

THE LANE FAMILY
OF BENSON

by David Lane

CONTENTS

Forward		3
Introduction		9
Chapter 1	James Lane Arrives In Benson	10
Chapter 2	Leather Shoes to Horseshoes	20
Chapter 3	Henry's Children	33
Chapter 4	Birmingham Yard Families	50
Chapter 5	The Lane Family Fire Brigade	61
Chapter 6	Working to Eat	68
Chapter 7	“John Joseph The Birds Dead”	77
Chapter 8	Village Clubs and Groups	87
Chapter 9	Around The War Years	98

Forward

It is now more than fifteen years ago since my wife and I started to research our families. We have followed back the female lines as well as the male lines. Some people might well think this is too much, and they are probably right. Tracing all of your ancestors may be exciting but can also be very confusing, if only from the vast number of different surnames that you acquire. Many people prefer to stick with just the main paternal and maternal lines while others do a ‘one name study.’ With family history there is no right or wrong way, more a case of whatever you do try to find as much proof as possible. Creating a false family tree is easy, proving a family tree is the difficult part. It is always better to say ‘I believe it to be so,’ than to say ‘it is so.’ And there were never that many people who came over with the Conqueror anyway.

During our searches we have unearthed the usual selection of skeletons, illegitimate births, unmarried couples and family feuds but, no murders. However the Lane families of Benson, appear to conform to the old traditions, they were generally good, law-abiding, citizens and never in serious trouble, which is not always helpful. Unfortunately they didn’t seem to believe in the writing of wills either, except for Henry, and he left everything to his wife Ellen.

It is a mistake to view our ancestors using today’s morals and ideas; life then was generally harder and like us they were only human with the same frailties and desires. It cannot have been thought too great a sin in the eyes of family and friends for a bride to be pregnant on her wedding day, judging by the frequency with which it happened. In many cases, stealing was a matter of life and death, in more ways than one; the desire to feed one’s family versus the thought of being caught and possibly deported or hung for the offence.

You soon come up against ‘probabilities’ and have to decide how far to follow a particular shaky line. For example I have a William Smith who was born circa 1772 but there are far too many William Smiths to even think about following any of them. However there is also a Mary Walduck; with an unusual name like that it is much safer to make at least an educated guess at a likely candidate. I did make an educated guess about where Mary was from and, later was able to prove it with the Administration for her brother.

It was only four years ago when we finally realized that we had to get ourselves a computer. Trying to control the endless bits of paper was becoming impossible. We are now on our second make of family tree software, which is quite user friendly, though whether we will ever use all the tools is debatable. It is so much easier to find a piece of information on the computer than trying to go through endless sheets of paper in numerous files. We do keep all those paper notes but rarely look at them once the information has been entered on the system.

I also don’t think I ever expected to learn so much about, what at first were, seemingly unrelated subjects. Of course, we made mistakes like everyone does when starting out on a new hobby. A couple of times now, I have had to discard whole families covering several generations because I had made one wrong assumption at an early stage. Not being careful enough about births, marriages and deaths is the easiest mistake to make. Like the child who had actually died shortly after baptism, or finding two people called John who married in the same year in adjacent villages but with only one baptism that can be found locally. There are so many pitfalls to learn about and you often find out after you have already made them. It is often not the parish registers that give the safest information; far more can be found in wills and in church and manor court rolls. Even

Visitations are not safe to rely on, as Pam and I have proved when checking wills for a wealthy line of her tree.

‘Years ago, people died young’ is a phrase that appears again and again in print and on TV. I have even heard it used as an excuse for the present day high divorce rates; ‘When people didn’t live much beyond their fortieth year they didn’t have to stay married for long so didn’t get bored with each other as people do now!’ This is all obviously rubbish if you actually look back at people’s lives, especially those who lived in the countryside. Most of my direct ancestors lived beyond sixty five and several were in their eighties, two or three made ninety. As early as the sixteenth century, many people lived beyond seventy, and eighty was not that unusual even then. Sir Christopher Wren, the architect, lived to be ninety-one, even though he worked extremely hard all his life and, he lived in London. As for marriage, most of the couples in my own family were together for more than thirty years. The reason the ‘average age’ at death was so low is almost entirely down to the mortality of young children. Once beyond the early teens you could, with luck, have as long a life as most people today.

A lot of family history research is down to luck, such as whether parish registers were properly kept, whether your ancestors left a will, or were illegitimate. It would also appear that many girls got married after they became pregnant, though whether the pregnancy was planned we will never know. While unmarried mothers were not unknown in the past many of them eventually managed to find a husband and, often, it was the father of the child, perhaps the child had arrived at an inconvenient time. Whatever theories you come up with, be prepared, because, chances are it will be disproved with the next generation.

My great great g’father William Anderson, the father of Ellen Lane, was himself one of two illegitimate boys born to Amelia Anderson of North Stoke. It seems likely that the father could well have been one Charles Bennett a local farmer, but that, as they say, is another story. On my maternal side, there were three consecutive generations where the wife was obviously pregnant before the wedding.

A useful thing to look at is the use of the more unusual Christian names; this can often prove a very useful lead in finding the right family. A very helpful name could be the maiden name of the wife being used as the first or, more commonly, the second Christian name of one of the children. Percival was a common Christian name in my mother’s maternal family after her Gt. Gt. Grandfather married an Elizabeth Percival. When Henry Lane married Ellen Anderson as well as using a family name from Ellen’s side they also used Anderson as a second name for their son Ernest. The use of common Christian names can be a real nightmare, especially when there is more than one family with a particular surname in the village. You might then find two boys called John Bloggs baptized the same year, one to Thomas and one to John, who might themselves be brothers or cousins. The chances for confusion can start to escalate, especially in the towns and cities.

‘They never moved far’ is another rather worn statement. The Lane family lived in Benson from 1762/3 until 2003 but most of the younger sons moved away. In the Oxfordshire church court cases in the fifteen hundreds, some of the people mentioned had moved three or four times during their working lives and some had moved from as far away as Northumberland. You can say that most people kept to a small area but never ‘all of the people’. During most centuries work was often the biggest influence on whether someone would move or not. One of my great uncles was forced to move away, and chose Wigan in the north of England, after he threatened the local farmer, for whom most of his family worked, with violence. To make sure his father and brothers

could keep their jobs, he had to leave the area in a hurry. As most villages had only a few employers it paid to doff your cap to anyone in authority, regardless of any provocation.

In earlier times family links were often vital for marriage possibilities as well as a career. This was particularly true of families who had some money and property. You will often come across small groups of families who have several marriage links with each other, and younger members of families would sometimes take up a position as servant in the household of a relative or friend. Business links were also useful in providing apprenticeships and career opportunities for the younger children. Wealthier acquaintances were also thought useful and were often left small bequests in wills in the hope, no doubt, that they would take an interest in the welfare of the wife and children of the deceased. It was not unlike paying a priest to say prayers for several weeks, after one's death, in the hope that the stay in purgatory would be made shorter.

It was not uncommon for a widow or widower with small children to remarry within months of their partner's death. There was little time for long periods of mourning, or even much sentiment, when there were small mouths to feed. The new partner would often be widowed or an older unmarried person, perhaps they had been 'left on the shelf.' For women, a new husband would in many cases be essential, unless there was a relative wealthy enough to pay for their food and lodgings. In the same way, if the wife died in childbirth but the baby survived, a 'wet nurse' would need to be found or the baby too would soon die. This was another area of life where living close to other family members would be invaluable, possibly a sister or sister in law would be able to feed the baby.

Children who were expected to die young were usually baptized within a few days of birth 'privately'; I have often come across notes in parish registers of baptisms on the same day as birth. The baptism and funeral of a child on the same day is sad but also not uncommon. I had not realised that it was not always necessary to marry in church (an exchange of tokens and a spoken agreement was often enough in the sixteenth century), or that, for many years, weddings often took place in the church porch. It is possible to find entries made in registers in the 16th century that strongly hint that there was no actual marriage ceremony but just an agreement witnessed by close friends. Many church court cases at this time deal with this type of marriage, when one partner tries to claim it never took place.

In poorer households, children were expected to help support the family from an early age. Even in the late eighteen hundreds, some children as young as eleven worked a full day in the fields on such things as stone picking or weeding and, at harvest time, it was common for the whole family to work in the fields. Classrooms in rural schools could be very quiet at that time of year with most of the children away in the fields.

The eldest son would normally be expected to follow his father's trade. Of the six generations of the Lane family who were born in Benson it is known that three eldest sons were cordwainer/shoemakers and two were blacksmiths. It is more than likely that James Lane, the first of the family to move to the village was also a cordwainer, though this cannot be proved. It is only in the second half of the last century that a man expected his sons to follow the vocation of their own choice rather than his own trade.

The Victorians had a vast influence on how we think of the past in relation to the family and its values. It seems quite obvious that the Victorians invented the impression that every girl used to be a virgin on her wedding day, which would appear to be a complete myth, if many in my family

are anything to go by. And as for staying married, although the vast majority of couples stayed together for life this wasn't always the case. It wasn't until the second half of the 20th century that divorce was even possible for many people, before that date there were other ways of doing things. Bigamy was always illegal but quite common; a man might walk out of his marriage, move to a new area and find a new wife, without even thinking of a divorce. In big cities like London and Birmingham moving to another parish could be enough to throw anyone that might be looking for you off the scent.

The attitude to death seems vastly different today to what it must have been. Take a newspaper report into accidents on the railways in 1889, the figures make grim reading today and yet the report was very matter of fact. Total number of people injured 3826. Total number of people killed 905. This last figure seems incredibly high. 107 of them were actual passengers and 396 railway workers; presumably the other 402 people must have been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Perhaps it was the effect of living through wartime or maybe they just had a different outlook on life before the late 20th century. Whatever the reason it seems that those earlier generations were less afraid of death than younger people today. Neither my father nor his sister Lizzie seemed afraid to die and Lizzie actually told me that she had had enough of life not long before she passed away. "We all have to go sometime," was something they both said.

The Victorians brought in the law to stop the re-use of graves; before that date graves were always re-used after a decent period. The bones that were dug up in the process were often placed in the bone-vault (charnel house), if there was one, or just reburied when the grave was refilled. It is just as well that most people are cremated today because there wouldn't be enough room for all the graves we would otherwise need. There are over sixty members of the immediate Lane family buried in Benson churchyard (not all of them listed) and I imagine that most of them must have been placed into even earlier graves. Some of the earliest ones probably have later internments placed on top of them; this was common practice until the Victorian era.

You often read that people were buried illegally at night; these would usually include suicides, because they were not officially allowed in consecrated ground. Not only suicides, non-conformists were sometimes buried in this way as well. It is possible to find notes in burial registers concerning illegal burials, even those of suicides that took place outside the churchyard. An entry for one of my ancestors reads as follows;

Stanton St John Burial Register

12 June 1696, John Goodin Sen. Nigh Fostill (near Forest Hill) having hanged himself & being found by ye Coroners Jury to be Felo de Se (a suicide) was putt into ye ground in ye highway without any Christian burial.

It seems that once you were in the ground you were probably safe, I have never come across a mention of a body being removed. Obviously exhuming a body was far too much trouble for most parsons.

When my Gran, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Lane died in 1969 she was cremated at Oxford but her ashes were bought back to Benson. Her daughter Lizzie Parks decided that her mum's ashes should be placed in the grave with her husband Joe. So it was, that one fine Saturday afternoon my uncle Freddie Parks, together with neighbour Charlie Barney, took the urn containing the ashes, and a

shovel, down the road to the new Benson cemetery. They removed a piece of turf from Joe's grave, dug a hole, placing the urn inside and then carefully covered it over, replacing the turf. Apparently, they were totally unaware that permission was needed to do such a thing and, as far as I know, it is still not registered. It was as well that I had heard about it, as when my aunt Lizzie's ashes were later interred in the same grave I was able to warn the undertaker to take care when digging the new hole, to avoid the urn. The new headstone does note the fact that there are now the remains of three people in the grave.



Family grave at Benson

Introduction

How It All Started

What is the impetus that brings so many people to research their family history? The story of an ancestor who was the illegitimate son of the local Lord? All the money that great grandfather frittered away? Or perhaps, like me, it was an old photograph.

Pam, my wife, and I took my parents to Benson to see my Dad's sister one weekend and for some reason we looked through the photos kept in an old writing box that had belonged to my Gran. Dad and his sister both recognized several of the people, including their own grandparents, Henry Lane and Ellen neé Anderson and John Payne and Alice neé Saywell. The photo of Henry and his wife must have been taken about the time of their 20th wedding anniversary in 1890 but the one of John and Alice was much later, probably about the time of their daughter's wedding in 1910.

For me, the picture that really started me thinking was a torn and faded one of three men helping to shoe a horse. Apparently, they were Albert Lane holding the horseshoe, Ernest Lane holding the horses head and George (Joe) Lane, my grandfather, holding the horse's hoof between his knees. We were told several stories about their lives and also that their father Henry, and an elder brother Henry William (Bill), were also blacksmiths. I wanted to find out a little more; had Henry really died in the pub? and was Ellen really the old dragon they made her out to be? They were just simple questions but little did I know how they would take over our lives from then on.

The faded and torn picture that started it all



Albert

Ernest

George (Joe)

I was particularly lucky in that my father and his sister had quite good memories and I was able to note down many useful bits of information. However, the most reliable information has come from my aunt's lifelong friend and neighbour Ivy Barney, who is able to remember stories told to her when she was young by my grandmother. Ivy was also able to recount many stories from her childhood in the 1920's when she played with my father and his sister and their cousins,

in and around Birmingham Yard. Like many other people, Pam and I both started our research far too late to be able to ask our grandparents for their memories.

Before going into too much detail perhaps a note about my immediate family would help. My name is David John Lane; I have one brother, Stephen, we are the sons of John Joseph Lane and Louise Alice, neé Taylor. John had a sister Elizabeth Ellen (Lizzie) who married Frederick James Parks, and their parents were George Joseph (Joe) Lane and Elizabeth Alice (Lizzie) neé Payne. Two other people who should be mentioned are Ivy Barney neé Painting, godmother to Stephen and also Doris Louise May (Lou) Townsend neé Field, my own godmother.

A Benson Family

Chapter 1

James Lane Arrives In Benson

The family association with Benson goes back to the mid 1700's when the village was still busy with the horse drawn coaches and wagons passing through on their way between London and Birmingham. Although Benson was by no means a large village itself, as well as the passing trade, the tradesmen of Benson would have been able to increase their trade by supplying the small hamlets and outlying farms that lay within easy reach. Perhaps it was that there was more chance of increasing any business in Benson instead of his home village of Moulsford, which was the wrong side of the river, that made James Lane move there.

Most members of the Lane family seem to have been fortunate, in that they were never reduced to falling on the parish because of hardship. Only one went to the workhouse, Joseph 1796-1855, and that was probably due to ill health, as he died there. Thomas, 1829-1915, was given various payments of five shillings or half a crown during the late 1890s from parish funds. While Henry, 1844-1905, did claim for some shoes from a local charity for one of his sons. Whatever their circumstances, they managed to avoid the worst indignities that so many others suffered, especially the poor agricultural labourers.

It is believed that James arrived in Benson shortly after his marriage in 1761. He had been born to Joseph Lane and Mary neé Hall at Moulsford in 1740, the last but one of nine children. As was common then at least one older brother and two sisters had died by the time James came into the world. He was duly baptized in St John the Baptist church in Moulsford on 12th October 1740. The earlier parish registers are missing and other records for Moulsford are scarce, which means unfortunately, there is no other information about James or his brothers and sisters. I believe James is next mentioned when he marries Elizabeth White at Aldworth, not far from Moulsford, on 7th October 1761. Perhaps this could have been his birthday, being so close to the date of his baptism twenty-one years before.

The first mention of James and Elizabeth in Benson comes two years later when the Rev. Samuel Long baptized their first child with the name James, in St Helens church on 23rd October 1763. It would seem that young James did not survive childhood as there is no other mention of him and it would be unusual for the eldest son to move away if the father was in business, as James senior appears to have been. The next register entry is for Joseph, baptized 9th February 1766 and then finally John, baptized 26th March 1769. Sadly, John died when he was about seven months old, he was buried on 17th October 1769, probably the first member of the Lane family to be buried in the churchyard at Benson.

Assuming that Elizabeth was about the same age as her husband James, she died tragically young, in 1774, when she would have been in her mid thirties; she was buried on 30th September of that year. After his wife's death, it seems James managed to bring up his young son, Joseph, on his own (I am unsure as to whether James junior survived). However, he did eventually remarry in 1786, taking as his bride Ann, the widow of Robert Goody; the couple married at St Helens on the 9th November 1786.



Benson Church

Ann died in April 1809, after she and James had been married for nearly twenty-three years. James himself lived on for another ten years and passed away in October 1819. The burial entry for the 10th October reads 'James Lane aged 79, of Benson'; this fits well with 1740 being the year of his birth. It is unfortunate that the parish clerk didn't see fit to mention James' occupation when he wrote in the burial register.

There is a baptism noted in the St Helens register for 28th January 1798 of Elizabeth, the daughter of James and Mary Lane. There is no other evidence that a James married anywhere in Oxfordshire around this time or that he and his wife lived or died in Benson. As parish clerks were known to make, in some cases quite frequent, mistakes when filling in the registers I believe that the fathers name should read Joseph. It would also appear that this is probably the Elizabeth who was buried on the 5th June 1808. Although not of any significance to the outcome of the family tree it is nice to account for as many of the descendants as possible.

Joseph was the second born of James senior and Elizabeth's three sons and, on the 3rd December 1792, he married Mary Messer at St. Giles church in Oxford. To marry in Oxford was not uncommon especially if one or other of the couple may have been working in the city prior to marriage. Though not always the case, both were 'of this parish' according to the marriage entry and were married by banns. As was typical for that period, Joseph managed to sign his name, though whether he could write properly is open to doubt. Many people learnt just to sign their name and no more, as schooling at this date for the poorer classes was very limited. Mary, on the other hand, just made her mark, which was quite normal for a girl in those times. It was thought unnecessary for girls to need writing or reading, far more important to learn to sow and cook.

Mary's surname of Messer is not common in the county but it does illustrate a common problem for family historians. According to her age at death, Mary should have been born around 1769/70, but where? There didn't seem to be a suitable candidate anywhere, until one day I was looking through the Benson register again and came across a Mary Mercer baptized to William and his wife Martha on 27th August 1769. William and Martha had one other child, another daughter born in 1772, whom they called Elizabeth. When William and Martha married the register gives his surname as Messers and, when he was buried in January 1792, he was called Messier. Then, when daughter Elizabeth married Thomas Brown in 1793 at Benson, she is called Messel. I took a guess

that I had found the right family but it was several years before I found what I thought might be a baptism for Mary's father, William Messer/Mercer.

Finding a William Mercer in the Wheatfield register, along with eight other brothers and sisters, was to prove that I had been right all along. The first clue was one of the witnesses to William and Martha's own marriage at Nuffield, this was one Richard Coles; I later found a Richard Coles had married Hannah Messer at Oxford and Hannah was said to be of Ewelme. William did indeed have a sister Hannah but the person who was to prove far more useful was his brother John. I had found Mary Mercer at the beginning of my searches in the early 1990's but it wasn't until 2003 that I finally found something to prove my theory.

Early in 2003, I had bought an index to people in some Oxfordshire wills and I soon noticed that a Mary Lane and John Mercer had the same reference number. I later read John's will at Oxford Local Studies Centre, a copy of which is held on microfilm. Apparently John Mercer was a shopkeeper in Watlington. Although married, he had no children of his own and, in his will of 1801, as well as a sister Sarah (a Sarah was also born in Wheatfield) he named two nieces, Elizabeth Brown of Crowmarsh, and Mary Lane of Bensington. I already knew that Mary's sister Elizabeth Brown had lived for some years in Crowmarsh and, of course, my Mary was in Benson. Despite the different name spellings, it was obvious that they were the same people, and I had now found the proof I wanted.

During the first fifteen years after their marriage, Joseph and Mary had eight or probably nine children, six boys and three girls. The firstborn was James, born at the end of 1793, then John in 95, Joseph in 96, possibly followed by the Elizabeth listed as being to 'James' at the beginning of 1798. William was next in 1799, named after Mary's father?; then Thomas in 1801, who sadly died in 1809 and was buried on 11th May that year. The next born was in 1802 and was given the name Benjamin; this could be because Joseph had a great uncle called Benjamin and, I believe, his great grandfather was also a Benjamin. Benjamin died at the age of 31 and was buried at Benson on 31st October 1833. Unfortunately there is no other information about him, not even an occupation. Mary was born next, in 1805; and finally Sarah in 1807, she was baptized in April of that year, but tragically was buried just two months later on the 21st June.

Joseph Lane probably worked as a cordwainer all his life but the only reference to the fact is on the death certificate for his wife Mary. When she died of typhus fever on 20th February 1843, at the age of 73, it names her husband as Joseph, a cordwainer. The dictionary defines a cordwainer as a leatherworker or shoemaker. I imagine that in a small village this would mean that Joseph would turn his hand to make or repair almost anything that was made of leather. Mary had been a widow for over twenty years, as Joseph himself had died in June 1821 at the age of 55, he was buried on the 16th. It seems probable that, as was common in those days, she lived with one of her children and, in the census entry for 1841, she was living with her son James and his family. Also lodging with them, was Joseph her third eldest son, which sounds like a real house full.

I was to get a bit of a shock when I purchased an index of the Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions, Joseph Lane committed suicide! "On the 13th June 1821 Mr. G P Cooke, coroner, held an inquest at Bensington on Joseph Lane, who hanged himself. Verdict: Lunacy". It would appear that by the late 1700's most suicides were labeled as lunatics, which allowed them to be buried in a churchyard, instead of by the side of the road. I wonder if he did go mad, or was he just depressed about his life? Whatever the circumstances it must have been awful for the person that found him hanging lifeless. How did Mary feel when it happened, was she even aware that Joseph was

contemplating such a drastic move, she may have been the one to find him. One wonders if there was much finger pointing by people in the village, and perhaps, comments about a father who was a ‘loony’. People who were ‘different’ were often made fun of, their lives made more miserable by the attitude of an unsympathetic society around them.

As to the children of Joseph and Mary, we know that Thomas, Benjamin and Sarah died young; but I have been unable to find any other reference to William and Mary. That leaves James, John and Joseph, who all stayed around Benson. Joseph junior never married and worked as an agricultural labourer. In the 1841 census he is listed as living with his brother James but in 1851 he was living at the Red Lion public house, opposite the Old Red Lion Inn, where Richard Newell was the landlord. Richard Newell was later to become the father in law of Joseph’s great nephew, when his daughter Hannah married Charles Mathew Lane. Joseph died in the Wallingford Union Workhouse at the age of 59 and was brought from there to be buried back at Benson on 4th May 1855. At this time the old and sick often ended their days in the local workhouse rather than as now, in hospital.

