In villages of those days one's slightest misdemeanour was publicly displayed. The upshot was that although the fire was feeble the Warden took a dim view of the affair and the result was public humiliation in the magistrate's court and a fine of ten shillings.

The last fete held at Lilford Hall remains etched sharply in my memory. It started as a happy afternoon in late summer. The sun was shining on the tents and stalls of the fete as I toured them. I remember bowling for a pig and having a go at the coconut shies. But there was no escaping the war. It was late afternoon when the news spread around that London was being bombed by the Germans. It was that fateful day, 7 September 1940, and the bombardment of London - the Blitz - had begun. I had that awful sinking feeling as I heard the news for Father was in London working. I cycled home as quickly as I could for the six o'clock news. I learnt later that at the same time my father was rolling out barrels of paint from the inferno of incendiary fires in the Berger paint factory in Hackney. Fortunately, for our peace of mind we did not learn of this episode for a year or so.

The Blitz continued for weeks on end and we lived amid the peace of Wadenhoe in a state of constant anxiety. Each morning we would read in the newspapers of another aerial onslaught, not knowing the fate of Father who was exposed as a Warden and as an auxiliary fire fighter. Later he was to be given the Freedom of

the City of London for his war services. Only rarely could my father telephone to say that he was safe, for telephonic communication was not what it is today. He had to make what was called a 'trunk' call and it might take hours for the operators on manual switchboards to make a connection. It would go through to the Post Office and Mrs Head or Violet would come to our cottage to let us know and then we would take the call in the red telephone box that still stands opposite the Post Office and remains in my memory as a reminder of those desperate days. Eventually the Blitz was over and we were briefly reunited as a family that Christmas. By then the house we lived in had been destroyed (by a land mine); fortunately Father had been on ARP Warden Post duty that night.

There was a village school in Wadenhoe in those days, but I never went to it. It was presided over by just one teacher, Miss Jones (who had had built the only air raid shelter in Wadenhoe). On Thursday afternoons the School became the village library. The library was modest, consisting as it did of one large wooden trunk of books! The books, as I remember, were mostly popular trash. Discipline was feeble. Once on a snowy winter's day a friend and I amused ourselves throwing snowballs at the School bell that hung outside the front entrance. We scored several direct hits. Then a school child appeared in the school yard and then another. Snowballs were exchanged. Yet more children appeared in the yard until the whole School was there. Weight of numbers forced us to beat a slow retreat up the hill pursued by the whole of the School. The classroom had emptied save for Miss Jones! It appeared that the children had, one by one, asked to be 'excused', and permission had been given! Later Miss Jones delivered a very mild reproof to Mother - would Alan not do it again.

One of the strangest households in Wadenhoe was that of Colonel Pilkington and his wife. He had been something important in the Indian administration. On his return to England he settled in the Old Rectory, generally keeping himself apart from the village. It is thought that he regarded the villagers as 'natives'. Each evening he and his wife would change for dinner and dine at separate tables.

The Americans came to Wadenhoe in 1942. They might have been Martians as far as I was concerned. I saw them walking the village streets and driving along the country lanes in jeeps (the forerunner of the Land Rover). I viewed them overhead in aeroplanes and I heard about them from village gossip, but I had very little direct contact. I was not a girl and so not of interest.

The American airforce set up aerodromes at Polebrook and Molesworth. In those days I would see armadas of Flying Fortresses sweeping across the skies on their way to bombard Fortress Europe. Never before or since have I seen so many aeroplanes in the sky. Clark Gable was amongst them, as a rear gunner. His presence caused a stir of anticipation amongst the local girls. Alas, when they saw the great man in the flesh and not on the Celluloid they were disappointed for he was an ageing 40 with greying hair.

The American army took over Lilford Hall and sentries lolled at the Lodge and jeeps swung through the gateway. It was not

long before flocks of girls appeared at the gates. There was much gossip about goings-on, and there *were* goings-on, as one might guess.

