

## Stonehouse in the Nineteen-Thirties by Jocelyn Walmsley (nee Willcox)

This article was first published by Stroud Local History Society in 2000, in “*A Millennium Miscellany*”. The Forward was by Jocelyn’s husband, Philip Walmsley, in his capacity as President of the Society. The original article contained three photos. We have added more from our collection.

### The Roof

In 1931 the population of Stonehouse was 2255. It was in that year that my father bought the pharmacy there and the family moved in to live over the shop. My sister was seven years old and I was almost five.

The building was an early nineteenth-century stone house which had been spoilt by an extension to the shop stretching across the wide pavement and crowned by a flat lead-covered roof with a low parapet round it. To our childish eyes this was the best part of the whole building, for, by climbing out of a front-room window, we could get on to the roof and survey the whole of the High Street.



*Central High Street in the 1930s showing the Chemist’s shop near right and the trees.*

To the left was the tunnel-shaped bridge over which the railway trains clattered, and at its side was the first shop in the High Street, a small brick-built house where an old man with a long beard ran his watchmaker’s business.<sup>1</sup> To our right, the street stretched as far as Regent Street. The two ends of the High Street were always known as the top and bottom although the road itself was perfectly level.

Along the street at intervals were various magnificent trees that after the war were felled by the Parish Council. Later, the Shell Guide was to say of Stonehouse that it was fast becoming the ugliest village in Gloucestershire. However, in the thirties, the High Street was an agreeable mix of brick and stone buildings, with shops and houses interspersed, some having a narrow pavement in front while others stood far back from the road.



*Central High Street in the early 1950s showing Gardiner's Garage in the centre.*

### Gardiner's Garage

Old was next to new, as when a black and white Tudor cottage and a modern garage with petrol pumps stood on opposite sides of the entrance to a lane. Behind the garage was a patch of derelict land where a number of large and ancient cars had been abandoned. We would climb inside and pretend to drive them, but they were so tall I had to stand up to see through the windscreens. In the garage itself was for many years a green caravan with shafts and a door over which was written GOD IS LOVE. Probably it had belonged to a travelling preacher. My sister and I planned to buy it when we grew up but it had disappeared long before then.

### The Congregational Church

Halfway along the street stood a handsome Congregational chapel. Separating it from the pavement was a low stone wall topped by railings, in the middle of which was an archway commemorating the chapel's golden jubilee. Double gates opened on to a long flagged path leading to the entrance of the building. On either side of the path were wide stretches of grass. I do not recall any tombs there, but behind the chapel was a graveyard no longer in use.



The chapel was largely run by my mother's family. She had been born in Stonehouse, the youngest of eight children, most of who still lived in the village. Our two maiden aunts cleaned and polished everything and prepared the bread and non-alcoholic wine for Holy Communion. Our eldest aunt's husband played the organ, an uncle and later his son, were both stewards, and my mother prepared the top-class Sunday school children for scripture examinations. My sister and I attended morning service and afternoon Sunday school.



*The Congregational Church (or chapel)*

There were many chapel activities all through the year, my favourites being the harvest festival and the men's sausage and mash supper.

Preparations for the former began on Saturday when chapel folk came laden with flowers, fruit and vegetables. Every window was decorated with autumn leaves, dahlias and chrysanthemums, and a long table in front of the wide, wooden pulpit was laden with garden produce. Next morning, as we arrived for the service, the flower-shop smell that greeted us made us sing the well-known harvest hymns all the more lustily.



*The altar decorated for Harvest Supper*

The sausage and mash supper was arranged entirely by the men. They cooked the food, and then, dressed in waitresses' frilly caps and aprons, which roused a great deal of hilarity, they served it. There followed an evening of entertainment when every act, good or bad, was applauded with fervour. The last item was always a sketch put on by the men. The sight of solemn chapel members cavorting in women's clothing left us children helpless with laughter.



