



Ann Webb

Village Memories



Ann and Nigel Webb

I was born in North Muskham on November 22, 1952, and my brother Andrew on February 28, 1955.

Our father was John Dye and his family moved to Trent Farm in the late 1800s. Dad was born there on 22nd November 1917, the eldest of 6 children - two boys and four girls. Sadly the second son, Robert, died as a toddler in tragic circumstances in the mid 1920s. My father grew up and worked on the family farm alongside his father Charles.

My Mother, Marion Story, was born in Letterbox Cottage on May 10th 1925. My grandfather, William Story, had moved there from Upton with his wife, Frances Idonia (formerly Foster) and baby daughter Irene, born in 1920, having bought the house from Joseph Kemp's charity. Joseph Kemp died in 1678 and he left that property and others for the benefit of the poor in the village. My Aunt Jean, the third of the Story sisters, was born there in 1932. My grandfather was the local corn merchant and grocer. In 1937 my grandparents took over the post office from Gertrude Gibson who lived in Church Cottage. They had the shop as well and so their home became the hub of the

village. Everyone knew each other and there was a strong community spirit, particularly during the war.

My Mother attended a private school in Newark called the Winton School. They had very few pupils, probably only about 20 -25, but my dad and three of his sisters were pupils there as well, also Mum's sister Rene. After that, Mum went on to Lilley and Stone girls school in Newark. Mum left as soon as she could. I think it was at the age of 14. She spent her time helping in the post office and shop. My grandmother had failing health, so Mum took over her role, helped later by Aunt Jean who tended to work more with Grandad. Rene had no interest in it and went to work as a secretary at Boots headquarters in Nottingham. My grandparents led busy lives. They had a smallholding, worked as corn merchants, ran the shop and post office. Then in 1950, on the 23rd July, Grandma passed away at the age of 58, leaving Grandad and his two younger daughters to carry on. Aunt Jean was married by this time. Unfortunately, Grandad became ill and he died on July 3rd 1951, also aged 58.

Mum and Aunt Jean were both "courting", as they used to say, and so in the September both got married. Mum and Dad just slipped off on Wednesday 26th September 1951, got married and carried on working in the afternoon. In fact it was a bit of a scandal in the village because everyone thought that John Dye was living with Marion Story, that he had just moved in, but in fact they were married. I was born in 1952 and Andrew, my brother, came along in 1955. Dad also helped out at local farms. There was an agricultural contractor in the village who was a close friend, he was Frank Swannack and Dad helped him. We had a girl helping to look after us. Her name was Enid Mitcherson from Bathley and she was like one of our family. She was with us when Andrew was born, a bitterly cold morning at the end of February. He arrived quickly, despite weighing 10lbs and Dad had to rush down Vicarage Lane to get the local midwife, Nurse Clipsham, there in time! I can just remember it and Dad took me down Chapel Yard as it was called then, to tell Mrs Musson who was like another grandmother to us. The only living grandmother we had was our paternal one and she lived with us for a time until moving into rented accommodation on the Trentside. Grandad Dye

had died in 1947 and Grandma passed away in 1959 when I was six.

Primary School Years

I attended the local school, which is now Woolhouse Cottages and there were only two classes. Mrs Florence Billyard was the headmistress and Mrs Crabtree taught the infants. There was also a school at South Muskham and so our catchment area was mainly Bathley and Cromwell. Eventually the "middle" class came into being and I seem to remember that we had a couple of part time teachers in that class. There was an open fire in the front classroom and we used it to the full, drying our wet clothes and shoes and thawing out the frozen milk in winter. It was particularly useful during the harsh winter of 1963. We had a row of outside toilets in the playground - not flushing ones! The caretaker, Mr Worthington, had the daily job of tending to them! There were two playgrounds and no grass - only a small strip at the front where we weren't allowed to go! I remember the exciting time when we had a climbing frame installed but there were a few accidents as the ground underneath was tarmac!! Skipping was our favourite pastime at playtime.