The Kings Head in Wadenhoe was the nearest pub for the GIs and they revived its fortunes. Before their advent it had been the sleepest of country inns, coming alive only on Sunday when the Home Guard met there. During the week its opening times were irregular, depending on the whim of the Landlady and whether she had gone shopping to Oundle or Peterborough. In those days the Kings Head was as peaceful as a country cottage. The two rooms within were parlours more than bars. There were no beer engines, indeed, no sign of anything to drink. Customers sat in a state of tranquility and waited, patiently. Eventually the Landlady would make an appearance and take an order. Then she would disappear down a flight of stone steps in the cellar where barrels of beer were stored, draw the beer and then ascend the steps with the drinks on a tray. Customers needed to be patient, but one more kindly than the others said at least the beer was properly kept. The coming of the Americans transformed this leisurely way of life for ever and the Kings Head became thronged with as many customers as a city pub. They got on well with the locals.

The Americans came to Wadenhoe *en masse* mainly in the evening and were only seen in ones and twos in the daytime when they had other interests, girls. In those far-off days before jet travel country girls were naive and unsophisticated. Foreigners were rare. Then the Americans came with all the allure of the unknown. They enlivened the dreary war years. They were smartly dressed, glamorous and generous. The girls fell for them. Another attraction was their ample rations, a cornucopia in a land where food was scarce - two ounces of cheese and butter a week. The Americans distributed their rations generously to the families of their girl friends. There was also chocolate and cigarettes - Camel Brand became familiar in the land of Players and Wills Woodbines. They could hardly fail to be a success with the girls. One attractive blonde Wadenhoe girl, Mary Bell, did become a GI bride. More often there were affairs with married women and single girls. These could never be kept secret in a village and became the subject of village gossip. I think too that the Americans put ideas into the heads of some men of the village. The war ended and the Americans went. Life returned to normal and it was as if the Americans had never been. Perhaps their lasting memorial is the Kings Head, which they probably saved from closure.

We left Wadenhoe for Hackney in 1946 and I went to the University of Nottingham. Once more there were no Wilsons left in the village.

## **Memories of an evacuee**

*IRENE DRAKE*

In my growing years the Luftwaffe evicted me from London and Wadenhoe became my 'safe haven'. I was eventually returned to London, only to be returned to Wadenhoe during the time of the V1s and V2s. I know, historically, that there are some horrendous stories told about 'what happened to me when I was an

evacuee', but I loved it. I loved Mrs Emily Bell, my parents' friend with whom I stayed; I cannot remember her ever punishing me, and I was certainly no angel! I loved having a candle in the bedroom and being allowed to blow it out and open the curtains to look at the stars. I loved the pump in the middle of the Green; it was like a magnet to me and I would not leave it alone. Occasionally Mrs Moisey would come out and tell me I was not to waste the water. I longed for the bucket to be empty so that I could go to that glorious pump and fill less than half a bucket of water (that was all I could carry initially). I loved taking the can to the Mill after school to get the milk. I was besotted with The Bull who was a tremendously fine fellow in the 'bull world'; the ring through his nose fascinated me. And I was intrigued with the tin bath in front of the black range on a Friday evening. How those women managed all that work defies belief. No running water, no electricity, no sanitation... I imagine even as a child I knew Wadenhoe was 'safe' although I do remember, later, many of the Londoners were not happy at all and left. I loved sneaking over the wall into Wadenhoe House - in reality I did not need to 'sneak in'.