Each winter during the 1930's the men of the Congregational Church, to express their thanks to the ladies, used to provide for them a sausage and mash supper and very light entertainment. On this occasion many of them served the meal dressed in appropriate "Lyon's Nippy" attire! Standing, from left – Tommy Clutterbuck, Bill Davis, Sidney Goodman, Don Fowler (on loan from the C. of E.!), Harry Anderson, Rev. Gordon Mackay, Harry Davis, Jack Anderson, Archie Gardiner and Dr. E. de Carle Prout. Sitting: Bill Allen, – Bignell, Frank Davis.

Photo from *Stonehouse: a pot-pourri of the past in pictures* by J.H.A. Anderson (Jocelyn Willcox's cousin)

After the war, attendance at the chapel gradually decreased and it finally closed in 1964, soon after which the building burnt down.

## Shops and Pubs

Between the chapel and two houses, each belonging to a doctor, were three shops, one of them a saddler's with its smell of new leather drifting across the pavement.



*William Pile & Co saddler c1900*



*The doctor's house c1900.  
Later to become Beard's Hardware shop and  
subsequently an Indian restaurant.*



*The Woolpack early 20th century.  
The man with arms folded is probably the landlord Alfred Taylor*

From our rooftop we could just see the sign of the Woolpack Inn, although the pub itself, a rough place, stood far back from the road. There were three public houses in the High Street. The Globe, a similar type to the Woolpack, was at the top end of the street, and close by stood the Crown and Anchor Hotel, once a coaching hostelry and of a higher standard.



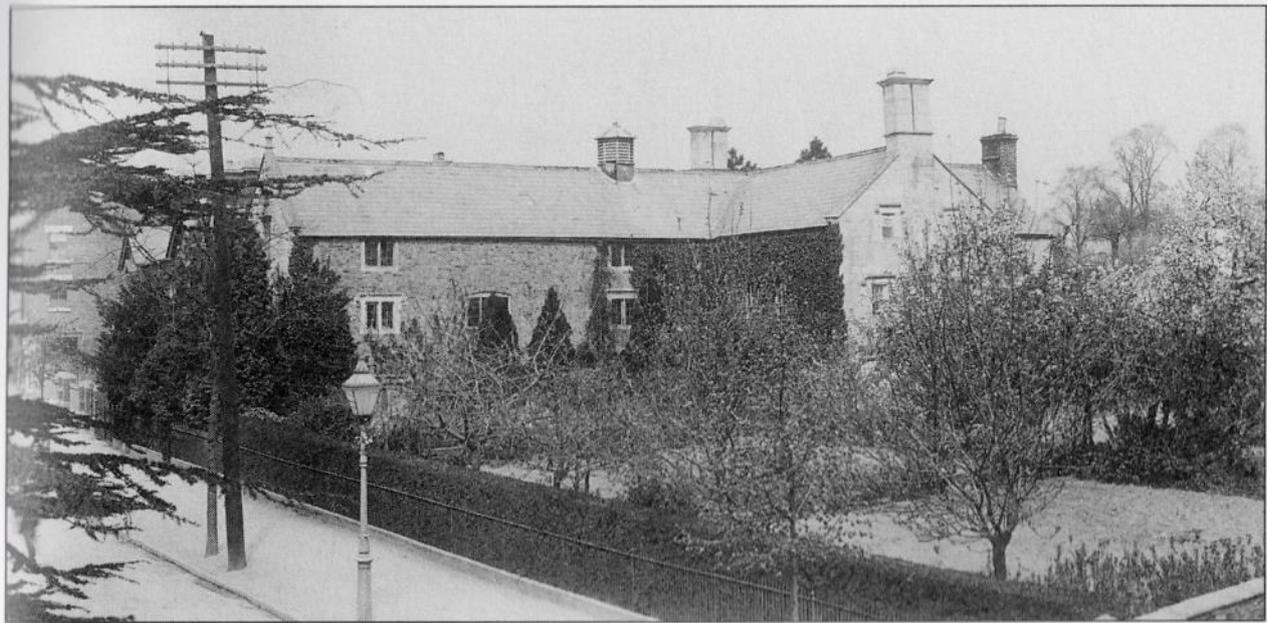
*\*Elm House is the white building in the centre of this early 20th century postcard.*

