

PAST TIMES IN AKELEY

My Name is Olive Bennett, nee King. I was born on 31st August 1926 in a house in Akeley which was then called 'Brickfields' and is now called 'Potterscote'. The house is out of the village on the back road to Lillingstone Lovell.

I had a happy childhood with my mother and father and my elder brother and sister Wilfred and Muriel. My earliest memories are of the family and the house and garden. Our house had two large bedrooms and two small.

On the ground floor was quite a large sitting room, a small living room, and down three steps was the scullery with a door into the back garden.

In this part of the garden, we used to keep hens for the eggs, and also when a hen wanted to sit she was settled in a coop with about six eggs and usually produced six baby chicks. We also had ducks at times, but they were more difficult to keep safe from foxes.

On our side our boundary hedge was by the road on the other side between our garden and the field belonging to Mr. Panter.

We had a large beech tree there, and in the summer evenings two cart horses used to stand under the branches for shade and rest.

Mrs Panter and my mother were friends, so from a very young age I was aware of farms in the village.

The only other house nearby was called 'The Pottery' and was owned by the Dunkley family. The tenants were Mrs. Tranter and Mrs Cook and family.

The house was not large but had many brick out buildings and a kiln for firing bricks; this was quite large and towered over the house. Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain any dates when this opened and closed.

The clay for the bricks was almost certainly obtained from the adjoining field. There were two ponds in the field, plus a large shallow water swamp, and I have always believed this to be where the clay was dug for making the bricks. There was also a spring of fresh water which added to the swamp.

It seems likely that a foreman or workman lived in the pottery – the house adjacent to the kiln, and possibly the manager or owner lived in our old house.

Unfortunately no photographs seem to have been taken of the kiln; they would have made an interesting record.

There are, however, chimney pots, capping stones, drain pipes and gulleys in Buckingham Museum which were made in the kiln.

After some years, Mrs Cook and family moved to a house in Chapel Lane, then called Duck End.

Mr & Mrs Ernest Dunkley and their son Frank came to live in the house and be our only neighbours. My mother was pleased to have neighbours again. My sister and I used to take walks by the brook and in the fields there was a mass of wildflowers: primroses, cowslips, violets in the hedges in spring, and moon daisies later on.

The fields that led to the brook all belonged to the Dunkley family.

After some time a dairy herd was kept as well as cattle.

AKELEY METHODIST CHURCH

My mother and father attended the Methodist Chapel on Sunday evenings (it is now a house) in the road which was then called Duck End.

When I was small I stayed at home with my brother but as I grew older I also attended.

I thought the best service was the yearly Harvest Festival.

Akeley Post Office and shop, which is now a house called The Laurels on the main ^{road} just by the turning into Coronation Cottages, was kept by Mr & Mrs Steer and when I was very young we used to get all our grocery there.

The bacon rashers were sliced off the sides of the sides of bacon with a very sharp knife. I remember the sugar being weighed into blue bags, 1lb size. Not many things were pre-packed at that time.

There was an out building half way down the garden, partly used for storing shop goods and partly for boiling the white wash up in the copper.

On a Monday, Mrs Steer frequently hurried off either for stores for the shop or to give the clothes in her copper a good prod with the copper stick.

The out building was originally the village reading room being donated by Mrs. Anna Pilgrim who lived at Akeley Wood. I was told Mr. Steer used to work as a head groom for Mrs. Anna Pilgrim by Miss Lizzie Richards (who lived in one of the original cottages before Coronation Cottages were built) that Mrs Pilgrim ran the reading room possibly helping people to read and supplying books.

Mrs Pilgrim died in 1910. The cottage and the reading room was left to Mr. Steer.

SHOPS

There was also a shop in Akeley Square which was next to the Bull and Butcher. Mr & Mrs Tompkins lived there and kept both the public house and the shop.

I remember the shop being there in later years but cannot recall it in very early childhood, but this may have been because we went to Mrs Steers' shop.

FARMS

Church Farm next to the churchyard, farmed by Mr Cox – a dairy farm.

First my older sister Muriel and then I used to call for our milk in a can every day after school and take it carefully home. Mr. Cox used to carry milk round the village with a yoke on his shoulders and a bucket hanging from each side, but we were living too far out of his delivery area so we had to collect ours.

Mr Patern's Farm. The farm buildings were in Leekhampstead Road, also the stables for the horses that were used for taking hay from the fields to the rickyards to stack, and also for ploughing.

Some fields were for grazing, some meadows for hay which was carried at haymaking time by horse and cart. The grass was still growing in the spring; there were lots of wild flowers and later moon daisies. The fields were on both sides of the road by our house. For some years, pasture and later one was ploughed.

Mr Panter's Farm

A field on each side of the road leading to our house. Two carthorses used to come and stand under our beech tree each evening for the shade in summer weather. the farm buildings were in Leckhampstead Road.

