INTRODUCTION

‘Memories of Old Wellington’ as a project, has now been going for several years with a great deal of success. The stories in all the books are personal experiences of the people who tell them, tape recorded some time ago by Don Pearce.

Although it was an extremely good idea, the amount of work involved has been great. After a slow start it was soon clear that this was an ‘open ended’ activity which could go on for ever more, so it has now been decided that after Volume Three there will be just one more book and that – Volume Four – will be the last.

To those who have enjoyed Volumes One and Two – well over a thousand have been sold – I commend this new work. Wellington is a fascinating place as well as being the finest market town in Shropshire but the best part of Wellington is its people and this is a part of their story.

The book should be approached in two ways; it is a bit of nostalgia about the old days, told by those who remember them; it is also a piece of social history which could well serve as a background for studies from GCSE upwards.

To readers who think ‘I know something they don’t know’ – which must be quite a few – may I ask that they record what they know for future generations and leave it in the Local Studies Library. That includes old photographs, papers and school projects. If you want to keep the originals we will be happy to have photocopies (which the library will do for you). Then your information will be available for future generations to see and learn from.

Finally I am sure readers would like me to thank, on behalf of us all, the authors of these books, Mrs. Audrey Smith and Mrs. Kath Pearce, for all the work and thought they have put into them. Also we must be grateful for those who told the stories and have shared their memories with us.

Here’s to ALL FRIENDS ROUND THE WREKIN.

GEORGE EVANS

INTRODUCTION

This book is not intended as a true history of Wellington, but the memories of people who lived and worked in Wellington in the early parts of this century.

We make no apology for the inevitable repetition or slight mistakes of the whereabouts of some of the buildings, but this is a book of peoples’ memories and who are we to interfere with that?

We would like to thank all those people who welcomed us into their homes and allowed us, and you to share their happy memories of bygone days.

A special thank you to Austins, Hobsons, Supasnaps and Wellington Information Centre for their help in selling these booklets.

This is the third of our booklets and we hope you get as much pleasure out of it as we had compiling it.

KATHLEEN and DON PEARCE

AUDREY SMITH

Photo on Front Cover: Barclays Bank facing the Village Green and cottages.
New Street around the turn of the century.

The Square showing Slany's Liqueur Vaults, Britons and the Wrekin Hotel.
MRS. BOUGHEY

I was born in Dothill Cottages by the Prison field, you came off the Admaston Road to that.

My grandfather lived in the Bailiffs cottage, and when I was 11 years we moved across to there. My grandfather who’s name was Lewis, was bailiff to Mr. Groom at Dothill. He lived in the Bailiffs house until he died aged 85 in 1924. It was a family tradition covering six generations.

Mr. Groom owned the timber yard by Groom’s Yard alley, he used to go to the office every day but he had nothing to do with the farm that was left to the bailiff. My grandfather died when I was 11 years old, father took over from him and was Bailiff until 1944 when he died, and Mr. Groom passed on about the same time. I myself left in 1937 but my three brothers worked on the farm for 10 or 12 years after father died. After Mr Groom died the farm was bought by a Mr. Hodson. A man named Mr. Shirley farmed it, he was a relative of Mr. Hodson and he married a girl named Mulliner from Hadley but he didn’t live at the farm so my brothers still managed it. He was there for quite a while when the farm was sold again to a Mr. Jones from Bratton.

It was a 300 acre farm and produced wheat, barley, potatoes and swedes, they never grew sugar beet but they had cattle, pigs and sheep, I didn’t work on the farm myself, only for fun, but life was very hard work then. They used heavy cart horses for the harrows and plough and it was all very old fashioned equipment.

Father and my brothers were up very early to start work at 6.30 a.m. and worked all day until dark then the milking had to be done; and that was done by hand. It was put into churns and collected by Mr. Treherne with his milk float.

We didn’t make cheese or butter, that was made down on the farm. We used to go down to the farm on Sunday afternoon and get a pint of cream for three pence. They also made the butter there.

Mr. Groom was a bachelor, his niece was his housekeeper and there were also two maids. The niece was housekeeper for quite a long time and when she left her place as taken by Miss Reece, sister of Mr. Reece of Dudley and Reece.

