

WYCHWOODS HISTORY

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those of the Society

Foreword

This edition of *Wychwoods History* takes a rather different form in that there are only two long articles with another shorter but related one.

In 1903 a new butler arrived at Bruern Abbey, the home of the Samuda family. Henry Gooding's great-grandson, Mark Cathcart, records the 'upstairs/downstairs' life that was lived in this Edwardian household and the memories of Henry's young daughter whose heart never left Bruern for the rest of her life.

There is a connection with our other long article when Princess Victoria of Schleswig Holstein, a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria, visited the Wychwoods in 1911 to attend a Temperance Society meeting, a fete at Bruern Abbey and a visit to the Waifs and Strays Society home at St Michael's, all arranged by Mrs Samuda.

St Michael's College for Young Ladies was founded in 1869 and moved in 1881 to purpose-built premises in Milton Road, Shipton. The building had a chequered career until it was demolished in 1989 and the site became Willis Court. With much information gathered over many years about the uses of the building by John Rawlins, Wendy Pearse has pulled together the history of what was for just over a hundred years a landmark building in Shipton. In the late 1940s the building nearly became The Wychwoods Social Centre. Trudy Yates has tried to unravel why the scheme did not take place.

Trudy Yates, Joan Howard-Drake and Sue Jourdan

The Butler of Bruern

MARK CATHCART

In the late spring of 1903, Henry Gooding arrived at Bruern Abbey to take up his new role as butler for the Samuda household. For the next ten years he, his wife Sarah, and his two young daughters were to live an idyll deep within the Oxfordshire countryside, amid the architectural magnificence of Bruern, a life in service with the local aristocracy. Yet five years later the dream had been broken, with a wave of tragedy sweeping through the Abbey that brought master and servant together in their grief with the structures of society set to change forever. This is the story of Henry, his early years as the son of the coachman on the Holton Park estate and as the butler at Bruern. It is also the story of Kate, his daughter, who in later life living in a world far removed from Bruern, held onto the dream that was her childhood. Much of the following account has been researched, but the soul of what has been written here is thanks to the memories of her years at Bruern that she so carefully preserved by sharing them with her own family.



Henry Gooding



Sarah Gooding

Henry's childhood at Holton

Henry was born in February 1868 in Wheatley, a few miles south of Oxford. His parents James Gooding and Fanny née Moreton had met a few months before through their work at Wheatley for the Tyndale family on the Holton Park estate, James the coachman, Fanny a house maid. James came from a large family with twelve brothers and sisters all growing up together in a worker's cottage in the small farming hamlet of Marsh Baldon, a few miles to the west of Wheatley. James's father Thomas was a farm labourer working the land with teams of horses, with James by his side as a boy learning how to train them. Fanny came from Thame from a family of farm labourers and craftsmen.

Holton Park was a large and beautiful woodland estate and Park House stood inside its walls, castle-like and imposing. Elisha Biscoe had purchased Holton at the beginning of the nineteenth century demolishing the former Elizabethan moated castle, once used as headquarters by Cromwell during the Civil War, on the excuse of its being haunted, and built a more functional castellated house with the former castle providing much of the building material.

The owner of the estate for whom James and Fanny worked was William Tyndale who inherited it from his uncle Elisha, and lived at Park House with his wife and eight children, seven sons and a daughter. James and Fanny lived as part of a large community of servants and farm labourers supporting the estate, with a mixture of servant accommodation and estate cottages. In a letter to his brother Henry written in May 1867 James updated his brother with the news that he had just married and as a consequence was moving from the house itself to a worker's cottage in the village on an annual income of £60. The rent charged was half a crown a week, £7 10s a year, an eighth of his salary. The workers' cottages in Wheatley were set in pairs, built of rough limestone, whitewashed without and plastered within, with red brick floors, low ceilings, attics and thatched roofs.

James's job as coachman on the estate was to be responsible for the team of horses pulling the coach and transporting the Tyndale family and friends to and from Holton, with occasional trips into Oxford and beyond. On party nights at the house, James, as he informed his brother in his letter, was expected to 'remain at saddle'. The hours were long, though not labour intensive, requiring the skills that he had acquired as a young boy from his father working with teams of horses pulling the farm machinery.

The marriage of James and Fanny was productive with eight children in the first ten years. Three died in infancy, however, Elizabeth as a baby, and Edward and Fanny as young infants. As the eldest of James's and Fanny's children, Henry fulfilled a responsible role in the household, helping with the chores, the gathering of provisions, and generally with the job of looking after his younger brothers and sisters, while his mother was pregnant or nursed the latest arrival. Despite these responsibilities life as a child was relatively simple, with entertainment consisting of stories by the fire, singing and recitation of rhymes. Play was tree climbing, swimming in the river, fishing in the streams, bird nesting and egg collecting, a playground of spinning hoops and skipping ropes.

The free education provided by the government meant that the children of Wheatley were all expected to be literate, able to count, and fully versed with the scriptures. When Henry was eleven, Mr Tyndale-Biscoe presented him with a book for 'good behaviour and satisfactory attendance' according to the inscription on the inside of the cover. Attendance was important given the

demands placed on many of the children to help their parents at home with their families, and their fathers in the fields according to seasonal demands. The choice of book given to Henry for this occasion, *The bee hive and its wonders*, a book written by the Scripture Society, would have held its own fascination for Henry. Children were acquainted with the subtleties of the seasons, the cycle of growth and decay, the names of trees and wild flowers, their fruits and scents, with bee keeping and honey a rich component of this cycle.

All this was to change when on 14 July 1882, James Gooding, aged thirty-nine, was killed in a coach accident on the estate. The repercussions for his family were, of course, momentous. Fanny was unable to pay the half a crown a week rent and the worker's cottage was now required by the new coachman. Obligations of the owners to families in such events were negligible. It was an unfortunate event, and life at Holton Park had to go on. And indeed it did, with Fanny and her children having to make their own way.



Funeral card of James Gooding

Henry, now fourteen years old, was no longer living at home, and had lodged with an uncle in the nearby village of Cowley since the age of twelve. His younger brother and sisters, Earnest, Emily, Georgina and Annie were, however, still living at Wheatley with their mother. With no welfare state, and no income that could be provided by the Goodings themselves, alternative homes had to be found for her younger children. Emily, the oldest of the girls, was sent to an orphanage in Hampshire four months after her father's death. She had lost her father, and now the comfort of her family too, with Farnborough a long trek by train from Wheatley. A week after her arrival she was allowed to write a letter home. In it she told her mother how much she had enjoyed the journey 'by looking out of the window at all the nice fields'; also that she liked playing with all the other little girls, and had just attended a christening at the local church. She also informed her mother how much she was longing for February for visiting day (it was November when she wrote the letter); and that she was only allowed to write home on writing home days, once every three weeks. Reading between the lines Emily, just nine years old, was a brave young girl.

Four years later aged seventeen years, Earnest, Henry's only surviving brother, died. This was a bitter blow to Henry. Earnest had suffered from ill health for much of his childhood. Despite his young years he had recently been

playing the organ at Wheatley church for services. Only three of Henry's seven siblings had therefore made it to adulthood, Emily, Annie and Georgina.

The butler's path to Bruern

Henry initially helped his Uncle Harry Moreton at his pork butcher's shop in Cowley, and later worked at a stall in the covered market of Oxford. Henry's entire childhood had been spent organising his younger brothers and sisters, making sure they were fed and ready for school, and helping his mother at home. He was respectful and understood deference, fully versed in the master-servant relationship through helping his father in his work as coachman on the country estate. It seemed a natural progression for Henry, therefore, to find his own career in domestic service, and in what would have seemed a natural move returned to Holton Park as footman.



Henry at Wheatley Station

behind a hood beckoning everyone to stand still, ready to capture the moment on camera. Cecil Tyndale was setting off to the mission fields with his parents and younger brother Julian there to say goodbye, with footman Henry to assist.

Henry's life was also about to move on, from Wheatley station to Paddington, London, from where it was just a five-minute walk to his next place of work, 45 Gloucester Square, the home of the Lucas family. The whitewashed terraced residence faced onto a pleasant square planted with lime trees. The property had a traditional portico entrance, and it was here that Henry was to stand, and greet the guests as footman to the residence. Inside he waited on the family and guests, delivered the post, and ran errands, living in the servant quarters on the attic floor.

Henry and Alice Lucas and their three young children were supported by a butler, a governess, a cook, a nursemaid, a nursery maid, a housemaid, an under housemaid, a kitchen maid, a scullery maid, and of course a footman,

It was in this role that on a summer's day in July 1888, a twenty-year-old Henry stood on the platform at Wheatley train station, his home village, dressed in his formal attire and smart bowler hat. Several feet in front of him a man was crouching

Henry. Working at Paddington was ideal, with easy train access back to Wheatley for visits to his family there. More especially, it was convenient for visits to his mother, Fanny, who had re-married and was now living in London in the less than savoury district of Deptford. Mr Bennett, her second husband, was not especially kind to her. Henry's younger sisters had also entered service with Emily working as a housemaid just round the corner in Paddington at 77 Cambridge Square, with Georgina slightly further away at 10 Sheffield Terrace, Kensington serving as a housemaid. Another of his sisters, Annie, worked further afield at Mountfield, Sussex as a nursery maid. The Gooding family had to all intents and purposes re-located from rural Oxfordshire to London in their search for work in service for the swelling ranks of the Victorian wealthy.

In early 1892 Henry's mother passed away at the age of forty-four. Her life had been hard and full of tragedy, but also hope. She died knowing that her four surviving children were all making their way in the world. Indeed Henry was about to be promoted, serving as butler to Robert and Emily Bayford, a retired barrister and his wife, just a few miles from Winchester at Hedge End, Netley Hill.

Henry was now responsible for a staff of six: the cook, kitchen maid, housemaid, under housemaid, lady's maid, and footman. The success of guest entertainment rested on his shoulders, with Henry compiling his own notebook, with recipes for cocktails, dressings and other specialities, from how to make Russian salad and homemade syrup, to a range of beverages, ginger beer, gin sling, sauterne, sherry cobbler, claret, and cider, hock and badminton cups.

The house maid at Netley Hill was Sarah Attfeld. Originally from Surrey from a family of farm labourers, she had already travelled extensively with her work in service from one end of the country to the other. Sarah had initially spent four years, 1889-92, in North East Scotland working in Aberdeenshire, Rosshire, Wigonshire, and Deeside. Sarah was lucky to be alive having survived a train crash on one of her journeys from Scotland to England in which dozens of passengers had died. For this she was compensated with an income bond for life, 10s a quarter. She later moved south with her work in service taking her to Wimbledon, Hampshire, Sussex and Suffolk.

On 1 August 1899 at the age of twenty-six Sarah commenced her post at Netley Hill. Relationships proved difficult for many in service but luckily for



Henry with bicycle and pipe

Sarah and Henry they found love in their work together and four years after meeting they married in Sarah's home village of Lyne in Surrey in April 1903. Henry's sister, Georgina, acted as witness with Sarah's parents and some of her six brothers and sisters attending. Following their marriage Sarah and Henry immediately moved to Oxfordshire for Henry's next role in service, the butlership at Bruern.

The owners of Bruern



Bruern main house, terrace and east wing

Bruern Abbey was owned by Mr Cecil D'Aguilar Samuda. The Samudas and D'Aguilars had originally been Jewish families from Spain and Portugal. Cecil's ancestor Abraham Samuda, a physician to the King of Portugal, was facing arrest as a secret Jew during the Inquisition of 1748. Abraham devised a scheme to escape whereby he invited all of the leading citizens of Lisbon to a banquet, only to flee on a British ship on the eve of the feast. Despite his ship being pursued, Abraham arrived safely in Holland. Both he and his wife died a few months later from ill health, with their son Jacob enrolling at the Portuguese Orphan School in London.

Despite his Jewish roots, Cecil was a member of the Church of England, with his immediate family seceding from the Jewish faith some years before. Mr Samuda's father Joseph served as MP for Tavistock, 1865-8, and later for Tower Hamlets, 1868-80. The Samudas were civil engineers by tradition, pioneers in the use of iron for steam ships, though much of the family wealth had been generated by one of Cecil's ancestors who had been a successful London broker. Their family home was Loudwater Park, Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire. Cecile, his wife, came from a military family, the daughter of Colonel Markham from Becca Hall, Yorkshire, a descendant of Archbishop Markham of York, the tutor to George IV. Cecile was only seventeen when they

married just before Christmas in 1877, with Cecil ten years her senior. The couple had one child, Cecil, born two years later.

Mr and Mrs Samuda were in every sense the local dignitaries of the community, originally living at nearby Shipton Court following their marriage, moving to Bruern Abbey some fifteen years later. Mr Samuda was High Sheriff in 1892, and was a local Justice of the Peace on the Chadlington Bench. A strong Conservative, he was an active leader in his local party, and a representative of Kingham on the County Council. At a more 'social' level he was the churchwarden at Shipton, and president of the local choral society. During his years at Eton in the 1860s he was a keen cricketer, consequently President of the local branch of the County Cricket League, and captain of the Heythrop Hunt Cricket Club, and he loved croquet, being a frequent participant at local tournaments. Cecil's real passion in life though was for horses and hunting, and he was an original subscriber to the local Heythrop hunt, and also a member of the Moreton-in-Marsh hunt.



Mr Samuda

Mrs Samuda, in keeping with her role as local patron, hosted village gatherings, gave prizes at local competitions and organised fund raising events. One of Mrs Samuda's events at Milton raised £150 in 1892. The first concert she hosted for the Shipton Choral Society was a 'great success' according to the local deanery magazine of Chipping Norton. Her support of the local Temperance Society went as far as examination of the girls' needlework. In every sense, Mrs Samuda was royalty on a local scale.

In 1893 the Samudas purchased nearby Bruern Abbey, an extensive Georgian mansion set in beautiful grounds. The property was also neatly adjacent to a rather substantial stable block that Mr Samuda had built six years earlier to satisfy his riding and hunting passions.

In 1780, just sixty years after its completion, Bruern Abbey had suffered a serious fire with the interior of the property all but destroyed. The main south elevation, however, did survive. This was the most striking aspect of the house, with its seven bays and terrace looking across the lawns and pleasure gardens to an ornamental canal, the part of Bruern used by the Samudas for formal reception of guests, and entertainment. By the time the Samudas took residence, Bruern had been restored to its former glory, with wings and entrance hall reinstated. The house was transformed into a fine aristocratic residence worthy of late Victorian society, offering a perfect setting for gentrified

functions. Guests alighted from their carriages to cross the marbled floor of the entrance hall, passing through the Doric pillars to the staircase that led to the long gallery with its views of the cloisters below. Magnificent doors led through to the drawing room, and a sequence of reception rooms beyond, out to the front terrace, where guests could stroll through the gardens down to the canal. Mr and Mrs Samuda had found their 'perfect' home, and, as the Victorian age turned Edwardian, were ready to entertain. John Calvert in his diary of an Oxfordshire Farmer, *Rain and Ruin*, recorded visiting the house and buildings in November 1894, and specifically admiring Mr Samuda's improvements to Bruern.

