

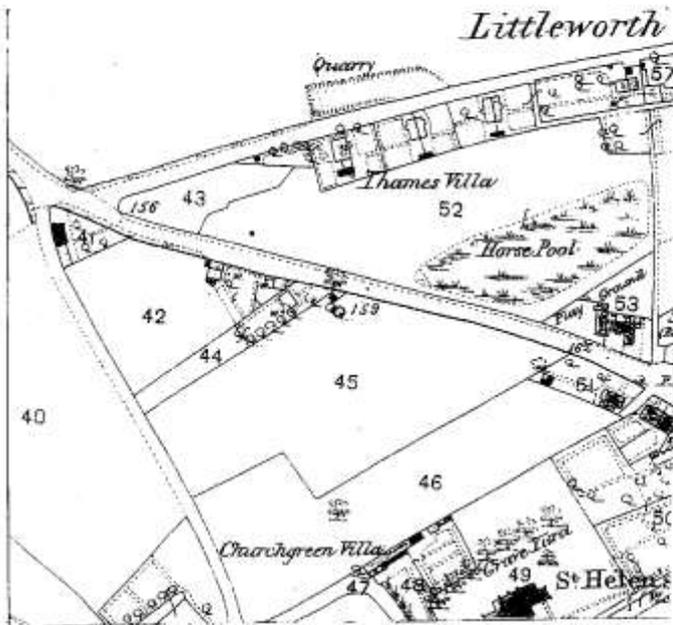
Meadfoot and my family

Timelines

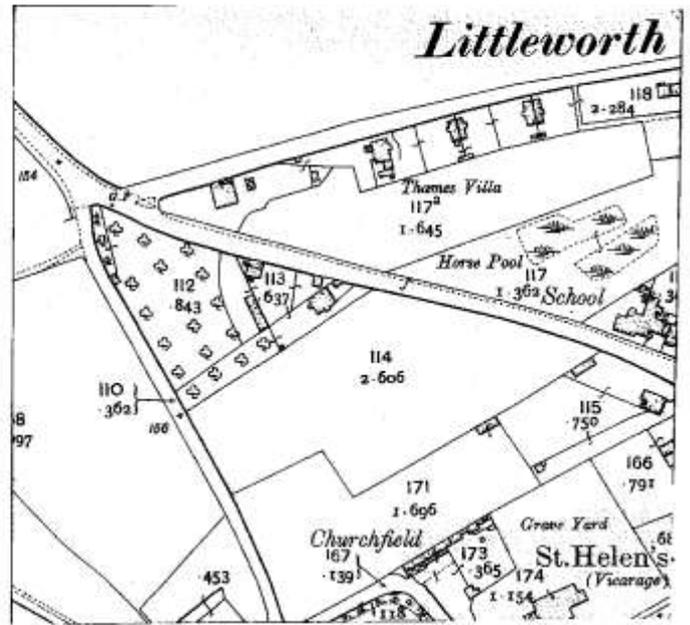
1. **1876** Outhouses belonging to Blenheim House opposite are built, consisting of coach house and stabling (subsequently to become the garage), an ostler's sleeping room, an apple storage room, and – at the east end - a laundry.
2. The buildings were in a large orchard and the first living memory is of a number of large (20-foot-high) standard fruit trees interspersed with newer ones planted c. 1918.
3. **1928.** Arthur Jenkins living in Blenheim House opposite, decides he wants to build his own house in the orchard. He does so – a large bungalow - and calls it Meadfoot, so named after a happy holiday with his wife Edith Jenkins at Meadfoot beach, Torquay.
4. **1959** Joyce Clarke, daughter of Arthur, inherits Meadfoot and has a Flat built in the spacious roof of the former bungalow.
5. **1963** Successful application to build in the orchard to the west of Meadfoot. Corrie Head built. Joyce Marion Clarke occupies the “Granny Flat”.
6. **1986** Peter's mother dies and Peter and Joyce Margaret Clarke become joint owners of Meadfoot. Extensive renovation.
7. **1991** Removes the green-house and replaces it with a conservatory/dining room, and replaces the former lobby with a utility room.
8. **2005** Ostler's room, apple storehouse and laundry converted in to a Flatlet and called “The Applehouse”.
9. **2017** Meadfoot meadow sold on May 25th, for a Care Home to be built on it.