James, the eldest of the three boys married Mary Hope and, like his parents, they married in Oxford but this time the church was St. Aldate’s. The service took place on 26th March 1818 with one of the witnesses being Mary’s brother James. Mary was one of the ten children born to James Hope, a gardener of Ewelme, and Ester his wife. This particular Hope family illustrates the illegitimate birth followed by a later marriage.

In late 1785, Ester Barnes gave birth to a son, who was baptized James Hope Barnes on the 11th December of that year at Benson. There was a case at the local Assize, 16 Sept 1785, when James Hope sen. of Bensington was liable for £40 for his son James to answer for a child of Hester Barnes. Ester then married James Hope at Ewelme on 14th April 1789. Why there was such a gap is unclear, perhaps James served with the local militia, he may have been working away from home, we will probably never know. Although both James Hope Barnes and his sister Mary were baptized in Benson, all of the other children were baptized at Ewelme, where the family seem to have lived for most of the time. It is strange that after having so many children, there seems to be no trace of any of them in the following years in Oxfordshire. As James Hope would seem to have originally moved into the area, possibly from outside Oxfordshire, it is possible that his children moved back to their ancestral home, or perhaps down to London in search of work.

Another curiosity is the name of Mary’s mother, although she was obviously known as Ester, it being the name given in the various parish register entries, it is not until she died in 1838 at the age of 72 that an interesting fact appears. The parish clerk entered the burial in the Ewelme register on the 22nd February and added a very useful note. It says, “*I was misled by the Registrars Certificate, she was baptized Martha.*” Without this note it would have been impossible to trace her baptism, which took place on 9th November 1766 at Benson, it reads simply ‘Martha Barnes daughter of William and Mary.’ Although I have looked for a suitable Ester Barnes, just in case, I have always drawn a blank, so it seems that without that one small note I would never have found a baptism for the right person.

After their marriage, James and Mary Lane also set up home in Ewelme where the first four of their six children were baptized. A son they called Joseph was the first born, in 1819, followed by Sophia Jane in 1822. Sadly Sophia died and was buried at Ewelme on the 25 April 1824 aged only 2 years 6 months. Next came two girls, Lucy in 1824 and Lavinia in 1827; it was shortly after this that James moved his family to his home village of Benson. Thomas was baptized at St Helen’s

church on 4th October 1829 and then the last to be born was Letitia in 1832. James and Mary suffered the loss of both of their youngest daughters, Lavinia, (written as Elveana in the register) in September 1833 aged 7 and Letitia died in the August of 1848 at the age of 16.

Of the three children who survived into adulthood, Lucy had an illegitimate son in 1852, whom she called James Hope Lane, and he was baptized at Benson on 27th April 1856. In 1851 Lucy was a domestic servant working in Canterbury, Kent, perhaps she fell victim to a forceful employer? The entry in the register gives his age as 4 and also says he is a ‘child living in Benson’ which possibly infers that his mother was living elsewhere. Although there is no further trace of Lucy, James Hope Lane married in London in 1874, he named his father as Thomas Lane a farmer, and who this Thomas was I have no idea. James is listed as J H Lane; a married man aged 28, a tram conductor of Benson, who was living at 28 Stanbury Road, Camberwell when the 1881 census was taken.

Thomas, the younger son of James and Mary, followed in his father’s trade and was a shoemaker. In 1849 he married Mercy Warner, the daughter of Francis Warner of Ewelme. Altogether, Thomas and Mercy had twelve children of whom seven were boys and five girls; four of them were baptized on the same day in February 1856 and there are no recorded baptisms at all for five of the children. In 1851 Thomas and Mercy, with their first two children, were lodging with Francis Warner, Mercy’s widowed father, and her unmarried sister Sarah. Francis was 77 and described as a grocer’s labourer.

For most of Thomas and Mercy’s married life, the couple lived in a cottage in Crown Lane and, in the 1884 Rate Assessment, Thomas is listed as paying Robert Aldworth Newton rent for an allotment and cottage there. [The Newton family held Fyfield Manor and many acres of land in Benson parish] It was in this same year that the qualifications to vote were changed and the following year, 1885, Thomas appears in the register of voters for South Oxfordshire for the first time. In the register for 1894, for the first time, the entry gives Crown Lane as the address for Thomas. This shows one of the problems with this type of official record, in small villages like Benson there is often no mention of an address of any kind. For instance, the cottages in Birmingham Yard were never even numbered until the mid 1960’s. This can make it difficult to be certain of the exact house someone lived in, unless it was a more significant building, like a farmhouse or one of the large named houses, like Colne House in Brook Street.

Crown Lane appears to have been called Berrick Street in the 1861 to 1881 censuses, when Thomas was described as a master boot and shoemaker and his wife was helping him as a boot binder. Most of their children had left home by 1881, with at least four of the boys having found work in London. Thomas was still living in Crown Lane when, at the age of 70, he won seven first prizes for fruit and honey at the 1899 Benson flower show.

The eldest of Thomas and Mercy’s sons was baptized Francis and it is probably him who appears on the London census of 1891 as Frank Lane of Benson. He is listed as being a widower and was working as a packer. The second eldest boy Joseph married in 1874 at Kensington to Isabella Adams, who was also born in Benson. The couple travelled back to Benson in October 1876 to have their son Herbert Thomas baptized at St Helen’s church. At this time, Joseph was a postman and gave his address as 58 Cromer St, Gray’s Inn Rd. London. Perhaps they travelled by train up to Wallingford, to be met by relatives at the station there. Or did they use one of the old daily horse drawn coaches that still ran between London and Oxford. By 1891 Joseph was

described as a ‘traveller in the tobacco trade’, according to the census entry and he was living at 36 Ainsley Street, Bethnal Green with his wife, and their four children.

The next son, Thomas junior, was born in 1855 and in 1901 he was living with his wife Edith and their seven children, three boys and four girls, at 26 Dumont Road, Hackney. His occupation is given as a carrier’s clerk, whether it was his occupation that necessitated the family moving around London quite frequently is unclear. The places of birth given for the seven children list five different locations in London, which seems rather excessive. The eldest child shown in 1901 was Arthur aged 22 and the youngest, Frederick, aged just 2 years, twenty years age difference between youngest and oldest being quite normal.

Another son of Thomas and Mercy, Charles, was aged 43 in 1901 and is listed as living at 3 Holly Street, Hackney. He was still single and also unemployed. Two of the girls, Mercy born in 1864, and Sarah born in 1869 stayed at home with their parents, though Sarah died in 1909 when she was only 41. Their mother Mercy had died nine years earlier in 1900, when she was 76, and Thomas passed away in December 1915 at the advanced age of 86. One wonders what he must have thought about the terrible slaughter of WW1, which had started the previous year.

Thomas’ daughter Mercy moved into a tiny two-roomed cottage in London Road and it was here that my father John used to go to collect and deliver her washing, which his mother laundered for her. Mercy had been a dressmaker in her younger days but, as she approached middle age, she suffered with her health and by the late 1920’s was confined to her bed. John and his sister would often deliver any medication from the doctor for the frail old lady, as well as the washing; she looked forward to them visiting as they would regale her with all the local gossip as well.

According to my father, one of Mercy’s brothers was called Ted and was a butler who worked for a well to do family in London. When this family took him away on holiday with them he would leave his small dog for Mercy to look after until he came back. In 1901 it would appear that Thomas’ youngest son Edward was aged 30 and was working as a butler in Herefordshire, so perhaps my father was right.

Mercy was always referred to as ‘granddad’s cousin’ and it took a while to find out who she really was. It seems odd that there are memories of Mercy but none of her father Thomas, even though all of Henry’s children would have known their great uncle. Mercy passed away at the age of 67 in February 1931, and her tiny cottage, which was part of a small terrace, has now been amalgamated into one larger house.

James and Mary’s eldest son Joseph would also follow his father’s trade and was later to marry his first cousin, Caroline Lane, in 1841, but more about him later.

James is listed in Pigot and Co.’s Directory of 1830 as being one of three boot and shoemakers trading in Benson. In that year there were twenty-one different types of business being carried out in Benson, from three bakers and two coal merchants to a wine merchant and a watch and clock maker. There were also three ‘academies,’ one for boys, which was run by James Coles, one ‘gents boarding and day’ which was run by Rev. William Oram, and lastly a ‘ladies boarding and day’ run by Catherine Oram, who was the Reverends wife.

In 1841 James was living near the junction of Littleworth and Oxford Road, in a cottage he rented from John Quatermain, when he was listed in the census as one of six shoemakers in the

village. James was listed in the various local directories as a shoemaker/cordwainer until 1869, which was shortly before his death. Mary, his wife, died of heart disease in 1854, sixteen years before her husband, who himself died of heart disease in 1870 at the age of 76.

It seems odd that there were more businesses, and a far bigger variety, in Benson when the population for the village was under a thousand, while today the number is around 4000. The number of businesses fell during the early 1900's and has stayed low ever since.

James and Mary's second son, John, seems not to have taken a particular trade, but over the course of his fifty-six years, had at least three different occupations. The first job description I found for him was in 1821 as a labourer, followed in 1833 by one as a horse keeper and, finally, he was a coal merchant's labourer in 1851. On 6th November 1821, John married Mary Belcher at Benson and, for part of their married life, they lived in a cottage along the London Road. This dwelling apparently came under the jurisdiction of Wallingford parish, as he is described as a parishioner of that town at the baptisms of two of his children in the 1830's.

Although they had eight children, sadly only two are known to have lived to any age, along with one daughter who possibly moved away. Their firstborn is registered as Catherine, baptized on 30th December 1821, less than two months after the wedding. At some point, and for some unknown reason, Catherine became Caroline before she married her cousin Joseph in 1841. There are at least two possible answers, firstly, it was an error by the parish clerk and she was never called Catherine, or perhaps her name was changed in memory of Caroline the wife of George IV, who died in 1821.

John's wife Mary Belcher has for a long time been something of a puzzle, not least due to the fact that if she is the daughter of Jacob and Anne Belcher, who was baptized at Benson in 1799, she is also the probable mother of two illegitimate children. A Mary Belcher gave birth on 5th May 1817 to a daughter named Ann whose father, according to the register, was Edward Smith a cordwainer. Then, on 21st February 1819, there is a baptism entry for a George Belcher, baseborn, to Mary; there is no mention of a father and no trace of either of these children at a later date. Was Mary just a girl who was free with her charms and, if not for John agreeing to marry at the last minute, would Catherine have been her third illegitimate child? There could also be a question mark about Caroline's actual father, i.e. was it actually John? As Caroline and her husband were first cousins the answer to this particular question would only add another family rather than taking one away.

Mary was not alone in being an unmarried mother as, according to the baptism register, there were eighteen illegitimate children baptized in Benson village church between 1811 and 1820. They were referred to as being either baseborn, natural or illegitimate rather than in earlier days when they would generally have been called 'a bastard child.' Most of those children, like the George Belcher mentioned previously, have no fathers name listed in the register.

After Catherine, the next born child was Eliza in 1823; she married Abraham Slaughter in March 1849. Eliza obviously took after her mother, as she gave birth to her first child within weeks of her marriage. After giving birth to two further children she died at the age of 30 in April 1854, leaving Abraham to remarry Caroline Cox neé Lake a widow of Wallingford, in 1856.

Next came Matilda who was baptized in April 1825 but died in the October of that year aged just eight months; she was followed by Cadman who was born in 1827 and baptized on 30th

June that year. As Cadman is such an unusual name, I have wondered if it had anything to do with Cadman Messenger who was a servant at the White Hart Inn at this time. Perhaps Cadman Messenger was a good friend of John or even godfather to the boy.

Sometime after his father's death, Cadman married and went to work for the West Middlesex Waterworks in North London. His wife, Eleanor Catherine Ashley, was the daughter of William Ashley of Benson, a coal merchant; possibly the same person his father John had been working for. Eleanor gave birth to at least two children; William was born on 11th September 1862 and Eleanor Catherine 30 November 1865, at which time they were living in St Dunstons Road, Limehouse. In 1881 Cadman, a labourer, his wife who was a nurse, and daughter who was a milliner, were living at 1 Dartmoor Street, Kensington. Eleanor died in London in 1889 aged 57 and shortly after this Cadman moved back home to Benson. In the census of 1891, he is listed as living in Littleworth. From 1892 until 1903, Cadman is also mentioned in the electoral register as being of Littleworth, Benson.

It was said that Cadman planted the holly trees that now stand in the garden of the cottage opposite the 'Sun' but, as it was Caroline who lived there, I think it was more likely to have been her or her husband. Whatever the case, Cadman lived in Littleworth until his death in 1903 at the age of 76. The later members of the family mistakenly thought that 'Cad Lane' referred to the villain of the family rather than 'Cad' being just a shortened version of his real name.

John and Mary's next four children were, Sarah born in 1829; William in 1832, who died aged 17 in March 1849; then Esther in 1833, she died at only seven months of age in the same year; lastly there was Mercy, baptized 7th June 1835 but sadly buried 30th July 1836, aged just fourteen months. John had not only already lost two daughters at a very young age, he then lost his wife Mary in June 1836, and then his baby daughter Mercy passed away just over a month later. Probably with the help of his close family, John managed to cope with the loss and also bringing up his young family.

By 1841 he was living with his five children in a cottage in Brook Street that he rented from Thomas Powell. By then the young Catherine/Caroline had probably taken the part of mother to her younger brothers and sisters. In 1851 John was sharing a cottage in Littleworth with his then still unmarried son Cadman and it was there that he died of a heart attack on the ninth of October that year. There was an inquest into what had happened and the coroner for Wallingford, John Cooke, registered the death. One curiosity of the death certificate, which made me smile, is that where it asks for date and place of death it lists the place as 'in his bedroom at Benson.'



The cottage in Brook St, part of which John rented

In 1849 Sarah, born 1829, married Robert Tanner, a farm labourer of Berrick Salome, which was where they started married life. However, by 1871 Robert had improved his lot, and the life of his family, the couple were now living at Hale Farm where Robert was employed as the farm bailiff. By 1881 the family had moved again, Robert was now the bailiff on Pierce's Farm in Wokingham.

It is possible to find many useful bits of information from the old parish registers that help to build a picture of life, at various times, as with the following.

In 1769 one Ann Brookebank appears to have travelled all the way from Westmoreland to marry George Brooker in the parish church at Benson. In that year, out of the six weddings that took place in the village, only one couple both said they were of Benson, with one partner from each of the others being from elsewhere. Also that year, William, son of William and Elizabeth Miller of Woolwich was baptized in Benson. As Woolwich is on the river Thames, it is possible that they were barge people. Barges were a common sight, hauling heavy bulk items like coal and grain.

During his life in the village, James probably brought his bread from the local baker's shop, where William Latimer was the baker at that time. If, by chance, any post was delivered, it could well have been by William Holder the post-boy. I don't know if he would have owned a horse but, if he did, it may have been shod by John Hutchings the blacksmith. James may well have had a small cart for his business and William Costar the wheelwright may have been asked to repair the wheels when it became necessary.

Although there was a local militia it is very rarely mentioned in parish registers and even less often is a regular army regiment mentioned unless the barracks were close by. But in 1782 there is mention of a Christopher Jeff, '*private in Lt. Fauconberg's Regiment quartered at the Red Lion,*' when his daughter Margery was baptized on Christmas Day that year.

During this period an unusual funeral took place that possibly got the village tongues wagging. On 11th October 1790, John Christopher Normann was buried and the register records that he was the son of John Deiderich. Strangest of all is that John Christopher was apparently a long way from home as he was a native of Riga in Livonia (present day Latvia).

By the beginning of the 19th century there was a fishmonger in Benson by the name of John Cook and Samuel Hicks and William Bridger were the village bakers. You could go along to see James Costar the local barber for a haircut, probably a short back and sides. Also at this time, the village had a surgeon, one John James Simms Freeborn; I wonder how safe the locals felt going to see him. The first mention of the Three Horseshoes, which will appear later in connection with the Lanes, appears in the baptism register when Thomas the son of Henry and Jane Kirby was baptized in 1818.

In November 1830 the ‘Swing Riots’ came to Benson, when Thomas Newton tried to enclose the common fields. A crowd of about one thousand people are said to have congregated outside the church on the morning of 21st November, waiting to see a copy of Newton’s notice. When no one arrived, a crowd of several hundred broke into his barn and destroyed a threshing machine. At 9.30 pm, Newton backed down and, although there was more trouble, things soon settled down and it was another twenty years before agreement was reached on enclosure.

It would seem very unlikely that any of the Lane family would have been directly involved in any way, although they may well have been at the church, along with most other people in the village. Most of those taken to court seem to have had no links with Benson, and it would seem, were probably troublemakers from outside.

It is also possible to find many tragic stories in the local registers.

One day in July 1834 a bargeman by the name of William Cheney got involved in a fight in Benson and during the ensuing violence was killed, so it was that he came to be buried on the 20th of that month. Although this sort of report in the register is rare, other tragedies are not, and drowning was quite common along the river. In 1827 an unknown man was pulled from the mill head at Bensington Mill and was buried on 25th November. One very poignant event was recorded on 20th February 1835 when one-month-old twins Anna and Maria Pearce were buried together in the same coffin.

Chapter 2

From Leather Shoes to Horseshoes

In 1841 Benson was still a bustling village. The second biggest occupation, after farming, would appear to have been coach building, with twenty five people apparently directly employed, plus, one assumes, numerous other connected trades. At this time Mary Padbury was the postmistress and the post office was situated on the corner of Mill Lane. There were also three adult postmen and two young postboys, brothers Edward and William Goodey, employed to deliver and collect the mail. Letters arrived from London at 1 o'clock in the morning and were dispatched at half past one. Mail for Wallingford went by foot at eight every morning. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century postmen walked miles to deliver mail to all the outlying hamlets and farms. As well as the numerous coaches that passed through the village daily there was also a weekly wagon that travelled to London on a Thursday, leaving at six in the morning.

In Preston Crowmarsh, apart from farming, the only recorded businesses were the Swan public house, the flourmill and the basket makers, the Argyle brothers, Charles and James.

I don't know what the working hours were for shops in the mid 1800's when James was still in business but, they must have been long, because they certainly still were in 1894. According to a note about early closing in the local paper, they must have been open half the night as well. Perhaps it was in an effort to save on candles during the winter months.

Berks & Oxen Advertiser - 28th September 1894: "BENSON, - We are asked to say that the tradesmen of Benson have agreed to close their shops at 7 o'clock from October to March, and that the new arrangement will take effect from Monday next."

It was on 3rd October 1841 that Joseph Lane, the son of James, married his uncle John's daughter, now known as Caroline. They married in Oxford at St Mary Magdalen and the marriage certificate confirms their father's names and occupations. They gave St Mary Magdalen parish as being their place of residence but they must have taken temporary residence, as when the census was taken just four months earlier in June, they were both living at home in Benson. It is uncertain exactly where in Benson Joseph and Caroline set up home together but, just three months after their marriage, their first son Charles Mathew was born, on 14th January 1842. When she went to Wallingford to register the boy's birth, Caroline gave her husband's occupation as shoemaker. Obviously Joseph had other ideas about his job description as two years later, after Henry was born on 24th October 1844, he registered the birth himself and gave his occupation as cordwainer.

Joseph had, apparently, been unwell for some time and, less than two years after Henry's birth, he was to die of consumption; he passed away with Caroline by his side on 23rd April 1846. When she registered the death on 6th May, the cause of death is given as, 'phthisis, some years', phthisis being the clinical name for the disease. Joseph was only 27 when he died and Caroline was left with two small boys under the age of five to feed and care for. She probably had to rely on her family for help until, on the 27th July 1848, she married Alfred William Saunders, who was a shoemaker, as her first husband Joseph had been. Caroline's younger sister Sarah was a witness to the marriage at St. Helen's church in Benson.

Alfred and Caroline's first child was Maria Ann, who was registered at Wallingford in the December quarter of the same year as the wedding, 1848. It would appear that Caroline really was

taking after her mother as, once again, she must have been pregnant before the wedding. Did she snare a young and impressionable man, five years her junior, who possibly worked for her father in law James? Or did Alfred seduce a vulnerable widow, the mother of two small boys? Whatever the case, they went on to have five more children together: Eliza Augusta, William Edward who died aged sixteen months, Annie Lavinia who died aged seven months, then Willie Llewellyn and finally Annie Amelia.



Littleworth cottages were Caroline lived, showing holly trees

Alfred became a ‘jack of all trades’ as, in the censuses in the following years, he was variously described as bootmaker, ironmonger and music teacher. The couple spent most of their married life living in Littleworth and certainly most of that time was spent in one of the end cottages opposite the Sun public house. In 1881 the Sun is listed as the ‘Three Bells’ and that same year Alfred and Caroline had the local policeman, John Keal, and his family living next door.

Alfred was listed in the electoral register from 1884 until his death at the age of 67 in September 1895. Meanwhile, their son Willie/William joined the army and was stationed at Farnborough in 1881, in 1887 he married Martha Powers at St John’s church Lambeth. On his marriage certificate he described himself as a Band Sergeant, and his father Alfred as a gentleman!! I must assume he was still in the army until sometime after 1895 as their three children, mentioned in the 1901 census, are listed as being born in rather exotic places for those days. Alice was born in Dublin; George was born in Bermuda, while Ethel was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia. By 1901 Willie and his family had set up home in Branscombe, near Dorking, and he was now self-employed as a ‘professor of music.’

There was a missed opportunity in December 2006 when a collection of military items went to auction at Bonhams in Oxford, and sold for £141.

Lot 319; Bandmaster William Llewellyn Saunders (The King’s Liverpool Regiment) A comprehensive archive pertaining to his career c1888-c1914, comprising a fine ebony and silver presentation conductors baton from the Sergeants 2nd BN Prince of Wales Vols (South Lancashire Regiment) upon his appointment to the King’s (Liverpool Regiment), his multi part officers forage cap badge 1881-97 (King’s Liverpool Regiment), his Royal Warrant upon appointment (1888), photographs wearing uniform and forage cap, marriage and children’s birth certificates, also a letter from H.M. Pensions in 1924 informing him of a pension reduction.

It was Willie who travelled up to Benson from his home when his mother Caroline died in 1905, aged 84; he gave his address as 1 North Street, Dorking when he registered her death. Caroline had been a widow for ten years but was probably never alone. Her grandson George (Joe) Lane was living with her in 1901.

By 1907 Willie seems to have given up the music and was now running a beerhouse called 'The Gun' in North Street. It was in this same year that he was a witness in a court case, after he mistakenly bought a pony and trap from a local baker called Thomas Luck, unfortunately they had been stolen. Willie had paid out £16 a mare and two pigs, the mare worth £7 and the pigs 14s each. In his evidence he said "I took a fancy to the turnout, as I thought I could take my wife out with it".