The household of Bruern

The household list according to the 1911 census consisted of seven live-in staff: the cook Mary Brind, and kitchen maid Mary Cripps, the scullery maid Lily White, the head housemaid Ruth Stevens, with her two assistants, Annie Jordan and Margaret Stead, and the hall boy William Munday, all



The cottage

from Oxfordshire and Berkshire. A number of staff also lived in accommodation outside the house itself. Henry the butler lived in the cottage opposite, with William Woodward the head gardener, Thomas Hawcutt the cowman, Joseph Tustin the groom, and the footman all living in servant cottages on the estate adjacent to the stable block and coach house. A number of young lads also worked at Bruern, whether in the stables, on the farm or in the garden.

Also in 1901 there were two residents. Mrs Samuda's companion, Mable Crispin, fifteen years her junior and originally from India, and Marie Davidson, a nurse originally from Germany. Aside from Woodward the gardener and Tustin



Henry the butler

the groom, none who served at Bruern in 1901 were still there ten years later. In 1904 Henry Gooding succeeded Henry Hone on his retirement as butler. The fact that one Henry had replaced another would have been lost on the Samudas and the Bruern household, nor would Mr and Mrs Samuda have been known as Mr and Mrs Samuda to the servants, rather 'the master and the lady of the house'. The inside cover of a book given to Henry as a Christmas gift in 1905, simply labelled 'To Gooding', captured the tone of formality and the structural essence of Edwardian society.

Despite there just being two people to serve, with the younger Cecil Samuda now an officer in the army and away on military service, the Bruern household was kept busy. Aside from the daily routine of running a sizeable country house there were plenty of guests to host, lunches, formal dinners and more elaborate functions to organise, with Henry or 'Gooding', at the hub of these activities. The butler's role was primarily to ensure good food and service at the table each day throughout the year, remaining as invisible to those he was serving as his role would permit, with livelihood and home dependent on it.

Henry also acted as valet to Mrs Samuda's brother, Captain Markham. Badly injured during the Boer War he was convalescing at the family home. Henry nursed him during his months of declining health, and, in return for his kindness, received a most precious Christmas gift, an ale jug and mug with a silver rim inscribed with Henry's name, and the year in which it was given, 1904. It was a fine regimental-style ornament that was to take pride of place in Henry's cottage for many years to come. Captain Nigel Markham died in the following spring, just thirty-two years old and unmarried. Henry, together with the rest of the estate, attended his funeral at Milton church with a tall stone later erected to mark the place of his burial at the edge of the churchyard by the lane. Despite the formality of the relationship between Henry and Captain Markham, less than four years of age separated them with the Christmas gift suggesting not only gratitude but some genuine bond of 'friendship'.

Mrs Samuda continued in her sponsorship of the local communities of Milton and Shipton, while Mr Samuda maintained his involvement in local politics as a councillor for Kingham, the law as Justice of the Peace, and sport as a leading huntsman of the area. As an Old Etonian, Mr Samuda continued to foster connections with 'society' outside Bruern, with visits to the Turf and Pratt clubs in London. Despite his formal title, Cecil D'Aguilar Samuda, his peer group simply knew him as 'Sammy', with 'Sammy' living the life of a typical aristocrat at Bruern, 'Gooding' and his staff there to facilitate it all.

Childhood at Bruern

Henry's two daughters, Marie and Kate, both born in the cottage opposite Bruern, grew up in the idyllic surroundings of the Oxfordshire countryside, free to run and play through the estate, picking primroses, daffodils and wild

strawberries from the grounds and gardens according to the season. Time spent with their father at home was limited given his role as butler, on duty from the beginning until the end of the day. At no time was this more apparent than on Christmas Day; Henry was permitted to visit his family at the cottage to carve the turkey for his wife and daughters, but was then expected to return to the house to conduct the formalities of Christmas lunch and the rest of the day. Father's lunch time visit, however brief, was, of course, the highlight of Christmas Day for Kate and Marie.



Kate and Marie

a privilege in her life that she would never forget.

All the children on the estate went to school in Milton, the Goodings, the Tustins, the Woodwards and the Hawcutts. Each school day morning Marie and her younger sister Kate walked the one and a half miles to Milton, through the woods. There was not a house in sight, and rarely a passer-by, from the time they left their mother waving them goodbye on the doorstep until arriving at Milton to meet the other children of the village. Later in the day they walked the homeward leg, learning as they did first-hand the cycle of the seasons and nature, appreciating the buds of spring, the wildflowers in summer, the leaves strewn on the woodland path in the autumn and the bare chill of winter.

School was rudimentary but effective; reading, writing and arithmetic with ample doses of scripture, and skills acquired with chalk and slate. Mr Burch was the teacher, a keen musician who aside from their usual lessons taught them how to sing the chants and psalms for church. He was a strict disciplinarian. Kate on one occasion received the cane on her hand for talking.

*Milton school photo.
Mr Burch to left, Kate
second row, last right,
Marie third row, second left*



The children simply knew him as 'Old Burchy', but he was regarded as a good teacher who taught them well.

Mr and Mrs Samuda took an interest in all the children of the estate workers, with Mrs Samuda godmother to them all, Kate and Marie included. Occasionally Mrs Samuda would visit the estate workers and take photographs on her camera. The photo album of the Gooding girls growing up was almost entirely thanks to her, Marie in her pram, parents and daughter posing on a dining room chair outside their cottage, and mother at the cottage threshold with infants Marie and Kate. Families in this era usually had one or two studio photographs and that was it. The family snaps that Mrs Samuda bestowed were a wonderful gift.

Mrs Samuda also took more general photos around the estate capturing the life of Bruern as she did. Each spring, the 'Waifs and Strays' from Shipton visited the estate for a walk through the woods and bluebell picking. At the end of their trek the children gathered on the lawn by the west wing proudly holding their blue clusters, Mrs Samuda there to capture the moment of their unified exuberance. The children of the estate sat in their midst, Kate and Marie towards the front of the group. The picture captured the children holding their freshly cut flowers lush with heavy blue and verdant green, with the air full of that special bluebell scent. It was an occasion that Kate would remember for the rest of her life. (*see cover photograph*)

Mr Samuda also took interest in the estate workers' families. On one occasion the Gooding family were leaving their cottage to go into Oxford, when Mr Samuda arrived. The master of the house bent down and placed sixpence in the palm of Kate's hand. At the age of five, sixpence to Kate was 'six-pence', with this 'six-pence' from the master himself. Kate chose a solid green rubber ball with her pocket money, a fine bouncer, that was to give her and her sister Marie hours of happy pleasure together during their childhood years of play at Bruern.

In the summer of 1912, Milton Church held its traditional summer fete, an important occasion not only for the village, but also for the Bruern estate, with the Samudas key sponsors of church life. The fete itself was granted full attendance from all who lived in the neighbourhood, with a marquee full of



Milton Fete

cakes and delights, and stands all around. All wore their Sunday-best, the ladies in white frocks and hats adorned with ribbons and flower motifs, the men in suits and ties with cloth caps. On inspecting the various stands and stools at the fete, Kate chose the wishing well for her special moment of fun. The well was draped in cloth, covered in foliage and flowers, with a lever to turn at the side to lift a plate from the well with its lucky prize. The moment was captured by the official photographer at the fete, Marie smiling in the centre, her 'rather serious' mother to one side, and Kate to the other, turning with determination and excitement as the gift began to surface. Standing behind her was her father looking towards the cameraman.

A year later in August 1913 Henry sent the photograph as a post card to Sarah's mother in Surrey. He jested in his writing that she might recognise some of those on the front of the card, informing her that Sarah and the 'chicks', an affectionate term he used for his daughters, were away with relatives, while he was too busy to leave Bruern.

The Great War at Bruern

In the summer of 1911 Bruern had a royal visit, Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein, a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria. Her father was Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, the most northern of the German states bordering Denmark, part of the pan-European dynasty that her grandmother Queen Victoria had orchestrated. Princess Helena Victoria lived in London and never married, spending her time working for charitable organisations, particularly for the young disadvantaged.

A visit to the Shipton Temperance Society by the Princess was followed by a visit to Waifs and Strays at St Michael's and then a fete in the grounds of Bruern, all organised by Mrs Samuda. A photo of the visit to the Temperance Society captured the absolute reverence and respect conferred by the poor on the aristocracy, with the girls kneeling in line as Princess Victoria accompanied by Mrs Samuda paraded past. A later photograph taken in Bruern gardens displayed Mrs Samuda and friends gathered on the lawn with a large white parasol protecting Princess Victoria from the sun. At no event would Henry have been prouder to be operating as butler, working quietly in the background, ensuring that the entertainments of food and drink were sufficient for the guests, and delivered with royal style.

Cecil, the son of Mr and Mrs Samuda, was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, following which he took a commission in the army, serving in the Boer War for which he was awarded the Queen's and King's medals. He was promoted to Captain in 1909. Like his father he enjoyed the full range of sporting pursuits, particularly golf.

On 22 July 22 1914, Cecil Samuda married Phyllis Caufield Stoker in her home town of Burnham, Somerset. The daughter of a Colonel, she was an ideal match for the Samudas. The timing of the wedding was as significant as the wedding itself, a month after the assassination of Duke Ferdinand of Austria, and just days before the outbreak of hostilities across Europe, and the mobilisation of British forces to serve on the Western front. Though Bruern was far away from the front-line trenches, it was to be greatly affected by the war. Cecil joined the British Expeditionary Force and by the following February was stationed in France and Flanders, promoted to Major later that year. A number of lads from Milton and Shipton had also signed up and were soon on front-line service. The progress of military action and news of Cecil and other local men was, of course, closely monitored. More importantly for Bruern Abbey itself, the wings of the house were transformed into a 'hospital' for those injured in battle, a place for troops to convalesce before returning to the front line.

Mrs Samuda, with her organisational skills and feelings of responsibility for the wider community, mobilised not only the Bruern household but also the surrounding villages into 'service' at the Bruern hospital, with Henry's wife Sarah and a number of other ladies forming the local Red Cross



Mrs Samuda

contingent. Some years before Henry had helped nurse her brother Captain Markham at Bruern; this was to be on a grander scale, though injuries to be treated were relatively 'minor', a case of splints, crutches, bandages and eye patches.



Soldiers on the drawing room steps

The Milton and Bruern Red Cross branch was thirty strong, half of whom were located at the Abbey itself. A photo taken sometime in the summer of 1915 captured a motley but cheerful crew of twenty-four soldiers on the terrace of Bruern, with fifteen nurses under Mrs Samuda's leadership. Henry and his footman stood at the back, with Kate and Marie sitting on the knees of the soldiers at the front, together with the Woodward boys, Frank and Jack. The soldiers who were now living within Bruern's walls had witnessed first-hand the trenches, with the smiles of confidence on their soldiers' faces belying their fears of returning to front line warfare. The tranquillity and beauty of Bruern was their 'heaven' for the time being.

The national roll call of death was beginning to mount with the Bruern household staff especially vulnerable to the personal accounts and horrors of trench warfare from the patients. On the morning of 17 June 1916 Mrs Samuda was found drowned in the fish pond. The 'household' account passed down to Kate was one of suicide although the death certificate suggested otherwise, giving medical causes. Whatever the verdict, Mrs Samuda had died at the age of fifty-five during a period of great personal stress, not least with her son in military service on the front line. Her loss was to be sorely felt not just by her family and the household and soldiers at Bruern, but the wider village networks. A week later, the Somme offensive began with even worse news emanating from the front line with two of the Hawcutt lads, Esau and Bernard, losing their lives.

On 2 July 1917 Major Samuda of the Somerset Light Infantry died of wounds incurred near Messines. Mr Samuda, still recovering from the loss of his wife, had now lost his only son. Grief was accompanied by hope, however, with Cecil's wife Phyllis giving birth to a son just a few days earlier on 22 June, Cecil Anthony Ward Samuda.

Henry was relatively fortunate in as much as he had no immediate relatives serving in the army, He was, however, being greatly affected by the events that were unfolding around him. His wife Sarah had enrolled into the Bruern branch of the Red Cross, with Henry duly signing up to the Oxfordshire Special Constabulary. The police force was severely stretched with so many men conscripted for military service. Aside from his duties at Bruern, he was now spending time on patrol in a different uniform fully equipped with truncheon.

Henry's health was beginning to suffer. He had been diagnosed with dropsy, a condition which affected the circulation of his blood made worse by being on his feet and standing still. Unfortunately, as butler and more recently as a policeman, Henry could spend up to several hours a day on his feet and standing still, waiting in the dining room at Bruern. His legs were beginning to suffer from swelling and pain.

Armistice Day was 11 November 1918, but the sense of relief on the Bruern estate and in the village at Milton was not shared by the Gooding household. Henry was extremely ill, and was also very concerned about what would happen to Sarah and his daughters if he were to die, remembering how his mother and siblings had been evicted from their home on the Holton estate following his father's death. The cottage in which they lived would almost certainly be required by the new butler. A solution was quickly found, however, that gave Henry some modicum of peace in his last days. Mr Samuda agreed for Sarah to take on the butler's role in the form of house keeper.

Henry died on 5 December 1918, less than a month after the end of the Great War, and in his sixteenth year of service at Bruern, aged fifty. As a keen pipe smoker Henry's ambition in life if he had reached retirement was to own a tobacconist shop in Winchester. Instead, Henry was laid to rest in Milton churchyard just feet away from the grave of Captain Markham. Christmas 1918 was a time of deep mourning for Sarah, and her daughters. Henry's 'chicks' were to remain at Bruern though, as Henry had wished, and life went on.

Confirmation at Bruern

Two years after her father's death, at the age of thirteen Kate was confirmed at the church of St Simon and St Jude at Milton. For Kate and all who lived on the estate, the church was without question the literal house of God and on this occasion Kate was being formally accepted as a member of the church, able to take her first communion, part of her coming of age. Mr Burch her teacher was present as choir master. With the absence of her father, there

was, of course, a poignancy attached to what was a most important occasion in Kate's life, though her mother and sister were there to watch with love and pride.

Kate knelt to receive the body and blood of Christ in a church that was now full of monuments to the Samudas. On the church wall visible to the congregation two new plaques had recently been placed. Mrs Samuda was 'ever ready to devote her energies to work of national importance, and equally desirous to aid the sick and needy'. Major Samuda was a 'dutiful son and devoted husband'. Anyone who had been acquainted with Mrs Samuda's efforts to support the church, the Temperance Society, the Waifs and Strays, and her instigation of the Bruern hospital, would have fully supported her epithet. Kate's father's recording was outside in the churchyard, a fine stone, denoting his birth and death dates, and the more simple motifs 'Till we meet again', and 'He giveth his beloved sleep'.