Country Dancing

Another highlight was the country dancing and there was great excitement when the school acquired deep pink skirts with a white flower on the pocket for the girls which had to be worn with a white blouse. There was an annual event at the Lilley and Stone High school and I made a complete hash of the ribbon dance one year when Bill Swannack caused me to drop my ribbons and we messed up the whole dance. We weren't very popular that day! We also performed at local fetes and when my daughter Laura attended Muskham school in the 80s they still had those skirts and were using them!!

There was a high standard of teaching and although the teachers relied on the large wireless quite a bit - programmes like Music, Movement and Mime, Listen with Mother and Singing Together- there was a high pass rate at the eleven plus and Friday mornings were taken up with tests - spelling, mental arithmetic, tables and reading. Nature played a large part in our lessons as well and we used to go for long nature walks at the back of

the school through the school gardens - a row of allotments, one of which my Dad had, growing all our own produce. The school kitchen catered for the local schools and at one time Dad had the job of delivering school meals to Norwell and Caunton, South Muskham too I believe.



Dance Team left to right

**Back: Shirley Price, Anne Weeks, Ann Dye, Julie Smalley
Front: David Handley, Neil Joyce, Jimmy Waterfield.**

School dinner money was collected by the teachers on Monday mornings and we could also buy the government savings scheme stamps with the royal children's heads on them - Princess Anne (6d) and Prince Charles (2/6d). As Mum ran the Post Office I had the job of going on my bicycle home to purchase the required number of stamps. I even insisted on buying my own stamps at school and then going to my Mum for them!! Eventually a school secretary was appointed to work on Monday mornings and I was out of a job!

It was a lovely school and each year we had two annual outings - one in the Summer to the seaside and in Winter to the pantomime at the Theatre Royal in Nottingham. We were transported there by Thomas Motor Tours buses, the village bus company. Another vivid memory of my time at Muskham school was the regular visits by our dog Floss. She would roam around the village and



then decide to seek me out at school! I got to dread the door opening and seeing Floss there wagging her tail and trotting up to me. Mrs Billyard would then ask me to take her home and I would plead with Mum to keep her in and save me further embarrassment! She always managed to raise a smile though and was well known in the village. She had several litters of puppies, always under next door's shed and she would bring them out when she was ready. Quite a few families ended up giving the puppies a home and two went to Cromwell Lock. At first I was terrified of them falling in but they never did and both lived to a ripe old age, as did Floss.

Happy days but there were sad times too, particularly on 8th January 1962 when two pupils were involved in an accident on the level crossing in Vicarage Lane. Keith Spellar and his father lost their lives when they were hit by a train. David Handley was pulled free by the crossing keeper but the consequences were devastating. Mrs Key was the caretaker who was sent to see what had happened and I remember the ashen faces of the teachers looking out of the windows.

Having passed the eleven plus I went to Lilley and Stone High for Girls in Newark and so I had to get used to bus journeys by Lincs Road Car and school dinners! Boys who passed the exam went to Magnus School and then there was the secondary modern school called Hercules Clay.

I was required to help Mum and Dad when I was growing up and I loved being in the Post Office. Everything was carried out there including sorting and delivering the post, which was done by Dad. He was such a character and offered more than just a postal delivery service, which he carried out in his own unique way! He called in on all the old and frail people in the community and did whatever was needed. He'd light fires for them, carry things, run errands and generally make sure all was well. We even had a delivery service on Christmas Day and Dad would partake in the Christmas spirit with everyone, causing Mum to get annoyed because Christmas dinner was getting spoiled and he was nowhere to be seen! She resolved this by sending us children with him and then she could carry on and we would be home in time. We always had our neighbours, Sid Thurman and Cliff Garwood, round for a drink on Christmas morning and

they carried on doing this even when they had moved to South Muskham. Our friends Mr and Mrs Barratt, an elderly couple who lived in Chapel Yard, would come round on Christmas afternoon to watch the circus and the Queen's speech because they didn't have a television.