Opposite our shop and some way back from the road, was a very old and attractive stone cottage\*, which in more recent times was demolished to make room for a car park. Next was the Post Office which, in 1933, moved further down the street to a new building on the corner of Queen's Road, a mainly residential road leading to the railway station, the brickworks and Doverow Hill. It was in this road that I once saw an organ grinder playing his instrument, and a little monkey in a jacket sitting on his shoulder.



*Queen's Road with the new Post Office on the right.*

The brick-built Police Station seemed overlarge for the small population, but it included a police house and a court room where cases were tried once a month. It was not the Police Station that I feared but the dairy close by, where I was occasionally sent on an errand. It was a Cotswold stone cottage with a long garden in front. After knocking on the door, I would listen intently for fear that the old grandfather might answer. If I heard the stump, stump of his wooden leg along the stone passage I was almost paralytic with fright when he opened the door. He had a bushy beard and fierce eyes, but it was his total silence as he dealt with my purchases that thoroughly unnerved me. Another man with a wooden leg, whom I much admired, was the lamplighter. He rode a bicycle with a single pedal for his good leg and carried a long pole which magically lit each gas lamp in the street.



SEVERN VALLEY DAIRY PRODUCTS COMPANY. This building in the High Street, now known as Apsley House, was occupied around 1910 by the Severn Valley Dairy Products Company. It remains basically as shown in the photograph, though the gardens are much altered and the gas lamp has gone. Once owned by a Mr Bond, the firm was noted for the cheeses it produced.

*Photo from Stonehouse, the Stanleys and Selsley by Howard Beard pub.1996.*

Of the four largest shops in the village, two were grocery stores – one at each end of the village. The one closest to us had a licence to sell beer, wines and spirits, so naturally we patronised the other.

The other two, a drapery store with ladies' fashions, and a menswear and family shoe shop stood on either side of the entrance to Regent Street.



*Mullins drapery store on the corner of Regent Street c1930s*

## Stonehouse Brick and Tile Co. Ltd.

Towering above the High Street buildings was the brickworks chimney, designed by our grandfather Arthur Anderson, the first manager of the Stonehouse Brick and Tile Co. Ltd. Belonging to a family of brickmakers, he had come from the North in 1890 to start the brickworks. With him came his wife and six children. Another two, of which my mother was the youngest, were born in Stonehouse. He soon became a prominent figure in the village as a staunch Liberal, a loyal supporter of the Congregational Chapel and an active member of the parish council. He died in 1914 at the age of 55, after which two of his sons ran the brickworks for many years.

As members of the family, my sister and I spent many happy hours in the brickworks watching the various processes in the making of the bricks. Our biggest treat was being taken into the great kilns once they had cooled to see the great stacks of newly-baked bricks. We thought the smell was as good as newly-baked bread. The bricks were loaded into barrels and thence on to trucks waiting in the railway sidings. They were then dispatched to various places in this country and abroad.

Near the brickworks was the station on the G.W.R. main line from Cheltenham to London. As well as the express and stopping trains, there was the railcar service which stopped at the little halts all the way to Chalford. The coach was pulled by a small steam engine and in the morning was filled with children on their way to the four Stroud schools at Downfield. In those days the High School had a preparatory department, which my sister and I attended with many other boys and girls from the age of four to eleven.



*The GWR station looking east towards Stroud.  
The Stonehouse Brick and Tile Co., with its siding, can be seen on the left*

## Transport

The L.M.S. station was further from the village, near the Bristol Road, but within easy walking distance past the school through the fields. Although the G.W.R. line was more frequently used, it was to the L.M.S. station we went for exciting outings to Weston-Super-Mare, Bristol Zoo or the city of Bath.