In the beginning

The OS map clearly marked in the margin as 1877 is anomalous since it shows neither Blenheim House nor the Coach-house which were apparently built in 1876. It does show the Star Pub at area 41 was also demolished in 1876. Prospect Place built in 1857 (dismantled in 2016) is at the east edge of area 42. It may originally have been two peasant cottages.



1877 Edition



1912 Edition

Scale 1:2500

The 1912 map shows Blenheim House and the Coach-house and related rooms are clearly visible as they remain today. When the Star beer house was demolished, the last landlord was Thomas Polly.

Arthur Jenkins purchases Blenheim House in 1919 for £1,100 and sells it in 1928 as he moves in to Meadfoot.

An "Abstract of title" dated 1927 refers to the plot as "That piece of land (or part whereof the Star Beerhouse formerly stood) with the stable, coach house and the buildings erected thereon at Bensington, County of Oxford, and having a frontage to High Road leading from Oxford to Henley-on-Thames of 569 feet or thereabouts which said piece of land contained by admeasurement 3 rods and 17 poles or thereabouts and was then in the occupation of said A.J Hyde."

Arthur Jenkins must have bought the property in 1927, and moved in to the new house in 1928, which is the year he sold Blenheim House to Mrs. K Paxman. At possibly the same time he purchased the open area shown as 40 on the 1877 map.

Arthur's ownership

Until his death, Arthur and his wife Edith put their heart and soul into the place. Also, a lot of money, as Arthur was an astute business man. They were both devoted gardeners, and

as I type this in 2018, many of their trees and shrubs survive. They enjoyed the locality, keeping a punt for the Thames in the garage (formerly the old coach house and stables referred to above and below). What follows is an extract from an article by Frank West about his time in Benson as a young man. It must refer to the mid 20s, just prior to the Meadfoot build

[With my friend Saunders, we knew] Maurice Jenkins, whose family lived at Blenheim House at the river end of Littleworth on the Oxford Road. His father had the newsagents in St. Marys Street in Wallingford. Both Saunders and Jenkins had attractive sisters who later went to the same school.

In school holidays we spent much of our time together and were fiercely competitive in our outdoor activities and during the long holiday competed and kept records of our performances in running, jumping, cycling, swimming, diving, tree-climbing, etc. Jenkins' had a tennis court, an orchard and fairly large area of woodland across the Oxford Road from his home and this was the base for all such activities. The river held first place and Jenkins father owned a punt which at times we were permitted to use much to our enjoyment.



My father, Noel Clarke was a bank clerk in Wallingford and eventually won the competition for that "attractive" Joyce Marion Jenkins and they were married from Meadfoot in 1930.



The house from construction until Arthur's death

Clearly Arthur had strong views on how he wanted his new house to be. It is alleged he sacked the architect because it was not how he wanted it. In any case it reflected the social mores of the time. On the south side he had a veranda with steps leading up to the front door, just visible to the right of Joyce's shoulder in the picture above, and clearly shown in the next two photos. A path led down the north side from the Oxford Road main gate, and was for visitors such as the doctor, the vicar and similar status. "Trades" people were expected to arrive for delivery of mail, milk etc. situated on the east of the house, opposite the garage.



Arthur and Edith with Joyce in the late 40s. On Arthur's death in 1959 Joyce inherits the house, and her brother Maurice has the business, which now consists of shops in both Wallingford and Didcot. Maurice builds his own house on Haddenham Hill above Didcot.



