

Berkshire Revisited

During August I took my parents away for a few days. They had expressed a desire to visit Berkshire. "Thatcham was where I used to go when I was a small child", said Mum. "I used to be sent to an aunt and uncle to be looked after during the summer as my mother and grandmother had to work and there was no one else to look after me."

"OK!", we said "We will go and explore the area but bear in mind it's over 70 years since you were there so don't expect to recognise much - after all road names change, old cottages are demolished and areas get redeveloped...."

The day before we were going to Norfolk to pick them up I had a phone call from my mum. "Could you look up an address on the internet? I've been given an address by my cousin of the place I used to stay when I was a child!"

Sure enough a search brought up Stoney Lane in Ashmore Green, a village just outside Thatcham. It showed there was a pub and there was even a map. I called Mum back.

"Well Stoney Lane still exists in Ashmore Green and there is a pub."

"The Sun in the Wood!" she exclaimed. "I remember it now! We used to walk there. I think we knew the people who lived there." "Well it's still called The Sun in the Wood so if we can find the pub then the cottage, if it still exists, should not be far away."



The Sun in the Wood

On the way from Norfolk to Berkshire mum talked about her memories of Ashmore Green. "We used to travel down from London in a charabanc. I stayed with Uncle Fred and Aunt Elsie. Their daughter Gladys used to look after me. I was taken to Sunday School in a sort of chapel. It had a corrugated roof and the rain would make a terrible noise on it."



Baptist Chapel

The next day proved to be very exciting indeed! We found our way to the village of Ashmore Green, located Stoney Lane and almost immediately saw a small brick built chapel. We got out of the car for a closer look and found an inscription above the door 'Baptist Chapel' but no corrugated roof! A woman then appeared from a side door and explained that it was no longer a chapel but was now a small museum of fairground organs. She said we were welcome to look inside and would call someone who held a key. Then Mr. Piper arrived! He was very proud of the mechanical instruments as his father had collected them.

Mum explained to Mr. Piper the purpose of our visit and how she had come to the village as a young girl.

“What was your uncle's name?” he asked.

“Fred Haines.”

“Oh I knew Fred Haines and I knew his daughter Gladys” he said. “In fact I think I've got a photo of your uncle somewhere.....”

We spent almost an hour chatting to Mr. Piper. He had obviously lived in the village all his life, was very interested in local history and was able to tell us exactly where the cottage was, as well as the pub and also the parish church where mum's relatives might have been buried.



Next stop was 'The Sun in the Wood' for lunch and although the building had been extended and the pub was really busy, we could still see where the original bar room was. The cottage was a short distance away and had been extended a little but Mum still recognised it.



After taking photos of the pub and the cottage, we headed off to the parish church in the neighbouring village of Cold Ash. We split up to search the memorials in the churchyard and in a short space of time had found the graves of Uncle Fred, his wife Elsie and their daughter Gladys. It seemed we had more than achieved what we had set out to do!

St Marks, Cold Ash

But this isn't quite the end of the story. The day after we returned to Norfolk a letter arrived. It was from Mr. Piper and contained a photograph taken about 1960 of a prize giving with Uncle Fred in the background. Mr. Piper wrote 'Note the trilby hat. I never knew him without it.'

GILL WHITTINGHAM