John Dye on a post round at the caravan site at The Nelson

Village Shops

When I was growing up there were two sweet shops in the village for us children. Arthur Rogers and his wife Bertha had one at Manor Cottages - it was like stepping back in time going in there and although my Mum had a shop, I would call at Mr Rogers on my way to school. In the early part of the century Mr Rogers ran the carriers cart into Newark. The other sweet shop in the village belonged to the two Miss Woods who lived on the Trentside near the Ferry pub which I think was then called the Newcastle Arms and both Miss Woods were tiny. I can't remember their Christian names but they were sweet old ladies and we used to knock on the door and they would lead us through to the front room and all the sweets were at low level because of their height. We used to pick up sweets and also bottles of pop, lemonade or whatever. We also used to go along the Riverside picking up the empty bottles because they were returnable and lots of fishermen didn't bother to pick them up, so we could make a bit of pocket money by returning the bottles and getting the penny deposit back.



In the 1950s and 1960s we also had a couple of travelling shops coming round, delivering paraffin and grocery essentials. We also had a bakery delivery several times a week and a butcher's (Brewitt's) on Tuesdays and Fridays. This continued into the 1970s. My parents gave up the shop when Andrew started school in 1960 and Enid left us to work in Marks and Spencer. The Post Office continued in the family until 1998. During the 1960s we had Price's shop on the corner of Main Street and Nelson Lane, Colonel Moore's at the corner of Main Street and Ferry Lane, Gleed's and then Dewar's at Woodbury where the Mellors live now. In the 1970s there was another shop on the site of old Mr Roger's shop, run by the Washington-Locker's at Manor Cottages. Also at that time Jim Walker had a grocery shop on the corner of Main Street and Chapel Lane and then later on there was a shop opposite which in the 1990s became Robin's Nest. This included the Post Office after Mum retired. The final shop in the village was opened in the early 2000s by Sue Hill adjacent to Sycamore Cottage. At present this is the hairdressers, Pina's.

Three Pubs

The riverside was very busy and there was a lot of activity on the river. Beside The Ferry there was a caravan park, now Eastfield, and people from Sheffield and the surrounding area came for weekends to enjoy the countryside, local pubs, of which there were three (The Newcastle Arms, The Crown and The Lord Nelson) and of course the fishing. My husband's parents had a caravan there and that is how I came to meet Nigel whom I married in North Muskham church on July 17th 1971. This site was in addition to the residential caravan site which was beside the Lord Nelson pub.

Farming

Farming was very much at the heart of village life when I was growing up. Some were dairy farms and others mainly arable but often a combination of the two. Cattle being led down Main Street was a common sight and I even have a photograph of a cow tethered to the railings outside our house! There was Ness Farm, Lodge Farm,

Manor Farm, Trent Farm from which the milk was delivered, The Willows, Old Hall Farm, North Road Farm and Burr ridge Farm. I remember when I was very young there were two sisters - Alice and Edith Clipsham - who used to ride round the village on bicycles with cans of milk on the handlebars and they used to sell it out of the cans. In October each year we had the potato picking holiday when we had the back breaking job of working in the local fields. There were also several smallholdings, including ours. Each Spring Dad would take in Cade (orphaned) lambs and we reared them. It had its downside though when I realised one Sunday that I was eating my pet lamb, Winnie, for dinner. No sentiment allowed in farming my Dad would tell me! I loved the life.



Charles and Ethel Dye with daughter Bertha

Development

During my years in the village I have witnessed a lot of development and I think the biggest impact was the construction of the A1 to alleviate the horrendous traffic jams on the Old Great North Road. I was at Muskham school and we followed its progress closely. When it was finished in July 1964 we schoolchildren all gathered near the Lord Nelson and we had to take a white handkerchief to wave to the Transport Minister, Ernest Marples, as he passed by for the official opening. Afterwards, we were all taken to sit outside the Lord Nelson, and Mr Cockerill, who was Chairman of the school governors, gave us all lemonade. Shortly afterwards, when I had left, the school moved to its present site. It's difficult now to clearly remember how the village looked. Lots of lovely buildings have disappeared, as well as prominent landmarks, a lot due to making way for the A1.