The domestic staff in about 1938. Peter Clarke is in the arms of his nanny Elsie Ashfield. "Mickie" Waite was the general cleaner in her overalls, and lived we think, in one of the small houses at the top of Littleworth. She was devoted to Edith Jenkins. There is no knowledge of the third young maid.

Meadfoot in the 1940s

The history of the house is now inextricably linked to our family history. In the late 1930s, my father Noel Clarke was promoted from Bank Clerk in Westminster Bank in Wallingford to Manager and given a branch of Westminster Bank in Hove. The war breaks out. Born on Christmas Day 1900, it makes him too young for WW1 and too old for WW2. Hence the family moves to Hove, and he becomes a very active member of the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) in Hove.

In August 1941 Joyce brings my sister and I up to Meadfoot for a holiday, when poor Flt Sergeant Dennis Noble impales himself in the pavement outside our Hove home. (The story is fully told in my Benson Bulletin article entitled "Why I live in Benson"). The upshot is that my mother Joyce, sister Monica and I become war refugees at Meadfoot. My father comes up when he can, my mother works in the Jenkins family business in Wallingford as well as the Red Cross. My sister and I start at Benson School. Elsie continues as our nanny, living partly with us or with her Wallingford parents. Across the road in Blenheim House old Mrs. Paxman is now a widow permanently dressed in black. Next door lived the Picks. Ben Pick dies on 23 Dec 1940 flying a Lancaster bomber.

Memories of the actual war for us children were minimal – a few bombs heard, Lancaster bombers just making it back to RAF Benson badly shot up, lots of ARP activity, and later US forces throwing candy to us from their bikes. Benson had a lucky war.

Once war is over the Clarkes move back – this time to Brighton – where my father has a larger Branch.

Eventually Edith Jenkins dies in 1957 and Arthur in 1959.

More memories of the 1940s at Meadfoot

Later in the history, reference will be made to how the Victorian outhouses (part of the 1877 build of the Blenheim House) became converted in to a present-day guest Flat which we call “The Apple House”. What follows is a childhood recollection, reinforced by more help from Catherine Murray, Benson’s architectural historian.

The large present day garage was originally the coach house with the stables for two horses at the back. Catherine pointed out the two traps in the ceiling where the hay was dropped into the mangers below. How long there was a coach and horses is mere speculation, for fairly soon (early 20s?) it simply became a garage big enough for two cars end to end. A large trench (now filled in, but outline visible still) is where a car could be serviced from underneath, before a car winch was invented.

Next door to the coach house was the ostler’s sleeping room. It was always referred to as “the Den”, and indeed was a perfectly acceptable “overflow” sleeping accommodation. Elsie Ashfield would sometimes sleep there, rather than going back to her parents in Clapcot Road Wallingford. It had (still has) a fireplace.



Next room along was the Apple Store which remained in use as such until 2005. This is a picture in its final year.



Arthur had two large chicken runs at the north-west area of the orchard. When supply exceeded demand, eggs were preserved in large open stone jars as shown here, which were positioned beneath the apples stored as above.

They were immersed in “water-glass”, a sodium silicate solution that supposedly sealed the pores in the egg shell to stop them going bad. Arthur wasted nothing!

The final room, with lovely memories, was the Wash House.



Entering, on the right hand side was the wash boiler, exactly like the one downloaded here



There was also a dolly and dolly tub as shown here. Dirty clothes were washed up and down as shown, using a Reckitt's blueing bag.



Finally after boiling, the washing went through the mangle and hung out to dry.



Hanging out the washing continues in the Meadfoot courtyard to this day!