Dothill House was a very large square house, it was very old fashioned inside, when you went upstairs you went up a few steps here and a few steps there. There was a big billiard room with beautiful carved ceiling. There was a dining room, living room, drawing room, and a big kitchen and then there was the dairy and the cellar. The house was lit by paraffin lamps and then a generator was installed for electricity and later on it was put on the mains.

I can remember the cottage we lived in before we moved into the bailiffs house.

There were two together, the front door opened into a big room and then you would go through to another room which was a very long pantry, there was one great big bedroom and a landing bedroom, at the side there was a washroom, the cottage was only small. We got our water from a pump which came through the wall from a well outside. The water was lovely, clean spring water.

There was an underground passage from the cellar up to the All Saints. I read an article in the paper some years ago (I think it was the Journal) about the underground passage to All Saints’ Church and according to them there was another passage to Lilleshall but I have never heard of that. I went down the cellar once and saw the beginning of the path to the Church but I didn’t go along it. The passage went under the house and under the fields for more than a mile, and there was a public footpath along there! (Has this tunnel been destroyed by recent building projects)?

I don’t know how the pool got there but I should imagine it was dug out and the clay used for bricks, probably Dothill Wall was made from that as they were hand-made.

There used to be a well in the grounds which was supposed to be bottomless, it went up into the mound and then we opened the door in front of the well and put our bucket down. We had
a tap in the house but in the dry weather it used to dry up and we had to carry water from the well then.

Mr. Groom was a bachelor as I have said, he was very set in his ways and he used to have visitors every Saturday afternoon and he used to come and walk around the farm. For his supper every night he would have some fruit, rice pudding and a glass of water. We used to go down there most nights and sit with the maids. He was always very polite, he wouldn't stop to chatter but he would never pass without speaking, when we were kids we always went in awe of him.

He was a reasonably large landowner of that time and his father before him, he also had a brother Cecil who was in the Ministry. He also had a sister who was Mrs. Clift, they had the coach building firm on Tan Bank.

I was educated at Wrockwardine Church of England School with my brothers and sisters. It was quite a large school with the girls and infants on one side of the road and the boys on the other. There were about a hundred girls and sixty boys. I won a scholarship and went to the High School. The High School was where the college is now. I just missed Miss Tattersal it was Miss Bradley who got me through the scholarship. Miss Tattersal left to become a nun. We used to have to walk to school from Dothill to Wrockwardine, it took us about an hour and no matter what the weather we never missed school. We took our own dinners, there was a store in the middle of the school and we took cocoa and sugar and they would boil a kettle and make our drinks for us. We had half an hour for dinner finishing school at 3 o'clock.

Empire Day was quite an event, we decorated a stick with flowers and we had to take it to school. Before Empire Day we all had to write an essay and when it came to the middle of the morning we paraded all round the village, then we used to go to Wrockwardine Hall, sit on the grass and they used to judge the essays and give out the prizes. On leaving we would go back to school. We used to go to the Church first for a service and then go on to the Hall. General Mackinson lived at Wrockwardine Hall, he had a daughter Diana.

I used to go into Wellington with mother once a week to do the shopping, usually on Saturday morning.

We used to go to Cooks on the corner of Duke Street as you go into the market, they sold bacon, cheese, hams - that sort of thing, and then to little Miss Keays, and on to pay for the papers, there would be the Journal, Farmer and Stockbreeder and the Christian Herald, we didn't get a national paper because they didn't deliver those and we would have had to collect it.

Harvest time was very busy on the farm, there were six houses and at haymaking time they would have one day going down and one coming back (when the corn was ready for threshing it was stacked under the Dutch barn). The threshing machine was watched to make sure it didn't become too warm. The thresher belonged to a local contractor who visited all the farms. After it was threshed we kept it in a granary and the chaff being given to the horses. When we were cutting the corn there were plenty of rabbits running about so there was always plenty of rabbit pies for a meal.

We also had sheepdogs because we had quite a lot of sheep but because they were working dogs they had to be kept outside, their kennels were also kept outside. We didn't have a shepherd because father looked after the sheep himself, it was hard work but father wouldn't have it any other way.

