

Claydon with Clattercote Newsletter

Village History Supplement

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A LIFE IN CLAYDON Part 6

Continuing the recollections of Doris Beswick nee Bloomfield who has lived most of her life in the village, beginning at the Top Lock in 1925, with her father Ted, mother Beat and four brothers. Ted was the foreman of the stretch of canal from Fenny Compton to Banbury.

Changes at Home and Away

Doris had begun working for Canon Williams and his family at St Mary's Vicarage in Banbury in April 1942. In 1946, a few months after the end of the War, Canon Williams was transferred to St Peter's Church in Bournemouth. Doris was asked to go too, along with Vella, the other maid, who had returned to service following her period of war work at the NAAFI in Shenington.



Doris while in Bournemouth

The Vicarage in Bournemouth was much smaller than that in Banbury, as was the household. There was only Canon and Mrs Williams and one of their children. In service, there was just Doris and Vella, with Vella taking on the role of cook, but she would also clean the kitchen and help with polishing the silver while Doris was a maid of all trades. As in Banbury, Mrs Williams frequently helped with the chores. With no handyman, Doris took over some of those tasks, such as cleaning the Bishop's shoes while Mrs Williams relieved Doris of one of her Banbury jobs of cleaning out the grates and setting and lighting the fires. The girls were allowed to take their time off together and the family would organise their meals themselves and do all of the washing up.



Doris centre with Vella on the right and Vella's sister on the left

In Bournemouth, when the girls were off duty they enjoyed paddling in the sea and social events based around the Girls' Friendly Society that was attached to St Peter's Church. They played tennis during the good weather and table tennis when driven indoors. They also learned to dance, but with no men present some of the girls had to learn the man's steps. The dances were mainly waltz and quickstep and party dances such as the Gay Gordons and the St. Bernard Waltz. The town became very crowded in high summer and they preferred the time outside the main tourist season after the holidaymakers had returned home.

During this time Doris would travel home to Claydon for a long weekend once per month. This practice continued whatever the weather and on one visit Ted and the lock-keeper Frank Stanley had to dig a way along the towpath through the heavy snow, from the Appletree Road at Middle Lock to Top Lock so that she could get through.

Things were changing in Claydon too. Ted was preparing to retire, so it was time to leave the life that they had known, the interactions with the boat owners, and the space that they had occupied by having use of both lock cottages. Narrowboats had converted from horse drawn to diesel resulting in the once clear waters of the canal turning to the sludge colour of the present day. There was no longer a need for the boat owners to stay overnight at Top Lock with their horses stabled in the building next to the cottages and for a canal worker to manage the operation of the building.



The life of the boat owners is well chronicled in the excellent account *Ramlin Rose* by Sheila Stewart. Although the boat family is fictitious, it is a composite of all of the true events that were recounted to the author during her research. The people that they encountered on the bank were real, including the lock-keeper Frank Stanley and Beatrice Bloomfield. Beat was described as “one of the many kind women ‘on the bank’”. She had helped the families on many occasions, including a time when a child had died because no-one could reach a doctor through the snow. Doris related her own stories to Sheila Stewart and

loaned two photographs one of which is printed overleaf. It shows Beat holding a very young Doris with boatwoman Annie Wilson. (When road and rail transportation brought the working life on the narrowboats to an end the Wilsons along with many other families settled in Banbury).

Doris was given a week's holiday to return home for Christmas 1946. It was to be the family's last Christmas at Top Lock. They were joined by Doris' aunt and uncle from Birmingham, who had regularly visited during the previous months, each time bringing with them, on the train and bus, tins of fruit. These were amongst the items still rationed and they were steadily building up a stock for Doris' twenty first birthday party which took place just a few days after the Christmas celebrations.

The village school was hired for the event and Ted and Doris' aunt spent the day preparing the school room (clearing away the desks etc) while Beat and Doris' uncle, who was in the catering trade, prepared the food. With no motorised transport, everything had to be carried along the towpath and Appletree Road, then through the village to the school building. With the capacity for dancing and games and many villagers invited, a good time was had by all.

In 1947 Ted retired and the family moved to a new Council House in Fenny Compton Road. The pigs had been slaughtered at Christmas and not replaced, but the hens moved to the village too. With a large back garden there was also plenty of room for Ted to grow vegetables, a tradition which Doris continues to this day. Although Arthur, Doris' brother then became foreman at Top Lock, he moved with Ted, Beat and brother Sid and the two lock cottages were left empty.

To be continued

Many thanks to Doris Beswick

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