



Village Life Between The Wars

by Robin E. J. Chater

For much of rural England the inter-war period was a time of significant social change. On the surface, the old ways and settled attitudes remained, whilst at a deeper level a quiet revolution was taking place in village and domestic life. The annals of Childrey Parish Council provide a good local record of events during this time, charting the growth of the welfare state, the introduction of piped water and mains electricity, and the progress of more perennial community concerns such as leakage from the village pond.

Annual parish meetings seldom involved more than a handful of people. The Council itself was elected every three years at these meetings and subsequently came together about twice a year. In the immediate post-war period issues were few and of a type that recalled the Victorian and Edwardian era. It was, for instance, the Council's lot until 1923 to appoint an 'overseer of the poor' and to administer the 'charity allotments'. After that year this duty appears to be discontinued, although the Council maintained control of the Stowell (now Stow Hill) 'allotments' which were let at 6d. a pole. Signs of hardship, however, remained. In 1925 the Council wrote to the R.D.C. (Rural District Council) to point out the 'real necessity for additional housing accommodation in the village'. In response to the village's request for ten new houses, the R.D.C. granted just four for the 'working classes'. Five years later a further list of over twenty applicants was submitted and a further ten houses were granted. Even so, this did not satisfy the growth demands of the village, which by 1937 had reached such a crisis point that a 'strongly worded letter' was sent to the R.D.C. underlining the fact that young people who married had to look outside the village for a home.

One of the first modern amenities was the bus service provided by the Great Western Company. This had proved to be so popular that in 1927 the Council enquired whether seats could be provided for the convenience of waiting passengers. In 1931 the Council opted to stay out of an experimental 'scavenging scheme' which was presumably the fore-runner of today's refuse service. Two years later a number of recent fires in the village led to enquiries being made about participation in a fire service based on public subscription and in 1936 formal responsibility for fire protection was finally handed from the parish to the R.D.C.

An important factor in improving fire services was the introduction of mains water to the village in 1935. Childrey took advantage of a general village scheme running in from East Challow. Trouble brewed when the contractors took a long time over the job and complaints built up about the poor state of the roads after they had dug them up.

No such difficulties ensued over the street lighting scheme which was considered by the Council in 1936. Here the cost proved to be the main stumbling block and an attempt to introduce a 6d rate to pay for the scheme failed to gain support.

In the 1920s the high point of village life appears to have been the visiting fairs. These had become so frequent and clearly so lucrative for those who ran them that the Council

introduced a local tax on amusements stopping in the village. Rates were set on a daily basis and stood at:

Roundabouts	10/-
Coconut Shy	3/6d
Hoopla	3/6d
Swings	3/6d
Shooting Galleries	3/6d
Smaller Shows	2/-

A collector was appointed who was granted commission at 10% of the charges made.

Two major village events in later years were the King's Silver Jubilee in 1935 and George VI's Coronation in 1937. On both occasions the day was marked by festivities including a high tea, sports for children, dancing and fireworks. The Silver Jubilee celebrations were particularly spectacular with the Vicarage lawn illuminated by a great many fairy lamps, the distribution of a hundred 'half flags' and fifty balloons to village children.

Running like a chorus through the song of these years was both the pride and the bane of the village - its pond. Initial entries in the Parish records refer to the problem of leakage. This was partly resolved in 1923 by the employment of a contractor to make up its walls. A year later, however, the work had to be made good and once again in 1929 'the shortage of water in the pond' was noted. By this time the problem was further compounded by its apparent use as a refuse tip (perhaps the Council should have taken a greater interest in the scavenging scheme). All was clearly still not well. In 1933 the pond was once again cleaned out and in the following year the County Surveyor erected a concrete wall on the roadside to prevent leakage in that direction. This obviously worked only too well, for some six years later a wartime council expressed concern about the action of flood water from the pond.

The author would like to thank the former Clerk to Childrey Parish Council for allowing a copy of Parish Council minutes to be taken for the purpose of publication.



1920s? - Pinnell baker's shop -baker in doorway L - 4 people; 2 ponies and traps; pram. (V-CHD029)



1936 - Wantage fire engine re-filling at pond while attending fire at bakery behind Post Office. (V-CHD021)



1936 - taking goods out of Post Office because of fire at bakery behind - Mary Legge on R. (V-CHD030)



1930s? - Cantorist House - view from road (V-CHD034)



1930s - view looking north - cottages and the Pond V-CHD034)



1930s? - 'The Old School' - view looking west. (V-CHD038)

PLEASE NOTE. The museum has many more photographs of Childrey which may be viewed at the Museum.

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