We also had plenty to eat in the way of pork. We kept pigs when we were at the cottage but not at the farm, the butcher used to kill them for us and father used to cut them up and salt them with brick salt and saltpetre. They were then put in muslin bags and hung from the ceiling for three to four months and they never went bad like bacon does now. We had a cadre pig which mother found, it was a rattling, there was always a little tiny one in a litter of pigs, this one was dying but we spoon-fed it for ages until it grew. When Mr. Groom used to call in on his rounds on a Saturday he used to call him 'Jacko' and say "Come on Jacko" and he would come and eat out of his hand. He was just like a dog but in the end we sold him.

I don't know how long pigs would live if they weren't killed, I don't suppose anyone knows because they're normally killed.
Mr Twinney Boot Repairer in the High Street.

The Old High Street, Wellington before demolition.

Mr Howells the Saddler in Walker Street. The boy is Mr Howell's son and the other older one is an apprentice.
Furniture by Addisons of Wellington.

Cottage furniture made by Mr Barker, Great Grandfather of Mrs Evans.
MRS. ARNOLD

I was three years old when we came to Wellington. Father came to work at Walter Davies the ironmongers and our house was at the back of the shop. There was always a lot of noise because the buckets were made there; they were hand-made, there was no mass production then. Eventually my youngest brother went into the business, the man in charge was a Mr. Hill. The buckets used to go off in cartloads but I don't know where they went.

There were only two employed in the making of the buckets, Mr. Hill and my brother. Monday was a very busy day at the shop because of Smithfield, apart from other market days. The shop was where the Halifax Building Society is now.

I was educated at Wrekin Road School, the headmaster was Mr. Buttrey and he really taught us, we didn't get away with things like they do today, we learnt because he made us learn. I went to the school until I was fourteen and then I went to Sharmans, I served twelve months there for nothing then I was supposed to start at half-a-crown a week but they found they couldn't afford the half-crown so I had the push. Sharmans were stationers, they had a printing works at the back of the shop (now part of the Staffordshire Building Society) where they printed the Church Magazine and although I wasn't getting any money I had to fold all those magazines and all that work was for nothing. They also sold china and daily papers. I always used to go over to Arthurs the confectioners (where Woolworths is now), he was a Scotsman and he always used to call me "The Wee Brat". I told him I was finishing at Sharmans so he said "You can come here". I was there for three years, I got half-a-crown a week and my dinner and tea there. That would be around 1912 when I was twelve years old.

I used to serve behind the counter and sell the cakes and buns, they made all their own confectionery, they made plain rather than fancy cakes, scotch pancakes, scones, etc., as I said they were Scottish people. While I was at Arthurs I didn't have to wear a uniform but when I was at Sharmans it was a black dress and stockings.

Arthurs was a family business, they had three people in the bakery, his daughter, future daughter-in-law in the shop and myself the only outsider.

I can remember bread pudding was only 1/6d a slice and scones were four for 3d. When the bread came out of the oven it was delivered to Wrockwardine and Admaston by a man with a covered push-cart but during the War he was called up and we all had to help deliver the bread, we started off at Groomes Dothill then on to Admaston and Wrockwardine, Mrs. Arthur was a big singer and she used to get members from New Street Choir to come and parcel the bread up and we used to deliver it after we closed at 8 o'clock.

I used to start work at 8 o'clock in the morning and finish at 8 o'clock at night and 10 o'clock on Saturday, all that for 2/6d a week. The family were very very good to me, on Saturday night if there was anything left in the shop they would give me a big bag of cakes, there were six of us at home and they would all be waiting for the cakes, it was a real treat for us.

The shop itself was double-fronted, it went right back and it was very large, as Woolworths is now it went right back to the Station Hotel. There was a very small tea-room, the cakes for the teas were taken from the shop. The kitchen was next to the tea-room, then a packing-room and another room where they put all the stuff from the bake-house after it had been baked, it was a very long room.

They used to start making the bread at night by spongeing up (dissolving the yeast) and they started baking at 6 a.m. the next morning, they made the bread first then the cakes and scones and the custards were last. The custards were left till last so that they were fresher. The bread flour used to come from Bullocks at Donnington Wood and it was delivered by horse and cart. Mr. Allison's brown bread was very popular in those days and we sold a lot of that, they sold white as well. They also sold chocolate and sweets and plum puddings at Christmas. Shops didn't have much variety in those days because there were so many specialist shops which only catered for specific things.