A branch line also ran from this station to Nailsworth and was known as "the donkey line". There was a frequent bus service from Stonehouse to Stroud, a town I disliked because of its powerful smell of hops from the brewery, and for the dreaded dancing lessons we attended at Miss Atkinson's Academy. Like Stroud, Stonehouse even had a cinema, the Regal, in Laburnum Walk. Later it burnt down and was rebuilt in Gloucester Road just beyond the railway bridge.



A privately owned bus starting at Frampton-on-Severn came through Stonehouse on its way to Gloucester, returning in the late afternoon. It was a friendly service with much chatter and laughter between the passengers, the driver joining in. The bus would stop for people to board or alight anywhere along the route, and as the driver delivered packets as part of the service, the ride was a leisurely affair.

A minority of residents in Stonehouse owned cars in the nineteen-thirties and bicycles were more commonly used. Even one of the doctors cycled to visit his patients, always dressed in a frock coat and bowler hat. The grocery shops had vans whilst the smaller tradesman employed delivery boys on bicycles with square baskets on the front. Horses and carts were a common sight. The Co-op bakery used a van drawn by a small chestnut carthorse while an enormous black shire was used by the L.M.S. station to pull a flat dray for delivering bulky packages.



The farmers delivered milk, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, using brisk little pony traps. The milk was in metal churns with half- and one- pint measuring cans hooked to the side, and was measured into housewives' jugs on their doorsteps.



*Thomas Cook delivering milk in Frocester*

Each Spring the elver man visited the village and his cry of "Elvers, live elvers!" brought us scrambling out on to the roof to gaze down on his horse-drawn cart with its tin bathtubs filled with the wriggling little eels. Women poured out of their houses with jugs and bowls to buy them by the pint for they were considered a great delicacy.

An annual event of much solemnity was the Remembrance Sunday parade. It began at Stonehouse parish church and wound its way along Bristol Road, up Regent Street and into the High Street. Out on the roof we strained our ears for the first sounds of the Salvation Army band that led the procession. After it, proudly wearing their medals, marched those who had fought in the war. Our father was amongst them and always gave us a quick wave as their column passed by. There followed a less orderly line of villagers with children and dogs, and we would quickly run downstairs to join everyone round the war memorial on the village green. There followed a short service ending with a trumpeter playing the Last Post. Even the children were aware of the solemnity of the occasion, for the thirties were only a few years distant from the end of the war in 1918.



## King George V Silver Jubilee in 1935

An exciting event in 1935 was the celebration of George V's Silver Jubilee. There was to be a Jubilee Queen, a fancy dress parade, decorated cars, carts and bicycles. I was disappointed to have been chosen as one of the queen's attendants as I had wanted to go in fancy dress with my sister. However I was somewhat mollified to find that the queen and attendants would be leading the procession in a much decorated farm wagon immediately behind the silver band. The procession started on the outskirts of Stonehouse above the railway bridge. It slowly wound its way along the High Street past the shops all decorated with Union Jacks and red, white and blue bunting, into Regent Street and to the recreation ground in Laburnum Walk, where, after the judging of all the entries, there were races and other competitions for the rest of the day.

I cannot remember any festivities for George VI's coronation, perhaps because that took place only two years later.



*Silver Jubilee Procession. Jocelyn Willcox is pictured back row extreme right*

*Willcox Chemist in 1935*



## Employment in Stonehouse

There was much unemployment in the nineteen-thirties and the villages dependent on agriculture were badly hit. Stonehouse, however, had mainly industrial workers employed in the brickworks and in nearby factories such as the brushworks, the paper bag factory and the woollen mills. Wycliffe College, the public school on the outskirts of the village employed both indoor and outdoor staff as did Standish Tuberculosis Hospital on the Gloucester side of Stonehouse.



