

BROOK STREET BY JOHN ALDRIDGE

No.1 Brook Street, known as 'Crossways' is two storey, built in ragstone and flint in bands with brick dressings and a clay tile roof. The main building incorporates 'Cruck' construction in the eastern gable. This framed and pinned truss was carefully exposed and preserved by my brother Peter Aldridge and may be C16 or earlier, making the original structure one of the oldest in the village. The present house has remained virtually unchanged since rebuilding in 1747. There are various bricks carved with initials and dates. From about 1800 the premises were used as a beer house until 1864 when Mr Henry Munday used the right hand front room for the making and repair of harness and saddlery.

His son, Edgar John Munday continued this business from 1903 until 1911 when he became Post Master and used part of the present post office as his workshop. Mr Alfred Halliday, who was a retired naval officer purchased the premises in 1922, built the present workshops at the rear and set up business. He installed petrol storage tanks and pumps (first in the village) and repaired and serviced motor vehicles of all types. He was renowned over a wide area for his knowledge and skill for installing, repairing and servicing marine engines for the ever increasing motorized traffic on the River Thames.

My father, William Aldridge, purchased the house, workshops and land to the rear, No.3 Brook Street, and 'Orwell' in Crown Lane from Mr Halliday in 1944 for just under £2000. Dad continued the business with a manager and staff until my brother Peter and his wife Dorothy took over in 1969. The workshop was sold to a motor body repair specialist in 1977 and the petrol pumps removed because new government regulations controlling the siting of tanks could not be met.

'Wisteria Cottage', No.2 Brook Street (or Plough Cottage) is at the junction with Old London Road. *(It has now been renamed Plough Cottage, because it was once The Plough Public House.)* It was built with ragstone and brick with roughcast finish and a clay tile roof. This was a Beer House Known as 'The Plough' until about 1865. The brick and tiled building to the west (now extended to a modern showroom with flat roof) was a blacksmith's shop with two forges and active from about 1791 to the last recorded blacksmith in 1863. These premises were purchased by my grandparents in 1903 for £120 through Wallingford Building Society with an interest rate at 3% per annum. My father could remember helping to remove the forges when he was 12 years old. In

1922 Dad and his brother Harry formed a Building and Decorating business using the blacksmith's shop as workshops. The ground floor room to the east of the house was my grandfather's shoemaker's shop from 1903-31. As a young lad, I used to sit with my grandfather waxing his thread for stitching boots and shoes, many of which were made to measure for the local gentry. I still have, and treasure, some of his tools.

Adjoining this was a corrugated, iron-clad wooden building which was erected in 1923 as a garage for a 'Bean', 14-seater coach my father and uncle purchased and used for a bus service between Benson, Wallingford, Henley and Oxford. It was also used for private hire. The service ceased in 1934 when new regulations could not be complied with. At this time the Oxford return ticket was two shillings (10 pence). The bus was also used to convey the older boys at Benson Church of England School every Monday to spend the day at the carpentry class at Dorchester's old school near the Abbey. This was a very valuable addition to the very basic '3 Rs' education given in 'Billy Saunders' class.

Nos 3 to 11 Brook Street were built in 1905 and are virtually unchanged except for the addition of bathrooms and toilets to the rear. They were built as a terrace in traditional brick with clay tile roofs, and behind these cottages stood a large thatched barn. My Dad watched its demolition and the building of these cottages from his home at 'Wisteria Cottage' on the opposite side of the road. It is interesting to note that Dad was able to purchase four of these cottages, Nos 5 to 11, in 1930 for £300. They were let at seven shillings and sixpence per week, including rates (equal to 37p) and not increased until the late 1940s. In 1944, he also bought No.3 to complete the block which, even in 1956 was still let at twelve shillings and sixpence (63p) per week including rates. All five cottages were sold to private buyers over a period in the 1960s as they became vacant.