Mr and Mrs Panter lived at Lylo which is now Mr Land's property. My Mother and Mrs Panter were friends. I used to like the side garden at Lylo, it was small with tubs of Creeping Jenny and very pretty.

MANOR FARM Leckhampstead Road

The Dunkley Family

A large farm with land in several parts of the village. The Close, which was donated at a much later date to the village to be a Playing Field and which is used for village events also. Also the field immediately behind the site of the bonfire on 5th November is held.

Two fields leading to the brook (River Lec)

HILLSIDE

Mr George King (my uncle and his wife Gladys King lived at Hillside near to the Village Hall. The fields and farm buildings were on the opposite side of the road. It was a dairy farm for a good many years.

They had no children, Uncle George used to take me to a shop - Vyles in Castle Street in Buckingham to choose my Christmas present. I found this very exciting.

Mr & Mrs Taylor lived in the cottage in Akeley Square opposite the Bull & Butcher.

Mrs Taylor and my aunt Mrs Gladys King were sisters. Mr & Mrs Taylor had two children John and Mary, so they changed houses and my Uncle George and Aunt Gladys then lived in the cottage next to the school. The village pump was outside their house. It was well used as lots of houses had no tap water.

Mr Capel - Smallholding

Mr Capel lived at Buckingham and used to come to Akeley on the bus or on his bicycle. The buildings were by the junction to Church Hill (then called The Baulk), on the opposite side of the road. One of his field's was where Capel Close is now. It was named after him.

Stanley, my husband was told by the late Mrs. Whitehall that the barn on his land was a tithe barn. Mrs Whitehall lived in Church Hill (The Baulk). In her later years Mrs. Whitehall was the oldest person in Akeley.

BUSINESSES

Wood and Coal yard at the Cedars.

Mr & Mrs Dunkley senior
Mr Fred Dunkley (son)
Mrs Morgan, married daughter

It was considered a large business in those days . There were two shire horses which were used for pulling the large tree trunks just felled to the timber yard. When a load was being taken to Buckingham station, it was pulled by one. The children liked to watch them going through the village. There were also deliveries of coal to houses in the village.

The horses were stabled in Leckhampstead Road.

AKELEY VILLAGE HALL

I understand that some time after the end of the Great War in 1918, Akeley School was no longer available for social gatherings in the village.

A plot of ground was given by Mr. Roland Nicholls on the main road. Mr. George Jones who lived in Akeley heard of a large army hut for sale at Halton Camp for £100 and he organised the purchase of this on behalf of Akeley village by paying the £100 himself. He and three or four more men went to Halton to collect it. It was erected, I believe, with all voluntary labour.

Mr. Jones was a very good bricklayer, and he and his son Fred built the brick piers to support the hall. There was a fireplace and kitchen built, also a stage.

The floor was laid in wood and I have always understood it was the same as laid in Buckingham Town Hall many years ago. I can confirm it made a very good dance floor having spent a good many evenings there years ago.

A large set of crockery was provided with Akeley Workers' Institute on the side of each plate.

The Akeley Flower Show was held there and stalls and games; side shows were held in the field outside.

AKELEY SCHOOL

Date of erection

In 1931 it was time for me to go to school.

My brother Wilfred left in that year, 14 years was the school leaving age in those days.

My sister Muriel was 10 years old; it was good to have an older sister there. I liked school very much.

The school building (which is now a house) is in the Square.

It was divided into two rooms by a partition which could, if needed, be pushed back to make the two rooms into one. Children 5-8 in the small room and the older children in the larger room.

The headmistress was Miss Neale. She lived in Hanslope and came to school each day in an Austin 7 car.

Mr. Albert Tompkins, who used to live in Akeley, told me Miss Neale started teaching in Akeley School at Easter in 1927. Albert was attending the school then.

Albert's parents, Mr & Mrs Tompkins, kept the Bull & Butcher public house and shop adjoining until the family moved to Akeley Wood to live.

The infants' teacher's name was Miss Samson, who lived in Lillingstone Lovell and used to walk to Akeley school each day along the back road past our house, complete with her little black dog, and after school, walk home again.

In those first years in school there was strong pressure to learn to read and write which pleased me because the sooner I could read those interesting books, the better I thought.

CHURCH OF ST. JAMES.

Opened 31st July 1855 by Bishop S Wilberforce, Oxford

The Church seemed very large to me as a child. I always thought the interior was beautiful.

The rector at that time was the Rev. Seagrave.

As I got older I found Sunday was a busy day. I used to go to morning service with my sister Muriel. I liked the music and singing, but found the sermons rather lengthy!

SUNDAY SCHOOL

This was held in the school at 3 pm. We were taught by Mrs. Seagrave and the piano for choruses and hymns was played by Mrs Land – Mr. Tom Land's mother.

I liked Sunday school; lots of singing and stories from the Bible.

We also had a very nice party at the Old Rectory in the summer with games in the rectory garden.