As for the other Saunders children, it is known that in 1881 Eliza Augusta was working for Frederick Widnell as a cook in Streatham, South London, then in 1891 she had moved on to work for a family in Paddington. In 1900 at the age of 49 she finally married, to David Ashwell of Worthing, he was seven years her senior and worked as a traveler for a sugar company.

Annie Amelia was still at home with her father in 1881, working as an ostrich featherist. However, on 25th May 1884 she married Mark Bishop, a farrier, at St. Mary Lambeth; they both gave their address as Gardeners Place, Lambeth. (It seems possible that Annie may have met her future husband through her brother Willie as he and Mark may have met during their army service.) Mark's father Philip is described on the marriage certificate as a carman, while Alfred Saunders is described as a musician.

In 1881, Mark was a private soldier in the 52nd Foot Regiment stationed in Chatham, Kent, the 52nd being the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry. Once he was married, Mark seemed to find it necessary to move fairly often, presumably because of work. In 1901 the couple were in Littleworth, Benson, with their four children, just two doors away from Annie's mother Caroline; their son Albert had been born in Woodstock, Philip in Bromley, Kent, then Ernest and Elsie were both born in Canning Town. It is known that Mark's last address was in Bromley.

Whilst checking the certificate for Mark and Annie's wedding, I noticed that the witnesses were Charles and Maria King. As Maria was the name of Alfred and Caroline's eldest daughter, I decided to check the 1881 census index to see if I could match a Charles and Maria King with the wife having been born in Benson. It took just moments to find them living at 59 Lambeth Walk, Lambeth with their three daughters. The biggest surprise was the last name in the entry, *Caroline – Mother In Law – age 59 – place of birth Benson*. I had been trying to find out where Caroline Saunders was in 1881 for years, without success. It's surprising how long it can sometimes take until the final piece of the jigsaw falls into place.

Her probable reason for being with her daughter is that Maria had given birth just four days before the census day and, in 1891, Caroline is listed in the census as being a midwife. I must assume that she travelled to Lambeth to help her daughter through the birth. If I hadn't noticed Maria King as a witness to her sister's wedding, I would never have found Caroline, as she has no surname listed.

It appears that Maria met Charles King, a bootmaker from Framlingham in Suffolk, probably whilst she was working in service in London. The couple married on 28th January 1877 in Lambeth. By 1881 they had three children: Anna who was 2, Caroline aged 1 and Agnes, the

newborn, just four days old. It seems that Maria had travelled back to Benson to give birth to Caroline, as that is given as her place of birth.

Joseph Lane's two sons, meanwhile, both became blacksmiths. In 1861 Henry, was aged fifteen and still at home, he was, for a short time, employed as a ploughboy, it is uncertain who he was later apprenticed to as a blacksmith. Meanwhile Charles Mathew had left home and was living in Berrick Salome, working as an apprentice smith with Charles Coster. It is quite possible that Henry joined his older brother when Charles had already established himself in Benson.

Charles Mathew later married Hannah Newell, the daughter of Richard, on 26th July 1866 at Benson; his brother Henry and Maria and Eliza Saunders, his stepsisters, were witnesses. I like to think it is possible that he became friendly with Hannah when his great uncle Joseph was lodging with her father Richard at the old Red Lion pub. Charles and Hannah lived in Littleworth and, over the next eight years had two boys and two girls.

As well as Charles and Henry Lane at least four other people gave their occupation as blacksmith in Benson in the 1860's, one of whom, Frederic Wadsworth, was also listed as a publican. Later, Henry himself would be running a public house, as well as his blacksmith business. It is probable that Charles and Henry were unlucky with their choice of occupation, as their apprenticeships finished it would have coincided with the steep decline in the volume of coaches passing through the village.

More trade was being moved by the railways, a branch line came into Wallingford, and another line was soon to come to Walton. By the mid 1870's there were only three or four regular coaches passing through the village, now that trains were becoming safer and more reliable. With only local farms and the few privately owned horses to shoe there was very little full time business for more than two or three blacksmiths, at the most. It was probably difficult for both brothers to find enough work in the area and perhaps Charles was the more adventurous of the two, this may be why he eventually decided to emigrate with his family.

Sometimes the oddest coincidences can lead to unexpected revelations; this is the story of how one event lead to some surprises for several people on both sides of the world.

I think it was in 1989 that my aunt, Lizzie Parks, told me that someone from New Zealand had left their address at the post office in Benson because they were related to the Lane family. Apparently they had been unable at the time to find anyone who knew about the family or the fact that at least two people in the village were indeed related. Even the postmaster didn't realize who those two people were, even though he knew them both well, but I was eventually given the address and wrote off to New Zealander, to Belle Harper, to find out what the connection was.

I soon received a letter back telling me that Belle was descended from Charles and Hannah Lane. She had been to Benson, on the off chance of finding family, while over here with a friend. She also put me in touch with her cousin, Steve Lane, who was actually researching the family. This was the start of numerous letters going back and forth; Steve sent me a large family tree with most of the descendants of Charles listed.

It was one evening a couple of years later that I received a phone call from Aunt Lizzie saying that she had had an unexpected visitor! Apparently another relative from New Zealand had managed to find her and called in to say hello. Alan and Phyllis Whiteman were in the country on

holiday and Phyllis, a great granddaughter of Charles, had done some research and wanted to see the village that Charles had left behind.

It was pure chance that they asked one of the few people who knew the Lane family well; George Gurney had known Lizzie Parks neé Lane all his life and was able to tell Phyllis where she lived. After spending a pleasant time talking about the family, and taking some photographs, they left their address, before they went round to Littleworth to take some pictures of the cottages there before leaving.

Needless to say, I wrote to Phyllis and it was when I received her reply that I found out that she was descended on the one line of the family that Steve had known nothing about. The biggest coincidence was that both Belle and Phyllis lived in Lower Hutt a suburb of Wellington. I told Belle, suggesting that she might like to surprise Phyllis. They had known nothing about each other but lived only a few miles apart and were then able to meet up and exchange stories.



Phyllis (on right) with Lizzie Parks

Phyllis was kind enough to send me copies of two diaries made by people who went to New Zealand in the 19th century, one of which was written by Henry Ward who had been a passenger on the same ship as Charles and his family. It was certainly not the sort of journey to be undertaken by the faint hearted. The conditions on board were quite poor for such a long journey and several people died from illness and disease.



Charles Mathew Lane, before he left England

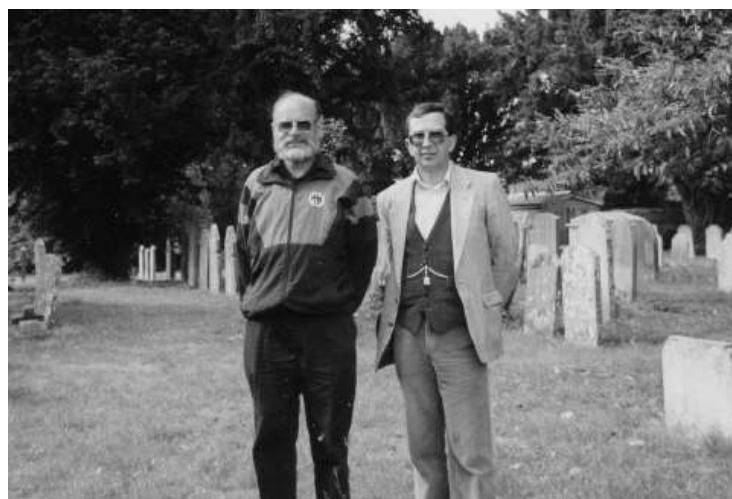


Charles Mathew Lane, in New Zealand

There was a photograph in my Gran's collection showing a seated gentleman sporting a fine beard, obviously taken in the late 1800's. Although I had wondered if it might be of Charles, it wasn't until Phyllis sent me a copy of a photo of him that I could be sure.

It was in 1995 that I too was able to meet one of the NZ cousins, when Steve was over in the UK on holiday. He had spent some of his time touring sites related to MG Cars, as he was a member of the New Zealand MG owners club. We met up in Benson and had lunch together in the 'Three Horseshoes', sitting in the bay where Henry was supposed to have died, before I showed him round the village, pointing out the various houses with family connections.

Without the contact from New Zealand I would probably never have known what happened to Charles and his family.



Standing amongst past relatives with Steve (on left) at Benson

In fact it was in 1874 that Charles, along with his wife and children, decided to take assisted passage on the ship Corona, under Captain Robertson bound for Otago in New Zealand. They were amongst a total of 496 passengers when the ship sailed from Gravesend on 24th May of that year; they crossed the equator on 2nd July and arrived in Port Chalmers on 28th August, ninety-six days after leaving port. They settled in Glenore, where Hannah gave birth to three more children, and there are now more Lane descendants known to live in New Zealand than there are here in England.



Maria Lane, (seated) daughter of Charles Mathew, with her family

It would make interesting reading if a book on the New Zealand family were ever written. As well as the journey out to New Zealand, one of Charles' sons went to the Klondike and one went to Australia for a while. Both boys eventually returned to New Zealand to marry and raise a family.

For some reason, although Charles was baptized six months after his birth, Henry was just a few months short of his twentieth birthday before he himself was baptized. I can only guess that, as his father was already quite ill by the time Henry was born, the baptism was postponed and then, perhaps, forgotten. On 22 October 1870, and two days before his twenty-sixth birthday, Henry married Ellen Anderson of North Stoke at St Helen's church Benson. Ellen was one of eleven children born to William Anderson, a farm worker, and his wife Sarah neé Smith. One of their witnesses was Charles the other was Ann Smith, possibly a relative of Ellen's. With the amount of family in the village there could well have been a good crowd waiting to wish the couple a long and happy life together.

Henry and Ellen started married life in Birmingham Yard; the census entry for 1871 gives it as their address, and for over a hundred years, with only a short break, one or more of the Lane family continued to live in one or other of the cottages there until my aunt, Lizzie Parks, passed away in August 1998.

After living in No.3 Birmingham Yard for a short time Henry moved in to what is now No.1 Birmingham Yard, which, until 1966, was a two up two down cottage with a small coal cellar and a toilet at the bottom of the garden. In 1881 Henry was living there with Ellen and five children, plus George West a young blacksmith from London. Another two children were born by 1884, so they

must have had some interesting sleeping arrangements, with four sons and three daughters, and only two bedrooms. Perhaps George West slept in the cellar, when it was dry, or more likely, the blacksmiths shop. In 1884, according to the Rate Assessment for that year, Henry Lane was paying rent for the cottage to William Frampton, who owned all of the Yard at that time.



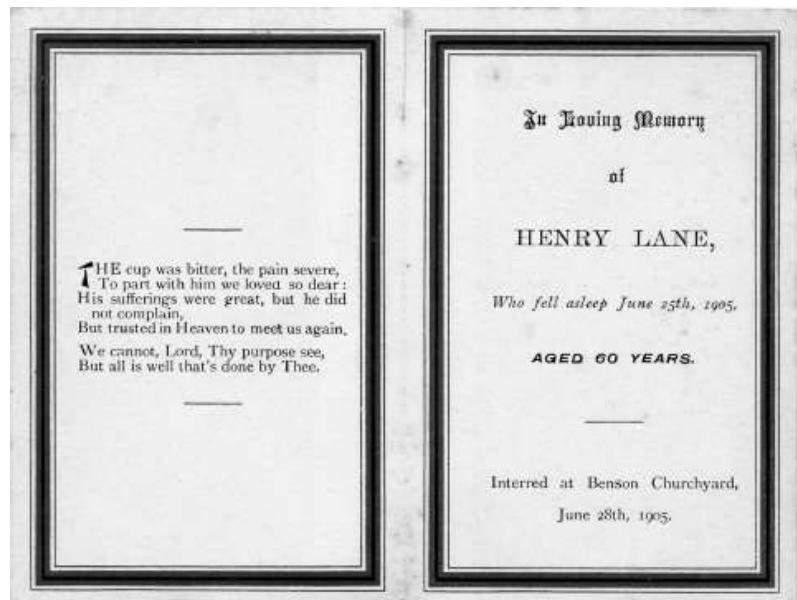
Birmingham Yard c1956 showing l to r Old Surgery and Nos. 1-3

Henry Lane's family was still in Birmingham Yard in 1891 but by 1893 they were at the 'Three Horseshoes' in Oxford Road. The electoral register for 1894 gives Oxford Road as his address but, unfortunately, does not specify which house, only the road. It was between 1901 and 1905 that they moved again, this time across the road to Nythe Cottage. It is said that, when Henry died in 1905, he was sitting in the bay window of the 'Three Horseshoes,' although his death certificate gives the place of death as Nythe Cottage, perhaps he was taken ill in the pub and died shortly after being taken home. I hope he had enjoyed his last drink. The following year Ellen's father, William Anderson, was brought from North Stoke to the cottage so that Ellen could nurse him during his final days.

Ellen eventually moved from Nythe Cottage in 1922 and spent various amounts of time with three of her children. Firstly, in 1923, she stayed with her daughter Kate Chainey in Brook Street for a year or two; then from 1925 she spent eleven years in Littleworth with Ernest, before spending her last days at Shirburn with her daughter Caroline, the wife of Sidney Linsell. After she died, on 10th October 1938 at the age of 87, she was carried back to Benson to be buried four days later close to Henry.



Three Horseshoes, bay window on the right were Henry Lane was sitting when he died



Memorial card for Henry Lane

Henry and Ellen's first child was a boy, Henry William, usually known as Bill; he was baptized at St Helen's Benson on 14th August 1871. Albert Charles followed two years later in September 1873 and then my own grandfather, George Joseph, better known as Joe, was born in 1875. Two of the girls were born next, Caroline Ellen in 1878, then Kate Sybilla in 1881; the name Sybilla was chosen because it was the name of Ellen's grandmother. Ernest Anderson Lane was the last of the boys, born in 1882 and, finally, Elizabeth Ann was born in July 1884. For some unknown reason, Henry William and Elizabeth Ann were the only ones of the seven children entered in the Benson baptism register (Elizabeth was not actually baptized until July 1900) although it is known that Ellen was a staunch churchgoer. Whether they were just missed out or were never baptized for some odd reason remains a mystery; perhaps Ellen didn't like the vicar of the time.

It is possible that the photograph I have of Henry and Ellen, below, was taken for their twentieth wedding anniversary in October 1890. Perhaps Henry took Ellen out for the day on a trip into Wallingford on their pony cart, all dressed up in their Sunday best. They may well have had a celebration lunch in one of the town's fine Inns, where Henry told his wife of the surprise he had arranged. After lunch, he took Ellen along to the recently opened photographic studio in St Mary's St. The studio was owned by James Latter, who had recently moved to Wallingford after learning the photographic trade in his hometown of Southampton.



Henry & Ellen Lane (anniversary photograph?)

In 1881, Benson High Street had a somewhat different range of shops than those we see today. Although there is no way to be sure in which order the census was taken, I suspect that the enumerator went from one side of the street to the other rather than completing one side first. If we start in Castle Square, because it would seem that there were shops here as well, there were of course the 'White Hart' and 'Castle' Inns, there was also a draper's shop run by the wife of Joseph Bird and Joseph himself was a boot maker. Nearby was the baker's shop where Ralph Hutchings supplied bread and a selection of cakes.

Into the High Street and the first shop you would have come across was the grocers shop (which became Woods and, later, Chamberlains) where John Burgis traded; it must have been a thriving concern as he was employing three men. Further along, Eli Hodgkins ran a toyshop and also did picture framing as a sideline; it was near to Thomas Coles' draper's shop. The butcher's

shop was run by William Strainge, it was a couple of doors away from 'The Ship' where Richard Jennings supplied beer. (The building that had been 'The Ship' would later become 'Brightings DIY Store', after being Bob Brightings home for many years. That shop later relocated further along the High Street.)

The post office was on the corner of Mill Lane and, at this time, the postmaster was William Goodey; there was a lockup tailors shop next door. Charles Bailey, not far from 'The Crown', ran the second of the villages grocery shops. The last shop in the High Street was on the corner of Berrick Street, opposite 'The Crown', and was another draper's shop; although there was no one living there so the owner is a mystery.



White Hart & Castle Square

Obviously there were other businesses, carried on from the front rooms of some of the cottages, like the shoemaker, a seller of sweets and the laundress. However, these were not specified as actual shops and so it is difficult to know whether you could have told the difference between this type of business and the ordinary cottage next door. There is no mention of two well known buildings, the 'Red Lion' public house and Collage Farm, although they were both there at that time.

I came across a very odd letter written by someone from Benson and printed in a Wallingford newspaper of 28th August 1885. As with papers today it is difficult to know whether it is a true story or not! I just wonder if Henry or any of the family saw it happen.

'The following rather remarkable occurrence took place yesterday (Wednesday). It seems that a dog was seen running through the principal street of Benson, with three rats sticking to its throat, and howling in dreadful agony. A man instantly seized a gun, which he discharged, the result being that he killed two of the rats, wounded some sheep that happened to be passing at the

time, killed a cat, broke four windows, and wounded a cow, the dog escaping unhurt with the other rat.

Hoping this will fill a space in your valuable paper, as to the ignorance of a man using a gun in the fashion he did.'

During the last years of the 19th century the winters, on average, seem to have been much colder than now if the story in the following letter is anything to go by. I came across this when I looked through the contents of my Gran's old writing box. I'm not certain how it came to be there or to whom it was originally sent; the only information is in the name and address.



Photograph taken in Castle Square

From J E Bowles, 11 St. Peters Hill, Caversham.

The Great Frosts In The Nineties

Sir the great frost of 1895 not 1894 as we have been told by the BCC and others was the culmination of a series of hard winters and was the largest and probably the severest last from the last days of January to March 5th.

In 1890-91 frost continued unbroken from mid December to January 20th. I skated from Clifton Hamden to Long Wittenham on Christmas Day. On January 15th I saw a sheep roasted whole over sixteen inches of ice just below Clifton Bridge and the 21st I skated from Long Wittenham to Days Lock and back a distance of six miles with an inch of water on the surface of the ice. In 1891-92 the foxhunters came into their own again but even in this year there was about a week's shooting in flood water in the middle of January.

In 1892-93 the Thames was frozen over again but the frost was intermittent. I remember skating from Long Wittenham to Appleford railway bridge but we had to thread our way between open pools or skim along near the banks.

In 1894 I skated once at Clifton Hampton this was I think one of the few places where the ice bore on that part of the Thames. In February 1895 an ox was roasted whole on the Thames at Oxford and a coach and four was driven over the river past the barges. Last week I was able to skate all round my garden on the same skated which I used in 1893.

On the 26th April 1908 the Lane family, as well as the rest of the village, must have been shocked to see twenty inches of snow lying across the countryside. It is said that, with the rapid thaw that followed plus heavy rain, the river Thames rose by thirty-one inches in twenty-four hours. I can only guess at the depth of water there must have been in the cellar of No1 Birmingham Yard at that time.

All four of Henry's boys became blacksmiths like their father and the family had forges at various locations during their working lives. As well as Birmingham Yard, there was one built at the back of the 'Three Horseshoes', in a small stable; another was built in a corrugated iron shed at the rear of Nythe Cottage. They also used one, which was located on a farm at the top of Shillingford Hill, in a shed under some chestnut trees.

It was Ellen who officially ran the business for more than twenty years after her husband died and she must have been a strong willed woman to cope with four strong and cantankerous boys. Although it has been said that she herself was not easy to get along with, she was prone to interfere in the lives of those around her. The last entry of her name in the local business directory came in 1928 when she would have been seventy-seven years old.

It would seem that at least one of the Lane brothers had a poor impression of government officials, the Tax Man in particular, judging by the following note that was found in family papers.

To the Collector of Taxes.

Dear Sir,

For the following reasons, I am unable to meet your income Tax demands:- I have been held up, held down, sandbagged, walked upon, sat on, flattened and squeezed by income Tax, Super Tax, Tobacco Tax, Beer Tax, Spirit Tax, Purchase Tax, Motor Tax, and every society, organization and club that the inventive mind of man can conceive for the Red Cross, Double Cross and every cross and Hospital and town in the Country.

The Government has governed my business until I do not know who the hell owns it. I am suspected, inspected, examined, informed and required and commanded, so that I do not know who I am, or why I am here at all. All I know is that I am supposed to have an inexhaustible supply of money for every need, desire or hope of the humane race and because I will not beg borrow or steal money to give away, I am cursed, discussed, boycotted, talked about, talked to, held up, robbed and damed near ruined.

The only reason I am clinging to life at all is to see what the bloody hell will happen next.

Yours faithfully,

The Small Trader.

I assume that this item was copied from somewhere, perhaps the local paper.

Chapter 3

Henry's Children

Bill

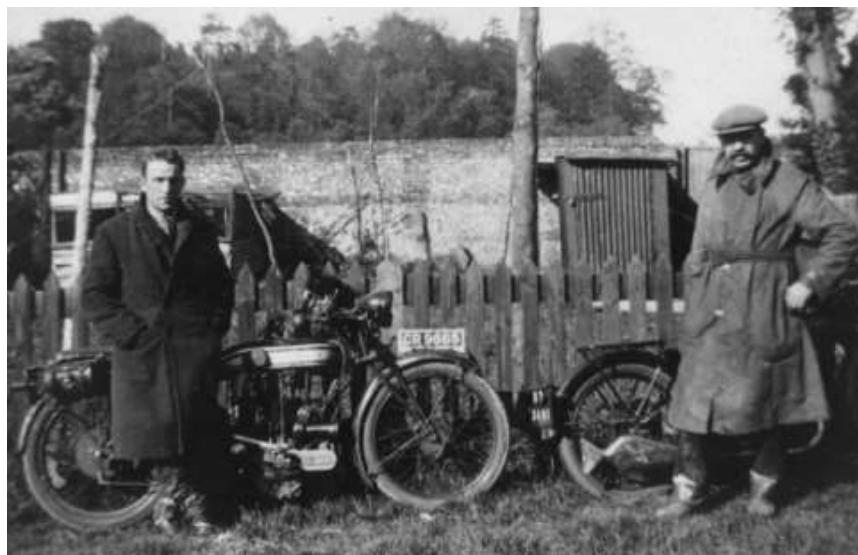


Bill and Rose Lane

As with all families, there are some stories that cannot be proved or disproved; it often depends on whose version you believe. The Lane families were no exception, being a rather argumentative lot at the best of times. It has been said by members of the family that 'Bill' Lane was often getting into trouble because he liked a drink and that in the end his mother found him work, "out of the way", at Warborough. According to one side of the story this was not far enough away, being only a couple of miles, and that after he came home to Benson asking for money, and hearing more drunken stories about her errant son, Ellen arranged for him to take a job in Henley. The truth is probably slightly different, in that Bill wasn't in Warborough until 1910.