*PHILIP E.* **An American remembers**  
*TRIBOU*

I was lucky enough to be stationed at Lilford from September 1943 until September 1945 at the 303rd Station Hospital, Lilford Hall. I think it was only coincidental that the Eighth Air Force had a 303rd Bomb Group nearby - possibly at Molesworth. These were not related except by coincidence as we were allies. We were a US Army hospital. My buddy Tony and I used to visit Peg and Jim Head [Post Office and smithy] on Sunday evenings and were fed 'real' eggs on toast - it is impossible to fry powdered eggs sunny side up, and that was all we had in the mess hall. One time Peg gave me a fried goose egg sunny side up, the largest egg I've ever had in all my 73 years. Every now and then we would agree that Jim and Peg would perhaps like to have a Sunday evening to themselves and we wouldn't show up. If Peg didn't hear from us during the week we'd get a call asking if we were OK. If the answer was 'yes' we had better have a good reason for not showing up the next Sunday. Jim was a constable - the only one in the village [he served as a Special Constable for 23 years] - and in the Home Guard, as well as being blacksmith, taxi owner and operator, and as a sideline raising chickens, geese, and I don't know what else.

On a return visit in 1990 the Kings Head looked about the same as I'd always remembered it except that there were no boats tied up at the river during the war years. The inside was all modernised (some people would say spoiled) [this was before the 1995 refurbishment!], and I missed the old panelling and the tiled floor. When we first went to the pub and hadn't become accustomed to the pounds, shillings and pence, it seemed that a pint cost more than later after we had learned how to count the change. Another thing that always seemed strange was that when the lights went out the management never seemed to

have the right coins to put in the meter, but we - the rich Americans - would come up with the goods. One time several of us were racing our bikes down the hill [The Lynches] just outside the gate on our way to Wadenhoe and the pub full speed ahead when one of the fellows who was just behind me yelled, 'look out'. I glanced back and he was straight out in the air heading for a crash landing on the pavement. The cable brake for the front had come loose from the handlebar and fallen into the wheel. The sudden stop made the front wheel change from circular to heart-shaped. The inner tube blew up like a balloon and burst. The young fellow named Gerard Jack, who came from Brooklyn, New York, broke his arm, tore up his pants and I don't remember what else.

Some ten or 15 years ago we were talking to a mutual friend of the Heads about going back to Wadenhoe; he said 'There have been tremendous changes - one new house built since World War II'!

## **Wadenhoe seen from the Thatched Cottage**

Our cottage was the first ever to be sold in the village. This break with tradition was not easily accepted by the people of Wadenhoe. We learned later that there had been much speculation about ‘strangers from London’.

We viewed the property (*Fig. 16*) and were intrigued with the little stone-built village and the pretty cottage in Main Street. The earth closet in the garden caused some dismay as did the lack of mains sewage and a single water tap outside the back door. Electricity had recently come to the village. There were just four lighting points in the cottage, two hanging from low ceilings and a hazard to anyone over five feet tall. Although we did a certain amount of ‘modernisation’ such as installing a septic tank, lavatory and fireplaces, our first year in Wadenhoe was a time of adjustment to a way of living we had not known. Here it seemed that the War had never been but for the Memorial on the Village Green where three names had recently been added to those of men who had given their lives in the 1914-18 conflict.

*Fig. 16:*  
Mrs Langley and Mrs  
Bonner and friends outside  
the Thatched Cottage  
in the early 1900s



A population of 130 lived in the 17th century stone-built cottages and farmhouses, for the most part working on the land. There were few basic amenities. Recently installed mains water and electricity had not been well received by many. ‘Nothing wrong with the well water’, they said. ‘Don’t trust them electricians’, said the older generation. They knitted and mended with the light of paraffin lamps and made their way to bed by candle light. We found three or four car owners and the same number of private telephones, with an unreliable call box opposite the tiny General Store selling everything

