

Yarpole Post Office, 1967-1970, by Jan Fletcher:

My mother, Doris Milner and I moved to Yarpole Post Office in October 1967 after my Father died. It had always been our family's plan to leave Wolverhampton to live in the country when my Father retired; the happiest part of his childhood was spent on a farm.

We came to the decision that we should buy a village shop so that we could get to know the inhabitants, and they could get to know us. The cottage and shop seemed rather unimpressive but we had brought a picnic and on asking where we could go to eat it we were sent up to the Common, sitting there we said "This is the place for us!"

It was a Saturday when we moved, Mother had to spend the day in the shop with a Post Office trainer while my sister and I organised the furniture which was difficult to cram in, even though we had left half of it behind. One furniture van left and two brought our stuff in as they waltzed around the men installing the water supply for the village. Electricity had not long been supplied to the village, not everyone wanted it. Mr & Mrs Jack Lloyd (Ivy Dene) could not see the point of it, they had perfectly good oil lamps and a Rayburn, they were quite comfortable, why meddle with new-fangled electricity?

When we opened the back door on first Sunday morning there was a pint jug of Jersey cream covered with a cloth. It was a welcome gift from Fan Adams (Charlie, Mary & Brian's mum) because as she said "I thought 'er needed fattening", meaning me because I was built like a hat-pin with knobs on.

The shop was to the right of the front door and a partition divided the entrance from the sitting room and staircase giving us privacy. What became the shop was a single storey store-room. In those days we had deliveries from wholesalers and the store-room was packed with enough to withstand a siege. Fresh bread was baked in Orleton and fresh meat came from Bowketts.

Even though the village had another shop, run by Ann Cresswell's mother Mrs Gover (Ollier), we settled in well. People could not just 'pop' into town when they needed something, so the shops were necessary and the Bell, the Village Hall, Church and Chapels were very much part of the social life.

Yarpole was a place where time seemed to have stood still. If you look at every new or newish house, imagine an orchard, most of the fields were smaller too. I was away at college during the week, but I do so wish that I had taken photographs of the village and surrounding area then, but I had no idea how much things would change.

Mother joined the WI and found herself President; it was a very lively WI with a good reputation for hilarious theatrical productions. Mrs Cornish was the driving force behind the entertainments. I remember laughing until I ached all over when Norah Barker gave an absolutely stunning performance as Romeo. The shop had very little stock when we first arrived so Mother built it up so that it stocked just about every necessity. At Christmas several of the old people in the village would ask Mother to get presents for them to send to grandchildren and great-grandchildren, so she would set off with a list of names and ages; when they were approved she would wrap and post them to all parts

of the world. On Christmas day some would come to us to phone their relatives and sometimes were too overcome to speak.

Mrs Gover (Ollier) at the shop in Steps Cottage did similar things for her customers, even feeding someone if she felt they needed it. Once she decided that Phyllis Barnett needed a coat, so gave her Ann's only coat.

When the water was connected to the village, it was not all sweetness and light. West End Cottage was inhabited by Mrs. Welsh, Mrs. Usherwood, her neighbour, lived in South View with her son & daughters. They shared the well in Mrs Usherwood's garden but there was a problem.

Mrs Welsh was rather eccentric and had other problems which meant that she would at times make wild accusations, few people escaped these attentions which strangely used to be made during the full moon, I jest not! Most people just ignored this, regarding her as ill, but some were deeply offended. Mrs Usherwood and her family were the most frequent 'beneficiaries' of her monthly attentions, so when the pipes were laid they would not let the pipe be extended to Mrs Welsh's cottage. One day she came into the shop hardly able to speak and her face and neck was swollen, she had been getting her water from the stream which had just left the busy farmyard at Church House Farm. After that she got her water from our stand-pipe at the back of the cottage.

The chapels in Yarpole and Bircher were active as well as the church. Mrs Daisy Perks, who lived in Brook House Cottage with her husband Caleb, was a forthright lady. When a new minister came to Yarpole Chapel, the service went as expected, except that he strayed to hymns not usually sung, a problem for those whose eyesight or reading ability prevented them from joining him. When he announced the third unfamiliar hymn, she stood up and said "Can we have a hymn as we know, because we b'aint come to hear you sing". She was a wonderful character.

Mrs Perks first advice to me was "Don't get married 'til your 30, 'cause no man's wuth it!" and another day said to me "Remember girl, look after your money, take care of your Mother and read the Bible ... in that order!" With each point she would prod you fiercely. She and Caleb seemed to be permanently 'at war' with each other, but when he died she missed him terribly. They each had their own lavatory, hers was built just outside the back door and his just up the garden; they each had their own copy of the Daily Mirror and each had to have their name on it, after breakfast they would each go to their own 'facilty' with their newspapers. I remember one day when afraid to be 'caught short' he used her lavatory and it was at least a week before she spoke to him again!

When in the late 60's we had the 'Yarpole Flood', **Mrs Perk's well** overflowed behind the house as water came in from the stream. When I waded across to help her, the water was about 3ft deep with a strong current but it did not get into the shop and just missed the store and kitchen at the back. It was said that sluices had been opened at Croft, but I am not sure if that was so. After this some people would say 'It always floods in Yarpole', but it needs to be said that Mrs Perks was in her 80's and she said that nothing like that had ever happened in her lifetime. Why do we have floods there again, what has changed?

There were 6 functioning farms in Yarpole alone at that time; Pound House with Clive & Eunice Barker, Lower House Farm with Ernie & Norah Barker, Church House Farm with Ivor Mason (Norah's brother), Brook House Farm with Mr &

Mrs Niblett, Vicarage Farm with Harry & Fan Adams, and Upper House Farm with Mr & Mrs Thomas, and that's excluding the rest of the parish.

Ivor kept his Hereford bull in the shed behind the footpath by the church, the bull was a quiet presence but every now and again his pigs would escape. A sow and 12 piglets came one day to explore our garden; it was hilarious trying to get them out, a bit like herding cats! Our neighbours were in tucks of laughter as we attempted to get them out. We were used to animals being herded or wandering through the village, if we didn't want them eating our roses, we kept our gates shut.

Ernie & Norah Barker could not have been kinder or more helpful and when I bought a horse I kept her on their farm, those buildings are now Jubilee Lodge and Barn House; Melrose Cottage was still at Shobdon and Ayers Barn yet to be constructed. The fields at the back where we have been lucky enough to have the Fete many times are much the same but the ones over the road have had most of the hedges removed and are very different.

The dreadful day when foot & mouth descended on Yarpole was the beginning of the end of much of the farming community. Three farmers who could not bear to see their animals slaughtered came to the shop, unable to speak, so mother posted them into our living room to give them privacy. So many treasured blood-lines were lost.

Though we were pretty much the first of the 'townie invasion' we felt very much part of the parish. Mother would help people with their form filling, became church treasurer and got involved in village life. She was particularly careful to see how things were done and not to leap in with new ideas until they seemed appropriate.

When Home Farm at Bircher was put up for sale, we bought it and sold the shop.

When you sell a premises with a post office you have to resign as postmaster, which Mother did as soon as we had a buyer; the buyer changed their mind at the last minute, so Ann Creswell took the opportunity to take it on and it remained there until 1979 when she moved to Stanley Bank Farm on Bircher Common.



This photograph, taken at the time, shows that the shop was still in the front room of the house with the entrance through the front door. The board in front of the window was advertising the sale of Lyons Maid ice cream and the two small boards on the wall were advertising cigarettes (Players and/or Senior Service).



These photographs of her mother, Mrs Doris Milner and the views of and from the shop were kindly supplied and the text compiled, by Jan Fletcher (October 2013).