All the shops were lit by gas. During the First World War we had a lot of wounded soldiers in Wellington, Bailey's College Sanatorium was used as a Red Cross convalescent hospital for the wounded. The patients wore a blue suit, white shirt and red tie and they were a familiar
We had a terrible winter at the time I'm speaking of and as soon as we cleaned the windows the ice would come back. There was skating on Apley Pool every night which was floodlit. We used to go down after work and all the soldiers were there, they wore long grey overcoats. There would be hundreds of people there. Miss Bailey (commonly known as Man Bailey because she looked so mannish) who lived in Park Street was a brilliant skater. My father and brothers were good skaters too. I skated on my bottom. We used to have terrible winters and skating was very popular, Walter Davies used to have rows of skates hanging outside his shop. I used to have terrible chilblains during the winter and sometimes I couldn't get my shoes on.

After I had worked at Arthurs for three years I went to Manchester for a holiday and stayed on there to work. I went to work on the trams. You had to wait for a tram in those days so I used to get up at 4 a.m. and if one of the conductresses hadn't turned up I would take her tram-car. They were all conductresses then because the men were at the war. I did three months like that until I got a tram of my own and a permanent job. It was very hard work, I was there for two years then I came home to Wellington. To me it was a bank because it was so much more money.

When I came back I went to work for Billy Boffey in New Street. At one time Billy Boffey worked for Howes who used to be in the Square. There was the Lamb Inn, Hiltons boot shop, then Howes, then Baxters, then Neals before it was Pearks and then there was Capseys, they did dressmaking, ladies mantles, etc. Howes shop was destroyed by fire which put Billy Boffey out of a job. He started a business of his own from scratch, I don't know how much he borrowed from the bank but he did alright. I got a pound a week, the biggest amount of money I ever had until then. Friday was half-day closing, he used to do horse racing and he would go mad if you went to the phone, this particular day was Grand National day and they were going out so he had gone up for his dinner early so when the phone rang I answered it, the message was "quick Billy, Music Hall", so I wrote it down and took it upstairs and he said "Don't tell anybody". I took my £1 wage to Ralphs the bookie and put it on Music Hall and it came up and Billy Boffey never knew. I had such a ticking off from mother because she wanted to know where all the money had come from. I bought her a box of chocolates and gave her a pound out of that money. The horse came in at 25-1 I won twenty five pounds, I thought I had a fortune, I have always backed the National but I have never won anything since.

Billy Boffey had a marvellous confectioners shop. There was no radio or television in those days so on Saturday night the farmers used to come in and spend quite a lot of money on sweets. He sold groceries as well but I was mainly on the confectionery side, when he first started in the business he just had one shop then he bought other property and expanded and he bought all the grounds at the back. He had a passage-way made next to the shop and Mrs. Boffey's mother used to sit in the kitchen looking out of the door into the passage.

At the back of the shop was a large garden and vinery which he bought and later built the Palais-de-Dance there. We used to use the Palais for storage purposes and packing the soda sugar, etc., Herbert, Mr. Boffey's brother and I used to do the wrapping there. One day Herbert put a sheet over him and came down from the warehouse, Mrs. Boffey's mother was sitting there on her chair and when she saw Herbert walk in she thought it was a ghost and she slid to the floor in a dead faint. Herbert said "Oh come on let's see what we can do", and tried to revive her. Billy was always the serious one and when he saw what had happened he said to Herbert "I've never seen such a fool as you in all my life". Herbert was Mr. Boffey's youngest brother and they were as different as chalk and cheese.

We used to sell piles of toffee and the trays were packed in the warehouse and Billy came down one day and said "I think our Herbert is going b----y daft, do you know what the silly b----er has done? I was walking through the warehouse and he got hold of a pile of trays and banged them down". Herbert would think it was me in there, he wouldn't know it was Mr. Boffey because he didn't appreciate anything like that. When I was up on the ladder getting anything down Herbert would shake the ladder to make me get down and when Billy arrived on the scene I would be in Herbert's arms.