The orchard

Before we leave the Meadfoot of Monica's and my childhood, it is worth recalling the trees in the large orchard into which this large bungalow had been built. As noted, the 1876 house opposite, originally Arthur's, is called Blenheim House, after the Blenheim Orange apple trees growing in the orchard opposite. They were all old Victorian standard trees of 20 or so feet in height. I recall Edith loved the Blenheim Orange apple, which she used to eat with Cheddar cheese, a combination I still enjoy today. But there were other old English varieties, and two old trees exist to this day, still fruiting strongly. The first was (and is, for

there is plenty of blossom this year 2017) the Codlin. This is an early cooking variety which cooks down to a beautiful snowy texture. Another old tree is the Golden Russet. Other trees were the Worcester Pearmain, a bright red eating apple which was delicious, but could not be stored, having a short shelf life. The Queen Anne was a bright green cooker. Also, Wellington apple trees, but I can't remember much about them. There were many others now lost in my memory.



Another apple we have wondered about, an expert also failed to identify, so that it is now in his catalogue named The Meadfoot Wonder. In fact, in the end when it died, cut down and ring counted, we learned it seemed barely 100 years old, probably planted in 1918. A bit disappointing! We had expected it to be a bit older.

Meadfoot and the family in the late 40s,50s and early 60s

With WW2 now behind us, our father Noel Clarke was given a bigger branch of Westminster Bank in London Road, Brighton. Meanwhile my sister Monica had settled in to a good education, travelling daily to Abingdon to St. Helen's and St. Catherine's School, eventually to become head girl there. This meant that she remained at Meadfoot with her grandparents, whilst Peter with parents Noel and Joyce lived in the Bank House. Monica enjoyed life at Meadfoot, having her own pony in the meadow adjacent to the house, stabled in a small black shed in the south west part of the orchard, approximately on the site of the former Star Beerhouse.



Monica on Dandy, with Arthur alongside in 1947. This is the field in which the Care Home is built in 2019.

Whenever possible the family reunited either at Benson or Brighton. As her parents aged, Joyce was increasingly back at Meadfoot caring for her ailing mother Edith, who eventually died in 1957. Two years later Arthur died in January 1959, and Joyce inherited the bungalow.

Our father Noel, having been born on Christmas Day 1900, retired at 60 and moved to Meadfoot.



*Monica
meanwhile had
met and married
Reg Norrey in
August 1954. The
marriage took
place in St.
Helen's Church,
and the Reception
was held in the
Meadfoot
orchard.*



Peter married (another!) Joyce. M. (that is, Joyce Margaret rather than his mother Joy Marion!) in August 1960. Very sadly, Noel had a heart attack in the Meadfoot garden on 10th June 1961 after merely six months' retirement, and died shortly afterwards, leaving our mother to start a very long widowhood eventually to die on 8th October 1986.

Early 60s to late 80s

A bitter sweet twenty-six years. Bitter because my mother had to administer the house and garden largely alone. Sweet, because she did so with verve and determination, offering a warm welcome and home to all who were able to visit from time to time. Universally known as "Gran" to all the family, as well as being a well-known personality in both Benson and Wallingford.

But the house and garden, together with the adjacent meadow along Churchfield Lane was simply too much for a widow's need. The bungalow in 1928 was designed at a time when space was of no interest. In the roof there was an enormous empty area, called the attic, and reached by an internal pull-down ladder. My childhood memory is that it contained little more than Maurice's unwanted violin, and a top hat in a box!

So, my mother's first initiative in 1963, was to have a "granny" flat built in the roof. This was done by a Mr. Collier, a builder from Crowmarsh, whose family now continue today as builder's merchants.

She moved into the Flat and was very happy there, squeezing in any members of an ever visiting and increasingly large family.

Even that had a bitter sweet aspect to it, in that she then let out the ground floor and she had to experience that part being lived in carelessly by a number of tenants.



The Flat is reached by an external stairway, and inside consists of a large sitting and dining room, a small kitchen, double bedroom and bathroom. It was equipped and furnished well, for her own use. This has, over the years, proved an inspired decision.

About this time, Monica had two young children, and appeared very happily married to a very wealthy husband. They had a large house in the Midlands. I recall to this day my mother saying “One day, this house will be yours”, and so she came to write her Will.

