

PETHER AND HEWETT FAMILIES OF BENSON by Peter Clarke



In 1930, a photo taken near the War Memorial recorded the view above left. The side of the old house on the site is behind the Inn sign, and its frontage is shown above right. It was called **Fairlight**, and owned by the gentleman leaning on the gate, whose name was Thomas Pether. This is his story, and that of his daughter Elizabeth, as related by *her* son, Alan Hewett, in 2007. Alan's childhood in the twenties and thirties was in the house located between the old White Hart Inn, and what was then Bertie West's farmhouse in Castle Square. Alan later moved up to Port Hill.

The hut shown between Fairlight and the White Hart seems to have been used as a general parish store. It garaged primarily the fire engine as well as being an occasional morgue, and general bicycle store! The ground on which it stood must have been on White Hart property (specifically, owned by Morrell's Brewery).

The Inn at the time was a popular venue for Oxford University students in their smart new sports cars, and the White Hart wanted access to convert the old coach and stable yard at the back in to a modern car park. Hence in about 1932 the hut, together with the hedge, were demolished to provide an entrance.

An amusing twist is that an old wheel-less horse carriage (a Brougham) left in the old stable yard was claimed by Thomas, who moved it in to his garden and used it as a shed and playroom for his grandson Alan.

On the death of Thomas's wife Harriet in 1928, Alan's parents Sydney & Elizabeth moved in to the house to care for the old man.

MR. ALAN HEWETT'S MEMORIES OF VILLAGE LIFE

"Mains electricity, generated at Preston Crowmarsh mill, arrived in the village by the late '20s. It was expensive. For ten shillings and sixpence (53p!) the Electricity Company wired up our house with three lamps and one 5 amp 2-pin socket in our living room. I know a lot of our neighbours waited until after the Second World War, continuing to use paraffin lamps for lighting, and cook on a coal-fuelled range.

The Benson Post Office had to share a half day closure with Ewelme. The reason given was that a Post Office had to be open for folk to walk to. During the war time much

communication was by telegram. As Benson was only a Post Office, whilst Ewelme was a grocers shop as well, then Benson had to close on a Tuesday. Benson Post Office sold daily newspapers, but the licence for Sunday newspapers was held by a lady in Wallingford, so she controlled all the sales in the district for that day.

Toilet emptying was usually with a bucket on to the house garden. This accounts for all the old houses having large gardens. In the cottage in Benson where I lived it was slightly different. The toilet was in a shed at the bottom of the garden sited above a large pit. The liquids drained away in to the sub-soil, but the solids remained. Father had a plot of land opposite, and once a year he dug a big hole – in the autumn - and in the night, once the adjacent pubs were closed, he crossed the road and tipped in the solids. He then took a newspaper, lighted it, and threw it in the toilet, putting the seat down. This got rid of the toilet paper, which of course was no more than newspapers cut into strips, threaded on string, hanging on a nail by the toilet. He wore his oldest clothes. When finished, off he went to the Thames with a bar of Lifeboat soap, and back into clean clothes that Mum had got ready for him.”

Life is much easier for us nowadays! Sewerage did not come to the village until the mid-Fifties, and who bothers to think about switching all the electricity we want on, 24 hours a day. Perhaps only the postal services are not much improved. Oh, and do those lovely cowslips in the garden of Alan's old house have anything to do with his last paragraph?!

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