Mr. Boffey sold a variety of confectionery, Terrys, Pascoes, Barker and Dobson, etc. Lovatts was the cheaper brand. There were boiled sweets called Wrekin Mixture, they were 1d for
Full boxes of sweets were sold to the little shops as wholesale, a box of toffee dabs was 2/­ wholesale, then the little shops would double up on that. There would be two or three dozen in a box. There were no end of little shops who had a window in a cottage and they would come and buy wholesale. Bullseyes were 2ox for a penny and good chocolates were 6d a quar­ ter. We also had a lot of customers from Dawley and Madeley and the outlying areas.

Freddy Bean bought a shop which had been a sweet shop and as there was a lot of stock which he didn't need such as chocolates, etc., he sold it to Mr. Boffey, he kept this stock in some of the bedrooms including his son Reg's room. When I was removing some of the stock once I had a taste of a lot of the liqueurs and I was ill during the night, I've never touch another one since. Next morning Mr. Boffey said "Aren't you very well Miss?" and I said "No, I've been sick all night", and he said "Yes I thought you would be".

I enjoyed working there although he was funny fellow to get on with. The staff consisted of Mr. & Mrs. Boffey, the son came in for a while after he left school, and Mr. Hadley, he came from Ison's when they closed. Ison's folded up after a good many years, they were a very big grocery company, they had travellers going all round the country taking orders. Mr. Hadley brought so much business from Ison's and that was when Mr. Boffey started with provisions, up till then he was mostly confectionery.

When he bought the Palais and we had to work in there it was terrible. I once took an oxo out of the shop and went upstairs to a girl by the name of Isaacs, she used to be the maid. As I was going up the steps I said "would you mind making me this? I'm so cold". When Mr. Boffey saw me he said "It's alright Miss I can see the steam but don't let me see it in the morning".

The only shops I can remember having heating in those days were Baxters and Olivers and they had coke stoves. People used to wrap up well then.

When I worked at Boffeys we started work at 8 o'clock and finished at 6 o'clock, if we were lucky. When it was getting near to closing time Mr. Boffey used to tuck his apron up and walk down the street to see if there were any other shops open and if they were closed we would close too. We never had any extra money even at Christmas when we worked so hard we could hardly stand, he wouldn't give us any extra, we didn't even get a Christmas bonus and the only time I got anything was one Christmas Mrs. Boffey said to me "Well we've had a very good Christmas Miss German, you may have a box of Pas­ calls chocolates", and that was the only time I ever had anything.

One Saturday Mrs. Boffey and I were so busy serving, as fast as we emptied the boxes Mr. Boffey would take them away and bring full ones, we didn't have time to take them ourselves. It was hard work, but it had to be done and people just did it, the present day youngsters don't know what it is, if I was employing anyone I wouldn't employ these youngsters because they don't want to work, even my own grandchildren would say "Oh I'm tired" before they had done five minutes, things are far too easy today. It was good training for us and we weren't afraid of work.

My mother was in service and she always used to say she wouldn't let any of us girls go into service because they were kept down. Mother always had a weakness for hats, the Mistress once called her into the drawing room to show her her new hat and asked how much it had cost, mother said it was because she looked better than the daughter, and servants should never look better than the daughter of the house, so she would not let us go into service.

When I was at Boffeys we were allowed an hour for dinner, but there were no rules and regu­ lations then and there was no union to help us.

We stocked tea and coffee but tea was more popular, the coffee was bought by the better-off people. We only had one type of tea but Morgans in the Square sold all sorts. The tea came in chests to be sold loosely, it was 2/2d a pound. One of the better class families had their groc­ ries delivered in a tea-chest. The butter came in large tubs, we had a lot of Danish butter and one very hot summer the butter melted and the sides of the box collapsed. There were no fridges in those days. We used to have farm butter as well, this was provided by the people who came into the market, it was brought in wrapped in rhubarb leaves to keep it cool, they also brought eggs and cheese. The farm butter that came on Thursday was really sold before it arrived. There was a lot of farm butter sold in the market in those days, the farmers wives made butter to sell for pin-money.
The colonies used to supply us with a lot of butter and other goods. We had bacon from Denmark and Espleys the butchers stored bacon and also Isons.