The meadow

Adjacent to the main house and orchard, on the west of Churchfield Lane was Arthur’s meadow. You see it in the picture of Monica on the horse above. Exactly how it came into his possession is unclear. Over the years it had a series of inconsequential uses. Occasionally for horses grazing, later for bullocks being grazed, it has been all too often empty. Over her time a series of planning applications for the building of two or three houses were made, some going to Appeal, but all rejected.

The orchard

The entire area was simply too big. Too big to mow, to many unwanted apples. It therefore became the obvious location in which to get planning permission for perhaps two new houses. This is clearly shown in this 1981 air photo.



Bottom left is the black shed used as Dandy's stable.

Top right are the footing for Pensfield being built that year.

Prospect House, behind Meadfoot, was built in 1857 and demolished in 2016.

The lawn diamond bed was replaced by lawn in about 2005

Accordingly, a Planning Application was finally agreed and "Corriehead" was built in 1985. The sale of this plot and a (at the time) substantial cash settlement, resulted in Meadfoot becoming Peter's the following year on mother's death.

1986onwards to today

My first move was to bring Meadfoot into joint ownership with Joyce (Margaret!).

Simply put, with the exception of the upstairs Flat, the house and out buildings were in bad condition and in urgent need of substantial refurbishment. Both the wooden foundations of Meadfoot, and the entire garage roof was infested with dry rot. I spent hours dressed in a shower cap and wearing a face mask, both under the floorboards and up in the loft roof painting, injecting and spraying Rentokil. I felt it would have been worth buying shares in that firm for the cans I got through!

Next, the house needed a complete re-wiring of the electrical system, for without that there was a substantial fire risk. This was duly done at considerable cost. All the windows were old fashioned, draughty and leaking, so that double glazing replacement was essential throughout. Finally, both the house and garage roofs needed completely re-tiling. In the

case of the former that had the great advantage by allowing the Flat to be substantially insulated and hence much warmer.

The house at last became properly habitable! All these matters were dealt with in the last years of my army service, whilst I could still occupy an army quarter. Eventually, Joyce moved in, working as a Sister at Rush Court, whilst I was in a paying guest in London, working in the MOD.

The garden

At this point it is worth a diversion, for the (later converted) bungalow the garden has always been too big. In Arthur's time, despite the devotion he and Edith gave it, there was always need for at least one gardener. The first I remember as a young boy was Mr. Mumford. His family lived in Littleworth, and his fulltime job was working for the Council, hedging and clearing ditches. I recall he was a very stout Conservative. I believe his weekly wage from Arthur was 2/6d (15p in today's money) eventually rising to 5/- (25p)!! By contrast, I pay £15 per hour today.

Next in my mother's time was Mr Newman, who live in one of the isolated houses halfway along the road to Shillingford with Mrs Newman who played the violin (not very well!).



In those days – the 1960s – the house still had in it an old kitchen range. He grew all his vegetables in his own garden as well as our needs too. He would never talk about his First World War experiences.

Gardeners came and went – and still do. But the best of all was Jess Bates, who lived in Sunnyside with his beloved Susie dog, who would let almost no one near his master. Jess knew every flower and blade of grass in the garden.



On the right is Jess – simply the best. But nowadays we also have Mel, who suits us very well...! And as I review this in 2020 we seem blessed to now have Jess's son Adrian to garden for us.



The garden style changed considerably over the years



As a child and in my mother's time the emphasis was on the formal, and planting of annuals. Today is much more informal with more shrubs and perennials.

Jess's son, mentioned above, at the end of 2018, has made, what must surely be my last major project at Meadfoot.

This is a wild life pond at the far end of the garden, complementary to the ornamental pond near the patio. 2019 will be devoted to building a feature of wild flora and fauna. Hopefully a spring and summer photo to follow.



...a house developing over the years

The first alteration following the building of the Flat was to convert the veranda in to a sun lounge, whilst at the same time transferring the front door to the east side of the house.