Whatever the truth is about those statements, 'Bill' was living in Bray when he married Rose Rolls on 22nd November 1897 at Maidenhead register office In 1901 they were living at Bath Road in Horton, Berks. They had two sons, George William in 1899 and Harry Albert in 1901; it was in 1901 that they are first recorded as living at 14 New Street, Henley. Then between 1910 and c1916 they lived in Warborough, Bill's granddaughter Evelyn has certificates her father gained while at Warborough school during that time. By 1918 the family had moved to 25 Northfield End, Henley but, by the time Henry died in 1935, they were back in New Street.

Although still only 19, George William is listed as a member of the armed forces in the absent voters lists for 1918, he was apparently serving with the S/S AVC, [Army Veterinary Corp] and his service number is given as 23616.



Harry

William (Bill)

It was while they lived in Henley in the late 1920's that the two sons, now young men, would travel on their motorbikes to visit their relatives in Benson. This often caused some annoyance to their Uncles and Aunts in Birmingham Yard, as they would give their young cousins rides up and down the yard on the back of the bikes, creating a certain amount of noise and a lot of dust. Young George William stayed in Henley and married May Alexandra Lidgley; it was May who registered old 'Bill's' death in February 1935. The couple first lived at Northfield End but moved to 14 Fairmile, Henley in the late 1920's.



Harry & Violets wedding day

Harry was to marry Violet Helen Norcutt at St. Lukes Church, Camberwell on 26th December 1926, when he gave his father's occupation as sawyer, although, both before and after that date he is described as a blacksmith journeyman. Harry gave his job title as a miller but when he died at the early age of 40 he was working as a stores foreman for the Air Ministry. At that time, he was living with Violet and their seven children in Gloucester and it is in this area that his children and their descendants still live.

Harry and Violet named one of their daughters Evelyn and it was the chance finding of her name and address, the first time we went to an Oxfordshire Family History Society open day, that was such a great help in my initial searches. Evelyn was kind enough to send me copies of various documents that built an immediate family and saved me months of research. I hope that over the years I have been able to repay her with some of my own finds in the various branches of our family tree.

Albert



Albert & Ada

At the age of 25 Henry and Ellen's second son Albert Charles, married a local girl. Ada Letitia Bonner was the daughter of Moses Bonner, a carter, and the ceremony took place at St Helen's church on 5th August 1899. Ada's brother Samuel and Albert's sister Kate stood as witnesses, and one imagines that the church would have been almost full if all the relatives turned up. It is said that at the start of their marriage, Albert and his wife lived in Littleworth with old Cadman Lane, but the story goes that it was feared that their first son Albert Ernest died as a result of an infection caught from the old man. The boy was born 27th October 1899 but sadly died the following year on 17th June 1900.

Albert and Ada then moved into the 'Three Horseshoes' with Henry and Ellen and it was here that their second son was born; he was also destined to die young. Harry George was born on 20th February 1901 but died, at the age of only four, on 9th January 1906. Henry Lane had doted on

his second grandson but the boy survived his grandfather by just six months. Albert is not listed in the electoral register until 1907 when he is in Littleworth, so I must assume that the couple lived with his mother until that date. They lived in Littleworth until 1911/12 and then the family moved into the Old Surgery in Castle Square.

Their other five children all survived childhood and went on to eventually marry. A daughter, always known as Nell but actually christened Helen Elizabeth, was born in 1903; she was followed in February 1905 by Kathleen Violet, who was always called Kit. Next was William John, the only boy to survive, he was born in February 1910. Jessie Sybilla was born in the following year on 23rd September 1911 and finally Alice Jeanette was born on 18th February 1916. Quite what the significance is of having four children out of seven born in February I'm not too sure. Albert and Ada spent the rest of their married lives together in Castle Square, from where Albert only had to step out of his back door and walk up Birmingham Yard to get to work.



Helen (Nell) Lane

Helen (Nell) moved away to London when she married Bert Painting and it was there they brought up their four children; Bert Painting was a cousin of Ivy Painting, who I mentioned earlier.

In 1924, at the age of just 19, Kathleen (Kit) married George Boulter a 22-year-old shop assistant, and it was only a short time later that their only child Margaret Joan was born. The couple lived in London Road at first before moving into a cottage on the corner of High Street and Castle Square.

George Boulter's family lived in Brook Street; Ivy can remember Granny Boulter always wearing a brown and white knitted shawl. There were one or two well-known families in Brook Street in the 1920's who had a habit of imbibing a little too much alcohol in the 'Lamb' or the

'Farmers Man' and ending the evening falling in the brook, whilst trying to cross the bridge to their cottage. At times during its history, Brook Street seems to have had a rather unsavory reputation, most of the housing being of poorer quality farm workers cottages. The poor at certain earlier periods in history probably had good reason to want to drown their sorrows.



Brook St, looking towards the High St c1910



Kit with daughter Margaret and Ada's dog

One evening in particular, a young Ivy Painting and Alice Lane were cycling between Benson and Ewelme along Brook Street, in the dark, when someone suddenly grabbed Ivy's ankle!

Apparently it was George Boulter's brother Charlie, who was lying in the road and, as Ivy passed, he reached out to her. Ivy let out a scream of terror so loud that Norman Currell, who was nearby, came running out to give assistance. Ivy was actually quite safe as by now Charlie was dead to the world and incapable but after that she was always very wary of people behaving oddly in Brook Street. Whether it was her imagination or not, in her young eyes there always seemed to be a lot of drunken people in that street at night.



Lizzie Lane & Kit Polley c 1960

George Boulter himself died at the relatively young age of 46 in February 1949 from Hodgkinsons disease and Kit later married Tom Polley. Tom was a local man whose own grandparents, George and Sarah Polley, had lived in Birmingham Yard at the beginning of the century, when he was a boy and he used to tell tales of when he used to play there himself, before most of the Lane and Painting children were born.



Mr. Stacey ----- Ernest Albert Bill ---- Phyllis Ally -----
Wedding of Bill & Phyllis Lane

William John, the only surviving boy, was still living at home with his parents when he married Phyllis Georgina Stacey in August 1935. At the time Bill, as he was always called, was working as a mechanic at the MG car factory in Abingdon but later he was to become landlord of the ‘Sun’ public house, which stood at the Littleworth end of Chapel Lane.

The first years of their marriage were spent in a cottage, in Littleworth, like so many earlier members of the family. Sadly the couple couldn’t have children of their own and so in 1942 they adopted David Clarke who was already Bill’s godson.

In the October of 1935 Jessie married George Ernest Calcutt, a baker of Ewelme. By the time their daughter Barbara Ann was born in November 1939, the couple were living at 5 Old Buildings, Wood Street in Wallingford and George was working as a dairyman.



George Calcutt & Jessie Lane

It was young Alice who brought about the use of a rather odd nickname. Her uncle Joe and his wife Elizabeth (my grandparents) lived next door; when Alice started to talk she couldn’t pronounce ‘Auntie Lizzie’ properly, it always came out as Diddy, and the name stuck. I remember that years later, when we moved to Benson, my brother and I began to call Lizzie Parks ‘Aunt Did’ or ‘Diddy’ but I have no idea why and, it seems, nor does anyone else now. From quite a young age Alice herself became known to everyone as Ally, and so it remains even today.

Alice was the youngest of the children and the last to marry; she became engaged to Herbert Beal, and the couple married in April 1939 at Benson, only a few months before the outbreak of war. During the war Herbert served with the Royal Engineers and rose to the rank of Captain. The couple spent the first years of their marriage in a terraced house in Crown Square but it was back home, in the Old Surgery with her parents, that their first daughter Wendy Jeanette was born early in the morning of the 18th February 1940. The new baby was promptly nicknamed ‘Wet and Windy’ by her proud grandfather.

It was Alice’s mother and aunt who helped her through the birth. Joe’s son John (my father) happened to be home on leave from the army and so he was delegated to keep a good supply of hot water coming from the kettles boiling on the old kitchen range. John had to leave early on the morning of the eighteenth and just shouted his goodbye up the stairs before going back to join his regiment at Reading; it would be a good while before he actually saw baby Wendy for the first time.

Apparently Joe wasn’t keen on young children but he watched over baby Wendy because he said she reminded him of his nephew Harry (Alice’s brother) who had died aged only four. Alice and Herbert were to have another daughter, shortly before the end of the war; Roberta Christine (Bobbie) was born on 4th May 1945 and baptized on 18th November of that year. Alice was the last member of the family to live in the village; she stayed until 2003 when she and Herbert moved to Cornwall to be near Wendy.

Joe



Joe & Elizabeth Lane

George Joseph (Joe) was the next eldest of Henry's sons and, in 1901, he was living with his grandmother Caroline in Littleworth. He was working as a self-employed blacksmith, though presumably from Birmingham Yard. A few years later he started courting Elizabeth Alice (Lizzie) Payne of Great Milton who at that time was working as a housemaid at the vicarage, the home of the Rev. Field. The couple married in Benson on 15th October 1910 and the Rev. Field gave them a bible as a wedding present.

Who gave it I don't know, but I have a small silver vase dated that same year and assume it must have been a wedding present, perhaps from 'Joe' to his new wife. I found the vase in two pieces in a draw when helping my Aunt Lizzie to clear a cupboard; they were very dented and dirty and I thought they were two separate items only good for scrap. I took them home along with a couple of other bits and they were put in a draw and forgotten. It was after Lizzie died and I was cleaning some other silver pieces that I thought of using the scrap bits of silver to practice on. Once clean, I set them on the table and admired how good a shine they had, then I realized that they were actually the top and base of a small vase. Now the base was clean I could see an assay mark and realized that the date was the year of my grandparents' wedding. I later took the two pieces along to a local jeweler and had the vase repaired and polished, it's almost as good as new.

For the first couple of years of their married life, the couple lived in a tiny cottage, now No5, opposite the 'Three Horseshoes' and for the following four years they lived in Littleworth, just a couple of doors from where Granny Caroline had lived; it was here that their daughter Elizabeth Ellen (Lizzie) was born on 23rd June 1915.



Elizabeth Ellen 1916

By now the three brothers, Albert, Joe and Ernest were sharing the blacksmiths business, although Ellen their mother was still 'in charge.' Like his father before him Joe had a chest problem and suffered from asthma, although this failed to stop him working hard or smoking. Joe and

Lizzie, along with daughter Elizabeth moved in 1916/17 down the road to No1 Birmingham Yard where on 11th March 1918 their son John Joseph was born.

Young Elizabeth married Frederick James Parks of Berrick Salome at St Helen's in Benson, on 27th June 1942; while he was home on leave from the army. Elizabeth's lifelong friend Ivy Barney neé Painting, was a bridesmaid and one of the witnesses. Having lived just two doors away from each other since Ivy was born in 1916, the two friends spent the following years living next door to each other in 'The Yard.' Apart from a few years before the war when she worked away (for the Burgis family at 'Battle Banks' and also in London and Bournemouth during the war), it wasn't until July 1998 that Lizzie said her final farewell to her friend and 'The Yard', shortly before passing away at the John Radcliffe in Oxford on the 3rd August following.

During the Second World War, Joe's son John started to write to the sister of a good friend he had made while they were both serving in India and Burma. The relationship blossomed after the war and it was in the summer of 1947 that family and friends travelled down to Morden, Surrey to see John marry Louise Alice Taylor. The couple set up home in rented rooms on The Green at Witney, the market town where John was then assistant manager in Chamberlains grocery store.

It was while they lived here that, two years later, their son David John was born at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, that's me. My one claim to fame is that I was baptized twice! Once in hospital when only three days old, due to serious illness, and again at Benson two months later when the vicar forgot that it was supposed to be just a ceremony appointing the godparents and conducted the full service instead. Everyone had arrived at the church door only to find it locked, so Ernest Townsend was dispatched to the vicarage where the vicar was found to be doing some gardening; he came rushing through the graveyard trying to pull his surplice over his head. It was possibly due to the confusion that I was fully baptized again.



Joe Lane Albert Taylor John Taylor
 Daisy Taylor Lizzie Lane John Louise Victoria Taylor Joan Taylor
 Wedding of John & Louise Lane

My brother Stephen was born three years later when the family had moved into a two up two down cottage, round the corner in Corn Street in Witney. One of my earliest memories is of going home, after staying at Benson, and coming through the front door to see Mum and my new brother. I was given a bag of sweets in a small wicker basket to keep me quiet, and told to sit on the front step while Gran and the others inspected the new arrival. However this quiet did not last long, as the sweets were soon gone, so of course I started to cry. Actually, I hadn't noticed that the sweets had dropped through a hole in the bottom of the paper bag, and lay between the paper bag and the bottom of the basket itself. We again travelled back to Benson, for Stephen's christening, and this time the vicar did turn up for the ceremony. We did live in Benson for a while, from 1954 until 1961, but then we had to move on because of Dad's work.



Proud Grandparents; Joe & Lizzie Lane with baby David

Carrie

In 1901 Caroline (Carrie) was working as a housemaid at Colne House in Brook Street for Mary Corsellis, a widow. After working as a servant, Carrie was in her fiftieth year when in June 1929 she married a widower, Sydney Linsell, a postman of Watlington, who was fifteen years her junior. Joe's daughter Elizabeth, and Albert's daughter Ally were the bridesmaids; the two girls wore mauve dresses and mop-caps trimmed with flowers.

After their marriage, Carrie sold sweets from the front room of their cottage at 8 Blenheim Road, Shirburn. As a young girl, Ivy Painting worked at Shirburn Castle for the Earl of Macclesfield and, in her free time, would often call into the cottage to say hello. It was there also that Carrie's mother Ellen spent her last days in 1938 and Carrie herself died there in December 1944 at the age of 66.



Ally and Lizzie 1929

Kate



Kate ?

The above picture is something of a mystery, in that, although it was with all the other family pictures no one was too sure who it actually was. After much deliberation, it was decided that the most likely person it could be was Kate, mostly because of the hair and general shape of the face.



William & Kate Chainey with their children

Like her sister and so many other young girls from working class families, Kate started work as a housemaid and in 1901 she was working for a family at 31 Prospect Street, Reading. By 1904, she had accepted a marriage proposal from William George Chainey, a bricklayer from Wantage; she married him in St Helen's church in Benson on Christmas Eve of that year, with brother Albert and sister Carrie as witnesses.

It is uncertain where they lived for the first few years after their wedding but in 1911 they were living in Littleworth. Until then, I assume they must have been lodging with someone, like her brother, this may have been with her mother. It was in 1913 that they moved to Brook Street, taking a terraced cottage opposite Passey's Yard. William and Carrie along with their children Gilbert Charles, Carrie Sybilla, Ellen Beryl, Arthur and Ernest moved to Clays Farm at Warborough in 1925. The family stayed in Warborough and it is there that the couple are buried; Kate died aged 71 in August 1952 less than two months after her husband.

One of Kate's boys, Gilbert Charles, born 10 July 1910, was sadly killed in Italy during WWII. Gilbert was in the 10th Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment and was killed on 4th February 1944 at Anzio, he is buried in the cemetery there. Gilbert left a widow, Eunice Annie, and a son Brian, who was baptized on 7th February 1943.

Another son is said to have become a bit of a hermit and was sometimes seen around the village looking like a tramp. He was said to live in a shed somewhere in the area of Roke.

Ernest



Ernest Anderson Lane c1917

Ernest Anderson Lane married Alice Jane Rudman in December 1913 and, like his elder brother and sister, their first home was probably with Ellen in Nythe Cottage, as Ernest was listed as living in Oxford Road in 1914. Their daughter Alice Ellen Louvain (always known as Ellen) was born in 1915, her first two Christian names were after her mother and grandmother, however, Louvain is the name of a town in Belgium where Fred Rudman, Alice's brother, was serving with the British army.

Unlike his older brothers, Ernest received his call up papers in 1915; he enlisted at Wallingford on 11th December of that same year. He wasn't actually mobilized until 6th October the following year and, after training, went to France on the 29th March 1917. He served throughout as a driver with the Royal Field Artillery in 34 Brigade. According to military records, while Ernest was away his wife Alice moved back to her parents' home in Brompton Road, Midgham. The couple were back together in Oxford Road by the end of January 1919, and the following year their son Henry William was born. It wasn't until 1923, when his mother Ellen moved to Brook Street, that Ernest and his wife and two children found a home of their own in a cottage in London Road. It was two years later, in 1925, when they made their final move into a cottage in Littleworth and it was there that Ernest George, their last child, (always called George) was born in 1928.

For several years from the late 20's on, Alice ran a small sweetshop from her home, which is where the various Lane children and their friends often spent their pennies. Another favorite sweetshop was located in St. Helen's Avenue opposite the site where the 'Riverside Café' once stood. It was run by Mrs. Croxton, and like many other small businesses, was located in one room of a small cottage. The children could spend forever staring at the selection of sweets that could be bought, so many a farthing or halfpenny, while trying to make up their minds what to buy. What to buy? 'Yankie Bars' at a farthing each, 'Fairy Whispers' that had a message on them, or then again perhaps 'Spanish Comfits'. Perhaps a 'Sherbert Dab' and some 'Cloves' would be best. Of course there was always 'Playtime' biscuits from Mr. Woods grocery shop.



Young Ernest George with Granny (Ellen) Lane

In 1939 young Alice (Ellen) married Alfred George Draper, a grocers assistant of Church Road, Lewknor. The couple brought up one son, Peter Brian, and spent sixty years together, celebrating their Diamond Wedding Anniversary together on Boxing Day 1999. They were to see two grandchildren and five great grandchildren born before they both passed away, Alfred in 2000 and Alice six months later.

At the age of twenty-one her brother Henry William married Helen May Brown in January 1942 at St John the Devine, Kennington. The couple met while both were serving in the forces, Helen a sergeant in the WAAF and Henry a sergeant in the Royal Artillery. After the war Henry worked for many years in London as a gardener until, in 1961, he moved back to Benson, with his wife and their daughter, to take up a position as a postman in the village.

Ernest George, the youngest of the children, who became a schoolteacher by profession, in 1953 married Mavis Evelyn Gould. The couple lived for the first two years or so with Mavis'

parents in Abingdon while they saved up £200 for the deposit on a home of their own. They were then able to buy a home in Kidlington, where their two sons Mark and Julian were born. The couple later moved to Devon, which is where they still live, as do their two sons. Julian married Helen Youngs in 1989; their daughter Bethany Frances was born 1994, followed by a son, Jonathan, born in 1999.



Alice Ernest (George) Alice (Ellen) Henry Ernest



Ernest and Alice Lane's cottage in Littleworth



Ernest & Alice at the cenotaph

Ernest Anderson Lane passed away in August 1954 at the age of 72, about the time his nephew John and his family moved back to the village. I well remember ‘Aunty’ Alice saying “Hello” to me as I passed her cottage on my way to and from school. She spent a lot of time tending her garden, which was very much a ‘chocolate box’ scene. It was shortly after her son Henry moved back to Benson that Alice moved in with him and his family, her cottage in Littleworth having been condemned. She spent a short time with them before she was able to move into a bungalow of her own. Alice passed away on 15th July 1974.

Elizabeth Ann

Like her elder sister, Henry and Ellen’s youngest daughter Elizabeth Ann (sometimes called Eliza) was also a housemaid in 1901, working at Shiplake for a widow, Mrs. Annie Cruikshank. In October 1905, when she was 21, Elizabeth married Sidney Taylor a wood turner, the son of James, the couple went to live in Mortimer, Berkshire. It was here that the couple brought up their two daughters Kate and Elsie. Sadly not all the family kept in regular contact and nothing more is known about Elizabeth and her family.

Chapter 4

Birmingham Yard Families

Families seemed to come and go from Birmingham Yard at an alarming rate in the 1800's; in 1871, as well as Henry Lane, there was Jane Marcham a dressmaker, John Bailey a coachbuilder and Richard Honey a labourer. While in 1881, the families were Henry Lane and family; Martha Wise a widow and her sons; Thomas Nicholls, an agricultural labourer, and his family; Jonas Green, a contractor, and family; and finally John West, a groom gardener, and his family. By 1891, all the families had changed again except for Henry Lane; the list now read; Henry Lane, William Polly, Joseph Clinch, Stephen Newting, Elizabeth Dixon and George Sayer. Again in 1901 only one family was left from the previous census; (of course no house numbers were given at that time) this time they were the Polly family, there was Mary Skinner living in No1; Harry Skinner in No2a; Annie Jones in No2b; Mary Young, who died aged 90 in 1926 while still living in the 'Yard,' was at No3 and George Polly in No4. George Polley died in 1913 aged 76 and the parish register confirms that he had still been living in Birmingham Yard; his wife Sarah died the following year.

As mentioned before Albert and Ada Lane lived in the 'Old Surgery' from 1912 until they passed away, the house finally becoming vacant in 1947. John Holmes and his family moved in shortly afterwards and, in the 50's, were followed by Jack Harris, a retired postman when they exchanged for a house at The Hale. Mrs. Stubbs the widow of Lawrence Stubbs of Paddock House moved in next in 1958.

After Mary Skinner a Mrs. Wiltshire lived at No1 and, with her passing, Joe and Lizzie Lane moved in. It wasn't until the houses were modernized in the mid 60's that Lizzie moved out to live with her daughter. When the work had been done, and a bathroom installed, the sisters, Ethel and Olive Green, moved in from their previous home in Dorchester. After they died, two or three different couples rented the house before it was finally sold to a private buyer.

Sometime after Harry Skinner moved from 2a, Mrs. Martha Chapman lived there until in 1920, as a fifty-year-old widow, she married Alfred Pudwell, a widower also aged fifty. The couple went to live in Mill Lane and Alfred's sister Rose Phillips moved into the cottage and lived there until she died aged 66 in December 1929. By the time Ernest and Louise Townsend moved in in 1935 the cottage had remained empty for some time; they had been living at Howberry Park where Ernest acted as caretaker and gardener. When the new RAF airdrome opened in Benson, Ern went to work there as a grounds man, we regularly saw him on his tractor cutting the grass between the runways.

After Annie Jones, it was Lawson Painting and his wife Fanny, who was a Birmingham girl, who moved into No2b and it was here that Ivy and her brother Sidney were born. At this time Mary Young was living at No3 with her daughter Kate. Ivy always thought Mrs. Young was called 'Mrs. Shung', she claimed it certainly sounded like that, possibly because of people's accents. Mary died aged 90 in 1926 and not long afterwards her daughter suffered a slight stroke. Although not serious it was thought best that she went to live with her brother Ezra in the gatehouse at Wallingford Cemetery, where he worked.

It was after Kate Young moved out of No3 that the Paintings then moved from No2b, and into No3, as this cottage had a third bedroom. Ivy and Sid could now have a bedroom each, what

luxury. Edward Collett, a labourer, and his wife Phyllis then moved into 2b and when they in turn moved on in 1947, Freddie and Lizzie Parks moved in.