Finally there was the war memorial, not in the churchyard, but aligned with the Samuda plaques. As in life so in death the ranks were held, with Major Samuda the first on the list followed by four officers, seven NCOs according to rank, and finally thirty privates listed alphabetically. Included in the list were, of course, the two Hawcutt brothers, sons of the Bruern cowman.

Life at Bruern was certainly sombre compared with the wave of optimism that had benefited the estate during the Edwardian years. The sadness that Kate and so many around her were suffering at the time of her confirmation merely strengthened the importance and comfort of the ceremony. On the inside cover of her confirmation book were written the words 'O Jesus I have promised', signed by the vicar, the Reverend Mr Shildrick, a promise she would keep for the rest of her life. For Kate kept her Bruern Bible and her father's hymnal as treasured possessions and never lost her faith, attending church regularly, keenly listening to church services on the radio in later life. Whenever she went inside a church she always felt more connected to her family, present and

past, the true gift of her confirmation day, 12 March 1921.

Mr Samuda was now in his seventies, with Bruern a considerably quieter place, significantly less busy than it had been when his wife had been alive. Sarah's children



Sarah distributing stirrup cups

were old enough to help with the running of the cottage, with most of their mother's time taken up with her role as housekeeper.

One event that never changed though during Mr Samuda's time at Bruern was the Heythrop Meet on Boxing Day, his true passion in life, with the Bruern stable yard coming into its own. It was a majestic event, and drew a large attendance, with horses and hounds in their dozens. The Meet commenced at Bruern with Sarah and the housemaids emerging from the hallway entrance to give stirrup cups to the riders on horseback before and again on their return. If there was one event that Kate would conjure up in later life to represent the essence of Bruern, it was the hunt, watching the riders in their pinks, some in top hats, race across the Oxfordshire countryside. To children of the Edwardian estates, it was the most colourful and exciting scene they were ever likely to see.

By the 1920s Marie and Kate were finding their own way in the world. Marie trained to be a school teacher, under the tutelage of Mr Burch for three years in the school room where she had once been a pupil herself, additionally attending lectures as part of her training at the Guildhall in Chipping Norton. At the age of nineteen she applied for teaching roles, equipped with three references. The first of these was from the vicar at Milton, Mr Shildrick, describing her as studious, painstaking and conscientious, claiming that 'she will always exert an influence for good'. The second was Mr Burch himself; 'Her conduct and appearance are beyond reproach and she comes of a highly respected family'. Finally there was Mr Samuda; 'A better-mannered girl it would be difficult to find, upright, honourable and truthful' concluding with the air of a man in charge 'I trust she will find what she is seeking for *without delay*'. In line with



Kate



Marie the teacher

Mr Samuda's expectation her search was successful, initially working as a supplementary teacher at Fringford, a village a few miles away, and by 1928 as a fully fledged teacher back at Shipton.

Kate opted for a life in service as a nanny after a brief spell of working in the local post office. As Kate said in later life, people in service had to go where the work was. Initially this was not too far away, on the other side of Oxford, but a few months later her work took her further afield, initially to Clifton Hamden, later to Hoar Cross Hall, Staffordshire, and eventually to Essex. Leaving Bruern was painful for Kate. She returned home whenever she could, gaining a particular affection for Paddington Station in the process, knowing that once she was on the train she would soon be back at Bruern.

Buern farewell

Mr Samuda died on 2 February 1926 aged seventy-seven. His passing marked the end of an era, not only for Bruern where he had lived for thirty-three years, but also for the wider communities of Milton, Shipton and Kingham. His influence had stretched from benefactor to judge, from local politician to leading huntsman. The funeral cortège moved in the traditional way from Bruern towards Milton church with the coffin on a farm wagon drawn by two shires. The family members were transported in automobiles, with household staff and estate workers walking behind. The estate community always gave



The funeral cortège

a degree of comfort on such occasions. This time was different with an air of finality. Bruern was to be sold with Mr Samuda's staff disbanded by necessity.

The funeral procession walked into the churchyard filing behind the Reverends Hayward and Moon. Tustin the groom and Brundsen the gardener led the estate workers, all wearing black armbands as a mark of respect. Sarah walked alongside the cook Miss Brind, with housemaids Tustin, Waters, Wilkes and Millin behind, heads bowed beneath their black bonnets. Sarah entered the church with her hands clasped respectfully before her. Mr Samuda had been her employer for almost twenty-three years, not least since Henry's death, and also supporter of her two daughters.

Buern was sold by Mrs Phyllis Samuda, Cecil's widow, to Mr Crompton Wood in 1928. In the meantime the household at Bruern had been disbanded, with the new owners bringing their own staff to serve them. Sarah was now housekeeper at Oddington Lodge, just a few miles away, towards Stow, working for Major Goff, a son of Mrs Samuda by a previous marriage, at least on her understanding. Yet Cecile was a spinster when she married Cecil, so the identity of Major Goff and his connection to the Samudas was clearly not what she believed it to be.

Kate and Marie had recently married, with Kate returning from Essex to marry at nearby Oddington Church. Kate and Marie acted as each other's bridesmaids. Marie had taught for three years at Shipton school, leaving in 1931 to live at Hethe with her husband Bow Fathers, whom she had met four years earlier while teaching at Fringford. Almost immediately she fell ill with cancer. Sarah gave up her housekeeping post at Oddington to nurse her daughter. After a year of painful illness she died in June 1932 at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London at the tender age of twenty-seven, married for just a year.

Of all tragedies associated with Bruern, Marie's death was the hardest to bear. Kate often said in later life that Bruern was 'unlucky', with Mr and Mrs Samuda and their son, and Kate's own father and sister all claimed by its presence. Bruern was of course not 'unlucky', but it would have been particularly hard for Kate to reconcile a place so beautiful and tranquil with so much death and suffering. Marie certainly suffered in her death, with her headstone at Hethe identical in style to her father's at Bruern. Her obituary in the local paper spoke of 'the gloom over the scholars and teachers at Shipton School'.

Kate spent the rest of her life in Essex, in a secure and happy marriage to Percy Alston. In 1933 Kate gave birth to a girl, Gillian Georgina, and in later life had the pleasure of two grandchildren and three great grandchildren. Sarah, her mother, joined them after Marie's death, and died a few years later in 1950. Although buried in Essex, the headstone was identical to Henry's in Milton church, with the words 'Reunited' and 'Bruern' to match 'Till we meet again' on his grave.

In late December 1965, the last of Henry's siblings Georgina ('Ina'), passed away at the ripe old age of ninety-one. Anne ('Dot') had died in 1937, aged fifty-eight. Her life had been relatively fortunate. As a teenager she had found work in London, like the rest of her family in service as a housemaid for Juliella Wertheimer, a Jewish heiress. Miss Wertheimer never married, with Georgina graduating from servant to 'companion', living with her in Kensington and benefiting from a generous annuity on her death.

As for Henry's daughter Kate, her heart never left Bruern. Seated in front of the fire she would recount stories from her time there to her family. She carefully treasured all the possessions from her childhood, the photographs and ornaments, a small black dog Marie had given her one Christmas, the green rubber ball that they had played with as children, Henry's Royal Doulton china he had received that first Christmas at Bruern in 1904 from Captain Markham, and even his truncheon from when he served in the Oxfordshire Special Constabulary.

There was also a lovely oil painting of horses at Shipton hanging on her wall. When Sarah her mother had finally retired from service at Oddington Lodge after twenty-eight years of service to the Samuda family, she was presented with a special gift. The oil painting of horses in a meadow showed the chimney and outline of Shipton Court in the background. The artist, the horse painter Claude Lorraine Ferneley, had been specifically commissioned to paint the horses, Mr Samuda's passion for life, to celebrate the recent birth of Cecil his heir. The inscription on the back of the easel read, 'July 30th in recollection', with Ferneley's initials, CFL 1879. Whether Major Goff realised the painting's emotive significance will never be known, and the financial value of the painting was also probably lost on Sarah.

As a retired couple, Kate and Percy returned each year for a Cotswold holiday staying at Stow-on-the-Wold, gaining a great affinity for the Malvern Hills. Without fail they would always drive through Shipton and Milton and past Bruern Abbey where in her mind's eye Kate could still see and hear the horses and hounds of Mr Samuda racing across the fields. They would also be sure to visit Milton church and Henry's grave.

Kate's family connection to Oxfordshire was reinstated in later life when her granddaughter moved to Littlemore to work as a nurse, with Marsh Baldon and Holton just down the road. Kate's three great grandchildren were therefore growing up close to the childhood haunts of Henry her father.

Kate also made sure that she never lost touch with her childhood friends, writing each Christmas and exchanging cards. Throughout her life she remained in touch with Gwen Morgan, her closest friend while she had been at Milton school, Anne and George Tustin, children of the groom, and Sid Hawcutt who lost two of his brothers during the Great War. To this day the grandson of 'Tustin' the groom tends to the grave of Kate's father 'Gooding' the butler each

summer. In November 2008 Kate's grandson Mark visited Gwen, holding the hand as he did of a lady who one hundred years before had been at school with his grandmother. The ties of friendships made at Bruern had lasted for more than a century.

Kate followed with interest the developments at Bruern over the years, fascinated by the arrival of the Astors at the estate after the war. In 1989 Bruern was opened as a preparatory school for boys, far removed from being a country home. The headmaster Mr Stover sent Kate an invitation to Bruern, curious to find out more about its history, though old age prevented her from visiting. Her grandson did, however, visit Bruern a few years later, after Kate's death, meeting with the staff of Bruern school, sitting on the terrace where his great grandfather had once stood surrounded by the wounded soldiers from the Great War.

Before Kate's death in 1993, her grandson made a film of her talking of her childhood at Bruern, in which she showed some of her treasures from that era, including the green rubber ball purchased in Oxford all those years before with Mr Samuda's sixpence. So much had changed in society, politically, economically and socially, many improvements and in other ways deterioration, with Kate adapting along the way. 'Here I am and life goes on, different, but happy' she stated at the end of the film.

The most important part of Kate, her childhood and formative years, had been set at Bruern, with her father, mother and sister all participating in something much larger and grander than themselves, life on an Edwardian country estate. Life for Kate at Bruern had begun as an idyll of childhood in a world that was set to be broken by the Great War. The treasures of those times spent with her mother, father and sister, Marie, stayed in her heart for the rest of her life, with the spirit of that age remaining in the woods of Milton forever.

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Remembering St Michael's

WENDY PEARSE

One hundred and fifty years ago, the area of land between Lanehouse Farm in Shipton, and Shipton Mill (now Milton Service Station), consisted of small fields, the only building being Wychwood House. But twenty years later, St Michael's College for Young Ladies was erected on the site of what is now Willis Court and despite its barely one hundred years of history, St Michael's, as a building, produced a varied and fascinating story. The facts of this history have been collected over many years by John Rawlins who has tasked me with putting the story into writing. I hope I achieve his expectations.



St Michael's, circa 1910

Surprisingly St Michael's story begins in Natal, South Africa with a woman named Catherine Barter. Brought up in Sarsden Rectory where her father was rector for fifty years from 1817-68, Catherine freely admitted that she was a 'plain woman'. As she states in her book *Alone among the Zulus*, she was 'plain in person, plain in dress, plain in understanding' and rather brusque in manner. But that was not how the Zulus saw her. They called her No Musa - meaning the mother of mercy or kindness.

Between 1846 and 1849 her younger brother Charles travelled the world and when in 1852 he decided to return to Natal, Catherine accompanied

him 'in the hope of being useful to her bachelor brother.' She was thirty-four and Charles thirty-two. She threw herself wholeheartedly into missionary work, learning the Zulu language and living and working amongst the Zulu people to whom she sought to teach the 'history, creation and redemption of mankind.'

After a few years she had to return to England owing to health problems but by 1857 she was back in Natal. During her initial foray she had considered buying African children and bringing them back to England to be educated, before returning them to Africa, aged sixteen, to instruct their own families. Her second visit to Natal lasted about seven years and towards the end of this time Catherine arranged with one of her long-term native associates, that she should adopt his infant daughter Salome Welayo. In 1864, she and Salome, still a babe in arms, returned to England, presumably to Sarsden Rectory where her father still resided. In 1868, however, her father died, and in the same year her younger brother Henry became the vicar of Shipton. The departing Shipton vicar, the Revd William Edward Dixon Carter, who was married to Catherine's sister, moved to Sarsden, so perhaps Catherine wanted to find a new home. She had hoped to enrol Salome in a suitable school but as none could be found, fifty-year-old Catherine decided to start her own. And so St Michael's came into being, in 1869, in the two houses now called Church View and Ivan House, north of the Crown Inn (now The Shaven Crown) in Shipton. The next house, Gales Green, housed some teachers and domestic staff.

This information can be found on the Shipton Census for 1871 where Catherine Barter is named as schoolmistress, Salome Welayo, aged seven is the youngest scholar and ten other boarders are listed aged between eight and sixteen. Some were local girls from Milton, Charlbury and Broadwell, Gloucestershire, but three came from Staffordshire, Surrey and Middlesex. The assistant teacher aged only seventeen came from Wantage whilst the pupil teacher was born in Barrington.

When Salome reached the age of seventeen around 1880, it seems that she and Catherine returned to Natal and the school was left in the capable hands of Margaret Moore, a teacher from Ireland. The school had obviously flourished under Catherine, and from the Chipping Norton Deanery Magazine and Oxfordshire Weekly News records, it appeared to go from strength to strength under the headship of Margaret Moore. We don't know exactly when she arrived in Shipton but Catherine is listed as head in the Post Office Directory of 1877, but the 1881 Census records Margaret A. Moore as Principal, her cousin Ethel, Edith Heale from Cambridge and Clara Borries, born in Germany, as assistants, and a total of eighteen pupils aged between eleven and seventeen. There were six pairs of sisters amongst them. Only one local girl remained; two were born in Australia and the rest came from various areas of England

and Wales. The household included a cook and housemaid and they were apparently still running the school in the houses next to the Crown. However, life was about to change.

The Chipping Norton Deanery magazine for February/March 1881 states 'The foundations have now been laid for a new house for the college for young ladies which was started in Shipton by Miss Barter in 1869. The College will be in Milton Road, and it is hoped give good accommodation for 30 boarders.' The field in which St Michael's College was to be built was either already owned or had been purchased by the Revd H. Barter so perhaps he either had the college built so that his sister's very successful enterprise could continue in finer style or it's possible that the cost could have been shared between brother and sister.

Six months later, the Oxfordshire Weekly News announced 'Shipton under Wychwood. St Michael's College. It is proposed to open the new buildings on Thursday, September 29th.' A full report of the opening was given in the Oxfordshire Weekly News of 12 October 1881. 'Opening of St Michael's College - The inauguration of the new college buildings of this very successful school for young ladies took place on the festival of St Michael and All Angels, when a goodly company from the surrounding neighbourhood, with well-known friends of the higher education of women from Oxford, assembled to wish God-speed to the vicar, the Revd H. Barter (to whose untiring energy and devotion is very much due the accomplishment of this long desired work), and Miss Moore, the excellent principal.' A short service of dedication was followed by psalms, hymns and collects, and a 'most admirably written paper' by the Warden of Keble. The building work was carried out with great attention to beauty and solidity by Messrs. Alfred Groves & Son of Milton and following a 'hearty choral evensong at the church ... the workmen employed on the building were entertained at supper, the Revd H. Barter and Mr T. Alfred Groves taking the chair and vice-chair respectively.'