Secondly, in 1990, there was a major extension on the south side by the building of a dining room, a utility room and outside patio.



Finally, in 2006 the old ostler's room (the Den), the apple house and laundry were converted in to a Guest and visiting family Flatlet. This has proved a major asset replacing redundant outbuildings.

Sale of the meadow in 2017

It's worth looking back at the history of the meadow, or rather the open land, west of Churchfield Lane. It is to be presumed that Arthur, when buying the Meadfoot orchard, also bought a substantial slice of land, shown as Area 40 on the 1877 map above, which extended almost, but not quite, down to the river. The bypass, built in 1932 neatly sliced through this area, so that in my early childhood I was aware my grandfather owned a meadow on either side of it. A Mr. Banks, keen to develop the waterfront, purchased the lower meadow at an apparently absurd knock-down price (£50?), raised the level of the existing water meadow by taking a large quantity of silt dredged from the Thames so that large scale Waterfront development was possible. My normally astute grandfather clearly missed out there! However, it left the meadow (in which you see Monica used as grazing for her pony, Dandy, in the photo above). In 2016 it was identified as a suitable site for a Care Home, and was sold accordingly on 25th May 2017. Unlike the lower meadow, it has proved an immensely valuable asset to the family.



The meadow was part of the original floodplain. The A4074 built in 1932 lies to the right of the picture, and right of that, the Waterfront complex, part of which had once been Arthur's second meadow, sold to Mr Banks. (Basically, that area shown as 40 in the 1877 map now divided by the Bypass).



In 2019 construction began of the Benson Care Home, completed and opened in 2021

Changes in 37 years, 1981 to 2018



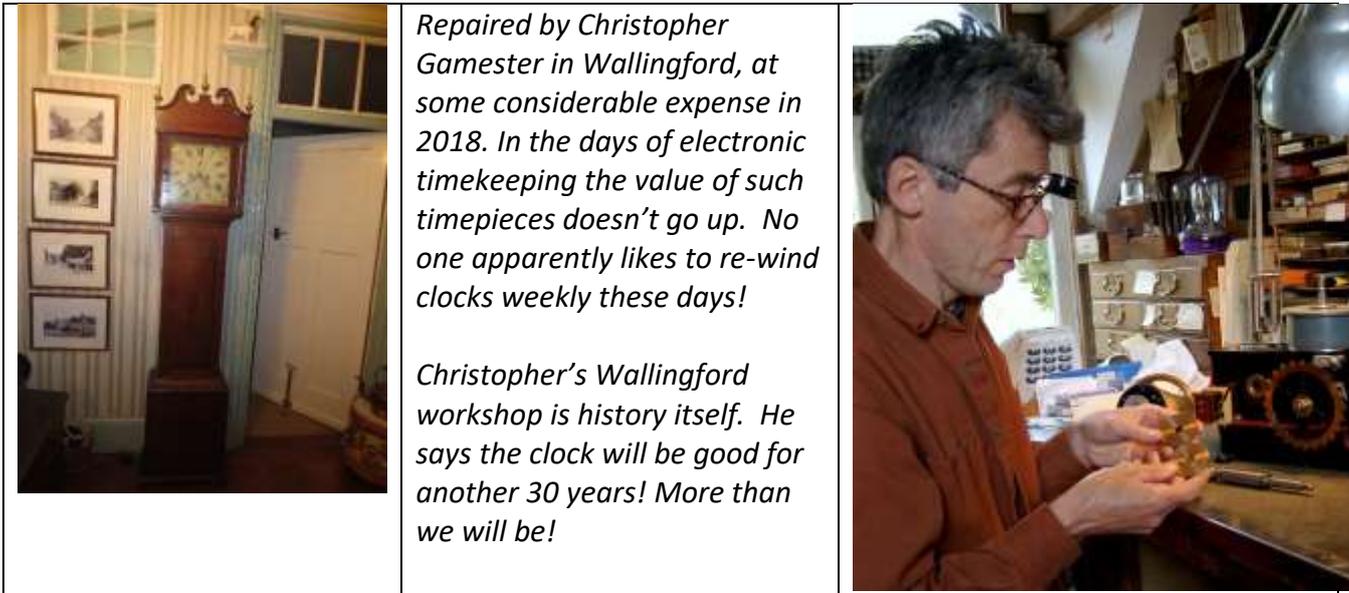
1. The drone shot below illustrates the changes in 37 years
2. The only unchanged buildings are Meadfoot and the outhouses
3. The lawn diamond path replaced by a lawn badly spoiled after a long summer dry period
4. The main orchard to the west has Corrie Head built in 1985 on it.
5. Prospect Place on the north side, built in 1837 was demolished and replaced by Little Well in 2017
6. To the East, Flint House has been built in the former orchard