from butter to shoelaces. Tradesmen's deliveries included bread, cakes and pastries from nearby Achurch, carried in huge baskets and covered with white cloths. There were weekly visits by a greengrocer and two rival butchers. Milk and dairy produce arrived in a horse-drawn float to be ladled into our jugs from the can. For 35 years, 'Mr Cotton's Man' came from Thrapston with sturdy leather boots and rubber Wellingtons for sale. He collected and returned our shoes in two weeks along with special requests. (From this town too, over 100 years ago, a man came walking with a pack of tea on his back. This he sold from door to door, an elderly resident recalling that her mother welcomed him twice a year.) Newspapers were delivered daily by a stalwort lady named Daisy, who covered a five-mile radius on a bicycle, stopping at our cottage for a cup of cocoa and a 'sit down'. Miss Mary, the Squire's sister, offered us 'milk for the fetching' when her lovely Jersey cow, Mendoza, gave surplus to requirements. Offerings of fruit and vegetables found on the doorstep were gratefully received. A man with sturdy broom, shovel and wooden barrow kept our village roads tidy. He was also the Poacher. Sometimes, in passing, he left a snared rabbit inside our ever-open door and was discreetly rewarded later. All this, and a regular bus service to Thrapston, Oundle and Kettering on Market days, did much to stabilise family life in a community whose joys and sorrows we were to share for many years.

By the end of the 1950s bottled and sealed milk was delivered four times a week. Less pleasing bread, sliced and wrapped, was sent from Spalding to be collected at the Post Office. Newspapers were delivered by a young man in a van. At this time other amenities included a dry cleaning service, occasional ice cream vendors and a mobile fish and chip canteen on Friday evenings.

In 1952 I witnessed the passing of an old custom when a coffin was placed on the bier and pushed to Church followed by a sad procession of mourners wearing sombre clothes and carrying flowers from their gardens. They were taking a loved-one to the funeral service and his last resting place in the churchyard. Hereafter a motor hearse carried the dead to burial, or to cremation far from home.

Schoolltime came for Bobbie, our first child, in 1951. He was taken, protesting loudly, to the village school, a single-storey stone building bequeathed to posterity by Mary Caroline Hunt in 1839 (*see Chapter 5*). It consisted of one large room partitioned by screens to make an Infants Room. During severe winter weather pupils sat around a large coal-fed Tortoise stove with Miss Jones, the Headmistress and only teacher. Playtime was enjoyed in a small area behind the School where an air raid shelter awaited demolition and Boys' and Girls' earth closets stood under the trees. Miss Jones lived next to the School, in the School House. She retired in 1952 after a period of 30 years in the School, and was succeeded by Miss Brice, who arrived in time for our boys to benefit from her new teaching methods and considerable ability. By that time the number of pupils had fallen to six. In 1956 the School was closed, and children were taken to Aldwinckle Church of England School by coach.

At this time I was asked to be responsible for the County Library books which had been kept in the Schoolroom. The large wooden box was transferred to the old barn in our garden by a boy with a wheelbarrow. The books were exchanged every three months until in 1966 the Mobile Library called at the village every two weeks. I looked forward to the much improved selection and coffee with the librarian and driver every other Wednesday until we finally left Wadenhoe in September 1990 to live in a modern bungalow in another village 16 miles away, which did not have a thatch needing immediate and expensive repair.

*Fig. 17:*  
The old Recreation Hall  
from Church Hill,  
in the 1970s



The old village hall, a large wooden structure, probably used as a temporary shelter for troops in the First World War and re-erected in 1924 (*Fig. 17*), had a small kitchen with stone sink and water tap, a trestle table and wall cupboard. Toilet facilities were provided by an Elsan closet until 1980 when two WCs and wash basins with septic tank drainage were installed. In 1953 I was invited to take a place on the Village Hall Committee. My first assignment was to help with arrangements for a day of celebration when Queen Elizabeth was crowned. Red, white and blue bunting, used in several previous royal events, was unearthed and strung across Main Street from cottage to cottage. The great day arrived. A service was held in Church and bells were rung. Torrential rain cancelled children's sports and other outdoor activities. We all gathered in the Village Hall for a hearty tea of assorted sandwiches, sugar-coated sponge cake and jellies. This was followed by the presentation of Coronation mugs by the Squire to all children under the age of 14. The day ended with a Dance and a very muddy floor which was scrubbed next day by four Committee members on hands and knees!