The building was imposing, set on a rise above the Shipton to Milton Road. A gabled wing extended forward from the west side of the main range. In this wing were the schoolroom and playroom at ground level whilst above, dormitories ran the entire length of the wing on the first and second floors. Underneath the wing was a cellar with a counterbalanced partition that rose to divide the schoolroom and the playroom. Next to the wing, entered by a porch leading to the hall and staircase, the main range consisted of staff quarters with a kitchen and scullery at the rear. A covered way at the back led to the laundry and toilets, whilst another covered way to the right of the main range led to a drying room. The sanitary arrangements were said to be perfect and the girls' cubicles 'replete with all the necessary adjuncts'. In the grounds surrounding the building were two tennis courts and a gravelled playground.

And so Miss Moore, her teachers and pupils moved into the new St Michael's College, its reputation for success already established. The College appeared to play a prominent role in the village. Ethel Moore and Fraulein van Borries played a pianoforte duet at a concert in Shipton School, Miss Moore invited societies to entertainments at the college, musical entertainments were held for prizegivings, excursions arranged to exhibitions and a sale of work was held for Shipton Church organ fund. The pupils were particularly proficient in passing the examinations of the Cambridge Local Examinations Board. In 1884 a stained glass window was erected in the entrance hall of the college in memory of Miss Barter the foundress. It depicted 'St Michael, the Archangel, the patron saint of the college, resting on his spear after his combat with the dragon'. It had been designed by two former pupils, then art students at Wimbledon Art College. Perhaps one of the students was Clara Coates who appeared on the Shipton Census for 1881 aged fifteen, and who, in the same year, received a prize for freehand drawing from the 'authorities in South Kensington'.

Advertisements for the College appeared in Kelly's Directory for the next decade under the Principal, Miss Moore, until in October 1894 the Deanery magazine was sad to announce 'The sale of Miss Moore's furniture took place on September 11th. Her departure is universally regretted.' By then Miss Moore would have been nearing fifty, not particularly of an age for retirement, but perhaps she had been overtaken by illness.

In the November Deanery an advertisement was placed in the magazine extolling the virtues of St Michael's College for Young Ladies. The Revd H. Barter was listed as Visitor, the Lady Principal was Mrs G. Herbert Smith and she was to be assisted by 'Certified English and Foreign Governesses and Masters from Oxford'. The General Education Course comprised all English subjects prescribed by the Oxford syllabus with the addition of French, English and French Literature, Science and Music. Sleeping arrangements were in two dormitories warmed by hot water pipes, fitted with cubicles, each having a window. The fees of fifty guineas per annum (forty guineas for under twelves) covered board, laundry, general education and gymnastics including 'Swedish drill, so highly recommended for the perfect muscular development of young people'.

However for some unknown reason St Michael's had apparently lost its allure and the Deanery for October 1896 reported that on a fine and sunny day in September the 'Annual School [Shipton Church of England School] Feast took place at St Michael's College which is unfortunately standing empty'. The situation was apparently still the same two years later. But life at St Michael's was about to take on a totally different aspect. The days of the affluent young ladies acquiring a serious education in preparation for their places in society, could not have been more opposite from that of the next residents - the girl

boarders of an Industrial or Reformatory School - a branch of the Waifs and Strays Society, which had purchased the building in 1899.

Alterations were made within the building, probably including the removal of the cubicles to create long dormitories to accommodate more beds, and in April 1900 the new inmates arrived.

The initial Order of Transfer from one Industrial or Reformatory School to another was sent from Whitehall, from one of the Secretaries of State of the Home Department (today's Home Office). It concerned the movement of fifteen girls from Olive House Home for Girls in Hemel Hempstead, a Certified Industrial School. Olive House had been established in 1884 for sixteen girls but as the demand for places grew in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a larger building was sought, and St Michael's proved to be the answer. It became St Michael's School for Girls, a Certified Industrial Home.

In charge of the girls were Superintendent Miss H. L. Stone and Matron Miss Hornby although the latter did not stay long, and the fifteen girls included Olive Violet Moore aged eleven, Evelina Mabel Kistner aged ten and Edith Felstead, the youngest, aged six, of all of whom more later.

The Industrial Schools Act of 1861 was initially aimed at children convicted of vagrancy and its remit was to improve the lot of children considered in moral danger or susceptible to petty crime. It grew later to include those charged with begging, disruptive children from workhouses, those beyond parental control or those having any association with prostitutes or brothels. The schools housed, educated and provided industrial training for their inmates and in the case of girls, was a preparation for a life of domestic service.

In 1900 young offenders could be sent to a Reformatory School or Home, so it is possible that some of the girls may have been actual offenders. The countryside was thought to be a far safer environment and following its establishment, severe rules of management were laid down by the Home Department, especially for St Michael's.

The girls were to have separate beds and sufficient plain useful clothing. They were to be served plain, wholesome and approved food.

They were to be given three hours of instruction a day mainly in reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic.

They were to be examined by a medical officer on admittance and regularly thereafter.

Industrial training was to be in needlework, washing, housework and cooking and was to last between four and six hours daily.

Each day should begin and end with Family Worship consisting of Prayer and Praise to God and the reading of Scripture.

This last indicates the strong connection with the initial concept of the Waifs and Strays Society (now the Children's Society), founded in 1881 by Edward Rudolf.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the power of the British Empire was echoed by the power and influence of the established Church of England. Philanthropists amongst the wealthy elite of the population sought to bring all society under the Church's wings and the shocking plight of the children of the slums was ripe for reforming. A cavalry officer's son, Edward Rudolf, determined to relieve the children's situation under the mighty auspices of the Church. His purpose, as approved by The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Tait in 1881, ran as follows:

- I. That the purpose of this Charity be to receive destitute children, and to provide for their care:
 1. Temporarily in receiving houses.
 2. in existing institutions.
 3. by boarding out in healthy respectable homes.
 4. in such other ways as the Executive Committee may deem expedient until they attain the age of fourteen years, or are placed in situations where they will earn their own living.
- II. That the work of the Society be undertaken and carried on in dependence upon God's Help.

All the homes were to be under the management of a committee set up to run them.

It was a most worthy endeavour and one responded to with great enthusiasm. Donations abounded, even whole houses were given, and vicars all over the country spread the news, encouraging their parishioners to add support. The vicars found a new placement for needy children without resorting to the universally dreaded workhouses.

But what of these children, especially those used to the freedom of the streets despite their ugly conditions? They had known no other, could only cling to what was familiar and the thought of these unknown and containing institutions must have only added another source of dread to their already dreary lives. Some homes under the management of kindly individuals would become a refuge, but not all involved were blessed with real love and care for children. Many amongst them abounded with a strict sense of duty, wishing to instil in these children the Victorian's high sense of morality in both church and society. Shelter, food and clothing were provided but conditions must have varied considerably, as must the characters of the children and their keepers contained within the homes.

The rules of management approved by Whitehall for St Michael's continued:

A timetable of hours of rising, work, school, instruction, meals, recreation, retiring etc., was to be drawn up, approved by the Inspector and displayed.

The Superintendent was authorised to deal with any misdemeanour or breach of the rules by punishment recorded in a book, and shown to the Committee and Inspector, but discipline was also to be maintained by a system of rewards and encouragement.

The punishment could consist of:

Forfeiture of rewards or privileges of rank which had been obtained by good conduct.

Reduction in the quantity or quality of food.

Confinement in a light room.

Simple offences could mean being deprived of a meal or part of a meal but the culprit was to be allowed eight ounces of bread with water or gruel.

For more serious offences a girl could be confined to a light room for no more than three days and allowed only one pound of bread with gruel or milk with water, daily.

No girl could be confined for more than twelve hours without the sanction of the Management Committee.

However 'No girl shall be kept in solitary confinement in darkness under any pretext whatever'.

The girls were to be allowed two hours of recreation daily and to be taken outside the boundaries of the home once or twice a week. (This latter was probably allotted to the weekly trek to St Mary's Church where they took their places in the pews detailed in the Shipton Vestry Book. 'The three seats in front of the first three seats on the east side of the door in the South Aisle.')

Parents or near relatives were only allowed to visit on the first Tuesday in each quarter, between 2p.m. and 5p.m. with an authorised person present. Letters only sent and received once a month.

When a girl was discharged, she was to be provided with a sufficient outfit at the expense of the Managers, and hopefully placed in some employment or service.

A record was to be kept by the Superintendent of all happenings in the Home including admissions and discharges.

Any irregularity such as girls absconding, dying, or being sent to prison must be immediately reported to the Inspector.



St Michael's School, early 1900s

These then were some of the regulations that awaited the girls from Olive House when they arrived at Shipton Station on that spring day in 1900. Probably the majority of them were already used to similar restrictions but what must these urban children have made of their new surroundings as they walked crocodile style into the village, headed by their Superintendent and backed by the matron? The probable excitement of their first long-distance train journey must have been succeeded by awe at the unfamiliar surroundings amongst which they found themselves. Was it likely that the locals had any idea of the girls' backgrounds and did they view with some misgivings the parade of young females, most likely dressed in pinafores and boaters as shown in the photograph above. The Revd Collingwood Carter, Shipton's Vicar, is standing at the back of the girls. Probably there would have been very little contact between the girls and villagers for the first few days but when they did communicate, how strange they must have found each others accents.

So the girls arrived and settled into their new home. Hard work became part of the norm to them. Apart from the routine laid down by the rules, all water had to be winched by hand from a well in the garden and carried in buckets to the building. With the amount necessary to cope with at least twenty people in regard to washing (all girls were to have cold baths every day and a hot bath once a week), cooking, cleaning and laundry work, this was a major task and had to be carried out every day, whatever the weather. Tanks to collect rainwater were located near the laundry which was an advantage, but many



*Shipton under Wychwood Church of England School, 1900.
The girls from St Michael's are the four from the left in the middle row
and another, third from the left in the front row*

hours must have been spent in this particular type of work, since laundry was considered a major item of Industrial School training. The toilets in the school consisted of six earth closets and one water closet, so this would not have been such a major water requirement.

Shipton Church of England School Log Book records the arrival of the first of 'The Home' girls at Shipton Church of England School on 25 April 1900. On that day, the Matron took ten of the girls to be admitted. These were probably the ten girls under the age of thirteen years listed on the Home Department's Order of Transfer. They include the aforementioned Olive Moore, Mabel Kirstner and Edith Felstead. Unfortunately the girls' grasp of arithmetic was limited and they were soon put down a standard.

This first batch of girls had presumably been baptised at Hemel Hempstead but as the numbers at the school grew, the new arrivals were taken to St Mary's Church to be baptised. On 30 May 1900 the first four girls were baptised. They were aged between ten and twelve and all came from London. In three cases both parents were named and their father's occupations were variously described as stationer, labourer, painter's labourer and coachman. Three more were baptised in June. One twelve year old followed in October, whose father was described as an actor, and one in November, and more children were admitted to Shipton Church of England School.

In October the St Michael's Home Inspector visited the school. The

Industrial School was always open to official visitors and inspectors under three authorities who inspected every aspect of life at St Michael's, and sent in reports. The Waifs and Strays Inspector produced his report, the Home Department sent an Inspector, and because many of the girls came from London, an Inspector from the School Board of London also visited the school. These were in addition to the local Correspondent, the Secretary, the Shipton vicar who was the chaplain, and the local doctor. It's hard to imagine that much escaped these numerous eyes.

In December an outbreak of diphtheria visited Shipton and 'The Home' girls were under strict orders not to attend the school. However sometime in 1900 a school photograph (*see page 33*) was taken which included five of the girls from St Michael's.

On 9 January 1901 'The Home' girls were allowed to return to school by the Sanitary Authority except for one girl, Mabel Kistner, who was listed on the original Transfer. Some background has been retrievable concerning Mabel's life. Her father, Jacob, was born in Kirn, Germany. At some stage he emigrated to England and married. On the 1881 Census he was listed with his wife Louisa, born in Walworth, and their two children, Elizabeth aged six and Jacob aged four. They were living in Artillery Row, Westminster, and he was a master baker with a foreman and second baker working under him, apparently a substantial family business. However by 1891, Elizabeth and young Jacob have presumably died and Jacob, by then listed as just a baker with no assistants, was living in Islington with Louisa, Frederick aged four and Evelina Mabel aged one. By 1901 Mabel Kistner [was the change of name by choice or a Victorian aversion to foreign-sounding names for the lower orders?] was living at St Michael's. There was no mention in the Census of Jacob, Louisa or Frederick. Frederick does appear on the 1911 Census as a fishmonger's assistant living in London. Could he like his sister have been hustled away, to a boys' only home, perhaps following the death of their parents?

Mabel was allowed by the Sanitary Inspector to return to school on 28 January, after suffering from diphtheria.

In that same year the Inspectors all agreed that the schoolroom results were most unsatisfactory. They also reported that the cellar was damp and there was no fire escape, only a chute.

'The Home' girls attended the school for the rest of the year until 21 November when they were again instructed not to attend due to the return of diphtheria. Someone, however, at this stage seems to have referred back to the initial rules laid down by the Home Department which stated that the girls were to be taught at St Michael's, and despite a brief return after the diphtheria outbreak, the girls finally left Shipton Church of England School on 3 January 1902, to receive their education within the walls of the Industrial School. From then on life for the girls must have become quite restrictive, possibly only church visits allowing some contact with the outside world.

In December 1902 two sisters, Mary Russell aged thirteen and Harriet aged eight were baptised at St Mary's Church. They came from the Midlands and were the daughters of a physically disabled mother and a coal miner who had spent time in prison. The girls, with their mother, had been sent to the workhouse whilst their father was in prison, but the parents were considered a very bad influence and both sisters were put under an order committing them to an Industrial School until the age of sixteen. Unfortunately their upbringing had been very detrimental, and life at St Michael's was suddenly disrupted by these wild, disobedient and uneducated characters. Nothing further is known of Harriet but Mary remained at St Michael's until she was sixteen. There had been some improvement in her manners over the years and she was then moved on to a home in Newark for further training. Only laundry work was deemed suitable for her and despite being finally found a position as a general servant, she was soon dismissed and she returned to her parents. This example gives some idea of the ups and downs in a children's home at the time.

Sadly, soon after the arrival of the Russell sisters the first death occurred amongst the inmates. One of the youngest girls, Cecilia Maud Carr aged nine was buried at St Mary's Church on 5 January 1903. The cause of death is not known but Cecilia's burial was probably the first to be marked by one of the four small metal crosses which used to stand in the old graveyard besides the railings, near the Church Path entrance to St Mary's Church. Probably all the girls were aware of the significance of these crosses when they filed along Church Path to attend the church services.