The big change for 2a and 2b came in the mid 60's when the cottages were knocked into one and modernized, with a new bathroom fitted in what had been the kitchen of 2a. This was how things stayed until Lizzie passed away in 1998 and the cottage was sold to a developer. They were then turned back into separate one-bedroom dwellings but now with central heating and upstairs bathrooms. The last thing I did after clearing Lizzie's things out of the cottage was to remove the three old horseshoes from above the outside doors. I thought that as the Lanes had probably made them they should stay with the family.



Freda Painting Joan Tilley Ivy Painting Vera Barney
Charlie Lansley Charlie Barney Elizabeth Lane

As I have said the Painting family moved in to No 3 shortly after 1926. It was in 1940 that Ivy married Charles Barney, of Watlington, whom she had met while they both worked at Shirburn Castle; at the time Charlie was on leave from the Royal Berks Regiment. The couple were to spend their married life together in No3, at first sharing with her parents, and it is here that Ivy still lives today.

After Sarah Polley died in 1914 Edward Field, his wife Sarah and their children moved in to No4. Prior to this, the Fields had lived in Littleworth, after moving to the village from Brightwell. [I'm not sure why so many of the people with connections to Birmingham Yard also have connections to Littleworth.] After their daughter Lou and son Albert had both married and moved out, Mrs. Field's sister, Mrs. Foster, moved in for a while. One of the Fields sons, Walter, was still there when 2a and 2b were turned into one cottage his sister Lou and her husband Ern Townsend moved from 2a into No4 with him. Later the then widowed Albert also moved back to the cottage and was the last of the family to live there, after his death the cottage was sold to a private buyer.

The Lane, Painting and Field families became, over a relatively short period time, related by marriage, which was quite normal for small communities. As well as Helen Lane having married Bert Painting, three of Edward Field's sisters had married three of Ellen Lane's Anderson nephews. To slightly confuse things even more there was also a link between Charlie Barney, Ivy's husband, and the Andersons.

Joan Collett, born 1930, the daughter of Edward and Phyllis was the last person to be born in Birmingham Yard, in No2b, for almost 70 years. There was something odd about the 'Yard' especially after WW2, when all the families living there were related to each other by marriage. Apart from no births, everything started to happen in threes; the three oldest men all died in consecutive years, Lawson Painting in December 1949, George Joseph (Joe) Lane in March 1950 and then Edward Field in September 1951. Next was to be their three wives who all died within five years of each other. As history began to repeat itself, the three sons in law died in the 1970's, starting with Ern Townsend. Lizzie Parks outlived Lou Townsend by just a few years but Ivy Barney is determined to break the mould, perhaps there is the chance of that famous telegram arriving.



Ern Townsend Bert Field Edward Field

When I first became aware of Birmingham Yard, it seemed a wondrous place to a small boy like me. Unlike today, the main entrance was to the right hand side of the Old Surgery, which is now just a pathway. Apart from a narrow path that went around the back of the blacksmiths shop, that was the only way in and out. There were five cottages ranged along the left hand side of the yard, the oldest of which date back to the 18th century. These culminated in a low barn that then housed two or three dozen chickens, belonging to old Miss Florence (Flo) Lane (no relation), earlier it had been the wheelwrights shop. There were three wooden, later steel, water butts to collect rainwater from the down-pipes of the cottages, one on the corner of No1, one between 2a and 2b and the last one to the right of No 4. I remember being fascinated with the red mosquito lava that used to wriggle around in the water. Rainwater was collected to not only water pot plants and

the garden but, many people preferred to use rainwater for washing their hair, as it was often softer than tap water.



Stephen John & David Lane outside the wheelwrights

During the early years of the last century, Charlie Lewendon ran his wheelwrights business from the old low barn to the left hand side of the yard. Often he had the help of the Lane boys when it came to putting the heated iron rim onto the wheel. There were originally two large hoop frames set into the ground at the top of the yard where this work was done. In 1901 Charlie was 32 and lived at the 'Farmers Man' with his parents; his father William was the landlord and a millwright. Charlie, for some reason, was frightened of frogs and on at least one occasion someone had to go to his aid when he fainted at the sight of one hopping across the yard outside his workshop door.



Gran's cat Smokey and me sharing fish & chips on her garden path
[Through the gate is the window of No2b]

To the right hand side of the yard entrance ran a wall with two gated openings, surrounding the kitchen gardens that belonged to the Old Surgery and No1. Where the wall turned right at the end of the gardens, stood the brick built washhouse that belonged to the Surgery. Standing out from the wall half way up the yard stood two large concrete air-raid shelters that had been built at the beginning of the WWII; these were large enough to take several families in each. They had been painted white inside and were just the place to keep things dry and cool in the summer, hence they often had sacks of potatoes and other vegetables stored in them and, of course, they were a good place for children to hide. Just past these, the yard opened out to the right making the whole into a large L shape.

Around the corner on the right, past the brick washhouse, stood a row of wooden washhouses, one for each of the cottages. At right angles to these stood two large sheds, one of which was timber framed, and the blacksmith's shop was on the end. Charlie Lewendon also used the first of these sheds at one time and Harry West used the middle one, where he kept building materials. Harry West was born in 1889, a third generation builder and the son of John. In the middle of the open space stood a large and very old walnut tree, which still produced walnuts, though infrequently. Beyond the yard there were four more large gardens, one for each of the other cottages, all very productive. In the days when the blacksmiths still worked in the yard, there was also a large corrugated iron shed with a smaller lean-to attached, which stood under the large overhanging branches of the tree.

For many years, William Frampton owned the yard and all its buildings, plus the two houses to the left of its entrance and then, on his death, it all passed to his nieces Florence and Gertrude Lane. In his will of 27th February 1928 he also left a bequest of £10 to Ada Lane wife of Albert; he died and was buried in Benson in 1931 aged 84.



The only known picture showing the washhouses and the timber-framed barn
Ern Townsend in the foreground

Most days Mr. Frampton, who had a long white beard, would put on his hat and take a stroll down the yard to see what was going on and people would ask after his health. Ivy Painting was still a little girl and for some time his answer always confused her, as she felt sure he said, "Ruff and tumble", when of course what he actually said was, "Mustn't grumble". He was, however, becoming very short sighted and in the end almost blind; as a girl, Albert's daughter Alice would lead him down the yard by the hand so that he could visit her mother. It was Florence Lane who later sold the properties, in two or three lots, to the local doctor, Dr. Harris.

Before 1967, apart from the Old Surgery, only No1 had an indoor water supply and that was just a cold tap in the kitchen. The other four cottages shared a coldwater tap fixed to the corner of No1 plus another halfway between the wash houses; this meant having to fill buckets with water for drinking as well as cooking and washing. Before the mains supply was connected, probably after WWI, the water supply came from a single pump, which stood just outside the kitchen widow of No2b. The pump was abandoned when the supply became infected and Mrs. Wiltshire died of fever, it was felt to be too unsafe for drinking.



Birmingham Yard in the winter of 1963

Another problem arose in the winter of 1963 when the outside taps were frozen for about three months. The only water supply left in the 'Yard' was from the kitchen of No1 and so Lizzie allowed all her neighbours to collect water from her kitchen every day. An elderly gentleman, who lived in a house called 'Blenheim' in Oxford Road, just down the road from the 'Yard', also lost his water supply so Lizzie allowed him to collect water from her house as well. How many people today would be able to cope with such a situation every day of the week for three months? Needless to say, as there was no water supply to the houses, there were no toilets indoors either. These were to be found at the bottom of the garden, for No1 and the Surgery, and in the washhouses for the others. It seems odd now that a doctor's surgery could be run without the benefit of an indoor loo! As it was, the small brick shed in the garden where the earth closet was housed was said to be standing only because of all the ivy that covered it. Supposedly the ivy was holding the walls up.

You could say that the toilet at the bottom of the garden of No1 was an executive model, as it was a two seater; two large wooden lids, one with a large hole for adults and the other with a small hole for children. It was the only sign of luxury though, as the wooden floor was rotten and only a very thick layer of lino stopped you falling through. There was also a large crack from the top to the bottom of the back wall, so wide in places that you could watch people digging on the allotments on the other side of the wall.

The toilets for the other cottages were to be found in the corner of each washhouse, a simple wooden box with a lid to cover the hole in the seat, containing a bucket, accessed through a door to the front. The coal and logs were also stored in the washhouse; of course it was always a good idea to clean the toilet seat after the coalman had delivered as you could end up with a nice black ring around your bottom. The washhouses were still used for doing the Monday wash of course, each one having a coal fired copper in one corner and a large mangle. It was also where the tin bath was kept hanging on the wall for bath night. As well as carrying water from the tap for the washing, you also had to do the same thing on bath night and, as the sheds were made of wooden shiplap boards, you could get draughts coming through in some very nasty places. When all the washing and bathing were done, the dirty water was tipped into a soak-away in the middle of the yard. This occasionally needed cleaning out, another job done by the residents. It is said that the smell could be worse than when the toilet buckets were emptied, especially in the summer.

On at least one occasion one of the men had an accident when taking the toilet bucket up the garden to empty into a freshly dug hole, he tripped and upset the bucket down his trousers. Apparently this didn't stop him walking back indoors just as he was; of course he was met with a stern warning to "get back outside". At least it was somewhat more private than Littleworth, here apparently, there was a designated area near the old gravel pit, set aside for the disposal of such waste. I must assume that as so many of the Lane family lived there over the years they too had to walk past all their neighbours to empty their bucket into a pre-dug hole. On at least one occasion, but possibly more often, someone took a shovel to dig a hole only to find it had been filled and covered over by the time they had returned with their full bucket. One can but guess at what it was like if you dug your hole in the wrong place, or stepped on a freshly filled hole.

A large open yard was not the place to go wandering about in the night when you were caught short, so everyone used a po or guz-under, alright then, a chamber pot. In my Gran's case this was often emptied, along with the slops bucket from under the sink, into a midden at the bottom of her garden. Today such things are probably illegal but back then it was the best place to go for little red worms for fishing and we used our bare hands to dig for them! After a year or three of use, a new midden was dug and the old one left so that the contents could decompose; one old one had rhubarb planted in it and I remember that the rhubarb was as thick as my wrist and some of it grew taller than me when I was 9 or 10.

Like many other women Lizzie Lane used to take in washing for various wealthier people, she also did washing for Joe's invalid spinster cousin Mercy Lane. At one time she also did washing for Hilda Georgiana Faber, Lady Wittenham, who lived at Howberry Park. Lady Wittenham's chauffeur, a Mr. Prior from Brightwell, would deliver the dirty washing and collect the clean in the family's limousine. Until she was in her mid seventies Lizzie still did washing for Miss. Field, the daughter of old Reverend Field, her former employer, who lived in Lavender Cottage opposite the school in Oxford Road. I was sometimes asked to collect and deliver the washing there on my way to school. I remember Miss Field as a very nice grey-haired lady who had a pretty walled garden at the back of the house, which was always full of birds nesting in old

kettles and flowerpots that had been wedged into the shrubs that covered the walls. I was amazed at how tame the birds were because they would all come and take food from her hand.

Every Monday morning the copper had to be filled, with about twenty gallons of water, and the earthenware rinsing bowls needed filling as well. Once this was done the fire had to be lit to heat the water and, this had to be checked during the morning so that it didn't go too low. As well as ordinary soap, blue bags and starch were needed; most things seemed to get a dose of starch, and blue bags were used for whites. Once the clothes had been boiled it was time to put them on the scrubbing board for a good going over with hands or brush, depending on how dirty the items were. Next, everything was put into one of the large earthenware bowls of cold water for rinsing. Once this had been done in one bowl, the clothes were all transferred to the next bowl for a second rinse, they were then ready to go through the mangle. As well as the large mangle, Gran had a small mangle that fitted between two bowls to avoid too much lifting. When everything had been rung out, it was just a case of carrying it down the yard to the garden where the things were hung to dry.

I often wondered why, as I watched Gran sorting the dried clothes, did she lay them out on the table and sprinkle everything with water and then roll each item up. It seemed to make no sense at all, after going to the trouble of hanging it out in the garden to dry. When each article had been done and put back in the basket she would set it aside ready to be ironed the following morning.



Sarah Field Lizzie Lane Fanny Painting
Washday c 1960

The above picture shows every day dress code for the three senior ladies in Birmingham Yard. Unless they left the Yard for a particular reason, like a day out, which was almost unheard of after WWII, the three ladies always wore their wraparound smocks, from first thing in the morning until it was time for bed. During the years I lived in Benson I only remember Gran leaving the Yard about three times, once to go to the eye hospital and once we took her by car to see her relatives at Haseley and Horsepath. She also went for a walk with Mrs. Painting and myself once, after much encouragement from me. The walk took us down Oxford Road, then right into Littleworth, before turning right again along Watlington Road and so back into Castle Square. As all three had their daughters to do the shopping for them, they had no need to even cross the road to Chamberlains Stores.

I never really worked out what was so different about sheets laundered the old fashioned way, apart from the fact that they tended to be somewhat greyer and stiffer than those washed in a modern washing machine. It was, I seem to remember, something to do with the smell and feel of the sheets on that little iron bedstead that I sometimes slept on at Grans.

On Mondays or Tuesdays the range also heated a selection of hand-irons and, the kitchen table, when covered with a blanket kept for the purpose, acted as an ironing board. Remembering to pick the iron up with a thick cotton pad to protect your hand, one spit to check it was hot enough and, you were away. Then in the evening, when it was time for bed, two house bricks were placed in the oven for a few minutes and, when hot, they were wrapped in newspaper and used to heat the bed on a cold winters' night.



Mrs. Field & Mrs. Painting, picture showing the timber-framed barn in the Yard,
used by Harry West

Although electricity was available in the village from the 1920's Joe was obviously not keen and probably thought it was an unnecessary luxury. This would explain why even in 1967, when the cottages were modernized, Joe's old cottage still only had one electric light and one socket for a radio, both located in the kitchen. The front room still had the old oil lamp suspended from the centre of the ceiling but upstairs there was no light at all, so it was necessary to carry a candle up to bed.

Most of the cottages originally had a range in the kitchen but Lizzie was the last person still using one in the mid sixties. She would get up before six every morning, summer and winter, to clean the grate and give it a polish with black lead, before whitening the hearth and getting the fire going. There was always a kettle of hot water ready to bring to the boil at a moment's notice for a cup of tea, whenever anyone called. The fire kept the room beautifully warm and Gran cooked the best food ever. The only trouble was you couldn't get the recipe for anything, as she never used a measure or scales; it was all a cup of this and two pinches of that.

Of course all the cottages needed a supply of coal, logs and paraffin and, in the case of house No1, the coal was kept in the cellar. The entry was under the floor of the pantry, located in front of you as you came in the front door; the kitchen was on the left and the front room on the right. You needed to be fit to enter the cellar as it meant first lifting the trap door, which was basically the whole pantry floor. Down at the bottom of the stone stairs, the small room opened out on the right hand side and there was a niche set into one wall in which to stand the candlestick.

I can remember being asked to go to Gran's house on some winter days, wearing my Wellingtons because she needed some coal and the cellar was flooded a few inches deep. This flooding was a common occurrence and I assume it still happens on occasions. In those days I would happily take the coal bucket in one hand and the white enameled candle holder in the other; then, to the sound of Gran calling for me to be careful, I would put the flickering candle in the niche and fill the bucket with coal "from the top of the heap" as she told me to.

Coal was delivered round the village on a large flat cart by Mr. Haines and Sid Cripps. You would need a large heavy hammer when it arrived, as it was often in huge slabs, often too heavy to lift. Some of the village parents would send their children down to the wharf, when the barge was nearly empty, as you could fill a wheelbarrow with small pieces of coal from the bottom of the barge for just six pence.



A young Doris Louisa May (Lou) Field

All of the neighbours had, by now, moved on to electric cookers. When it came to boiling a kettle Lou Townsend was different, although she had a cooker, she used a primus stove. I shall always remember watching her standing in her kitchen, a cigarette in her mouth while lighting the mentholated spirit, and then pumping like mad to pressurize the paraffin. Auntie Lou, as I always called her, amazed me because she seemed able to smoke a cigarette without once taking it out of her mouth and without losing any of the ash I, think she smoked something like 'Black Cat,' which were very strong.

As the 'Yard' and its buildings were modernized in a very haphazard way over a long period it still has a few peculiarities all of its own. The plumbing and drainage have been extended and added to without any real thought and at one time two of the houses shared part of their water supply through a hole in the dividing wall. It was also common for one house to get a water leak that affected most of the others by reducing their supply as well. All six houses shared a soil pipe that has blocked on more than one occasion; more than once has someone ended up getting covered in a horrible smelly mess. Now that some of the houses are privately owned, some of these oddities are causing problems. Like the owner of one property who thought he knew best when he connected the kitchen and washing machine waste pipes to what he thought was the soil pipe, despite being told it was a soak-away. It wasn't long before the foamy water from the washing was slowly spreading across his lawn and that of his next-door neighbour as well.

The old surgery was still in use until 1958, when the new building was opened at the bottom of Mill Lane. During the 1920's, Dr. Birch was the local doctor and he also practised at Dorchester. As he only had one examination room, and no waiting room, if more than a couple of people came to see him they would have to wait outside in whatever the weather. I wonder how many went away worse than when they arrived? After surgery, Dr. Birch would go off on his rounds and then collect any medication that was needed before delivering it back to the surgery. The usual practice was for the items to be left on the back doorstep marked with the relevant patients name, for people to collect. If the patient was unable to make it there themselves an arrangement could be made whereby one or more of the children who lived in the Yard would deliver. [Apparently there was no real choice for the children as the alternative was a clip round the ear from Mum or Dad if they didn't go.]

An elderly man, who lived at Preston Crowmarsh, suffered from consumption and often had to cue outside the surgery, usually coughing violently, while waiting to see Dr. Birch. The children would sometimes overhear the adults saying that if he was not careful he would "cough his lungs up". This so affected some of the youngsters that they always ran past him, incase he coughed up a piece of lung while they were close by; they certainly didn't want something as nasty as a piece of his lung landing on them.

Chapter 5

The Lane Family Fire Brigade

By the time Henry Lane was an established blacksmith, the railways were already taking a lot of the business that the horse and coach, or cart, had previously undertaken. The old coaching inns were losing out and there was less passing trade stopping in Benson. However for the Lanes there was still enough work, shoeing heavy horses and repairing machines for the local farms, as well as the horses used by local businesses and families. Like the Lanes themselves there were several local families who also kept a pony and cart, both of which occasionally needed the attentions of a blacksmith.

One of Henry's more unusual jobs was looking after the chains that were hung between wooden posts to mark the pathway from the vicarage down to the church. The sums paid for the work done are written into the Vestry Accounts book and show, for example, that on the 28th March 1883 Henry was paid ten shillings for repairs. The last of these entries is to Ellen Lane, Henry's widow, on 17th May 1909 when she was paid eleven shillings.

According to a report in the local paper, a fire broke out at Benson Flour Mill In October 1890. Many villagers turned out to help and, at that time, John West was in charge of the Benson Fire Engine. Later Henry Lane is mentioned in the Vestry Minutes and the Parish Council Minutes book in connection with the Benson Fire Engine. This old horse drawn hand pump was housed in an old wooden shed that used to stand opposite the entrance to Birmingham Yard, to the right hand side of the White Hart's driveway in Castle Square. This same shed was sometimes used as the village mortuary as well.



Benson Fire Engine

When called to a fire, the horse used was sometimes the one the Lane's owned, as it only had to trot across the road. Henry was probably involved as a fireman for most of his adult life but it is not until 1892 that his name appears in the vestry minutes in this connection. Although a fire engine is mentioned in records as early as the 18th century it was manned by volunteers when needed and, there was no organized fire fighting force until the beginning of the 20th century. It was

on 20th November 1902 that Henry was asked to get the names of ten men willing to serve as retained firemen. So Henry, along with his own three sons and six others, namely Charlie Lewendon, C Bonner, G Smith, H Cook, W Gurney and E Strainge formed the very first properly organized retained brigade in the village.

The engine still exists and is kept at Watlington Fire Station, where the current retained and retired firemen maintain it. It took several attempts for me to find where the engine was being kept and, when I did, I was asked if I would like to visit. I was made very welcome, shown how the engine worked, and allowed to sit in the seat that Henry probably sat in many times. I was also shown some of the Victorian uniform and equipment that local brigades would have used. After having a drink with the men in their clubroom, and taking almost a roll of film, I had to bid a fond farewell.

The engine is still used for various displays and can on occasion be seen in Benson; with enough volunteers it is still able to pump water to a reasonable height.

When it was in service the engine was usually tested in Castle Square and on one occasion the engine was duly filled with water and the men began to pump the water through the hose. The nozzle was aimed at one of the houses next to the 'Castle' and the men decided to see how high the water would go. No one realized that a dormer window was open to a room where an elderly man lay in bed. It wasn't until the poor chap was quite wet that anyone could stop what was happening. Considering the height of the buildings in the square it seems quite impressive that they could manually pump the water high enough to go across the roofs.



Myself sitting on the engine to give an idea of its size

The following notes are taken from the Benson Parish Records held at the Oxfordshire County Record Office.

Benson Vestry Minutes

24th Mar 1892

Proposed by Mr. Jacob Winter and seconded by Mr. James that Mr. Henry Lane be appointed superintendent of the Fire Engine and Mr. Lewendon Engineer at the same salaries as before, namely £2 to the one and £1 to the other and that the engine be taken out for trial twice yearly, namely one day in Easter week and one day in the first week of August and that a former resolution requiring it to be taken out more frequently be rescinded.

19th April 1892

Mr. Lewendon having declined to accept the office of engineer of the Fire Engine Mr. H. Lane proposed and Mr. J. Palmer seconded the appointment of Mr. Jacob Winter, who expressed his willingness to serve.

Henry Lane also signed the vestry minutes during 1893/5

Benson Parish Council Minutes

18th April 1895

It was proposed by Mr. Brown, seconded by Mr. Beisley, and carried unanimously that Mr. H Lane be requested to retain his appointment as superintendent of the Benson Fire Engine. On the motion of Mr. Pether seconded by Mr. Hargreaves, Mr. Lewendon was appointed engineer.

Mr. Brown proposed that the salaries of superintendent and engineer of the Fire Engine remain as before, viz; Superintendent £2 annually and Engineer £1 annually.

1st August 1895

Mr. Lane complained that the engineer Mr. C Lewendon did not assist him in the management of the Fire Engine, more particularly as regards drying the pipes. A discussion followed during which Mr. J Winter who had been the engineer before Mr. Lewendon said that he had considered it his duty when engineer to assist the superintendent to dry the pipes when called upon. As it was not very clear to the council what the duties of engineer were, and in view to more particularly defining the duties of both superintendent and engineer, Mr. Littleboy proposed that the appointment of Mr. H Lane as superintendent and Mr. C Lewendon as engineer be rescinded. Appointments to be considered at the next meeting.