*Staff at Wycliffe College 1930s*

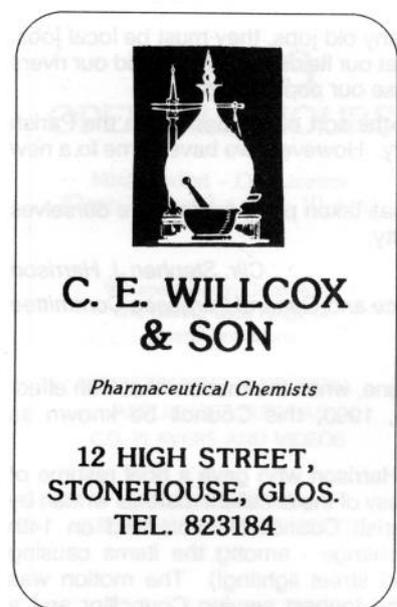
## The Manse

In 1936 my father moved his pharmacy to a shop next door to the doctors' houses and the family went to live in the Congregational Manse. It had been empty for some years because the minister was a bachelor who preferred to live in lodgings. It is the only house I know which was built on prayer, even down to a privet hedge for the garden and a gas lamp opposite in the lane. The story was told in a booklet – *The Manse and how it was built* by the Rev. George Jarvis, price ½d.



The house was situated halfway along Laburnum Walk, a lane parallel with the High Street. Although narrow for most of its length, it widened before its exit to Regent Street and at the other end divided - one part leading to the High Street and the other winding past a nurseryman's business and finishing at a stile into fields. There was also a shortcut into the lane along a passageway by the Woolpack Inn, known locally as Piss Alley – for obvious reasons.

The recreation ground stretched along most of the lane, and from our front windows we could watch the football matches between the Stonehouse team – the Magpies, and their opponents. Occasionally, a fair visited the ground with a traction engine supplying the power for the roundabouts, dodgems, music, and coloured lights at night-time. There were all the usual fairground stalls and I remember on one occasion paying my pocket money to see a headless woman.



## Never the same again

At the Regent Street end of Laburnum Walk were a wheelwright's shop and a forge. The blacksmith<sup>2</sup> was a small mild-mannered man but a fine match for any horse. He could deal with huge evil-tempered carthorses with ease, when his language was a shock and delight to our ears. He would sometimes entertain us with a firework show by blowing up the fire with enormous bellows and flinging a handful of iron filings into the flames, where they jumped and sparkled like a golden fountain.

Another friend was the nurseryman.<sup>3</sup> His produce of flowers, fruit and vegetables was freshly picked or dug up while a customer waited, and he would give us a paper bag to fill with the tiny ripe tomatoes too small to sell, for our own consumption.

Our weekly pocket money was a penny or twopence according to our age (the equivalent of about 40p today) but there was plenty to buy with these small amounts. A gobstopper that changed colour while it was sucked cost a farthing ( $\frac{1}{4}d$ ) and a 1oz bar of chocolate was one old penny (1d). There were also many items in the stationer's for a penny or less so that we were spoilt for choice.

Our favourite activity was walking and there were so many places around Stonehouse to go: Doverow Hill with a wood at the top and a quarry with steep sides to slide down, or along the canal towpath fishing for tiddlers with a jam-pot on a piece of string. Everywhere were fields full of wild flowers to gather, but near the end of the decade we saw a ball bearing factory being built in our favourite cowslip field in preparation for the war, and subsequently the Oldends Lane Industrial Estate.

In 1939, when war was declared, the street lights remained unlit and the blackout curtains were drawn across every window as though to signify the end of an era. Stonehouse was never the same again.



*A field like this became Hoffmann's ball bearing factory in 1939*

### Notes

1. The watch repairer by the railway bridge was Roderick Hughes.
2. The blacksmith in Laburnum Walk was Alfred Sirett.
3. The nurseryman may be W.G. Hobbs at Laburnum. There were several nurserymen in Stonehouse at this time including Bridgend Nursery run by Cecil and Amy White, Jack Elmer in Gloucester Road and Price's at Ryeford.