It seems very unlikely that the standard of education improved, since both the Superintendent and the teachers changed frequently over the first few years, and later in 1903 the Inspectors reported that the girls were 'very much out of hand'. One of the Inspectors made particular mention of Mabel Kistner, 'one particularly delicate girl Mabel Kistner, suffering consumption & heart disease - unlikely ever fit for service'. Mabel Evelyn (not even Evelina) Kistner was buried at St Mary's Church on 19 September 1903 aged fourteen. Probably Frederick her brother never had any idea of Mabel's whereabouts, let alone of her death.

Despite the fact that St Michael's had been established as an Industrial School for three years, there still appeared to be some uncertainty about its survival and there were constant problems with retaining staff for any length of time. Clearly the regime for the girls had become well established with training in various forms of domestic work, sewing, mending, laundry work, the preparation and serving of food, washing up and even repairing shoes, taking up the majority of their time. This was in comparison with only half the amount of hours spent in education, reading, writing and arithmetic. After all the prime purpose was to prepare the girls for a life of domestic service.

Between 1903 and 1910 thirty-two girls were baptised at St Mary's Church including Ethel Golding who arrived at the school in January 1903 at the age of just seven. She must have been one of the longest standing inmates because she was also listed on the 1911 Census. Only her date of birth and the names of her mother and father are known.

In 1904 life may have taken on a more settled existence since that was the probable year that Florence McCall took over the post of matron. She was to remain at St Michael's for twenty-seven years.

In 1905 a small chapel was built on the west of the schoolroom which could possibly have curtailed the girls' forays into the outside world even more.

On 31 May 1906 Edith Tresidder aged five was baptised at Shipton. It seems likely that despite her young age she may have been a difficult child. Born near Padstow in Cornwall, she was listed on the 1901 Census as the fourth child of Thomas, a general servant, and Bessie. Ten years later the family were still living near Padstow whilst Edith was an inmate at St Michael's.

The following month saw a significant event in St Michael's story, for forty-year-old Alice Anne Eliot took over as Superintendent and remained in that position for the next twenty-one years. Together with Miss McCall, she must have had a stabilising influence on the School and perhaps this was the purpose of Miss Eliot's installation. In 1901 she had been the Superintendent of Princess Mary Village Homes, an Industrial School for Little Girls at Chertsey, with a staff of twenty-one officers and 189 children, so she arrived with a great deal of experience.

A girl listed on the 1911 Census, Anne Alice Baker Quantrill, was possibly the next arrival. Baptised in Shipton, she had previously been living with her widowed mother and grandparents in Lowestoft, but none of them appear on the 1911 Census so perhaps family bereavement played a part in her story, and helped cause her removal to the other side of the country. Shortly afterwards another sad occasion occurred with the death of May Jessie Riddle, aged fifteen. It was noted that one of the girls fell down the stairs. Concussion occurred and she died a fortnight later of meningitis. The burial took place on 2 August 1906 and would have been marked by the third little metal cross.

The number of girls gradually increased over time and in 1908 they must have found some relief from constant water carrying when water was laid to a trough in the washhouse.

Although it was the policy of the Waifs and Strays Society to segregate the sexes, several pairs of sisters or even three arrived at St Michael's over the years. The Kerlake sisters, Elsie and Nellie, arrived in May 1909. Born in London they were committed to the school at the ages of thirteen and nine whilst their twelve-year-old brother was sent to a Boys' Industrial School in Somerset.

The fourth of the metal crosses apparently noted the burial of Bertha Evelyn Skidmore on 25 August 1909 at the age of ten.

At the time of the 1911 Census forty girls were residing at St Michael's, twenty-two of whom had been baptised at St Mary's Church. Of these Ethel Golding already mentioned, had been an inmate for eight years, three girls for five years, one for four years, four for three years, eight for two years and five for under two years. Their ages on arrival varied between seven and thirteen years. There seems to have been some movement between the Industrial Schools with long-term residency not happening that frequently. Of the forty girls, the birthplaces of fourteen were unknown whilst ten more were born in the London area. The rest were born in various parts of England between Westmoreland and Cornwall, and one was born in Wales.

The staff numbered four. Alice Eliot the Superintendent, Florence McCall the Kitchen Matron, Eliza Weller Certificated School Mistress and twenty-one-year-old Lilian Mackenzie the second School Mistress.

By 1911 all the original girls who arrived in 1900 had moved on. Edith Felstead, the youngest child amongst the first comers had become a general domestic servant to a silk buyer in London whilst Olive Violet Moore, born in Woolwich, followed the same occupation working for a clergyman in Portreath, Cornwall.

An entry in the Shipton Church of England School Log Book records on 12 July 1911 'Lessons this morning 5 mins in advance, in order to allow the



Princess Victoria with bouquet. Miss Eliot next to her on the right. 12 July 1911

chn to see Princess Victoria of Schleswig Holstein, who will be passing the school at 12 o'clock'.

This was a significant day for St Michael's and the local area. Mrs Samuda of Bruern Abbey was an ardent supporter of the Waifs and Strays Society and had arranged a Garden Party at the Abbey to help raise funds. The presence of royalty would certainly increase the attendance and Princess Helena Victoria of Schleswig Holstein was the favourite granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Her mother was Queen Victoria's third daughter Helena and her father was Prince Christian of Schleswig Holstein. She had been born at Frogmore House near Windsor and brought up by her parents at Cumberland Lodge where her father was Ranger of Windsor Great Park. Princess Victoria never married and followed her mother in working for various charitable organisations. She was always considered a member of the British Royal Family. At the time of her visit to Shipton she would have been forty-one years old.

Princess Victoria and her entourage must have travelled from London to Shipton Station and were then driven through the village to visit St Michael's, before proceeding to Bruern Abbey. Her route passed Shipton Church of England School where the children would have been excitedly lining the roadside. It was a very rare occasion for a real live princess to be seen in the flesh. It would be interesting to know what they made of her.

At St Michael's the inmates lined the

The day of Princess Victoria's visit. Stained glass window of St Michael to the right of the porch.



drive up to the School, dressed in frilly kerchiefs and bonnets with frilly aprons over their dark dresses, presumably all their own work produced in the sewing lessons. Possibly it was the youngest child who presented a large bouquet to the Princess but, on the sidelines, the girls may not have enjoyed kneeling before this influx of nobility. Mr Albert Brassey of Heythrop presided over the event at Bruern Abbey and the collection amounted to £70.

The Waifs and Strays Society was a charity and needed to raise money by voluntary contributions from both the rich and poor members of society. These contributions came from collecting boxes in homes and cottages, from fetes, sales of work, the support of the rich and powerful such as the event organised by Mrs Samuda, and also from a source unknown today, but which at the time was known as a 'Pound Day'. The various children's homes would have arranged a 'Pound Day' once a year, and well-wishers and supporters would be asked to visit the home with either monetary donations or a pound in kind, potatoes, butter, jam, sugar, etc., which could all be used to supplement the larder at the school. The event would probably have been advertised by posters and leaflets, in the hope of drawing as much support as possible. In 1909 the collection at the Annual Pound Day at St Michael's brought in £30 19s 10d which was deemed a good advance on the year before. Part of it was used to purchase a harmonium for the chapel. The supporters partook of tea after the vicar, the Revd W. Collingwood Carter had read a report of the Home's work through the year. During tea the girls entertained their visitors with songs and dances. These 'Pound Days' continued throughout the life of St Michael's Home although the sum in 1909 seems to have been much greater than in later years. Wartime restrictions and the establishment of many new charities probably had some affect, since in 1915 it was reported that the kind was below average but a good sum of £13 12s 9d was collected. The following year saw the contribution advance to £16 and the kind was considered a valuable addition to the larder shelves. All contributions and donations would have been gratefully received since the cost to keep a child in a home rose steadily through the first quarter of the twentieth century from £16 per year in 1915 to £36 by 1924.

It is not known whether the First World War affected St Michael's apart from contributions. The school was equipped for forty girls and could only take replacements as places became available. Eleven girls were baptised at St Mary's Church during the war, one noted as the daughter of a seaman and one the daughter of a soldier.

Perhaps because of the security of a solid front represented by Miss Eliot and Miss McCall, life at St Michael's improved steadily. Standards were raised, very fine needlework was produced and it was reported that 'The girls are amenable to discipline and anxious to do well'.

It is sometimes difficult after this length of time to recognise the anguish that some of these young girls must have suffered. After all, today they are just names on lists and surveys. But family memories can add another dimension to their lives such as that of Eleanor Lilian or Lily Munro baptised at St Mary's Church in 1907. There was no mention of parents and her date of birth was given as ?? 1898. She celebrated her birthday on Christmas Day having no idea of the actual date, and later in life, told her daughter never to search for her history. Although she married and had a family, her husband died at a young age and she had to bring up her family on her own. Despite the hard facts of her life, she lived to be eighty-nine. All her life she hung on to a Bible, prayer book and autograph book from her time at St Michael's, probably the only tangible evidence of her childhood, possibly because she remembered St Michael's as a sanctuary after the unknown misery of her early years.

Perhaps even more touching is the story of Elizabeth Ann Bridge who was born in 1906 at Sutton, Surrey. Her mother died in 1909 and at the age of ten her father put Elizabeth into a home at Teddington, from which she was transferred to St Michael's where she remained until she was sixteen. It is not known why her father placed her in a home, but imagine the courage required when, at the age of twenty-two, she approached her father to request a picture of her mother. She was left on the doorstep as he searched for the picture. She thanked him and said she would never bother him again.

It must not be forgotten however that St Michael's was a Certified Industrial School and had been for over twenty years. Some of the girls probably arrived there through virtually no fault of their own but most had been placed by the courts which, by virtue of a strict regime and strong discipline, sought to turn the girls into upright young women. Life at St Michael's would not have been a bed of roses.

Circumstances at the school were, however, about to change again, and from 1924 the Industrial status was removed and St Michael's became a Children's Home for girls. From then on the inmates were simply children whose need of care and protection could not be provided by a kind and loving family. Perhaps this was through poverty, or a family in which the number of children was beyond the care of the parents, or because of the death of one or both parents. And when the legacy of hardships following the Great War is considered, there would have been many cases of need.

Presumably some of the former inmates would have been transferred elsewhere but at least three who had been baptised at St Mary's Church prior to 1924 remained at St Michael's and probably a certain number of others since the local baptisms had become far fewer. No records are available to check this point. The girls could now have more freedom and in the summer of 1924 they were once again enrolled at Shipton Church of England School, after nearly a quarter of a century of receiving their education at St Michael's.

Miss Elliot and Miss McCall remained at the home, probably with the other staff, so a fairly strict regime continued, but at least the girls could make direct contact with the outside world, and to those newcomers life at St Michael's would probably have been less of a confinement than that which the earlier inmates must have lived under.

From the early days of St Michael's becoming a regular Children's Home, the accounts of the circumstances which brought two pairs of sisters to Shipton have been uncovered. They were the Rice sisters, Myrtle and Irene from Newhaven near Brighton who were listed on the Shipton Church of England School register in 1924, and Muriel and Flora Buchanan from Lee-on-Solent who arrived at St Michael's in 1926. Both pairs found their lives were suddenly shattered by tragic disruptions in what had previously been happy family homes. It was a policy of the Waifs and Strays Society to make a clean break from the children's family, believing this to be in the children's interest. For this reason they were sent to other parts of the country and brothers placed at a distance from their sisters. Myrtle and Muriel's stories can be found in former editions of *Wychwoods History*. Myrtle's is in *Wychwoods History* No. 23, 'The St Michael's Connection' by Trudy Yates, and Muriel's in *Wychwoods History* No. 24, 'St Michael's: Another Connection' by Christine Patrick'.

Many were the circumstances which brought the girls to St Michael's and adjusting to their new life must have been very traumatic for some, more so than others. Some found happiness but to others the memories are more unpleasant. Lily Weller (later Bellworthy) arrived in 1925. It seems that illegitimacy was partly the reason for her admission and in 1990 she recalled her memories of St Michael's in the later 1920s.

My memories of St Michael's are not on the whole very happy - as I found the strict regime and awful (to my taste) food wholly unpalatable - this may have been because I was a naughty child and so was constantly being punished ... On my arrival I was given a number 17 and that was put on all my clothes even my toothbrush ... there were 40 girls aged two and a half to 14 later this was raised to 16 years - the daily routine seldom varied - the older girls rose at 6.30 to clean the house and heat the water in the laundry - the rest rose at 7 in silence and after ablutions in cold water in the washroom - met for prayers in the dormitories after stripping the beds which were straw palliasses on iron bedsteads with cotton sheets (I was always cold) ... we filed into breakfast still in silence (talking brought punishment) (I was and still am a great talker) after the meal - it was time for chapel service - we all wore a white cap for this - then we met in the Hall for 'good morning' to the Staff - Matron - Ass. Matron & 2 called Sister ... bed-making followed. The children who attended the local school

would then form a crocodile and walk to school - there although we were referred to as Home Girls we were treated exactly as the other children - We all went to the local church - small ones twice and older girls three times on Sunday ... I suppose St Michael's was no better or worse than other institutions of this era.

Nellie French (later Shorter) arrived at St Michael's in 1923, two years before Lily, and although she was very upset at first, in 1990 she wrote 'I think personally that the years that I spent at St Michael's were the happiest years of my life'. For some girls the security and close association of others may have felt far more welcoming than their previous life. Unfortunately when they were suddenly turned out into the world at sixteen, although employment would almost certainly have been found for them, life must have become very scary. They had no experience of shopping or running a normal household, and following Nellie's first six months in service, she ran away.

She had other memories of St Michael's.

We were invited every Christmas to Shipton Court. They gave us a lovely party and a nice present from the Christmas Tree. The family who owned Shipton Court were named Mr & Mrs Graeme Thompson. We looked forward to Pound Day in September when all the local people brought Goods, Groceries etc. also at Easter when the Local Farmers gave eggs. We always had an egg for Breakfast every Easter. The Food we had was very sparse but I suppose was nourishing. Potatoes Boiled in their Jackets, which we hated. two slices of wholemeal Bread (Home Baked) for Breakfast (no butter or marg) and a dish of oatmeal Porridge made with Black Treacle. We left School at 14 and were trained for Domestic Science for 2 years, earning 6d a month in Wages. on reaching the age of 16 we were sent out in Service. I was very unhappy ... Lily Weller was always running away she went to London several times, and brought back by Police. Although we were shocked; she kept us awake in the Dornatory after lights out, relating all her adventures.

In 1925 the Matron, presumably Miss McCall, wrote an account in the Waifs and Strays Magazine, about the latest addition to St Michael's of two sisters. 'They were not only very rough and uncouth, but looked most miserable and helpless. The change that has taken place since their arrival is quite wonderful. Not only are they looking better in health and learning the rudiments of good manners. The hard hopeless look has quite gone from the elder girl and she looks quite gentle and nice. Poor little things, they have much to learn yet, but they have found already that all the world is not against them.'