20th August 1895

Mr. Littleboy reported that he had seen Messrs. Lane and Lewendon and they had agreed to act on the old terms as regards to salary, viz; £2 and £1. Mr. Brown proposed that Mr. H Lane and Mr. C Lewendon be reappointed superintendent and engineer of the Fire Engine respectively. Mr. Lane to receive £2 annually for acting as superintendent and Mr. Lewendon £1 annually for acting as engineer. That the duty of the superintendent to see that the engine and pipes are always in good working order and to take charge of the engine when called to a fire. That the duty of engineer will be to assist the superintendent at fires and practice and drying the pipes. That the Engine be proved 3 times a year, viz: about the end of March the end of June and the end of October. The clerk was directed to send the superintendent and engineer a statement of their duties as defined by the council.

13th March 1896

Paid Mr. H Lane (Fire Engine) £3-12-00

27th March 1896

Mr. H Lane Superintendent of the Fire Engine made application for two lamps for the fire engine also a small pickaxe.

15th April 1896

Mr. H Lane attended the meeting as requested and said that the cost of two good lamps for the fire engine including fixing would be about £1-12-00 and the pickaxe 4/-.

Mr. Brown proposed that Mr. H Lane be empowered to provide the lamps and pickaxe.

Mr. Brown proposed that Messrs F P Chamberlain, Henry Lane and Walter West be appointed Overseers of the Poor for the ensuing year.

1897

Rent paid for engine house. 10/-

18th June 1898

Mr Lane and Mr. West, Overseers reported that the Vicar and Churchwardens would consent to the Engine House being used as a mortuary without charge and the Overseers had decided to use it in future for that purpose.

20th January 1898

The clerk reported that he had requested Mr. H Lane Superintendent of the Fire Engine to ascertain the price of a short jet. Mr. Lane wrote to Messrs Shand Mason & Co inquiring the price of a three-foot jet but as they did not manufacture jets of that length they sent him on approval a shorter one. As Mr. Lane declared this to be just the thing he wanted, on the advice of the clerk he kept it.

Mr Lane, Fire Engine, Bill £3-17-9

12th October 1899

A letter was read from Mr. Lane, Superintendent of the Fire Engine asking for fifty yards of hose at a cost of about £8-8-0. The Fire Engine committee and council recommended it.

(Report in the Berks & Oxen Advertiser 29th August 1901

FIRE. About 2 o'clock on Saturday morning a fire broke out in two cottages situate in Mill Lane, the property of Mr. Dunford. It seems to have originated in the thatched roof, and soon took a firm hold; though the tenants, named respectively Patey and Jennings, were able to save their furniture. The Benson fire engine was soon on the scene, and did all that was possible, getting a good supply of water from the brook, but nothing but bare walls are left standing. The damage done is estimated at about £100 and unfortunately the property was not insured. The origin of the fire is unknown.)

17th April 1902

Mr H Lane, Superintendent of the Fire Engine asked for a lid, lock and key for the tool box of the fire engine also clips for the suction pump.

20th November 1902

Mr. H Lane, Superintendent of the Fire Engine, was authorised by the meeting to get five hand lamps and one horn. He was also requested to get the names of ten men willing to be members of a Fire Brigade to serve under himself and the Engineer Mr. Lewendon.

18th December 1902

Mr. Lane reported that he had procured the hand lamps and horn which he was authorised by the previous meeting to get, also that the following ten men selected by himself had consented to be members of a fire brigade, viz; H Lane, C Lewendon, A Lane, G Lane, E A Lane, C Bonner, G Smith, H Cook, W Gurney, E Strainge.

8th July 1903

The eight men selected by Mr. Lane should receive Five shillings each per year as a retaining fee, to date from 1 April 1903.

13th January 1904

Mr. H Lane Superintendent of the fire engine said he had written to various insurance companies and they had forwarded Six pounds towards providing the members of the Fire Brigade with boots. He requested the Parish to furnish money enough to complete the purchase. Request postponed.

12th July 1905

Mr. K Jennings proposed that in consequence of the death of Henry Lane, Charles Lewendon be appointed Superintendent of the Fire Engine at £2 per annum. The vice chairman proposed that Albert Lane be appointed Engineer in the room of C Lewendon at £1 per annum.

1909

Rent paid for engine house. £1

30th March 1912

Charles Lewendon resigned as Captain of the Fire Brigade.

16th April 1912

In consequence of Mr. C Lewendon having resigned the Captaincy of the Fire Brigade, Mr. H Hargreaves proposed and Mr. T Haines seconded, that Albert Lane be appointed Captain of the Fire Brigade at a salary of £2 per annum and George Lane be appointed Engineer at a salary of £1 per annum.

9th July 1912

Fire Brigade Committee decided to give each member of the Fire Brigade at practice the sum of six pence.

Captain of the Brigade appointed A E Coles as a member in place of C Bonner who resigned.

30th December 1912

Letter of this date from Superintendent Fire Brigade.

Sir, I cannot reach any houses at Littleworth with the present hose.

Yours obediently. A Lane

24th March 1914

The Captain of the Fire Brigade reported he had appointed Harry West as fireman in place of Robert Wells.

25th March 1915

Captain of the Fire Brigade pointed out to the meeting that the old hurricane lamp was quite worn out and a new one was required.

Proposed that a new one was purchased at no more than five shillings.



Picture of one of the original leather hoses showing the brass studs used to seal the joint.
The hose was very heavy even when empty and dry

11th July 1922

Mr. A Lane ten shillings for fire practice.

New hydrant and hose tested and satisfactory except for two lengths of hose, suggested two more sixty-foot lengths purchased.

3rd July 1922

About 11.55 fire broke out in Castle Square in the premises of Moreland & Co and in the occupation of Mr. E Walters, and the contents (motor car etc.) were burnt out and the building was extensively damaged. The Benson Fire Brigade were successful in getting the fire under by 1.30. The amount of damage was about £250.

Account sent to Insurance Co.

<i>Officers, 4 hours @ 3/-, 11 hours @ 2/6, 10/- extra</i>	<i>£2.09.06</i>
<i>Firemen, 10 hours @ 3/-, 10 hours @ 2/6</i>	<i>£2.15.00</i>
<i>21 pumbers @ 2/- per hour</i>	<i>£3.04.00</i>
<i>Washing and drying hose and lights</i>	<i>16/6d</i>

(A report on the fire in the Berks & Oxen Advertiser 7th July 1922)

BENSON FIRE. What might have been a disastrous fire, owing to the large number of buildings in the immediate vicinity, occurred in a building used as a garage by Mr. E Walters in the early hours of Monday morning. How it originated is a complete mystery, as the building was found to be locked by those who were first on the scene, and who worked very hard with buckets of water until the arrival of the village fire brigade. Tiles were taken off the roof and the water poured on to the burning car. An urgent call was sent to the Wallingford Brigade, but on its arrival it was found that their services were not required, as owing to the smart work of the village brigade and other willing helpers, all danger to other property was found to be averted. The building was gutted all but the walls, and the car was completely destroyed. We understand the damage is covered by insurance.)

31st March 1923

Mr. A Lane and W Gurney attended Fire Committee Meeting representing firemen.

Committee made recommendations.

Superintendent and Engineer should be given increase of £1 each, making salaries £3 and £2 respectively.

Third officer should be appointed at a salary of £1.

4th May 1923

Retaining fee increase for firemen to 7/6 from 5/-.

Also following men suitable for firemen, viz; A Lane Supt, W Gurney 1st officer, A Gurney 2nd officer, F Young, R Cook, E Thorpe, F Beckley, W and H Aldridge and A Pudwell.

September 1928 Fire Engine removed to Mr. Rowden's barn at Crowmarsh Battle.

One thing that does seem astonishing today, after reading these reports, is that the salaries of the superintendent and the engineer were set at the same rate for more than thirty years.

Another story concerning the fire engine and a fire at the primary school in Oxford Road occurred sometime during the 1920's. A large coal stove stood on the wooden floor in what was referred to as the 'top classroom', the one adjoining the schoolhouse. One day the floor under the stove caught light and someone was quickly sent to call out the Benson Fire Brigade. Ivy Barney can remember the excitement she felt as she and the other children watched the men arrive with the

engine and begin to pump water over the stove and floor to extinguish the flames. Apparently there was no serious damage done and a carpenter soon had the floor repaired.

In the 1920's, over the door of the engine shed was a notice, which read 'Keys with A Lane' (Albert Lane lived in the Old Surgery opposite). One day one of the teachers at the village school, Mr. Saunders, asked the children if they could find the notice in the village with the missing punctuation. It was the same sign; the full stop was missing after the A in A. Lane. Apparently it took the children a good while to find the right sign but they found it in the end. [One wonders if children today would be able to find it?]

I was asked to keep safe an original poster (below) that announced a concert of songs and music at Benson on 4th January 1898 in aid of the street lamp fund. I assume that this was to pay for the oil and upkeep of the lamps, as perhaps this was not included in the parish rates.

A CONCERT

CONSISTING OF

SONGS, PART SONGS, AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

WILL BE GIVEN IN THE

NATIONAL SCHOOL BENSON,

On TUESDAY, January 4th, 1898,

In aid of the Street Lamps Fund.

The following Ladies and Gentlemen have kindly promised to take part:

Mrs. GREET	Mr. FAULKNER
Miss E. BURGIS	Mr. H. HARGREAVES
Miss H. BURGIS	Mr. PERCY TURNER
Miss NEWTON	Mr. W. J. WILDER
Miss M. NEWTON	Mr. P. W. WILDER
Miss E. M. WILDER	Mr. F. A. WILDER
Mr. A. J. NAISH, A.R.C.O.	&c., &c. <i>Not to be forgotten</i> <i>Mr. B. ...</i>

The Chair will be taken by the Vicar (Rev. J. E. FIELD)

DOORS OPEN AT 6.30, TO COMMENCE AT 7 O'CLOCK
RESERVED SEATS, 1s.; SECOND SEATS, 6d.; BACK SEATS, 3d.

Although no one is exactly sure which of the brothers did the job it is said that one of the Lanes was the last lamplighter in the village before oil gave way to electric. The oil lamps were erected around the village to mark the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887 and there was a notice attached to the lamp that stood in the middle of Castle Square, which read.

"This Lamp and eleven others in the village were erected on the 21st day of June 1887 by public subscription to celebrate the Jubilee of her Majesty Queen Victoria"

Chapter 6

Working To Eat

Working

Being a blacksmith was a hard and, at times, very dangerous job especially being around animals as large as shire horses and hunters. All three Lane brothers were only about five feet four inches tall and many of the horses towered over them. Horses that were known to be trouble were usually tethered to the walnut tree; this had several large hooks driven into it and a large chain was also fixed around it for the animals to be secured to. One horse that belonged to an artillery officer, Capt. Hatt, stationed at Hale Farm was known to be a particularly bad tempered animal and was always well tethered to the tree. The chain was found, still imbedded in the tree along with the hooks, when the tree was finally felled in 1967.

There was the constant risk of being kicked or burnt with the fire or hot metal so it's hardly surprising that one or other of them usually had a bad bruise or cut on an arm or leg. Apparently, if Joe cut himself, he would cover the cut with homemade lard and cobwebs and a piece of cloth and leave it on until he thought the cut had healed. Of course this meant that any bandage, after a couple of weeks, would be totally black and often rather smelly.



The only known photograph of the smithy,
showing Joe Lane standing in the doorway

The men were not the only ones who were in danger from the horses either; there is a rather frightening story concerning my father John and a runaway horse. Apparently one day a large horse decided it didn't want new shoes fitted and decided to make a run for freedom, so down the yard he dashed with everyone running behind, shouting a warning. Unknown to the men was the fact that John, then still a toddler, was playing in the dust in the middle of the yard outside his front door. Of course the older children all knew it was time to run out of the way if they heard the shouts go up

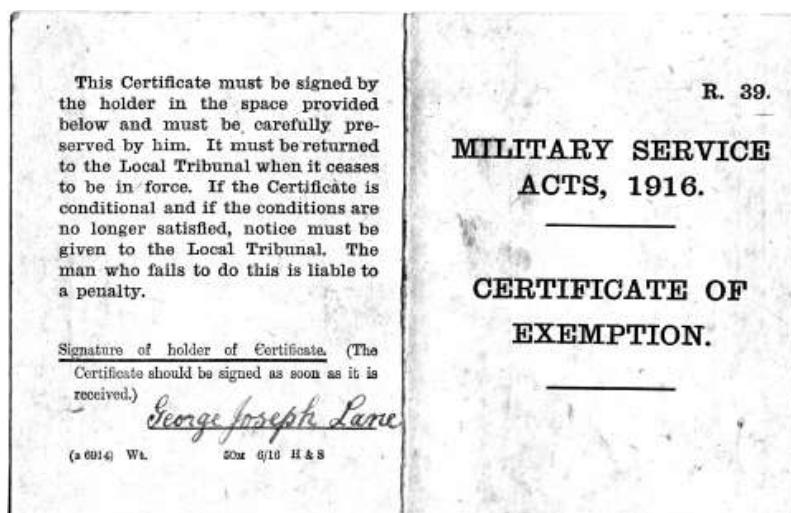
about a runaway horse. Lizzie, his mother, stepped outside to see what the shouting was all about only to see her little boy with the large horse bearing down on him at full gallop.

You can only imagine what went through her mind; she gave a short scream and fell back in a faint as she thought her son would be killed. However, the horse moved to one side and went straight past and off down Oxford Road. By then Ada had come out of her kitchen, the door of which is adjacent to the front door of No1, to find her sister in law laying in a faint and young John still playing happily, oblivious to all the excitement.

Although there were cockerels kept in the 'Yard' they were never needed as an alarm call, as the sound of the men working at the forge as early as four in the morning gave everyone an early call. Even if the men were out during the summer months, the rooks nesting in the chestnut trees at the 'White Hart' woke you up at dawn. I have a memory of staying at Gran's cottage and being woken just after sunrise to the sound of the rooks calling and the sound of the church bell tolling the hour.

The brothers kept shoe patterns on a board that hung on the wall of the smithy for many of their regular horses and, if they got a message to say a horse was in the fields and needed a new shoe, they could make a copy and go out on the cart to where ever the horse happened to be. They seem to have been very obliging, which is more than can be said for many of the farmers they dealt with. They once went out to a horse near Berrick and, after they had done the job, the farmer asked if they could take something off the price, to which one replied, "Can't take anything off, because we didn't add anything on."

During WWI Albert and Joe were given exemption from military service, partly because of age but mostly because of their trade. They did, however, work for the army and at various times Joe would have to set off for Henley very early in the morning. On arrival at the temporary camp, he would spend the day checking and shoeing the horses ready for transport to France. Then after a long and hard day, he would





Joe Lane's exemption certificate

make his way home, just in time to go to bed! No one seems to remember when it was that Joe was a special policeman; it is assumed that it was in wartime, but which one? Whatever the case, as a child I used to play with his tin helmet, painted dark blue with 'police' printed across the front, and the truncheon and whistle. Unfortunately all that is left in the family is the 'Metropolitan' whistle.

CLASSIFICATION CERTIFICATE. Army Form W. 3291.

17528 THIS IS TO CERTIFY that Mr. George J. Lane
was medically examined on 15 MAR 1917
and classified as:—

A. Fit for general service.	Recruits who should be fit for general service so soon as trained.
B. Fit for service abroad, but not fit for general service.	(i) In garrison or provisional units. (ii) In labour units or on garrison or regimental outdoor employment. (iii) On sedentary work as clerks or storemen only. (iv) In garrison, or provisional units. (v) In labour units or on command garrison or regimental outdoor employments. (vi) On sedentary work as clerks, storemen, batmen, cooks, orderlies, sanitary duties, &c.
C. Fit for service at home only.	
D. Rejected and therefore excepted from Military Service.	

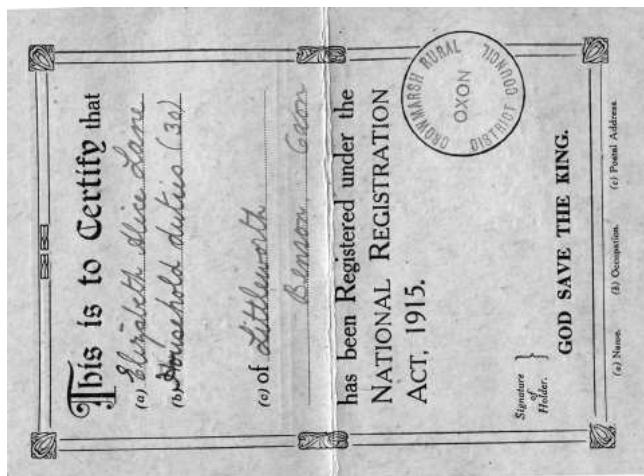
15 MAR 1917 Date. Mr. J. Lane Signature.
Categories not applicable to be struck out. None OXFORD Station.
W5143-704 540M 8/16 HWV(P1971) Forms/W.3291/4
8701-935 600M 10/16 [P.T.O.]

Although he was never called up, in 1917 Joe still had to go for a medical, and was passed fit

One or two other things have survived the passing of time and moving around. Unfortunately that does not include the fireman's axe that we used for breaking up the large lumps of coal when I was a boy. However, a large pair of pliers that were saved from the blacksmith's shop and some old woodworking tools do still exist. I had always known where the pliers came from but I didn't realize about the other tools until after my father died, and then only by chance.

Dad always had various old tools that he used for changing beds into settees and harmoniums into sideboards! It was when we cleared the garden shed that I decided I would keep the oldest tools; a setsquare, a plane and a wooden screwdriver with changeable blades. I put them

in my shed when I got home, until I decided to have a tidy-up. The setsquare had paint on the handle and the metal was rusty so I set about giving it a good clean and polish. As I was finishing and admiring the job I had done the sun shone on the wooden handle and I could suddenly see a name stamped into the wood. At first I thought it was the makers name but it was very faint so I looked harder, and there it was, H LANE! I suddenly realized that the chances were that all the tools had belonged to Henry, as they were certainly old enough.

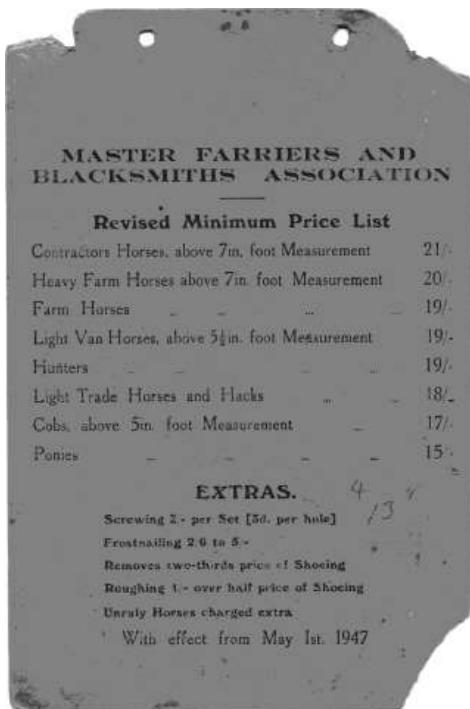


Lizzie Lane's identity card

Every month the brothers would send out the bills to their customers, sealed in brown envelopes, and when they were old enough the task of delivering them often fell to the children; two or three of the older ones would set off round the village. However, just because the bill had been delivered didn't mean it would be paid and this often caused arguments between the three brothers. It is said that at one point, Joe and Ernest thought their brother Albert wasn't paying all the money in, and was not keeping the books as he should. One day things came to a head and Joe and his younger brother went round to Albert's house and took away the writing desk with all the books still locked inside. Ernest could also find himself out of favour with his brothers, especially if money was short, because when he had his mother living with him he always got paid first even if the others went short.

There were occasions when the women and children living in the yard would all rush outside to see what the commotion was, only to find two of the brothers facing each other with large hammers in their hands threatening serious damage. I think that all three were probably as bad as each other but, it seems, from the headed invoice that I have, that Joe and Ernest ran the business for the last few years and Albert had probably had enough. Albert's part in the business was possibly over even before their mother died as, in 1935, when Albert's son William John married, he gave his occupation as gardener. This was also the case four years later, in 1939, when Alice (Ally) married.

John Holmes took over the blacksmith's shop sometime after WWII when the Lanes finally retired but, he and his family had nowhere to live; at first they used an old shepherds' hut on wheels that they parked at the top of the yard. It was only after Ada Lane died in January 1947 that they were given the chance to live in the Old Surgery. By the 1950's there was very little business left for a blacksmith and the old forge in Birmingham Yard went out of use, the last forge to be used in the late 50's was over the road in the yard to the side of the 'Round House.'



Price list saved from the smithy

The price list (above) was saved from the smithy when the brothers finally packed up work. By this time Joe was over seventy years of age and, with his failing health probably thought he had had enough.



Mackney Farm, Sotwell

Joe Lane sitting far right, Frank Beasley blacksmith 2nd from left standing, Mr Druce the bailiff wearing gaiters, far right. Mr Morphew the owner at the end

Joe Lane made regular visits to various local farms to carry out work; the above picture shows a typical line-up of workers at one of the larger farms before WWII. Most of the younger

men standing at the back were on release from a local agricultural collage, work experience even then.



The 'infamous' Mark Bishop Cabinet

Something occurred, probably in the early 1930's, that even today rankles with some of the family, and that's the 'Uncle Mark Bishop Affair.' Mark Bishop was the husband of Henry Lane's stepsister Annie Amelia Saunders and, for some unknown reason, Mark left his furniture to the Lane brothers. I do not know the reason for this as, although I was told that Mark had only one son and he was 'no good', I now know that Mark had at least three sons. Whatever the circumstances, Joe had paid several visits, over a period, to see his Uncle Mark. Then one day he and a friend set off for Bromley in a van to bring back the furniture. After going to the wrong Bromley to start with, they eventually got home with several nice pieces.

That's when the trouble started; Joe decided that as he went to fetch it he would keep it all! There was a large mahogany secretaire, a walnut display cabinet plus a large round dining table, also some other items; it seems that Joe got his way despite numerous arguments. Sadly the only piece left in the family is the display cabinet, which we refer to as "Uncle Marks Cabinet", the other pieces having been sold many years ago when money became short.

Eating

The corrugated iron roof of the old shed and the lean-to that stood under the branches of the walnut tree were like an early warning system to the children in the autumn, as they could hear every time a walnut fell from the tree. Then was the time to run up the yard and either climb onto the roof or borrow a clothes prop to push the nut off so they could eat it. The one trouble, apart from being shouted at by one or other of the men, with the offer of having their ears boxed for messing about on the roof, was that the skin of the walnut is soft and full of sap. This sap was once used in dying, and would dye your fingers a fetching shade of walnut brown, staining the hands for several days, despite frequent washing, even with mothers scrubbing brush.