I originally got the job at Boffeys through out next door neighbour who was a good friend of Mrs. Boffey's. I stayed there for five years. Before that I worked for a fortnight at the Y.M.C.A. cafe but I was not very successful as a waitress, I dropped too many plates. After that I went to work in a shop in Crown Street it was owned by a Birmingham firm but I didn't stay there very long, I didn't like the man, he was very shifty.

They were very hard times then, both my brothers were at Priorslee Works, they were allowed six weeks then they were put off. I then went to work in Manchester, I couldn't get into business so I went on the trams. I was in digs with a girl who worked in a factory, they used to have knockers-up and at 6 a.m. we could hear them clattering along the streets in their clogs. Working in a factory the girls earned a lot more money than I did on the trams, it was clean work but they were all chesty from the fluff off the cotton.

When I was young we lived at the back of Walter Davies's on Walker Street and when I was twelve we moved to Wrekin Road. The house on Walker Street was very damp, and we were never very well you see, with my father working for Walter Davies he didn't want us to get another house. The house was built in a hollow and there were never any repairs done. We had to get all our drinking water from the pump which was on Tank Bank, near to the Fox & Hounds and not far from Edwards' barber shop. We had a wash house with running water, a boiler, sink and mangle. There was a coalhouse, a huge kitchen with a huge range, you could sit on the hobs. The kitchen had a tiled floor and John my eldest brother and myself would clean it, we went along alright till we got to the middle then there would be a fight over who had to do that patch, the bucket would be knocked over and we would have to start all over again. A pole held the bay window up, I always had a collection of dolls and when I fell out with my brothers they used to bash the dolls on this pole.

The stairs went out from the kitchen up to three bedrooms and an attic. The bedroom I slept in had no window at all, for lighting we had paraffin lamps. When we went to Wrekin Road we had gas and thought it was marvellous.

We moved to Wrekin Road to one of the bay-windowed houses which are still standing. We had an indoor lavatory and at Walker Street it was an outside earth toilet. The man came round to empty it at midnight.

Father bought the house in Wrekin Road and while we were there my mother died. My father married again seven months after. My sister Hilda had given up her job to look after us but he turned them out when he married again.

The market garden began when father bought a plot of land which is now Appledore Gardens, he bought it for £300. A man called Cecil worked the garden for him, he used to work for Walter Davies making buckets but he had an accident, he fell off his bike and hurt his head, he was off work for a long time and when he went back to work he couldn't stand the hammering of the buckets so father employed him at the market garden, and it was Cecil that made it. He worked there until father re-married. All father paid Cecil was £1 for a twelve hour day. After leaving Wrekin Road he went into digs and as I was married my husband and I set him up in those gardens up Linden Avenue, that is how he came to get it. He did very well really in such a short time but he was never really very well. He used to take buckets of flowers to the market to sell. He fell into the swimming pool on Haygate Road and drowned, he was only 34 years old. I didn't have anything to do with my father after he married again but as he was Cecil's next-of-kin he came round to the funeral. There was quite a bit of money and as my father was snext-of-kin he claimed it, then he said "Now what about the business?" and I told him I wanted it because we started Cecil off, he charged me for the cabbage plants that were there. We were agents for Yates seeds. They'd stopped dealing with father and gave it to Cecil because they were sorry for him. Father went to Manchester and stopped me having them, he said Cecil was deceased and nobody was carrying on the business so we went from Yates to Hursts of London. We did alright with them.

We packed our own seeds for sale, everything was so much more lax then. They were very good to us.

At that time we were working in our nursery in Linden Avenue. We grew larger quantities of
flowers and sold them to people going to the cemetery. We sold most of them before we went to market, the remainder went to market on a truck and half of those were sold before they arrived there. The work was very hard and it was even harder after I lost my husband, my son who was eighteen at the time thought he would like to come into the business. We used to work very long hours, I used to start at 6 o’clock in the morning and carry on until 11 o’clock at night sometimes. I loved the growing part of it but it was very hard work, there was more money to be made from greengroceries, my son wasn’t interested in growing.

There were only two markets days then, Thursday and Saturday, no Tuesday market. A Mr. Bower did all the digging and I did the sowing, at lunchtime he would go to the Haygate for a drink and cheese sandwich, really you can never replace people like him. We also had a greenhouse to look after. I kept the business going for six years after my husband died at the age of forty-four, then we went into the greengrocery business which my son wanted to do, and he went over to Birmingham to buy. We opened a shop on Dawley Road when he got married but there wasn’t a lot of scope there because it was a new estate, the market was much more successful.