And so the years passed. At school our boys sat for the 11+ examination and proceeded to Wellingborough Boys' Grammar School with one other pupil from the village. For four years they rode their bicycles from home to Thorpe Waterville Railway Station, a distance of three and a half miles. The 8 a.m. train took them to Wellingborough Station, and from there they walked a mile to School. In the mid 1960s closure of the line was rumoured and I remember Tony, with clipboard and biro, soliciting villagers for signatures in protest against this

against this inconvenience. Notwithstanding, Dr Beeching announced his infamous cuts in British Railways, the Peterborough to Northampton line closed and the boys travelled to school by coach.

With the children finally away from home, and with electrical gadgets like automatic washing machine and food mixer, my domestic life became easier, and I looked round for something else to fill my time. In 1970 the Tack Room [the old Reading Room, taken over by Mary Ward Hunt as a tack room] in Pilton Lane became vacant. The Squire approved of my tenancy and with the help of husband and friends I was able to fulfil an ambition to express my interest in art and craft. As with most ventures there were setbacks. Local authority clamped down on the project, chiefly because I had unwittingly neglected to seek planning permission. With overwhelming support from Mr Ward Hunt, the people of Wadenhoe and a local newspaper, the Ministry of the Environment was put in a flutter, and after a year I was given the official go-ahead. During this time crafts were assembled, not only by young and old in Wadenhoe, but from villages all over Northamptonshire and beyond (*Fig. 18*). The challenge was enormous and included a request that an 18th century bell-pull be copied in finest tapestry work for a Chateau in France. Rushes from the River Nene were used to make flower baskets for Colefax & Fowler, the London interior decorators. Socks and pullovers were knitted especially for customers with deformities, and suitable toys designed for handicapped children. Pegged rugs were made in the village. Everything was hand-made and home-made, and standards were high. It was only when my husband retired that I closed the Crafts Centre in 1980 after ten fulfilling years.



*Fig. 18:*  
Helen Attewell in her craft  
shop, 1970s  
(*Photo: Peterborough  
Advertiser*)

*TONY* **School and play in the 1950s**  
*ATTEWELL*

Wadenhoe School, when I first attended in April 1953, was, I imagine, much as it had been since the turn of the century. The school aimed to give a basic knowledge of the 3 Rs to people who would leave school at age 14 for a lifetime's agricultural or domestic work.

The younger pupils sat together at the left hand end of the single classroom, looking at books, drawing, sometimes sleeping, all with little supervision, while the seniors sat in rows of iron-framed desks directly in front of the teacher Miss Brice at her tall desk on a raised platform. On three afternoons each week the younger pupils walked up to Mrs Bell's house at No. 3 The Green to watch Andy Pandy, Bill and Ben and Rag, Tag and Bobtail on her nine-inch screen television, which was one of the few if not the only television set in the village at that time. It was never disclosed why we didn't watch *The Woodentops* which made up the complete set of *Watch with Mother* for the week.

I do not recall any formal games at the school. Playtime was spent in the yard at the back of the school where activities included watching the frequent furious fights between John and Mickey Briggs, or trying to climb the high wall between the boys' and girls' toilets.

The school house next to the playground was occupied by a former teacher, Miss Jones, a seldom-seen figure dressed in black. Her garden contained the only air-raid shelter in the village [nine feet deep, it was dug out by Robert Whiteroe, who writes that it was never finished by the builders]. It was a playground dare to climb through the playground fence and look into the entrance to the earth mound.

In 1955 Wadenhoe School closed. The attendance had fallen to about six and we were transferred to Aldwincle C of E school. What had been a two-minute walk to school became a bus journey of over an hour as the bus first had to deliver children to Thrapston Secondary Modern school via Lilford, Clopton, and Titchmarsh, and similarly on the return journey. Even at seven years old I had reservations about the sense of taking an hour on a bus to cover a distance that I could cycle in 15 minutes. At Aldwincle school, formal lessons, organised games, discipline and large numbers of children all made for a less happy and secure way of life.