Milnes garage was on the corner of Walton's Lane and Old Great North Road and there was Singleton's cafe nearby. The whole village was sad to witness the demolition of The Grange in the 60s. It had been owned by a Mr Lounds and let out as flats in later years. This is where the famous hyena lived when Mrs Cogan was there. The parkland surrounding The Grange was a favourite playground for us children, a magical place with a large sundial behind it I seem to recall.

When I married I came to live in my present home, Pear Tree Cottage, in Chapel Lane. The row of cottages had been demolished and it was a much different place to that of my childhood. The building that was the Church Hall has been converted into a house and the property at the end of the lane that was the Blacksmith's is also a house. The Blacksmith, Tom Hutchesson, was a real character and my Dad had lots of tales to tell about him! He lived to a ripe old age but came to a sad end when in the mid 1960s the bread van was backing down the lane while he was cutting the hedge; the van caused him to fall over the hedge.

His son-in-law George Lynn was another great character who had at various times had a fish and chip shop at the back of the Blacksmith's, a village shop and a newspaper round. I used to help him deliver the papers and then go to Mrs Musson's for her renowned home-made toasted teacakes. I can still remember how good they tasted!!! In later years the Briggs family took on the delivery of the milk and newspapers and were a very popular family. The people who had lived in the cottages in Chapel Yard were mainly rehoused in Forge Close, South Muskham.

Tragedies

I have experienced many sad times in the village, some of which I have already mentioned. There was the time when Miriam Streeton walked down Mackley's Lane early one Spring morning, spoke to Tony Jepps who was delivering the milk from Trent Farm and carried on walking into the river to take her own life (I believe). Another was Doris Carnell who had looked after her invalid mother in Chapel Lane. Doris was a cleaner at

Burridge Farm and was sadly killed by a train whilst crossing the line to go to work.

No-one will forget the night in late September 1975 when a boat of soldiers on a training exercise capsized at Cromwell Lock with the loss of ten lives. There is a granite memorial at this site. Another incident there took place in June 1981 when a hired pleasure craft with a young boy at the helm was steered over the weir. Two adults drowned but two children were rescued. A number of fishermen have also perished nearby. Very sad.

The most devastating tragedy in my life however, was the loss of my brother in a road accident on 11th September 2002. The whole village went into shock and the memorials to him in the village are testament to the way he was loved by everyone. A true village person who never strayed far from the place he loved.



Andrew Dye outside Letterbox Cottage

He had been an electrician and before that he had taken on the mantle of our late father by delivering the post and looking out for everyone.. Following his death it was brought home to us just what it means to be part of a caring village community. Everyone came together to support us and it was truly humbling. We'll never forget him and his cheerful disposition. His son Leigh lives with his family at The Barn which Andrew converted into his home in the early 1980s. His daughter Lydia lives nearby and they help to keep Andrew's memory alive.

St Wilfrid's Church

My Dad passed away suddenly from a heart attack on 18th September 1979 and he is buried in the churchyard with all our relatives since 1900. We seem to occupy quite a bit of it! I have always loved our beautiful church. It's where I was christened on April 8th 1953, went to Sunday school lessons given by Peggy Grainger, had my confirmation classes (Andrew and I were confirmed together in Norwell Church), married Nigel in 1971, our three children were christened -John on 16th September 1973, Paul on 6th July 1975 (his daughter Nicole on July 6th 2014), Laura on 29th April 1979 and finally my dear Mum's funeral took place following her death on July 8th 2015.



Marion Dye (nee Story) at the Muskham Feast

All our three children attended the village school and enjoyed the activities that were available to them. More than we had but we were no less happy.



Letter Box Cottage

Altogether seven generations of our family have lived in the village and Letterbox Cottage is about to have been in our family for 100 years as our son Paul now lives there with his family.

My roots are well and truly planted in the village!!!

Ann Webb

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