No.15 Brook Street was converted from two cottages in 1941. The south cottage is C17, in ragstone and brick with interesting exposed oak floor joists, believed to be old ships timbers. The centre supporting beam is, I believe English Poplar, which is unusual. Perhaps the builders in the 1600s felled the first local tree they could find. The north cottage is C18 with front elevation in bands of brick and flint. The two main supporting beams and floor joists are pine. I personally extensively renovated and modernised both cottages in the late 1970s. This was my parent's home from 1921 until 1985 and my home from 1921 until buying 'Hope Cottage' in 1947. The large garden and orchard to the rear was sold in 1976, when my Dad had no further use for it, to the district council specifically for the erection of eight senior citizen's homes. This

development was named '**Aldridge Close**' by the parish council in recognition of my father's lifelong service to the village. The entrance is from Crown Lane.

Moving eastward, **No 17 Brook Street**, known until recently as Chapel Cottage. This was a 'Calvanist Chapel' until about 1880 when the staircase was fitted and the first floor added internally without disturbing the main C17 structure of ragstone and brick with part timber framing and rendered panels. It has two dormer windows and clay tile roof.

'**Appletree Cottage**' next door is built in ragstone with roughcast finish and clay tile roof. It has C.18 origins but was recently considerably altered and extended. The front door used to be in the centre of the road elevation. The room to the left used to be a butcher's shop for many of my Dads young years and then from 1922 to 1947 used for the retail of tobacco and sweets by Mrs. Whichelo. Here in my young days I would spend my 'Saturday Penny' and any gifts from granny and aunts on sweets and chocolate. Mrs. Saw, the daughter of the house, incorporated the right hand room to make a larger shop for the retail of general grocery. This was followed by a wet and dry fish shop until it was modernised as a private house.

Adjoining is the **Farmer's Man** public house. The brick street elevation probably replaced a ragstone wall c.19 but the main building is C.18 with slate roof, but this was most likely thatched originally. It is recorded as a Public House from 1910 but the owners were listed as Beer Retailers from 1864.

The cast iron horse drinking trough by the Inn sign in the road was in regular use up to 1945 by Mr. Bob Cherrrell, who ran a horse-drawn delivery van service from Ewelme to Wallingford every day except Sundays. Mr.Cherrrell's father, Edward, began this service in 1891. My father said they were both as regular as clockwork.

Customers were provided with a large cardboard letter 'C' which, when displayed in a roadside window or on a gate post, would summon Mr.Cherrrell to receive your instructions. For sixpence (2.5 new pence) in 1939, an order would be placed, an account paid or a purchase made from any shop in Wallingford and delivered to you the same afternoon. Bob and his horse (or horses) retired in 1951 after fifty years' service. Mr. J.E. Gilbey of Ewelme continued the business for a short time.

No.33 Brook Street, which used be the **Lamb and Flag Public House** is C.17 or early C.18. The stone walls of the house and adjoining barn are rendered and

coloured. The thatched roof is very thick and probably the original with periodical over-thatching and repairs over the years. In 1979 a new over-thatching was undertaken with great skill and precision with a decorative ridge capping.

The brick and clay tiled lower portion fronting the road used to be semi-detached with a passage between the houses. For many years, up to about 1939, this was used by Mr. Frank Cherill of Paddock Farm to retail pork sausages, poultry and eggs on Fridays and Saturdays only. As a boy, I helped to make sausages and deliver orders in the surrounding villages by trademan's bicycle for a Saturday pocket money job. Mr.Cherrill killed, dressed and butchered his own pigs on Mondays for sale on Friday so customers were assured of freshness without refrigeration.

To the north (of No.33) are **nos. 39-59 Brook Street**. Four semi-detached pairs and one single built about 1938 and one single house build in the 1960s. All were built in brick with tiled roofs and large gardens to front and rear. Between nos.53 and 49 is the **Blacklands Road** junction. Up to 1938 this four acres was known as Wimey's Field and was used for grazing sheep, cattle and horses and occasionally loaned for Village Fetes. In the early 1930s my Grandmother, Mrs.Sarah Aldridge used this field for her occasional Gospel Mission Revival Meetings. I remember helping to convey the piano from our home on a builder's hand cart to be used for these open air meetings which, I might add, were very well attended.

My Father remembers when his uncle, Charlie Clinch (a local poacher) used the small barn in this field to "dress his bag" of rabbits, hares, pheasants, partridge and the occasional sheep or lamb before delivery secretly to his customers.