Those were poor days, people didn’t have much money, the only shop to really prosper was the sweet shop, there was no post office there then and the butchers didn’t do very well. We lost money there and my son was out of work. He went to work for a chemical firm he was made redundant and set up in business for himself at Arleston.

As a child I thought Wellington was a nice place, there wasn’t much time for leisure activities then because we had to help our mothers. I was the maid, the scivvy. My pleasure was to take a bottle of water and some bread and butter up to the Ercall and make little stones houses. We didn’t have any toys in those days, I used to play lots of games that the boys played, marbles, cricket and that sort of thing, that was when I didn’t have to look after the babies.

Christmas when I was a child was so different to what it is now. We used to have nuts, oranges and apples, the apples I would exchange for the nuts. There would be a sixpenny toy from Woolworths and we thought we had the world. We didn’t have very much at all. Grandfather used to come on Saturday, there were six of us and my cousin was one on her own. He used to buy my cousin half-a-pound of sweets and half-a-pound for us but ours had to be divided between six. My cousin grew up to be ever so greedy, if you met her (going back to childhood) she wouldn’t ask you to have one of hers she would just eat the lot, I used to think that was terrible because we always had to share. One of mother’s relatives was superintendent at the cemetery and other relatives used to visit him there but didn’t visit mother, she was very hurt about it, it was because they would have to give a penny to the children and there were six of us.

We used to go to church on Sunday morning, Sunday school in the afternoon and church again in the evening. The vicar at that time was the Rev. Moor he lived at the Priory.

My father used to exhibit wild flowers at Shrewsbury Flower Show, mother used to do the flower arranging and it was my job to go to the Vicarage and ask for the lilies off the pond for the table decorations. Father also used to exhibit vegetables which he grew on an allotment at Christ Church, he also had a big garden on what is called the Alley. He was very successful at showing and I can remember making stands with tin and he would solder them, they would hold the containers. He always took first prize for the wild flowers, he walked miles to get them, flowers that you never see today. Our house was bedlam when it was getting near to Shrewsbury Show, I used to dread it, father was so bad tempered, he’d be washing all those vegetables, it was like a tip. He was a terrible man for money, anything for money. The prizes weren’t very much, the first prize was only five shillings in those days. There was a lot of competition from other people in Wellington and they would cut each others’ throats, you see it on television today how they grow these vegetables in secrecy. We were all sworn to secrecy, we dare not say how big the turnips or carrots were. All the stuff had to be on the train and it used to take two boys who he would push under the seat so that he wouldn’t have to pay their fare.

I wasn’t allowed to go to dances until I was twenty-one and then I had to take my younger sisters along with me, and if I found a boyfriend and I said I had to take my sisters home they used to dump me. These dances were held in the old swimming baths and it was covered over the winter. They held whist drives and dances there. They also held some very nice do’s at the
Y.M.C.A. and there used to be dances held at the Town Hall. I only went once to watch, our neighbour Mr. Miles was the Market Hall Inspector in those days I used to say that I would like to go and see and he used to take me so that I could peep round the corner. At the ball they used to have little programme cards and a pencil to mark off the dances. The 'nobs' of Wellington used to be there and I thought it was marvellous. They used to wear long dresses, of course as I got older they wore short dresses but I always fancied myself in a long one. They were mostly professional and business people such as Sinclairs from the ironworks, Gwynnes, Shawcrosses, Bradford the dentist, Dr. Mackie, Leaks Slaney, Williams from the Wrekin Brewery. The dance I remember so vividly was the 1914-18 Victory Ball when they all went in fancy dress.

Wellington was very snobbish in those days, they had their own little circles. There were a lot of snobs like Mrs. Stone who had the furniture business, she would walk along the pavement carrying her parasol and if any of us was playing there she would use her parasol to knock us off. When I first went to work at Boffey's she came in and Mrs. Boffey said "Miss German get Mrs. Stone a chair" and I said "I have come here to serve" and I thought I haven't come here to stick a chair under her backside. When Mr. Boffey was paying me that Friday he said "I know what it is but I came here to be a shop assistant and not to stick chairs under no one however much you pay me, I've come to work behind the counter and that is what I will do". He said "That's alright Miss I don't blame you".