How very difficult it must have been for a newcomer arriving at the home, especially if for the first time they had just left the security of familiar surroundings, no matter how desolate. Walking from Shipton Station up to the rather forbidding entrance of St Michael's with its walls, secure gates and overhanging trees must have been awesome, especially for those who had lived all their short lives amongst buildings and streets. To fit into a dormitory amongst girls of varied characters, both alien and friendly, and to lie in a bed listening to the night sounds of the country, and in winter shivering with cold, must at times have been quite heartrending for many a child.

The only other known death amongst the girls at St Michael's occurred on 24 October 1926. Sadly it was Irene, the sister of Myrtle Rice, who died in Burford Cottage Hospital of tubercular meningitis.

In May 1927 the Waifs and Strays Magazine carried the following announcement, 'After 21 years as Head of the Home and the mother of its 40 girls Miss Eliot has sent in her resignation, and those who have been in close touch with S.U.W. feel that they would like to mark in some way their appreciation of her devoted work for so long.' There was apparently a very happy ceremony when Miss Eliot was presented with a wristwatch, brooch and bracelet.

A new Head was appointed but unfortunately she was overtaken with ill health and in the following summer another announcement appeared in the Waifs and Strays Magazine.

SHIPTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD - 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and forever.' This was the message that Dr Westcott gave to the new Matron of St Michael's Home, Miss McCall, at the Installation Service on June 12th; and this was the message that conveyed the atmosphere of the simple service to those present. The favourite hymns were led by the Home children and sung by a large congregation of well-wishers, who overflowed from the little Chapel to the room beyond ... The simpleness of this service, which has become such a welcome feature when new Heads are appointed to the Society's homes, was greatly enjoyed by those present, and this personal link between the Secretary and the staffs of the Homes has become a much appreciated and greatly valued opportunity for impressing upon everyone the basis upon which the staffs undertake their somewhat onerous duties.

To be with the children day & night, not just for one day but every day, to look after them physically, mentally and morally, is a great responsibility not to be taken lightly and those present at this and similar services cannot fail to be impressed with the Sacred Duty undertaken by the Society's Masters and Matrons.

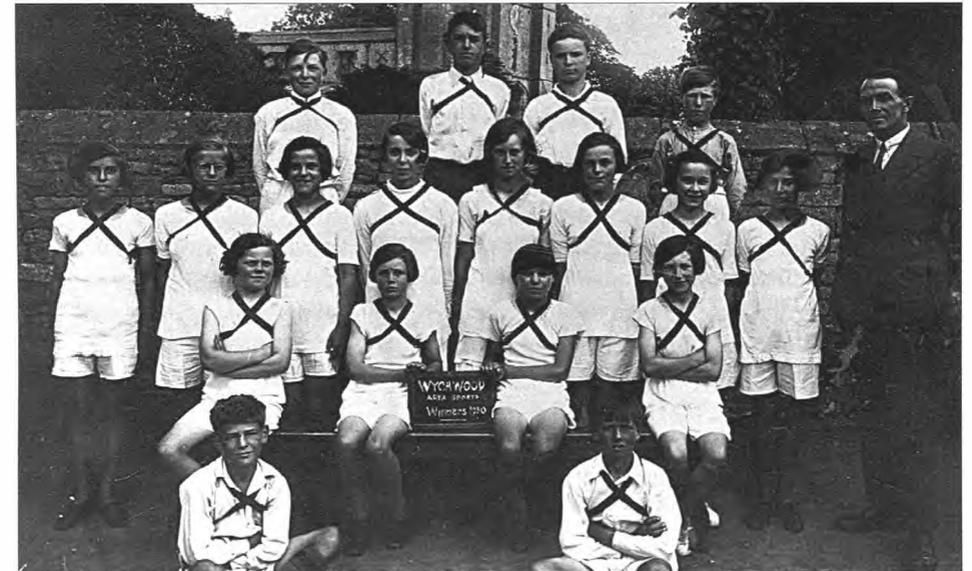
So at the age of fifty-three, Miss Florence McCall, who had already been working at St Michael's for over twenty years, was installed as Head of the Home. Joan Dangerfield (later Townsend) who lived in Lanehouse Farm, next to St Michael's, remembers that Miss McCall was very strict with the girls. Their food was very plain and monotonous but when the chance arose, she used to give the girls extra items, like fallen apples from the farm orchard. The conspirators had a system. When the children were sent to bed, they would watch at the window for a sign and then make their way down the fire escape at the back where St Michael's joined the farm land, to collect the goodies. Very often the co-conspirator was Lily Weller.

Other local people were willing donors to the Home. Mrs Ernest Peach in 1927 collected 790 new laid eggs and £1 10s in money from the villages around. Similar help had been given by this kind lady before but that particular year was a record. Mr and Mrs Wilkinson, in the same year, gave a wireless and Mr Wilkinson Snr, some headphones. A mowing machine was donated by a kind lady friend, perhaps the same lady who, in 1929 provided cars to take the girls to part of old Wychwood Forest, where prizes were given for games and races and an excellent tea provided. The Shipton Lodge of the Royal and Antedeluvian Order of Buffaloes (The Buffs) also gave a party every year for the girls at the home, when each inmate could invite a local child as a guest. There was usually a Christmas party at St Michael's with a large Christmas tree. Locals helped provide money and gifts. Every child received a present, but difficult to accept by these somewhat deprived girls was the fact that the fairy on the top of the tree always ended up in the hands of the daughter of some local worthy, and never in their own.

Life also brought a few more pleasures for the girls for they could each have their little garden plot with flower seeds given by the locals, the tennis courts were brought back into use and some indoor games were arranged. The traditional calico dresses were replaced by more varied ones and 'The Home' girls were less noticeable amongst the schoolchildren, although all were treated well, without any distinction, by Mr Horne, the schoolmaster.

The Diocesan Report for Shipton Church of England School in 1930 confirmed the Waifs and Strays Magazine's report that one of the home family had gained the Bishop's Prize for Scripture whilst two others had obtained certificates for the same subject. The winner was Muriel Buchanan whilst Myrtle Rice received the First Certificate and Lily Weller the Second Certificate. Myrtle Rice had been the winner the previous year. Obviously the girls' standard of education had improved greatly compared to that of the inmates earlier in the century.

Also in 1930 the Waifs and Strays Magazine reported that five of the girls had distinguished themselves at the area school sports with one girl having won all of her five events. That girl was Myrtle Rice. The winners of the Wychwoods Area Sports 1930 which were held at Ascott in the field where Dawls Close is now built, are shown in the photograph amongst the local schoolchildren



Wychwoods Area Sports Winners 1930. Shipton C. of E. School. Lily is second from left in middle row, Myrtle is fourth from left and Muriel is sixth from left



Lily in 2003



Muriel in 2010



Myrtle in 1990

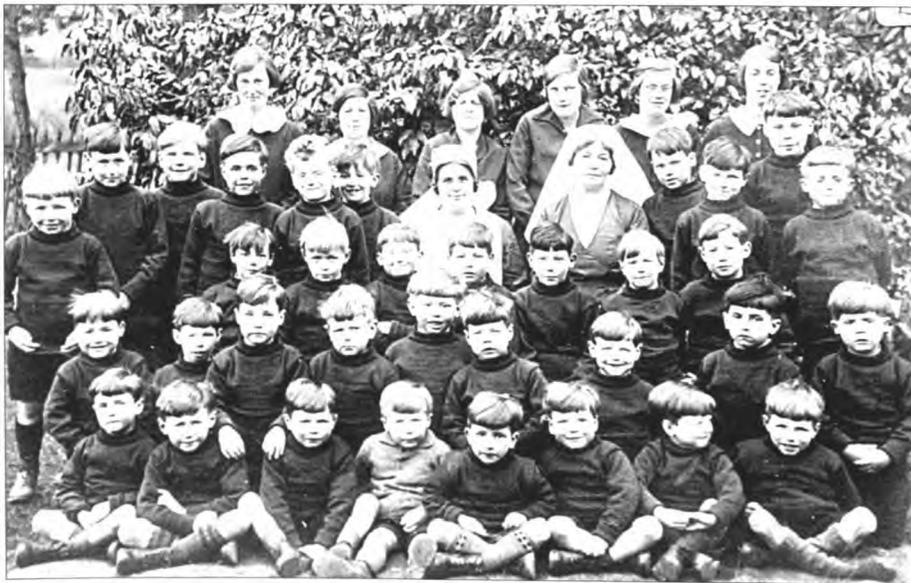
winners. Far more girls than boys are in the photograph. Boys were much in the minority at Shipton Church of England School between 1924 and 1931, although this situation was about to change. By 1931 when the fiftieth Jubilee of the Waifs and Strays Society was reached, things were not going so well for some of the homes and reorganisation was necessary.

After twenty-seven years of service at St Michael's, in April 1931 Miss Florence McCall was to leave. On the twenty-second, a number of friends gathered to say goodbye and she was presented with a gold wristwatch and a case of notes. The Waifs and Strays Magazine reported that 'many hundred girls had passed through her hands. All through these years she never wavered

in devoted perseverance in the work which God had given her; always cheerful, always kind, firm and wise; her retirement is a great loss not only to the Home but to the Church and village. St Michael's is now to be a Home for boys instead of girls.' It seems very likely that a number of those hundreds of girls would have expressed rather different sentiments about Matron McCall who was always considered very strict.

Miss Slater was appointed the new Matron and St Michael's was then approved to take in thirty-five young boys. The schoolroom at Shipton Church of England School took on a majority of a different gender and Joan Dangerfield remembers being nominated to look after those young lads, which was not always an easy matter. Six of those young boys were baptised at St Mary's Church on 15 November 1931 including two pairs of brothers. No ages were given but from a photograph taken at the time, many appear to be fairly young. How did their impression of St Michael's compare with that of the many girls sent to the home over the years? In one respect at least life did not follow the same pattern because as Lily Weller remembered in 1990, not all the girls left, some older ones were kept on at St Michael's to do 'all the work'.

The only girls when the boys were there - slept in separate bedrooms and not in the dormitories we did all the work - Gladys and I were in the laundry - I think ... Muriel ... was Matron's maid



Boys at St Michael's, probably in 1931.
Back Row Myrtle first right, Lily second from right

2 were kitchen and I think those three with Myrtle would do most of the housework - Matron had her own rooms and probably kept the books including the punishment book!! The boys from the age of five would make their own beds - clean their shoes and help sometimes with potatoe peeling - the other two or three staff had a room next to a smaller playroom. There was nothing in the playrooms except some lockers ... the lucky ones who had visitors might have some fruit or sweets in theirs. A lot of boys and girls from the Waifs and Strays were sent to Canada ... my main regret is that I for one never experienced love or understanding so that perhaps it took me so much longer to be able to express these feelings myself ... In a strange way I'm glad I had a hard life. I can help and understand the foster children although their problems are completely different.

Myrtle Rice remembered Lily as a very hard worker and after Lily married and had one daughter of her own, she went on to foster seventeen children.

The care of young boys did not survive for long at St Michael's. After only one year, the remaining girls and the little boys left in May 1932. Perhaps as Lily recalled, Canada was to be the destination for some of these children. Unfortunately none of the boys' names are known except those six listed in St Mary's Church Parish Register. By the early part of 1933 the home was offered for sale.

Initially, perhaps because of the continuing association with the church and local vicar, the Waifs and Strays Society offered the incumbent, the Revd Ernest Freeman, the chance of purchasing the home for £800, to be used in some connection with the church. Shortly afterwards, on 28 April 1933, Oxfordshire Local Education Authority published a notice signed by the managers of Shipton Church of England School proposing the use of St Michael's as a new Public Elementary School for about 120 pupils. This was either to replace the old school by the church or to add extra accommodation. It was to be a Voluntary School, one not provided by the Local Education Authority, and the intention was to include pupils not only from Shipton but also from Ascott, Fifield, Idbury, Leafield and Milton. Unfortunately only three years previously, a regrouping of local schools by Oxfordshire Education Committee had caused problems and ill-feelings, and letters of objection were soon received from both Ascott and Leafield.

The proposal fell through and the next step was the production of a notice advertising the sale of St Michael's for £1200 or near offer. The description of the home on the notice included the following details: '... occupying an ideal situation in the village ... approached by a carriage sweep ... stands in own tasteful grounds'. Accommodation included a large hall, sitting room, chapel, large dining room or playroom, rooms for staff, kitchen and larder, large

dormitory, seven bedrooms and two bathrooms. 'The water supply was by petrol pump and windmill from well.'

The only prospective buyer we know of was the Provincial Sister of the Convent of Our Lady, Help of Christians, a convent whose headquarters were in Italy. Mr Freeman was not best pleased. He urgently wrote to the Waifs and Strays Society 'some Roman Catholic Sisters from Oxford to look at the Home this afternoon. Of course you will not let them have it, will you!' The sisters either decided against the home or were not allowed to buy it, and so St Michael's remained empty until 1936 when the Waifs and Strays Society decided to reopen it as a Home for Girls.



Shipton C of E School 1937. St Michael's girls in square necked gymslips

Between April and August 1938, Jean Rogers, Margaret Smith and Josephine Amelia Easter were the last of the Waifs and Strays to be baptised at St Mary's Church. Twenty-five of the girls attended Shipton Church of England School and a few of these can be seen in this school photograph taken in 1937. They are distinguished from the other pupils by their square necked dark gymslips. Amongst them may be Doris Vassallo who in 1999 described the reactions of the final group of Waifs and Strays to their new accommodation.

... we went there in the thirtys from the Lampson Home in Overhill Rd in Dulwich 36 girls as our home was being pulled down and rebuilt. St Michaels was empty when we went there we couldn't believe seeing the wash basins and toilets outside the main building we often wondered who lived there before, but nobody ever gave us an answer we always thought it was Nuns or Monks

... the Village School a man & wife ran it when we were there, there was a hut on the side were we did cookery and the boys did woodwork several of the children came from other villages, when it rained what was our play-ground used to be a big pond. I used to walk to the Post-Office (in Church Street) on a Saturday morning to collect the mail when I was a house-girl, I use to love this because I was on my own and I felt free a lovely feeling but only for a short while ... We used to take some lovely walks to Milton to the church on some Sundays. And we use to go up the lane by Dangerfields farm [in Meadow Lane] and swim in the river. We used to go to a house opposite the Station to do craft work once a week. We and all the village children went to Shipton Court for a Xmas party one year we used to go to the Village Hall to see a film, to us kids being home children was quite exciting, we had quite a good life we had a good Matron who was very strict in our manners and behaviour but all ways treated us fair and we always seemed to have the best of everything, but we always used to look out the window to the drive and the gate used to look miles away hoping somebody was coming for us I think we all lived in dreams in those days ... My memories of St Michaels were mostly good and the people in the Village were very good to us.

By 1939 St Michael's was deserted again, but it was soon to resound to a sound which had not been heard at St Michael's since the previous century; voices communicating in a foreign language.