Out of school, play was largely dictated by the seasons and the weather. As soon as snow covered the Church Hills, sledges were renovated or built, and the runners, made of steel strips from old bed frames, were sanded smooth and oiled. As the youngest I was usually sent to the Post Office to borrow an old sledge that Violet Woodbridge had used as a girl. This was known to have a design defect which made it tip over after about five yards from the top of the hill, and I suspect that I was the victim of an annual leg-pull. However, to me it was better than no sledge at all. In spring we set off on flower-picking expeditions, for primroses and bluebells in Wadenhoe Woods and cowslips in the water meadow below Pilton Lane. I cannot recall the reason for picking armfuls of flowers, but I enjoyed the walks with the older children.

My brother Bob, three years older than me, each year religiously laid out football and cricket pitches in the field next to our house (now the garden of Bearshanks House) although by this time there were fewer children of our age and the games usually comprised just the two of us.

Before child employment legislation prohibited small children from workplaces, most farming activities had a number of us in attendance, 'helping' and generally messing about. I recall several jobs as being particularly interesting, such as threshing, where we made ourselves useful by killing mice that jumped out of the sheaves of corn as they were thrown into the threshing machine, and feeding cattle in winter in the yards round the village on Sunday afternoons.

An opportunity for a ride on a vehicle was never to be missed, such as opening and closing gates for Mr Morris or Bryn as they drove from field to field in their Landrovers, counting cattle, or just sitting for hours on end on tractor mudguards ploughing or cutting grass. The farm workers I remember most clearly were Sid and Bill Mills, and Arthur Gammons, together with Mr Ben Morris, and his sons Bryn, Willie and Mansell. My brother actually worked on the farm for money, but my contributions were purely amateur.

Organised activities often involved participation of the whole village, and the greatest of these during my childhood was the Coronation in 1953. My memories at age four and a half are a little blurred at the edges but several events stand out from that day, such as the pouring rain, what seemed to be the whole village crammed into Mrs Bell's living room to watch the event on television, sports on the Green, and ham and salad supper in the village hall.

Christmas parties were held by a number of organisations in Wadenhoe and surrounding villages, such as the Sunday School, Labour Party, Conservative Party, and British Legion.

Our family also attended the London Brick Company party in Peterborough, where my father worked. This was a superior affair with Laurel and Hardy films and expensive presents as opposed to the usual bar of chocolate and orange. There was an element of competition in who had attended the most parties by the end of Christmas.

One of the most enjoyable of these events was the Pilton Sunday School party held at the Rectory. The evening started with games and puzzles round the glowing Triplex range in the Rectory kitchen, followed by tea which always included Mrs Dawson's Scotch pancakes, better known as 'clammy hands'. The games which followed tea were of a surreal nature, not known to exist outside the Rectory kitchen, and included flap the kipper, and balloon fights. The whole event was presided over by the Rector, Mr Basil Dawson, who enjoyed the parties as much as the children. I remember him as a kindly and enthusiastic man who led his flock by example.

A number of myths and legends existed amongst us children, some of which may have had a basis of truth, but most now seem fairly incredible. It was said that the small oxbow lake in the meadow on the far side of the river below the Church was so deep that Ted Briggs had put a 40-foot line in it and not touched the bottom. If you stood on the

roof of the barn at the end of the farm road beyond the Reservoir on Oundle Road, you could see the tower of Boston Stump in Lincolnshire (on a clear day!). There was an ornate sword found by the river below the Church which was kept in the Church tower. Under a large stone in the Coniger at the back of the Church was a cave where meat was once stored in ice. Stories such as these and many others were told and elaborated on by successive generations of children obviously less cynical or questioning than now.

In hindsight, Wadenhoe in the 1950s was temporarily cut off from the changes that were happening in larger communities. There must have been a good deal of hardship, due to low agricultural wages and poor living conditions in rented or tied accommodation. Despite being newcomers, and my father working outside the village, my own family was far from well off, but I have lasting memories of freedom and security that have become unimaginable to later generations.