Today, food is cheap and it is possible to buy most vegetables all year round; this was not the case even forty years ago much less eighty years ago. Country people had a big advantage over the town dwellers in that most had a garden and many also had an allotment. As well as growing most of their own fruit and vegetables many, like Joe, kept some livestock. In Joe's case this was a pig, which was kept in a run that was built in the garden against the back wall of the washhouses. Four of the families in the yard kept a pig in the 20's and 30's; only the Paintings did not, as Ivy said she couldn't bear to see it killed. The animals were fed on scraps that were boiled up on the kitchen range in a large pot, and that sometimes included potatoes that were too small to peel. The best time, so the children thought, was when Lizzie boiled up the small potatoes separately, as she would often allow them to have one each on a plate with a little salt on the side, apparently they tasted sweeter.

As for the pig itself, once it was considered big enough, the butcher would be called in to kill the animal. He used a wooden trough shaped device that the pig was held over and its throat was cut and the blood drained. The meat was cured, some being hung over the fire and some being salted and kept in the cellar before being hung from a hook set in the kitchen ceiling. There was also black pudding to make, with the blood and excess fat, and sausages were made from the trimmings. My father always said he hated that time because his mother would sit in the washhouse cleaning the pig's intestine for sausage skins and the smell was horrendous. The pig's head and other bones were all boiled up so that the meat could be removed easily and then this was placed into a bowl with herbs and some of the liquor, then a large weight was placed on top; once cool and set you could turn this out and were left with a tasty piece of 'pig brawn.' After they had been cleaned of any meat the bones were put in a sack and then sold to a local dealer to go for processing as fertilizer or glue; nothing was wasted.

Another treat that I have never heard of anywhere else was a 'skimmerlad'; this consisted of a dessert size spoonful of suet pudding mix, dropped into a pan of water that had been used for boiling potatoes or such like, and left to simmer on the stove. When ready, the dumplings were placed onto a plate and a spoonful of syrup was drizzled over them. My father John thought it was one of the very best treats. A variation on this was to drop the mix into a pan of water that had been used to boil a bacon joint, the fat on the top of the water would be soaked up and give a nice bacon taste, though rather too greasy for some people.

Food could even cause conflict between neighbours as on the day Ivy Painting refused to eat her tea because she said she didn't like it, so her mother sent her outside. She was standing by the water-butt crying when Mrs. Lane saw her and, not realizing what had happened, hoped to cheer the little girl with the offer of a lump of bread and jam. Ivy thought this was much better than her own tea but, when her mother found out she was furious and went to remonstrate with Lizzie.

"I was teaching her a lesson for not eating her tea," she said, "don't think I can't afford to feed my family." Things remained rather frosty for the next few days, but it was soon forgotten. On the subject of bread and jam, to Joe's mind if you wanted bread and jam that was what you got and it didn't include butter, you could have bread and butter, or bread and jam, but not butter and jam together!

Of course any housewife with access to a vegetable garden would be expected to make jam and bottled fruit as well as chutney and other preserves. Beetroot and cucumber were both stored in vinegar and runner beans were stored in a jar using salt. I can remember preparing runner beans in this way as a small boy; we used large sweet jars to put them in. The first thing you needed was block salt, which came wrapped in paper and was the size of a loaf of bread; this was crushed and placed in a layer in the bottom of the jar. Once the beans were washed, dried and sliced, the jar was filled to the brim with alternate layers of salt and beans. Every year several jars would be filled and, in this way, the beans would last right through the winter months. It usually paid to concentrate on growing things that could be stored rather than those which couldn't.

I remember that Gran's jam was never old enough to be thrown away, even when it had a half-inch crust of sugar and mould on top as, once scraped off, the jam could still be used. My favorite treat at Grans was a thick slice of bread and pork dripping. Gran kept a bowl for pork fat and one for beef fat. This fat was reused every time there was a roast dinner, on the potatoes and meat, and never thrown away, so that the jelly at the bottom could be months old. I only remember that the flavour was delicious when spread on a thick slice of new bread and sprinkled with a little salt. That was before cholesterol was known about, or worried about.



Freddie Parks, the butchers boy

Until refrigerators became common, most people needed to do a certain amount of shopping every day, especially for perishables like meat and bread. Milk, of course, has been delivered to the door for many years and, before the advent of the milk bottle, the dairyman would bring round a churn on the back of a cart, serving out the milk with a measured ladle. Many people took a jug to the farm to collect their own milk, although this mostly stopped when regulations about heat treatment came in. Bert West, who owned the farm on the corner of Castle Square and Watlington Road, used to supply Birmingham Yard with milk.

At the age of two and a half when I was sent to stay with my Gran, I met Mr. West for the first time and I was terrified! Gran had to go up to the washhouse to check some washing and so,

placed a gate across the front door so that I couldn't get out while she was away. When she came back, I was crying and making a terrible row, even Ivy came along to find out what the noise was about. When I finally calmed down enough to talk, I said a man had come to the door and he had two black eyes! Apparently Mr. West had an eye problem that made it necessary for him to wear very **dark sunglasses**. Milk was not the only thing brought to your door; bread, fish and even paraffin as well as a myriad of other goods, were sold door-to-door from a horse drawn cart, and later a van.

Joe was very fond of his homemade wine, that he made himself with various leftovers from the garden and from the local hedgerows. He seems to have made enough so that he rarely bothered with the local pubs. Then of course there were the old homemade remedies for ailments, like goose-grease for the chest, lard for cuts and cough mixture. I can still remember the first time Gran gave me some of her cough medicine made from blackberries and vinegar. I wondered what had happened to my throat, but it did taste really good after the initial shock.

Chapter 7

“John Joseph The Birds Dead”

While Ellen (Granny) Lane was still living at Nythe Cottage, the family kept their pony cart there, although the pony itself was kept in the lean-to at the Yard. On market day one of her boys would take the pony, which was called Star, down to the cottage and hitch him up to the cart and Ellen would then drive into Wallingford to do her shopping. If her grandchildren had behaved themselves during the week, she would take one or perhaps two with her, and this was treated as a great thrill.



Joe with Star outside Nythe Cottage

Poor old Star, the family pony, sadly died after being fed grass that had been cut in the churchyard. Unknown to whoever fed the pony, someone had also trimmed the yew trees. Some of the yew clippings had become mixed with the grass and the poor animal died of poisoning. Albert's wife, Ada, made pincushions of the pony's hooves, as keepsakes, after they were removed; she padded them out and fitted a piece of velvet over the top, trimming the edge with a piece of ribbon. I think my brother Stephen still has one of them.

Sundays could be a day of dread for Ellen's sons, especially if the children had failed to attend church service. Ellen always placed great importance upon her grandchildren going to the children's Sunday service; quite often she would go along and sit at the back of the church just to make sure they were all there. Woe betide anyone who was not present; after the service she would go to the relevant home and want to know why the child hadn't been in church - the excuse had better be good.

Probably the best thing about going to church, as far as the children were concerned, was that there were regular monthly tea parties held by Mrs. Miller, who lived in Preston Crownmarsh. There were also occasional outings to be enjoyed in the summer, a typical one would be on a horse

and cart supplied by Mr. Weller, a farmer of Berrick; one of his men would bring the flat cart over to Benson and, once the children were all aboard, he would drive off around the lanes stopping eventually in a hay field where the children could play games. A free picnic tea was always supplied.

Sometimes treats didn't go quite how the children expected; like the Sunday School Christmas Tea. One particular year this was held, as usual at the village hall, and Ally, Lizzie, her brother John and Ivy all went off in their Sunday best hoping for a good time. When they arrived at the hall there was to be a disappointment for two of them. Apparently, neither John or Ivy had enough attendance marks for the year and were turned away. Both mothers were distinctly unimpressed when the two of them arrived home a few minutes later in floods of tears, "They call that charity?" was their exclamation.

There were more adventurous trips to be had, like going on one of Tappins breaks, an early type of open bus. This would take the children further a-field to the 'Black Horse' at Checkendon or perhaps by the river at 'The Beetle and Wedge' at Moulsford. It was thought that one of the best trips involved going to a wood at bluebell time so that flowers could be brought home for mother. I myself can remember the woods around Nuffield and Stoke Row being carpeted in primroses and bluebells, at springtime, when I was a boy in the 1950's.

It was even possible to get into trouble on the day of your Conformation. On the day of Lizzie and Ivy's Conformation the service was held at the church of St Thomas of Canterbury Goring. Those attending the service from Benson duly boarded Harry Aldridge's bus, known affectionately as 'Joyce', for the journey down to Goring. After the service a light tea was provided



John & Lizzie on the day of Lizzie's confirmation

and the children were allowed some time to explore. The first the children knew of anything wrong was when they were shouted at for walking over an area of ground that had just been freshly seeded with grass. It was with heads bowed, a short time later, that they boarded the bus for the journey home. On arrival home, as it was a special occasion, a local photographer had been booked to take

a photo of Lizzie, in her Confirmation dress, with her brother John at her side. The photo was enlarged and framed and for many years hung in the kitchen of No1.



Ellen Lane wearing her 'widows weeds'

As was the custom, after her husband Henry had died, Ellen wore a long black dress with a high neck, made of bombazine. When going out, she would usually wear a black bonnet tied with ribbon under the chin. On Sundays, she would wear a white cap with gathered edging that framed the face and, over this, she wore a bonnet adorned with a bunch of imitation grapes. The ribbons under the chin were slightly twisted together to give a checkered effect in black and white.

It was on a market day when Mrs. Painting took her daughter Ivy and John, the young son of her neighbour Joe Lane, for a trip into Wallingford. As was usual in those days they walked along the old gravel road, through Preston Crowmarsh, towards Howberry Park. John was being mischievous and mocking the way an elderly friend of Mrs. Painting walked, apparently she walked with a small but quick step, unfortunately for John he missed his footing and fell forward into a muddy puddle. When he got to his feet he was worried what his mother was going to say when she saw the state of his little blue coat with the velvet collar, which now had mud smeared all down the front. Ivy's Mum comforted him by saying that it would soon dry and on the way back they would call at her elderly friends cottage and brush it all off. However she did stipulate that under no circumstances should he mention what he was doing when he fell, as her friend would be far from amused.

Ivy often had the job of taking her baby brother out for a walk in his little wooden pushchair. She often took him down past Mrs. Croxtons shop and on down the slope into Pretson Crowmarsh. She thought the best way to do this was to get up a good speed just past the church, and then, on reaching the slope, jump on the back placing both feet on the rear-axle. One day she met with a calamity when the front wheel hit a large stone and threw the pushchair forward. When she got the pushchair back onto it's wheels Ivy discovered poor little Sidney had a severely grazed and bloody face.

She started to push her brother home, all the time wondering how much trouble she would be in with her Mother. As they came to the vicarage, Mrs. Price the parson's wife was standing by the gate; when she saw the state that Sidney was in she immediately invited the children in and proceeded to bathe the little boys face. It took several minutes to remove the dust and gravel from his wounds and then rub some homemade grease into the worse ones. Ivy can't remember how much trouble she got into when she did arrive home, perhaps it's just as well as it was probably quite severe.

Joe's wife Lizzie was born in Great Milton but, by the time her children were old enough to be taken out in the pram, her parents were living at Little Haseley. Once or twice a year, Lizzie would push the pram all the way to Haseley from Benson to see her mother and would arrange it so that Mr. Harber would bring her and the children home. Mr. Harber drove the wagon for Mr. Woods who, at that time, owned the grocer's shop in Castle Square; that shop was later to became Chamberlains Stores and finally 'The Pine Shop.'



Woods delivery wagon c1920's

When her children were old enough to go out on their own they would go to Haseley and back on the carrier's wagon but on one occasion they were too involved in their play and forgot the time. The wagon didn't wait and left them stranded in Haseley. Fortunately, Lizzie's brother Tom Payne was able to talk the local postman into taking them back to Benson in his van. The poor chap was very worried as it was a new collection route and, if anyone checking up on him had found the children in the back of his van, he would have been sacked on the spot. He kindly dropped them off at the 'White Railings' while no one was about and they walked back to Birmingham Yard.

Needless to say, there were some very worried parents awaiting their return as they were, by then, long overdue. Today, we have the advantage of the telephone but then there were very few and it would have been almost impossible to get a message back to Benson with any speed.

Once John and his sister Lizzie could ride a bike, they would often ride over to Haseley to see Granny and Grampy Payne, and Ivy would often go along with them; they were usually given something to eat and a glass of lemonade. They were always being warned about not going too fast down what was known locally as ‘Chicken Hill,’ near Rofford Brook. It was a long hill back down into Berrick and in those days was only a dirt and flint track. The problem lay at the bottom of the hill where there is a sharp bend and they could have done serious damage to their knees and elbows if they had fallen off their bikes.

Life may not have been easy, and would probably seem hard and boring to today’s children but most of the memories are of fun and laughter. Joe made his son John a wheelbarrow, which had John’s initials “J.J.L.” painted along the side, and the boy took great delight in pushing it up and down the yard. He did however take exception to the girls, who were all older than him, because for some reason, that no one can remember now, they would call out after him, “John Joseph the birds dead!” John himself played some odd games, one day he went into the washhouse to see his mother and announced, “I’m the nit nurse and you’ve got seven.”

Lizzie and her cousin Ally, along with Ivy Painting, would play at “families” for hours, making mud pies and decorating them with periwinkle flowers, while sitting on the patch of grass outside Charlie Lewendon’s shed. They also had the fields and the brook to explore, which they often did. One day, Ally and Ivy went over the fields near Battle Banks and when they came back they took a short cut through a barbed wire fence by the brook. This was not such a good idea as Ivy scratched her leg and, even worse, Ally lost one of her boots in the water and it floated down stream. It wasn’t until two local youngsters, Wilf Major and his girlfriend Floss Winter, came along that they stopped panicking. While Floss helped Ivy clean her badly scratched leg Wilf managed to retrieve the missing boot, which had become stuck at the next bridge down stream. Ally was worried about going home with a wet foot and so they went to the playing field in the hope that it would soon dry out. Of course at 7 o’clock in the evening the sun was no longer very warm, so Ally still got into trouble because of her wet boot.

Most of the local children went down to the river and taught themselves the rudiments of swimming, near the coal wharf, with the help of their friends. As the water was too deep for most of them to be able to stand on the bottom, they came up with a ‘cunning plan’. The participants usually included Lizzie Lane and her cousin Ally along with Ivy Painting, and brothers Bern and Ben Pick. The idea was, if there were enough children, they would go a bit further up river to where the bulrushes grew. There they would form a chain by holding each other round the waist, with the one at the front reaching under the water to pull out bulrushes by the roots. When enough were collected they were tied into bundles and each of the children would then hold a bundle under each arm to use as water wings! The bundles seem to have given just enough buoyancy to keep them afloat as they splashed their way through the water near the riverbank. Now I wonder who dreamed up that idea? The Romans!

There was no talk of the dangers from the coal barges, perhaps it was never considered serious enough to worry about. Obviously the number of pleasure craft navigating the river in the first half of the 20th century was far less than in the second half. Certainly up until the 1950’s the

riverbanks could get quite crowded at the weekend with families having picnics and people swimming in the river. There were various regattas held on the river especially at Wallingford.

It was in the mid 1920's that Mrs. Cumberidge, an artist from London, and her two daughters came to spend summer holidays in the village. She and her two children stayed with Mrs. Walters in Littleworth, and it was she who taught several of the children, including Lizzie, Ally and Ivy to swim properly. Mrs. Walters husband ran the local taxi and it was his car that was involved in the fire on 3rd July 1922. He was later to build a block of three garages, about where the library now stands. These were let to local people; Charlie Barney always kept his little Morris car in one.



I to r Mrs. Cumberledge, Dawn Cumberledge, Alma Thompson, Rene Bailey, Lizzie Bailey, Alice Lane, 'Tiger' Cumberledge, Lizzie Lane. Mr. Haines standing behind Dawn.
Swimming at Benson Wharf c1927

For several years the changing facilities, such as they were, were looked after by Mrs. Haines the wharf manager's wife, and consisted of an old thatched cottage. Apparently if this was locked or Mrs. Haines turned the children out they would use the willow trees instead. The trees had been pollarded for many years and the tops of some formed a flat broad platform just right for keeping clothes safe. [*The willow trees along the river may well have supplied the material for the baskets that John Argyle and his son Charles made in their workshop in Preston Crowmarsh. They were in business from approximately 1780 until 1875 when Charles died aged 76.*]

Apparently young children from the poorer parts of London were boarded with various families in the village during the summer months in the 1920's. Many couldn't swim, and they didn't realize the fact until they were in the water, either that or they didn't want to admit that they couldn't. On more than one occasion Mr. Haines had to rush from the wharf to use a boat hook to pull a half drowned child to the bank. He was possibly the only lifeguard Benson ever had, and unpaid.

It seems somewhat strange that when swimming in the river at Benson was most popular the water was quite badly polluted, now that it is relatively clean few people even paddle in it let alone swim. Most now prefer to swim in highly chlorinated indoor swimming pools.



Swimming area and diving boards c1950

However it wasn't only the children who got into trouble in the river, sometimes the adults could be rather reckless as well, as was the case of my grandfather Joe Lane and Mr. William Aldridge. There is an account of the event, that took place on Sunday 12th, in the Berks & Oxen Advertiser of 17th January 1936.

RIVER THRILL AT BENSON

Two Men Narrowly Escape Drowning While Fishing :- Two Benson men had a narrow escape from drowning while fishing in the river at Benson on Sunday last. They are Mr. W Aldridge and Mr. G Lane, and they were fishing from a small open boat.

The river was running at a fast speed and, fully occupied with their angling activities, Mr. Aldridge and Mr. Lane were unaware their boat was being rapidly carried away to the weir. Becoming alarmed when they realized their predicament, they endeavored, without success, to steer their boat to the riverbank. Suddenly the boat was swamped and they were thrown out. Fortunately they managed to scramble to a danger sign post and clung to this until help was secured. The oar was washed away to the weir, and had not Mr. Aldridge and Mr. Lane been thrown out of the boat, it is more than possible they would have been drowned. They called for help and their plight was seen by Mr. Eade, the lock-keeper; who was instrumental in assisting the men to safety.

Other persons on the riverbank also witnessed the incident. "It is something I do not wish to see again," one witness of the incident told a 'Berks & Oxen Advertiser' representative. "Not for a moment did I think they would be able to escape and I was powerless to help. I went in search of a boat and assistance, but meanwhile Mr. Eade secured a boat and safeguarded himself by anchoring a line to the riverbank."

"It was a big risk on his part because the spot at which the men were overturned was at a danger point in the river. It all happened within a few minutes." Mr. Aldridge is a member of the Benson

Parish Council and Hon. Secretary of the Benson Angling Club, of which Mr. Lane is also a member.



Joe Lane (foreground) spends a pleasant afternoon
on Benson Fishing Club water

I also came across another account of this event, by the grandson of the lock-keeper; in this he tells of Mr. Eade's frantic attempts to make an anchor of heavy objects and having to row upstream before being swept across the main flow of the river. He reportedly had to tell the men to jump as his boat passed them in the fading light and one almost went over the side. Then there was a frantic row, almost across the face of the weir, to the safety of the bank. Apparently Mr. Eade received a letter from the Thames Conservancy and an award of two guineas for his gallantry; Mr. Aldridge and Mr. Lane gave him a bushel of Blenheim apples in appreciation

All the children, including the girls, liked to kick a ball about the yard and often Ada would put her head round the door of the Old Surgery, telling them not to kick the ball towards the house. On one particular day Ada had already been out and shouted at them to be more careful when Dr Birch walked past on his way back from the privy at the bottom of the garden. The doctor asked for the ball and gave it a mighty kick, sending it crashing straight through Ada's kitchen window. As soon as the children heard the glass, they started to run but Ada was already at the door, "I warned you what would happen," she shouted and, waving her fist, was about to go after the nearest child. "Hold on mother," called the doctor, "I'm afraid that it was me, I'll pay for the damage." Ada was a bit flustered at that and the children stood about giggling behind their hands, thinking it was all

rather funny. Doctor Birch seemed to involve himself in village life in general and it was he who presented one of the fishing trophies to Joe Lane at the annual fishing club dinner in 1936.

As well as not being too safe playing near the windows, children could also get into trouble with the men if they played near the work-sheds. One day the children were being a nuisance and Charlie Lewendon told them to clear off or he would kill them; when they didn't go away, he came out again carrying the trough that was used when the pigs were killed. Ivy for one knew exactly what it was and ran home in fear for her life.



Benson School c1921; back row, Lizzie Lane 6th from left. front row,
Ivy Painting 1st on left, Ally Lane 4th from left



Benson School c1920; back row far right Freddie Parks
Alice (Ellen) Lane? front row far right

It is thought that Henry Lane's seven children all attended the National School in Benson but no one ever seemed too sure about whether that was true or not. It is certain that all his grandchildren went to the Oxford Road School until they were fourteen. Once a week the youngsters went to Dorchester where the girls took cookery lessons and the boys did carpentry. The children would board an elderly bus, or sometimes a van, for the journey to Dorchester, where classes were held in a wooden building that was located by the green in Bridge End.

Their lunchtime play was usually divided between the Abbey church, in inclement weather, and Dyke Hills when it was dry. On one particular wet day the youngsters were in the Abbey when Lizzie proudly pulled out the bottle of fizzy drink she had in her lunchbox. Unfortunately as everyone crowded round to see, the bottle slipped to the floor, smashing on the stone flagstones. The immediate reaction was the same with everyone, they immediately ran out of the Abbey door and back to their class room, despite the rain. Later, the vicar probably pondered on where the broken glass had come from.

The journey home from Dorchester could be eventful, especially if the girls had made something like a rice pudding, of a runny consistency. In the rush to get a good seat on the bus after lessons, this would sometimes lead to there being a nasty mess in their carry case, on the floor of the bus, or sometimes in both places.

Chapter 8

Village Clubs and Groups

Benson always used to have a thriving community spirit, especially if the 1889-1900 newspaper reports are anything to go by. Newspaper reports were very full in those days giving all the names and much detail of everything that happened. An example of the community spirit is represented by the yearly collection for the local hospital, in 1889 Henry Lane donated 1 ½ bushel of potatoes and in 1892 he gave five shillings. [*To give an idea of food prices that year here is a list of just some, taken from the local paper:- Cheddar Cheese 7½d per 1lb, Bacon 4d – 9½d per 1lb, Butter 1/1d per 1lb, Sugar 2d per 1lb. This means that in today's money sugar would have been less than one pence a pound and butter just under five and a halfpence, if we hadn't made the half pence obsolete.*]

There would appear to have been a village social club in earlier times and according to a report in May 1893, a sports day had been arranged for Whit Tuesday as something to replace the '*old Club, which was for many years the principal holiday for the villagers.*' After a cricket match, various races took place for young and old alike and the first three in each race were given a useful present, these included knives, shoe brushes, handkerchiefs or braces to name but a few. Joe Lane won the sack race and was given a tie and belt, while Albert Lane and L Green won the Siamese race (three-legged race) and were given a walking stick each. After the sports were over and dusk was falling, the young people played 'kiss-in-the-ring' apparently, while the adults went to the 'Crown Hotel' where the landlord, Mr. Pether, provided a cold supper. About sixty people sat down to eat, including old Thomas Lane. A speech of thanks was given, followed by a concert by local people; the evening concluded with a rendition of 'God Save The Queen.'