On 13 January 1939, the *Chipping Norton Advertiser* reported the arrival of '25 Basque Refugee Children' at St Michael's House, Shipton under Wychwood. Probably in all its fifty years of housing children, these thirty (not twenty-five) young Spanish boys had experienced nearly two years earlier the most traumatic events of any of the children who had passed through the portals of the home. Over eighteen months of recuperation in England had probably done much to alleviate the worst memories, but it's likely that some of the boys had lived through the first-ever saturation bombing of a civilian population, when Nazi bombers destroyed Guernica in the Spanish Civil War in April 1937.

The Basque Government appealed to the European nations to give a temporary asylum to some of the children of the war zone. Despite Britain's non-intervention pact, the Duchess of Atholl, President of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, took up the cause, and eventually, on 21 May 1937 an old converted liner, the SS Habana left the port of Santurce north west of Bilbao. Built to carry 800 passengers, she was loaded with 3,840 children, eighty teachers, 120 helpers, fifteen Catholic priests and two doctors. On the two-day journey through the extremely rough Bay of Biscay, the children,



Young Basque boys and carers at St Michael's in 1939

crammed into every available space, were violently seasick. The Habana finally arrived at Southampton docks escorted by two Royal Navy ships, and after rigorous medical inspections, the children were bussed to a camp set up in three fields at North Stoneham in Eastleigh. Gradually by mid September the children were dispersed to colonies all over the country from where offers of aid had been received, from the Salvation Army, the Catholic Church, individual volunteers, other church groups, trade unions and those who were shocked by the plight of these children. One of the colonies was established on Buscot Park Estate in a house belonging to Lord Faringdon and it was from there that the thirty boys travelled to St Michael's. They were in the care of an English Matron and a Warden, Walter Leonard, himself a twenty-seven-year-old German Jewish refugee whose real name was Walter Levy. He was the son of the famous German singer, Lotte Lenya, and was always known to the boys as Leon.

The British Government had insisted that all funds must be raised by local committees and in this area a local committee was formed to assist St Michael's. The Chairman was the Revd Father Hayward, the vicar of Milton. Other members were Dr G. Scott, Mrs R. J. Franklin, Mrs S. E. Groves and Mrs Wainman, all of Shipton. The villagers brought gifts of all kinds including household goods, food and money. Many 'At Homes' were held to help raise funds, but unfortunately the vicar of Shipton, or possibly his wife, declined to help. They judged the children to be either Communists or Catholics. It seems

likely that Mrs Wainman, who lived at the Prebendal next to St Mary's Church and often invited the Basques to tea, disapproved of her vicar's attitude and ever after attended Milton Church.

With the advent of the Second World War evacuees from London were soon distributed countrywide and Mrs Muriel Groves, in her book *Shipton and Milton During the War*, remembered that three evacuees, the naughty ones, were sent to join the Basques at St Michael's. Despite Leon's outrage at the language of one of these young Londoners, he persevered in his care for them until later in the autumn, when the building was taken over by the military and the Basque boys with their carers moved on to another former Waifs and Strays Home, St Joseph's at Aston near Bampton.

The country was now at war and although St Michael's remained in the ownership of the Waifs and Strays Society, for the duration of the war it was requisitioned by the military. The nearest Waifs and Strays Home was a war nursery at Bruern Abbey. The first of the soldiers to be billeted at St Michael's were those of the Fiftieth Northumbrian Division, a first-line Territorial Army Motorised Division, part of the Southern Command. The ambulance unit was based at Shipton and they were in the locality to undergo battle training and re-equipping. In January 1940 they left to join the British Expeditionary Force in Belgium and in June they were heavily committed during the withdrawal to Dunkirk. They took part in the counter attack at Arras, but most of the Division were fortunate to get out of Dunkirk despite the loss of all their equipment. During their stay at St Michael's, the building was mainly used for billeting of the lower ranks with most of the upper floors being used as sleeping quarters and the ground floor for administration and cooking. The same arrangements probably applied throughout the War as the RASC and the Royal Signals followed the Northumbrian Division into the building.

In 1941 Dr G. Scott put forward a proposal for the future use of the building. He produced a scheme for a Wychwood Social Centre, based on St Michael's. Dr Scott signed an agreement with the Waifs and Strays Society to pay £100 as a deposit with the total price of £1,000 to be paid one year after the end of the war. Some money had already been collected by fetes etc. and many local organisations had expressed an interest in becoming part of the centre. In 1939 both Shipton Church of England School and the YMCA building had been found seriously sub-standard and one of Dr Scott's main aims was to provide new premises for both institutions. The Wychwood Social Centre would also provide homes for those organisations supporting the scheme, the Guides, Brownies, Women's Institute, Sisterhood, Nursing Association. etc. A variety of rooms would be provided for meetings and exercise, for sitting, for reading rooms, a library, and it was also hoped that the doctor's surgery and Infant Welfare would be established there.

A proper kitchen would have to be built but no other structural alterations would be necessary. A caretaker could live on the top floor and the bathrooms on the first floor could be hired out to families who had no facilities at home. It was hoped that once the funding had been achieved, the centre would be self-supporting. Outside there was a proposal to build a swimming pool and tennis courts and to provide a playground and an area for other sports. As the war years continued many events were organised in the Wychwoods, to help with the funding.

Meantime life at St Michael's continued apace with men then occupying the spaces where numerous children had passed the early parts of their lives. A number of military units were based there, perhaps the best remembered being the men of the US military, the officers white but the majority of the soldiers big and black. They drove strange vehicles and placed dumps of ammunitions all over the verges of the country roads for miles around. This continued until early 1944, when soldiers and supplies all moved out prior to D-Day.

St Michael's was still requisitioned and continued so until probably October of 1945. Dr Scott was finally able to hold a meeting and to make it known that only the final £500 needed to be secured, but for reasons which have never been explained, within a year the whole proposal had collapsed.

In 1946 Dr Scott sold St Michael's to Mr Eric Meecham for £2,235. The money that had been collected for the social centre was returned to those individuals and organisations that had contributed it. This was also the point at which the name St Michael's disappeared.

Prior to 1946 Mr Eric Meecham, trading as Alfred Meecham, had run his corn chandlery business from a store and shop in Shipton Road, Milton, and he had rented Taynton water mill for the milling of grain and animal feed. When he was given notice to quit Taynton Mill, Eric Meecham bought St Michael's from Dr Scott and presented architect-drawn plans to the planning authority, to turn what had been a school and home into a grain store, flour mill and retail shop. A loading wharf with a canopy was built at the front of the building. Floors were strengthened to take the heavy milling machinery and storage was provided to the west of the building with grain silos to the east.

Eric Meecham, and then his son Peter, traded at St Michael's for twenty years, as a chandler, miller and a general agricultural merchant. They sold cattle cake for dairy cows and cattle, fertiliser, grass seed and seed corn. They had a seed dresser through which the seed corn was processed to protect against soil-borne diseases. They also had a clover winnowing machine which was used by local farmers to clean their purpose-grown clover seed, before it was collected by Mr Meecham for mixing with grass seed for growing the next season's hay. They sold binder twine and baler twine for harvesting, and arranged the hiring of two-hundredweight sacks to hold the corn during the threshing process, after which it was collected by their lorry for movement on

to the grain merchants. For some of the time the flats upstairs in the building were let out, but it must have been a rather uncomfortable experience for the occupants, since whilst the milling machinery was in operation, the whole building shook.



Alfred Meecham at St Michael's in the 1950s

Later, the St John's Ambulance Brigade built and used their headquarters to the right of the building, until they built a new one on the opposite side of Milton Road. In time the demand for pig and poultry food gradually declined, as did the Meecham's business, and in 1967 the building was again put up for sale.

Placed in the hands of Tayler and Fletcher, Auctioneers and Estate Agents from Stow on the Wold, the premises were put up for auction on 18 October 1967. Despite being described as spacious and imposing with a site area of nearly one acre, the property unfortunately failed to reach its asking price of £5,750. It was, however, subsequently sold by private treaty.

The new owner was Bernie Hill and his first priority was to return the building to its former state, before it had been developed into a corn mill. He then proceeded to fill St Michael's with all manner of memorabilia from past times and other places. It became known as 'The Olde Junk Shop' and became a haven for collectors and buyers from all parts. Probably one of the most memorable items from Bernie Hill's collection was the seven-ton amphibious landing craft which used to stand on the forefront of the building. It had been used during the Normandy invasion and Mr Hill and his son converted the six-wheeled ex-army vehicle into a motor caravan cum cruiser for the purpose



YE OLDE JUNK SHOP, SHIPTON-U-WYCHWOOD, OXFORD

The interior of Ye Olde Junk Shop in the 1970s

of taking the family on a 1,000 mile trip around Britain. They spent nearly six months fitting kitchen units, cupboards, wardrobes, bunk beds and a lavatory, and tested it for water trials on a gravel pit near Standlake.

Bernie Hill's business continued and flourished for about twenty years, before it was acquired by Mr and Mrs Lawson from London. They planned to run an antique shop, bed and breakfast business and teashop at St Michael's. Hazel Lawson, who had trained as a dancer, later turned to belly dancing and perfected her technique in Egypt. She planned to do engagements locally and had hopes of teaching the techniques as a fitness regime, perhaps in her new home. Unfortunately their business did not flourish and closed down in April 1988.

So St Michael's was up for sale again, but this time it was under threat. Between 1988 and 1989 several plans were proposed, three to alter and extend the building into flats, varying between thirteen and eighteen in number. However the more drastic proposals were to demolish St Michael's completely and build either six or eleven dwellings on the site. If pleas for its survival were put forward, they were to no avail, and the orders came through to demolish the building and erect six houses in its place. By September 1989 the demolition began and by the following December, the site was totally derelict. The high quality of the materials was by this date considered fairly valuable and much was saved by architectural antiques firms. Some of the stained glass moved on to a cottage further up the road into Milton, but no-one knows what happened

to the stained glass window featuring St Michael, which had been donated to honour St Michael's original headmistress, Catherine Barter.

The close on the opposite side of Milton Road had already been given the name St Michael's, so by 1993 when the houses on the site had been completed, it was decided to call the development Willis Court after James Arthur Willis who had been one of Shipton's first Parish Councillors and one of its longest serving Chairmen.

In 1994 Myrtle Rice died, and having no real home of her own, her ashes were brought back to St Mary's churchyard to be buried with her sister.



The demolition of St Michael's in 1989

Sadly memories of St Michael's are slowly disappearing. As time moves on fewer people remember its towering presence, and the presence of the numerous children and others who entered its gateway, their emotions varying between excitement and fear. The longest standing owners, the Waifs and Strays Society, now the Children's Society, perseveres with its original aim, to provide care and protection to all children in need, and so St Michael's survives in memory as one small part of their continuing vigilance.

This article was mostly researched by John Rawlins with some additional information gathered by Wendy Pearse.

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Dr Gordon Scott Revisited – The Wychwoods Social Centre

TRUDY YATES

What exactly made this man tick? Just picture the Wychwoods in 1941. Our sleepy rural villages were bombarded with frenetic activity. There were soldiers billeted locally – both British and American. There were children from London, some of whom were accompanied by mothers and younger siblings, to be housed and cared for until hostilities were over. There were local fund-raising events to support the war effort. Dr Gordon Scott, who had been in residence for only two years when the war began, had a hand in everything. He organised the women who provided meals for soldiers and evacuees every day in the Red Triangle Hut. He sponsored money-making whist drives and often obtained the prizes himself. His medical workload expanded and he visited Bruern often where the youngest children from London had been placed.

All this as well as his own special interests – the very young and the very old. He ran a mother and baby clinic in Milton which, today, we would call a Well Baby Clinic. Having started the Evergreens Club for village seniors, he wrote a book called *Facing Retirement*, which he hoped would help all those used to hard work throughout their lives. He had already started the tennis club and had brought cinema to the Wychwoods. Last but not least, he had a busy, demanding practice.

In the midst of it all, Dr Scott had an idea for the future – a very big idea. The Waifs and Strays Home became available. The size of the building and the location (in Shipton but on Milton Road) appealed to him. He visualised a Wychwoods Social Centre. As Wendy Pearse has written in her in-depth article on the history of St Michael's, it was well known that the Shipton Church of England School and the YMCA building were substandard. Dr Scott, always the visionary, included both in his plan.

As he had done with other projects, he immediately appointed a committee of like-minded people to assist him. Gordon Scott was clever and calculated in his choice of assistants. Who could question his judgment in this case? The master plan for the scheme stated 'The trustees of the proposed Wychwoods Social Centre should be the chairmen of the Shipton, Milton and Ascott Parish Councils, the chairman of the Lyneham Parish Council, with an independent chairman appointed by the Oxfordshire County Council'.

In 1941, Dr Scott envisioned an executive committee that would begin work immediately to plan and raise funds for a future opening of the Centre

when the war was over. He stipulated that members should be representatives of the organisations to be housed there.

When work began the trustees were Mr J. A. Willis and Mr W. J. Kethero, the treasurer was R. J. Franklin and the secretary was Dr Scott. The immediate object of the committee was to raise £3,000, the amount Dr Scott anticipated would be needed to bring his plan into reality.

A Statement of Trust Account was published on 30 June 1941 with donations from the Fifield Tennis Club whist drive, the Keep Fitters, the Shipton Sisterhood, the Milton Sisterhood, Guides and Brownies, Nursing Association, Canteen Ladies, Women's Institute, Mothers' Union, Shipton YMCA and anonymous donations. Of the £229 14s 5d sum, £210 was invested immediately in War Bonds. It was also noted that the YMCA had invested £350 in War Bonds, which sum would 'probably' be available for the Social Centre. Regular meetings of the committee began in January 1942.

With his ambitious plan set in motion, Scott wisely set out to publicise it. He published a booklet describing the scheme dedicated to the memory of the late H. Coombes, J. P. and R. W. N. Goss as well as 'to George Bartlett, happily still with us and working harder than he has ever done in his long life, to whom the Shipton YMCA with all that it has meant and especially during the last two years has meant to so many strangers, is so largely due', (an awkward sentence but meant to be most complimentary).

The booklet was brought to the attention of the *Oxford Times*, which was moved to write an approving article. Describing Dr Scott's determination not to proceed with the project until at least £1,500 had been secured (£600 already invested in Government Securities, including £200 raised at a fete in Shipton during the summer) the paper praised the project by saying, 'If by their own efforts the people of the Wychwood villages can provide themselves with a centre on the lines set out, they will have done a fine piece of communal work and given a lead to other villages. We wish them success.' Dr Scott was taking no chances on an insecure plan. Although St Michael's was requisitioned by the government as long as hostilities continued, he entered into a personal agreement to purchase the building when it became available. He essentially bought it himself.