*Fig. 19:*

Childrens party in the Village Hall, late 1950s.  
*Adults l to r:* Rev. Basil Dawson, Mrs Louie Briggs, Helen Attewell, Mrs Hankins, Miss White (housekeeper at Pilton Rectory), Mrs Dawson, Mrs Edna Morehen, Mrs March.



**MARY BEEK**  
*(née ATTEWELL)*

## **Childhood memories and adult reflections**

I was born in Wadenhoe in 1955, at 16, Main Street, the thatched cottage near to the Post Office. For the next 18 years, I grew up in the village and so my strongest memories are located in the 1960s. Childhood memories become distorted by adult interpretations, but I have tried, in writing this piece, to disentangle them from each other.

My early years passed in a series of gentle and utterly dependable routines. Firstly, there were the vans which seemed to bring everything we needed to our door and I thought that everyone must do their shopping in this way. There was also a regular cycle of visiting people in the village and to me, most of them seemed old. Again this seemed normal and I enjoyed being fussed over with sweets, chocolate and threepenny bits. Mrs Tomlin (who as Miss Childs, had previously been the Assistant Mistress at the School) lived

in the Mill House. She rarely came up the hill and gradually closed off the rooms in her house and sold furniture until she was left in the kitchen with the range, two upright chairs, a table and a mangle. She had tamed a pair of swans and they would come when she called to them, flying low over the meadow and into the mill tail. We also visited Mrs Quincey and Mrs Cooper on the Green, Mr and Mrs March and Mr and Mrs Hankins on Pilton Lane and Mrs Wilmott, opposite us. We knew everybody and if I couldn't get to sleep at night I would tour the village in my mind (starting at the pub), and count off the inhabitants of each cottage.

The yearly events of the village are also fixed clearly in my mind. My brother has described the Sunday School parties which seemed to have little connection to the very sober Sunday School, run by Mrs Lake at her home on Pilton Lane. The summer fete was at Pilton Rectory (hit the rat, lucky dip) and you could buy 'tickets' to spend on the stalls for several weeks in advance. The Aldwinckle Show involved filling jam jars with as many different wild flowers as you could find and I dread to think what rare species we might have crammed in. Then there was the Jumble Sale in the Wadenhoe 'Hut' in October, with Mrs Louie Briggs on the cake stall and us on the 'white elephants'.

Most of all, however, I remember freedom. As I grew older, I was free to roam and play wherever I chose and the fields, hedgerows, barns, nooks and crannies are still deeply imprinted in my mind. We made dens and camps and rode our bikes wherever we wanted. Later on, when I left home, I was genuinely surprised to discover that this was not the case elsewhere and that most farmland was regarded as 'private property'.

Now that I view my childhood through the eyes of an adult. I think that the clarity and detail of my memories is due to the fact that, particularly in early childhood, the village was central to my life. I rarely left it and it was the background for almost everything I did. I think I remember an ageing population because that is what it was. There were few young families. I was the only child from the village in my year at school and once the Americans had left Wadenhoe House, there were only a handful of us at the school bus stop. Somewhere around my mid-teens, things slowly started to change. There was a growing awareness of the 'specialness' of Wadenhoe and the village began to attract the attention of people who were keen to study and preserve the buildings, wildlife and countryside. Ten years later, much of the 'old' village life and people had gone and Wadenhoe was a changed community with younger families and different ways of life.

With hindsight, I can see that change was inevitable. The 'old' Wadenhoe had started to decline and it had to adapt to a rapidly changing world. The 1960s, however, remain for me the 'real' Wadenhoe. Just as I had no awareness then of the loveliness of the buildings and the countryside around me, so Wadenhoe itself was also unconscious of its unique beauty. It was just a village, getting on with life as best it could, and that is how I like to remember it.

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