At the following year's event, 300 oranges were shared between the local children; each then also received a bun and some sweets. Other well-known village surnames appear in the various lists of participants including W Gurney, S Blissett, W Young and W Belcher. The '*Abingdon Oddfellows Band provided the afternoon's musical entertainment*' and once again the evening supper was provided at the 'Crown Hotel.' After the meal, various people were persuaded to get up to sing; this sounds a bit like a modern karaoke night, although the songs were slightly different, with titles like, 'Bold Robin Hood,' sung by Mr. Pether senr; 'The village blacksmith,' and 'Monte Carlo,' sung by Mr. Tanner; and 'Shabby Genteel,' sung by Mr. T Pether.

During the 1890's Albert Lane played cricket for the village team and he and George (Joe) played for the single men against the married men at the village sports day most years. Like most village cricket matches in those years the game was played on a fairly rough pitch, the average team score for an innings being in the mid thirties. In the annual sports of 1894 Albert scored 15 runs while Joe managed a lowly 5, however, the brothers managed to bowl out members of the opposing married men's team.

There are photographs taken about this time showing Joe and Ernest in both the cricket and football teams. Surprisingly I could find no reference to a football team in any of the newspaper reports. In the late 1800's many of the local villages formed cricket and football clubs and there were various leagues in operation by the end of the century, catering for the different levels of performance. Benson were slow, compared with some of the other villages, in having an official football and cricket team.



Benson Cricket Team c1895

Joe Lane 2nd from right, back-row; Ernest 2nd from right, front row

It wasn't until July 1922 that the village formed a football committee, with Mr. Thorpe of Port Hill Cottages as Hon. Secretary, and they decided to join the North Berks Competitions. If this is true quite who the team were, shown below, I am unsure as it appears to date from the mid 1890's.

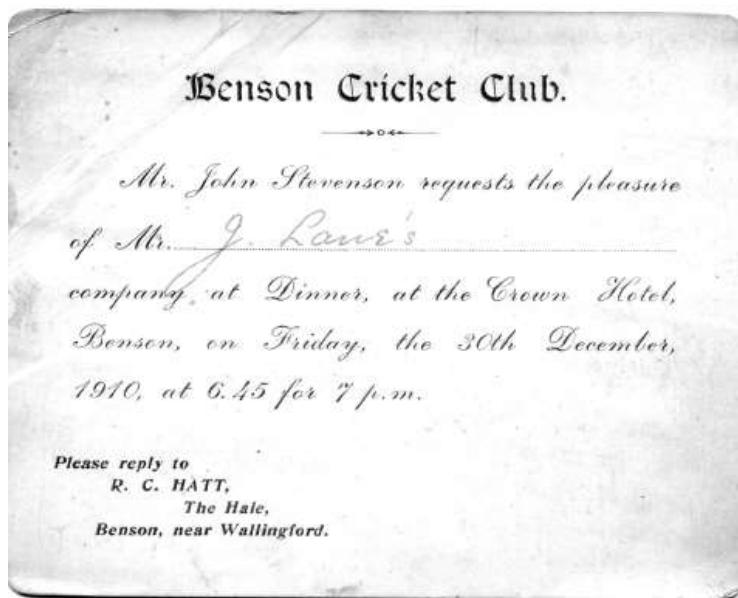


Benson Football Team c1900

Joe Lane center of middle row; Ernest far right front row

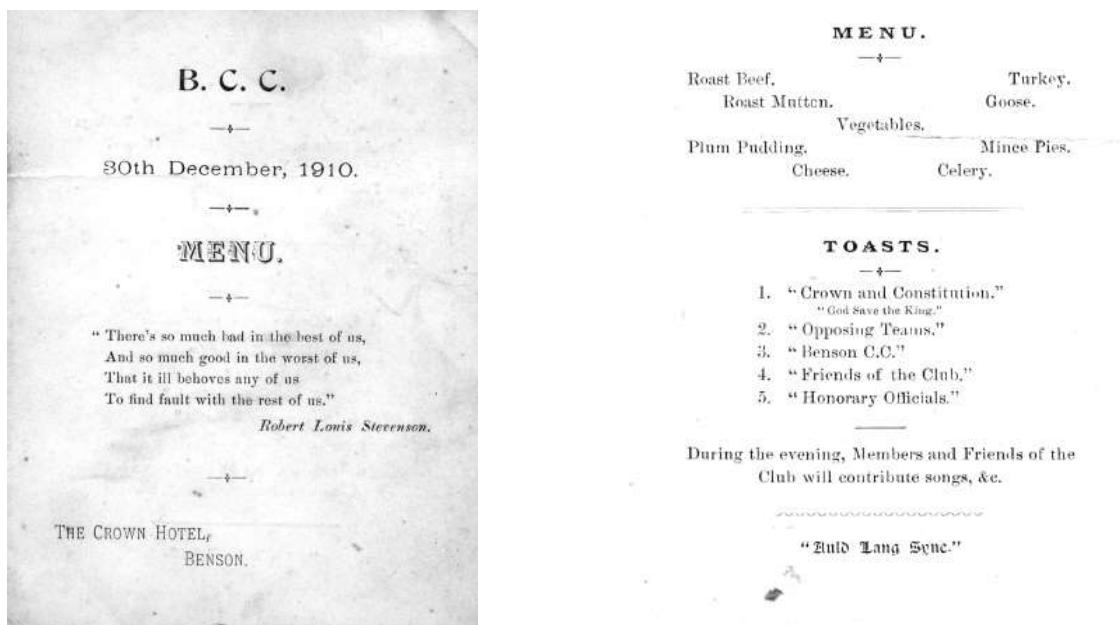
The Benson Horticultural Society was formed in 1894 and the first show was held in the meadow at Colne House, by kind permission of Mrs. Corsellis. Again, the local paper gives a full description of the event and the winners' names. The head gardeners from two local estates were the judges for the vegetable section, Mr. Keen from Howberry Park and Mr. Woodley from Newnham Park, and Berrick Brass Band provided some musical entertainment. Among the winners was Henry Lane, for his cauliflowers and runner beans, along with other winners with well known

local names including Beisley, Whichello, Powell, Polley and Cook. In 1899 it was reported that local man Walter Whichello apparently cut a marrow on his allotment that weighed 90lb!



Invitation to the annual dinner

Many of the various clubs in the village held annual dinners and these included the local tradesmen who in 1899 held their dinner at the White Hart. Apparently the meal consisted of Soup, Turkey, Beef, Mutton and sweets. In 1910 Joe Lane went to the Cricket Club's annual dinner at 'The Crown' and the menu consisted of the following, Roast Beef, Roast Mutton, Turkey, Goose, and Vegetables followed by Plum Pudding, Mince Pies, Cheese and Celery, it doesn't say if the meat was all served on the same plate! During the evening, various members gave renditions of songs with titles like, 'My Old Shako,' 'Our Beano,' and 'Come Back to Erin.' One has to wonder if any of the singers were as bad as many of the people who appear at karaoke sessions today?



The menu card 1910

In January 1936 the Benson and District Angling Club held their annual dinner and prize giving at the Crown Hotel. This was just a few days after Joe Lane and Bill Aldridge almost lost their lives while fishing on the river. Joe was awarded six trophies that evening, including the John Lewendon challenge trophy and best fish in four different species. He had also won the first match of the season held in home waters that year. Whether he had more time to enjoy himself in the thirties or a change of luck, he certainly had a lot of firsts during those years on the river. The following year, 1937, he was appointed weights recorder for the club.



Joe Lane with his fishing cups, 1936

Joe was an enthusiastic fisherman, as well as risking his life fishing from a boat on a flooded river Thames, he was known to have gone fishing on Christmas Day. How this went down with his wife Elizabeth no one is sure, was she pleased to see the back of him for a few hours, or annoyed to be left along with the children again?

As well as amusing themselves, Lizzie, Ally and Ivy all joined the local Guides along with many of their friends, while the boys were able to join the Scouts. Ally persuaded Ivy to join the

'Brownies' at Ewelme with her, at this time there was no group at Benson. The group in Ewelme met on a Saturday afternoon and Ivy agreed to go along with her friend.



Benson Guides c 1925; Lizzie Lane 3rd from left middle row
Alice (Ally) Lane 5th from left front row, Ivy Painting 8th

However, there was great rivalry between Benson and Ewelme and local teenagers were often having scamps. On the first day that the two girls went along they were chased back towards Benson, by a group of Ewelme lads, as far as Passey's Yard. Ivy was not at all impressed with the thought of running the gauntlet every week just for the 'Brownies' and so she told Ally she wouldn't go again. Ally was obviously made of sterner stuff and no Ewelme 'oiks' were going to stop her getting to meetings. Perhaps then it is no surprise that Ally devoted so much of her time and effort to the local Guide movement for so many years.



Guide Camp c1930; Ivy Painting 3rd from left back row;
Ally Lane 3rd from left middle row

There was also the chance for the lucky ones, whose parents could afford it, to go to a scout or guide camp near the seaside once a year. In those early days of the movement going away from home and sleeping under canvas must have seemed far more exciting than it would today. Family holidays were still something of a rarity for many people, except for the occasional day trip to the seaside. Scout or guide camp would have been the first time many children would have been away from home.

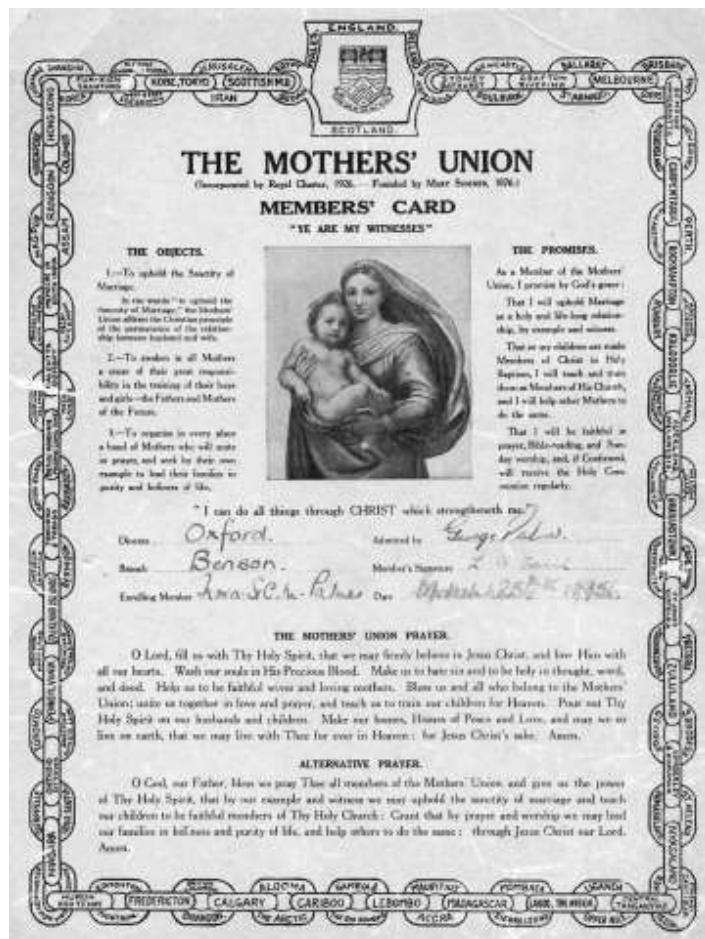
Admiral Miller from Preston Crowmarsh was a leading light in the local scout organization and various events were held in his garden. Lord Baden-Powell even came to one event in the late 20's (see photo below).



Benson Scouts c1922; Admiral Miller, back row 2nd from left, 4th Mrs. Miller, 5th Lord Baden Powell.
Bill Lane, front row 3rd from left, 5th Babe Field.

Of course there were also various concerts and dances organized during the course of the year by the same village groups, and by the local churches. During the first half of the 20th century there were dances or concerts most weekends, if not in Benson then in one of the nearby villages. There were several bands in the surrounding area that could be relied on to put on a good show at reasonable cost. There were also numerous local people who could be called on to make up the numbers in a show and perform a song or monologue in the village hall. The Misses Burgis and the Wilder brothers were well known for giving renditions of some of the popular songs of the time.

In the 1950's very many of the local women were members of a thriving Women's Institute and, possibly just as many men were members of pub darts teams. As early as the 1930's, at the annual fete the local children would stage a fancy dress parade and this continued at least until the 1950's. My brother and I made miniature gardens in soup plates to enter into one of the village fete competitions, we even won first prize once or twice. There were always opportunities to win prizes in local shows, from entertainment to gardening and cookery to sport, with no TV to watch and radio still very new local entertainment still had a lot to offer.



Mothers Union certificate from 1956, signed by Rev. George & Nora Palmer



Parade in Brook St. c1932 John Lane leads the horse,
Joan Walters wearing flying helmet, Jack Whitney wearing mac & cap.

When the children in the ‘Yard’ became teenagers they started going to the pictures at the Corn Exchange in Wallingford (before the cinema was built) and on one particular night, along with a group of friends, including Ernie Phillips and Reg Belcher, they went to watch Boris Karloff in ‘The Mummy.’ It was the journey home that my father seemed to enjoy the most. That night the fog came down so thick that the buses stopped running and so they had to walk back to Benson. They turned off between Walter Wilders and the parish church in Crowmarsh Gifford so that they could walk through Howberry Park.

Everything was fine, apart from the boys trying to scare the girls, until they reached the far side of the park and a small copse, that is still there. Next to the copse is a large field that now borders the modern airfield and just as they reached this spot, a horse put its head over the fence and neighed. In the eerie fog the shock brought screams from the girls and everyone was ready to run for it. By the time they got back to the village it was getting late and both Ivy and Ally still had to cycle back to Ewelme Manor where they worked. It was somewhat later than 9 o’clock, their official time to be in by, when they finally arrived there.



John Lane, boating on the Thames c1938

On a sunny Sunday afternoon they would sometimes club together and take a punt or two out for a leisurely trip along the river. Of course they needed to be dressed for the part in the 1930’s just as teenagers follow fashion today. Back then it was plus-fours for the men and white shorts for the girls when on the river. I wonder if they were always gentlemen or did it end with a splashing match, as these things often seem to do today. How often did they all go home dripping wet?



Lizzie Lane c 1938



Madge Bennett & Lizzie Lane



Lizzie Lane & Ruby Butcher stroll through Wallingford

The girls were into fashion then just as much as anyone since, judging by the number of photos of young Lizzie and her friends dressed in the latest styles. Even on a housemaids salary it was apparently possible to be up with the fashions in the 1930's. However, I suspect that today's younger generation has a much larger selection of clothing to choose from than would have been available then.

Holidays by the sea were a rarity in the early days of the 1900's but Tappins coaches made a difference to many lives when they started to run day trips. Even Joe Lane was persuaded, at least once, to go on a day trip to the seaside.



Tappins Trip c1938

Mrs. Collett Lizzie

Lizzie Joe Ivy Painting



Tappins Trip c1954

I to r; Lou Townsend & Louise Lane standing
Lizzie & Freddie Parks, Ern Townsend, Kit & Tom Polley

Brighton was always one of the most popular destinations. I went on several trips in the 1950's when I was a boy and I well remember going to Wallingford in the early hours of the

morning to meet the coach; sometimes on a dark morning we would wait in the bake-house at Chamberlains. I was fascinated to see the men cutting the dough and throwing it in the tins, the baked bread being taken from the oven on huge wooden poles, like rowing oars. Even today the smell of fresh bread takes me back to those exciting days.



Whitemans in the Market Sq. Wallingford

When he left school, John Lane, my father, started work at Whitemans hardware shop, which used to be located in the market square in Wallingford. Dad was always keen on sport and, despite being just 5ft. 4in. tall, he even managed to win the high jump at school. It was while working for Whitemans that he and fellow workmate Ted King started to play football for the 'Wednesday Swifts'; this was a team made up mostly of young men who worked in the local shops that closed on a Wednesday afternoon. I have only come across one match report in the local paper that gave more than the match score and that was when they lost to 'Railways United' in September 1937. Apparently they played a very poor game and lost 6 – 1. This report also includes the only mention of my father that I was able to find and, fortunately, it was he who scored his sides only goal.

Of course a football match then was somewhat different to today's matches. For a start the ball was much heavier, being made of thick leather, with a lace to hold the bladder in place. The boots were also made of thick leather with large leather studs, unlike today's, which are much lighter. Both of these items got heavier the wetter they became and then as hard as metal when they dried out again. It was easy to get a cut to the forehead from the lace on the ball while heading or have a large piece of skin removed from the shin by someone's studs. My father had the mark of a football stud on his shin, gained while playing for the 'Swifts,' until he died. It wasn't very safe in goal either as the keeper could be unceremoniously bundled into goal if he held onto the ball for too long. The violence was restricted to the pitch instead of the terraces.

Chapter 9

Around the War Years

By the 1930's the younger generation in the 'Yard' were all working, Bill was by now a qualified mechanic with MG at Abingdon. John was working at Whiteman's in Wallingford and Sid Painting had an apprenticeship at Walter Wilders in Crowmarsh Gifford. Meanwhile the girls were all in service; Ally and her sister Jessie both worked at Ewelme Manor, Ally stayed there until she married, while Ivy left school and also started work at Ewelme Manor before she moved on to Shirburn Castle in 1934. Four years later she got a job working for Mrs. Stubbs at Paddock House in Benson and it was here that she continued to work until after the war. Because she did so much war work for charities and local committees Mrs. Stubbs was allowed to keep Ivy as a housemaid even though most other families lost their own staff to war work.

Young Lizzie Lane was working for the Burgis family when war was declared. She had first been employed while they lived at Battle Banks in Benson before going with them, in April 1939, down to Canford Cliffs, near Bournemouth. While working in Bournemouth during the last months of 1940 Lizzie kept a note of the German bombing raids. A typical entry gives the day and time such as "12th October, day raid, 4 - 4.30". There is a note on 22nd November that there were three raids in the one day. Also noted, on 14th November, was the fact that a German plane was brought down at Ringwood Road in Poole at about 9.30 in the morning.

She moved back home in July 1941 but then in July the following year moved with the Burgis family to Sunbury-on-Thames, it was in 1944 that she moved back home for the final time and was called up for war work. She was lucky in being able to find a job near home; she started a driving job with Chamberlains Stores of St Leonards Sq, Wallingford, delivering bread and groceries, as well as the old accumulator batteries and paraffin. After the war she was offered a job in the shop, serving behind the counter, which is where she stayed until her retirement.

It was during the war when the government was asking for everyone to donate their saucepans and iron fences that Joe Lane and his brothers removed the iron railings that they had previously made to surround the family graves in the churchyard. I wonder if, like so many other railings they were just left to rust in a heap somewhere; the need was really for steel and not cast-iron.

There is always a lot said about 'the class war' in this country but every time I see the comedy sketch with John Cleese and the two Ronnies (aka Barker and Corbet), I am reminded of my Gran's thoughts on the subject. You see Gran could sub-divide each class into several smaller groups. As my father was a shop manager, she thought we were too good to play with children whose fathers might be labourers. On the other hand, we couldn't play with the children of white-collar workers because, although at the same level as us, they were 'different.' I can remember Gran telling me I shouldn't play with various children but Dad told me not to mind.

It took a long time for me to realize how proud Gran was of who she was. Although relatively poor and needing to take in washing to make some extra pennies, she was proud of what she did. I'm sure her philosophy must have been, 'whatever you do, as long as you do a good job, you can hold your head up in any company.'

Towards the end of the thirties John changed his job and started work at Chamberlains grocery shop in Castle Square, Benson. Then, on 15th November 1939, in the early days of WWII, John went to Reading and enlisted with the Royal Berkshire Regt. at which time he gave his occupation as grocer's assistant. At some point towards the end of February or beginning of March 1940 his regiment set sail for France.



John Lane in India

This, however, was a very short-lived experience, John and his regiment were lucky to board a ship well to the south of Dunkirk, missing the worst dangers of being trapped on the beach; he was back in England before the end of May. After more training, and trying to defend the Yorkshire coast at Filey with pickaxe handles instead of rifles, with telegraph poles instead of howitzers, he was sent to India with his regiment.

The rest of his war was spent moving between India and Burma, managing to miss the worst of the fighting but, contracting malaria, as so many did. His last bout of malaria occurred on the day before his wedding, which explains his rather pale and drawn look in the wedding photographs. He said that the nearest he came to the enemy was when the British were retreating and he, along with a group who were left to destroy equipment, almost walked into a Japanese regiment when they took a wrong track. It certainly wasn't all easy, especially when sitting on top of a hill being shelled by the enemy. He watched as one of the new reinforcements tried to dig his way home and another was mistakenly shot, by a nervous officer, when he got up to go to the

latrines. The bullet hit the poor chap in the head and they were unable to get him off the hill to safety before he died a week later.

It may have been because he had always had to be smartly turned out and polite at work that John carried this through to his time in the army, he was soon selected to be an officer's batman. The officer John was serving had to visit another regiment, while there John was pulled out in front of the assembled company one morning, as an example of what a smart soldier should look like. Like so many men who fought in both world wars John was reluctant to go into much detail about what he did. Like everyone else he was glad to get home safe and sound, he was soon back in the grocery business he enjoyed for the rest of his working life.

Within a few years of wars end the three Lane brothers all passed away and a way of life passed with them. When Joe Lane died in 1950 many notes of condolence were received by his widow, as was the custom then, there being no printed cards available. A typical example was sent by the church organist, it reads as follows:

Dear Mrs. Lane, I was so very sorry to hear that Mr. Lane had passed away. I have known him for so many years that to me it is the loss of another old friend. I sympathize with you most sincerely, and Lizzie & John, in the loss of a good husband & father. Yours Sincerely, Florence A Cooper

The costs of the funeral and that of Joe's wife and daughter illustrate the vast increase in the costs over a fifty-year period. For Joe the cost of a solid elm coffin and two mourning cars was £26-10-6, by 1969 when his wife Lizzie passed away the cost for a 'cremation coffin' and two cars had risen to £72-4-0. Thirty years later, in 1998 the cost had risen above £1500, the Vicar and Church had cost £1-0-6 in 1950 and £212 in 1998.