Fetes were the main fund-raising activities. In June 1941, the first one was held at Prebendal House. The receipts, including donations, amounted to £339 2s 8d. On 27 June 1942, another Prebendal Fete realised £167 8s 2d. (Perhaps the weather was inclement.) A Christmas Social, a Boxing Day Social, War Loan interest and bank interest swelled the total for the year to £349 8s 6d. The 1943 fete was held on 26 June and raised a profit of £165 0s ½d (R. J. Franklin was a meticulous treasurer).

For some reason there is no report of a 1944 fete. However, one was held 30 June 1945 at Four Winds, which raised a net profit of £117 3s 2d.

On 25 October 1945, Mr Franklin published the figures for the Wychwoods Social Centre to date: the post office interest was £2 3s 9d; Post Office Savings Bank was £230 0s 0d and cash at the bank was £66 19s 11d. This figure approaches the £1,500 Dr Scott had stipulated as his goal for going ahead with the scheme. Lists of individual contributions contain many familiar names: Dangerfield, Edginton, Haywood, Hathaway, Pratley Rawlins, Honeybone, Coombes, Rathbone and Cundell.

By 1946, plans had moved on. The membership of the committee expanded to contain several women - namely Mrs Miles, Mrs Meachem, Mrs Keen, Mrs Evans, Mrs Geach and Miss Chance. Meetings began to be held at St Michael's. It was decided that a Life Membership to the Centre would cost ten guineas. It was also agreed that a membership for sixteen to eighteen-year-olds would be five shillings a year. Plans were made to advertise for an on-site hairdresser with living accommodation for him and his family in the main house.

However advanced these plans seemed to be, something happened in May, for the minutes of the meeting held on the twenty-first of the month contain a cryptic statement of resignation from Dr Scott. 'Dr Scott advised the committee of his resignation because, whilst still in favour of the whole scheme, the future was not likely to be reasonably successful.' Why, with plans so far advanced and community spirit reportedly undimmed? Mr Norton expressed his views on the decision of the Bowls Club (what was the decision?) and other members gave their views briefly. If only they had been recorded!

It was decided to defer the future of the Social Centre for four weeks. Mrs Miles then proposed that plans for the June fete should continue. The motion was carried and a planning meeting scheduled for 14 June. Dr Scott, the secretary, appealed for old clothes for the rummage stall and for butter, margarine and sugar for teas. The meeting was adjourned.

A meeting was held on 14 June but no minutes were recorded. The fete did take place on the grounds of St Michael's Home later in the month. The sum of £89 9s 3d was paid into the bank on 31 December 1946 (six months later).

A meeting on 5 July of the Executive Committee was held with a full complement of members except for Dr Scott and Miss Chance. Dr Scott sent his apologies. Those present were Mr Meachem, Mrs Meachem, Mrs Evans, the Revd Mr Cooper, Mr Franklin, Mr Kethero, Mr W. J. Smith, Mr Broome, Mrs Keen, Mr Pratley, Mr Kimber, Mrs Miles, Mr Timms and Mrs Geach. The minutes stated that the possibilities of continuing with the scheme were discussed but, in view of Dr Scott's resignation, it was deemed that this would present difficulties as Dr Scott would be difficult to replace. 'After much discussion [about which we would liked to have had a record] Mrs Geach moved that the scheme should be closed down. Seconded by Mr Meachem,

and carried. A meeting to decide on the disbursement of collected funds was planned for a date suitable to Dr Scott. It was then moved by Mrs Evans and seconded by Rev. Cooper that a letter of appreciation should be written to Dr Scott for all of his hard work toward the Social Centre scheme. Signed by Mr Kethero and dated May 1947.' This is most peculiar. The closing down date was the summer of 1946. Be that as it may, the record of the workings of the Social Centre concludes with these minutes.

Why was a plan so avidly pursued throughout the war years so abruptly suspended? Did Dr Scott, seeing an end to fund raising for the Centre itself, go too far by proposing the Hostel for the Elderly scheme to be carried out in conjunction with the Social Centre? At Christmas 1945, he published a pamphlet rejoicing at the end of World War II and also about the result of the years of fund raising by the many villagers who believed in the Social Centre Scheme. He looked forward to Christmas 2000AD and wondered what the money raised would be doing fifty years hence. He predicted many changes impossible to envision in 1945. Changes, he continued, that would affect the well being and happiness of those who would follow. 'So', he wrote, 'we must do what is right: or we must do what seems to be right.'

Congratulating villagers for so far showing their mettle, he challenged them to aim yet higher. The hostel would be ready to help those elderly villagers who were beginning to fail and had no one to care for them. He proposed a purpose-built house with six or eight bed/sitting rooms, which would be for rent at a nominal sum with an on site warden, a kitchen in which meals could be prepared for residents, three or four extra rooms for guests or for the elderly who were indisposed and needed care plus a club room for all elderly people. Dr Scott envisioned the hostel on the doorstep of the Social Centre with the library, cinema and reading room nearby and the village shops and church within easy reach. With the help of grants and other assistance, he suggested a sum of £4,000 to be raised locally. It was a beautifully thought out plan. However, it gave villagers a financial challenge even greater than the original Social Centre scheme. Did the local people begin to feel that Dr Scott would never tire of challenging them? Perhaps. (*see Oxford Times article*)

Could it be, however, that there were financial irregularities? Dr Scott's folder of information about the Social Centre contains the copy of a letter he wrote to a Mr F. G. Jones, an accountant and auditor, with offices in Burford, Stow in the Wold and Moreton in Marsh. The letter is dated 23 November 1955 and in it Dr Scott requests Mr Jones to go into the accounts of the Wychwoods Social Centre fund and to prepare 'some sort of balance sheet'. In effect, he wrote, this was a fund held in the name of a number of bodies and groups of people that came together to fund a social centre with the provision that, if it came to nothing, they would get their money back with interest. This, in effect, they did. 'What is required', he continued, 'is that it should be established that

all the income was distributed.' To the doctor's dismay, there was some £18 remaining in the bank which could not be explained. Also quite worrying was the fact that the Inspector of Taxes appeared to want his cut on the interest for the fund. Dr Scott enclosed the taxman's correspondence in the letter to M. Jones, requesting that Jones take over communications with him. And then comes a very interesting sentence and the first and only written hint of discord within the committee. Dr Scott writes, 'I should add that originally Mr Coombes was supposed to handle this but he turned huffy because I switched my personal affairs to you.'

Also in the folder is an invoice from Mr Jones which charges £26 5s 0d as 'fee for attendances on Dr Scott; correspondence with bankers and post office authorities; preparing schedules of untaxed interest for the years 31st December 1941 to 31st of December 1955; separate schedules showing the allocation of the interest received and paid to recipients for all the years and appealing against the Schedule D assessments including lengthy correspondence with HM Inspector of Taxes.' The invoice was paid on 17 December 1957. This date, as the reader will realise, is a full ten years after the Wychwoods Social Centre Scheme was wound up.

One can only guess what effect the years of fund-raising and then the responsibility of winding up the social centre scheme must have had on a busy GP. One thing is certain, there were no more 'big ideas' from Gordon Scott. He saved all of the relevant paperwork about the plans but the welter of bits of paper was never organised. There was, perhaps, a little used drawer set aside to contain the material and it may never have been opened again until it passed into the hands of Janet Wallace, the doctor's eldest daughter. She has poured over it, John Rawlins has spent a great deal of time on it, and I have leafed through it so many times that I feel like a member of the original committee. It was a brilliant plan, well thought out, carefully set up and doggedly pursued not for 'a time' or a season but for years - possibly Dr Scott's most productive period of life. We can only imagine how the future of the communities would have been changed had the plans reached fruition. But they did not and we are left with a feeling of regret and no solid evidence to explain the failure.

Scattered among the financial statements, minutes of meetings and fete reports are several letters to Dr Scott from county and national organisations interested and enthusiastic about his Social Centre scheme. They are dated in 1945 and 1946 and many expressed an interest in meeting with the doctor to see how they could provide help. In May 1945, Claire Kreyer, Secretary of the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council in Oxford, offered to meet with the committee and provide assistance. M. Herbert Naylor, Secretary of the National Council of YMCAs in Reading, congratulated Dr Scott on the completeness of his scheme and commented favourably on his idea of an area YMCA organiser. He was discouraging about Scott's hope for a grant to the local YMCA however,

WYCHWOOD SOCIAL CENTRE SCHEME

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

CLUB, THEATRE AND HOSTEL FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE

A scheme for a comprehensive village social centre which might be taken as a model for all similar communities was put forward at a meeting at Shipton-under-Wychwood on Thursday week. Interested organisations which are giving financial assistance to the Shipton project, rural councillors and members of local parish councils attended the meeting, in addition to Shipton parishioners.

The scheme was outlined by Dr. Gordon Scott, the originator of the proposal, who has raised, with the co-operation of local organisations, about £2,500 towards the scheme. In addition, he has acquired the house and grounds of what was formerly the Waifs' and Strays' Home at Shipton, which will form the basis of the centre, and this he will transfer to the organisation at the purchase price.

The meeting unanimously approved the scheme, and an executive committee was appointed to carry out the initial steps and to take over some of the responsibility which up to now has been borne by Dr. Scott and three trustees.

The scheme, as outlined by Dr.

Scott, is to include club rooms with accommodation for meetings of organisations such as the Y.W.C.A., Girls' Club, Boys' Brigade, Girl Guides and Brownies, a really big library, for which the name of "The Roosevelt-Churchill Memorial Library" is suggested; a day nursery, reading room, card room and common room, and kitchen and bathroom accommodation.

Outside it is proposed to have a children's playground and it is hoped that eventually it will be possible to provide a building which could be used as a theatre or a cinema and also tennis courts and a bowling green.

After dealing with the financial position and the composition of the executive committee, Dr. Scott went on to say that one of the earliest additions he hoped to see would be provision for the aged. He hoped that bungalows for elderly people would be built opposite the Centre and he planned to have a hostel for the aged in the grounds. This would consist of six or eight bed-sitting rooms, a common room, accommodation for staff and a kitchen.

because the organisation already had a substantial sum in hand. He concluded that Dr Scott appeared to have enlisted the assistance and support of all the bodies likely to be helpful. He concluded with hearty congratulations on the scheme.

Claire Kreyer wrote again in January 1946, telling Dr Scott that his scheme was 'quite unlike any other to which grant-aid had been given by the Carnegie Trustees or the Development Commission'. She enclosed an application form and invited him to come to the Oxford office to talk about it.

In February 1946, Oxfordshire County Council wrote to say that the Finance and General Purpose sub-committee viewed the scheme for a Social Centre and Old Peoples' Hostel with interest and that they would be glad to be informed in due course of 'any further developments that take place when financial assistance is such that some definite proposals are possible. Signed R. T. Barre, Public Assistance Officer'; a rather vague statement.

Harold King, Regional Officer of the National Council of Social Services in Reading, wrote on 11 July 1946, anxious to meet with Dr Scott to discuss the disposal of money for the sale of clothing derived from the British War Relief Society. The chairman of the council had decided that the money should be spent for old peoples' welfare. He concluded that a meeting with Dr Scott earlier than August would necessitate his travel by public transport because 'my petrol ration has dried up'.

Also in July came a letter from the land agent in Oxford asking if Dr Scott would confirm his willingness 'to accept the sum of £950 0s 0d plus fees and rehabilitation allowances as final settlement of your claim for compensation under Section 2(1)(b) of the Compensation Defence Act 1939 in connection with St Michael's Home'.

Dr Scott must have accepted this offer initially but he wrote to the land agent again on 31 August saying that 'the settlement appears to be unnecessarily delayed'. He continued 'I accepted without prejudice a much lower sum than that which I should have done in the hope that we could get the thing quickly arranged ... On your own agent's figures, I am entitled to much more than the sum of £950 which we provisionally agreed and, since my object has been defeated, I must ask for the matter to be reopened and give you notice that I withdraw my acceptance.'

A month later, having had no reply, Dr Scott wrote again saying that if something was not done immediately he 'will bring the matter to the notice of the highest authority I can find, most probably our MP'.

We don't know how this matter of personal recompense was resolved. It was one of the many headaches suffered by a rural GP who dared to think outside the very confining village 'box'.

This is a second Oxford Times article. It was, no doubt, instigated by Dr Scott in conjunction with his initial mention of a hostel for the elderly. The way the article is written does not give the hostel equal status with the Centre. It is an aspiration - not to be given serious consideration until a much later date. Nevertheless, the seed was planted. The committee could not have said that they knew nothing about it

Wychwoods Local History Society

Publications in Print

Wychwoods History, an Index to Journals 1-19 (2004)

All the Society's past *Wychwoods History* journals are in print. An Index of articles, contributors, personal names, farms, maps and subjects in journals 1-19 is available free on receipt of a self-addressed C5 (229 x 162mm) envelope with two first class stamps. See www.wychwoodshistory.org.

Wychwoods History 20 (2005) £3.50

Joan Rein Remembers; Milton Church; Roman Activity at Swinbrook; Shipton and the Church Courts; One of Yesterday's Heroes - Albert Oliver; The People of the Wychwoods 1881; 'Tripping The Light Fantastic Toe': Traditional Dance Musicians of Finstock

Wychwoods History 21 (2006) £3.50

Reginald Tiddy; The Thomsons and the Walkers of Shipton Court; James Baggs and his Little Black Book; The Manor Courts of Ascott D'Oilly; Gordon and Jean Carpenter; Kelcot House; Gossip in Lyneham

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Bruern Abbey 1147-1536; To the 'Lee' of the Walkers; William Smith, Clock maker of Milton under Wychwood; The Society's Fieldwalk Programme - The Final Report; The Shipton Tillyards

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Defiant Women; Joan and Ben Townsend and Albert (Bim) Champness; The Society's Fieldwalk Programme - The Final Report Part 2; The Pottery; The Godfrey Case; The Little Girl From Salisbury Place; The St Michael's Connection

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Shipton under Wychwood Churchwardens' Accounts 1554-1696; Dear Mr Rawlins; Intrepid Travellers - Three Wychwoods Women in the 1880s; St Michael's: Another Connection; St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Wychwoods History 25 (2010) £4.50

Coldstone, an Ascott Anomaly; The Silence of Three Shipton Church Bells Explained; The Manor of Shipton in 1289; Great Scotts; The Shaven Crown, Shipton; The Crown Inn Charity; Annunciation Relief at St Mary the Virgin, Shipton

The Wychwoods Local History Society meets once a month from September through to June. Meetings usually alternate between the village halls at Milton and Shipton. Current membership is £7 for an individual and £10 for a couple or overseas member, which includes a copy of *Wychwoods History* when published.

Further details can be obtained from the Secretary, Wendy Pearse, Littlecott, Honeydale Farm, Shipton under Wychwood, Chipping Norton, Oxon OX7 6BJ (telephone 01993 831023).

To obtain further copies and back numbers of *Wychwoods History*, please see www.wychwoodshistory.org

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Cover illustration:

The annual event of bluebell picking by the girls of St Michael's at Bruern in 1913. Kate Gooding is behind the girl second from the right in the front row.



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