The grandfather clock

I have no idea when Arthur bought the grandfather clock. It was certainly there in my 1940s childhood. As such items go it is certainly not the best. But it has always been *there!* Chris Gamester dates it was made in about 1825

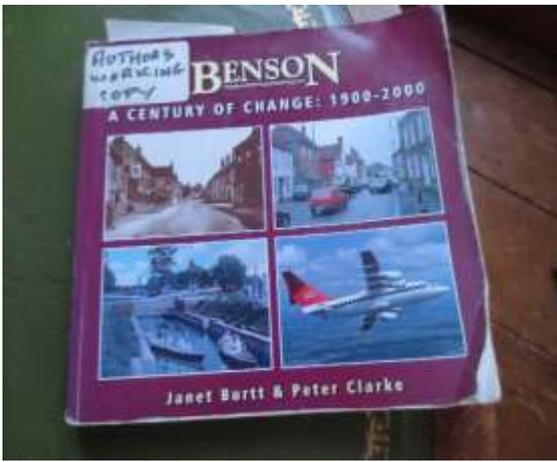
In 2018 it went wrong



Drawing it all together

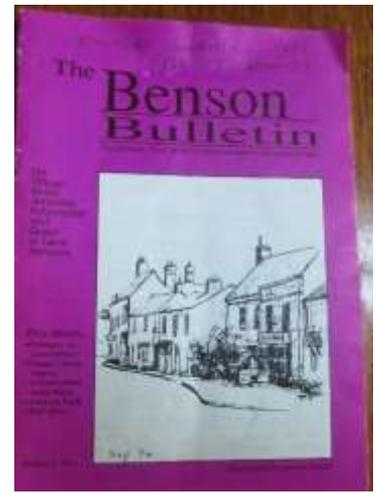
Joyce and I feel that after thirty-five years of occupancy we feel neither my grandparents, nor my mother would disapprove of the improvements made and the work we have invested. We are happy indeed, and for me the chance to retire in the same house in which I was a child is a great treasure. Benson itself when Arthur built the house was no more than a small agricultural village without the RAF Station or the vast growth in buildings, ongoing and still continuing from the 1950s. In the meadow a Care Home is being built, to be ready in July 2020 and Littleworth Road now is an enormous building site on the former fields to the west of the road.

In my childhood, everyone seemed to know everyone else by name. I recall a few years in to my retirement I met a very elderly old Benson chap. When I identified myself, his reaction was immediate. "Oh, you're artful Arthur's grandson are you"! I think that was a bit hard. Arthur was indeed a canny and very successful businessman. He spent many years on the Parish Council as well as being its Chairman. He loved the village. We can be immensely grateful for what he has given to the family's future generations.



So, for my good fortune a few years back now, I felt I was the right person to help write "Benson A Century of Change", which has been a large part of my own life.

And, in September 1994, I started and was first Editor of The Benson Bulletin, the monthly community magazine which continues to this day



P.D.J.C

January 2020