There were some very poor people in Wellington at that time, I often tell my son that the poor people are better off than I am today, the working class in Wellington are better off now than the business people, if I had my time over again I wouldn't be in business because the workers are so much better off today.

I must tell you about Chidley's on Walker Street. They used to fetch the cows from Haygate Road for milking and they would bring them along Walker Street up Tan Bank to the back of the house where they had a little orchard. That was a right-of-way to the orchard which was Chidleys own. After they had grazed a bit they would be taken back to Wrekin Road. We were allotted off with our buckets and spades every time they came down. On the Monday all the pigs used to come from Smithfield and we could hear squealing all day. Espley's used to bring them up Walker Street across Tank Bank and up the side of the Barley Mow. People never raised any objections about the cattle coming through the town, it was an everyday occurrence and everyone accepted it.

I feel I must go back to the Chidleys store for a moment, it was Childley and Webb, family owned, Mrs. Chidley was a Webb and there was a son Willy, they had about ten cows. They used to go round with a little float, they would measure the milk out in a can and pour it into a jug. They covered quite a good area of Wellington. They used to fetch skimmed milk from the Sanders on Holyhead Road and the Hollybush Farm. They sold a lot of milk there no milk was T.B. tested in those days and there were no hygiene inspectors then.

If you look at films of men in the First World War you will see they were much smaller than comparison than men today. That was caused by under-nourishment.

I know in my young days we never really wanted, sometimes mother hadn't any sugar, but father was an unreasonable man and expected the world from his little bit and mother would say "Perhaps one of you children will be able to find a penny and I can buy some sugar", she was able to get the sugar and have peace when he came in. A man's full wage was only £1/7 shillings a week then. Our meals were very simple, we had bread and butter for breakfast and we had a lot of stews and soups, we could get bones which were very cheap. Two of my brothers didn't eat butter and I used to go to Heaths and get a great big bason of dripping for sixpence, everything was so much cheaper. We used to have tea to drink, there weren't so many mineral drinks like there are today, though mother made ginger beer in the summer. We were mainly brought up on vegetables but we had bread and butter and jam for tea and mother made cakes and pies, everything out of the garden was preserved, we had great big stone jars on the cellar steps, there was pickled cauliflower and pickled onions, plenty of that kind of thing, I suppose we were better fed than the average family because father was a gardener and we always had fresh vegetables, there was always plenty of salads. Most of what father grew such as potatoes, carrots, etc., lasted through the winter. We would have mashed potatoes with pickles and chitterlings and what was called fry, which we don't see today. We had a huge fireplace and in winter mother had a huge oval pan and she would get marrow bones on a Saturday, the butchers would nearly throw mutton at you because there were no
freezers then to keep it in. When we lived in Walker Street we were very handy, Saturday night we could buy it ever so cheap, it would be stewed up to make meals for the rest of the week. Every Thursday mother would go to the market and we would have tripe and onions for dinner that day. Beards used to sell it. They had a stall in the market two days a week and also a shop in High Street, you can't buy good tripe today it's like water. On Monday we used to go to Band of Hope after a day of Church on Sunday, and we would go to Espleys and they would bring the scratchings in a Danish butter tub, they would be hot and we had them in a newspaper, enough to last a week. We would go to the Band of Hope and have a good go at these scratchings and there would be enough to take so many to school each day, they were really meaty, not like the ones we buy today.

As I say meat was very cheap and I used to go to James the butchers in the market and buy a round of beef and then I would buy 1½lbs of butter and still have change from ten shillings. We always had beef for supper on Sunday but you can't afford it now. It used to smell beautiful when it was cooking, mother used to do a big tray separate of Yorkshire pudding, if anything was left over it was eaten cold on the same day. She also used to make cakes in big tins and if we told her it was nice she would give us another piece. Turkeys were kept for Christmas, they didn't rear turkeys like they do today. One thing I disliked about Christmas, father would never buy anything for Christmas dinner until Christmas Eve and then we would have to start plucking this blooming goose, they were bought live, nearly everyone bought them live, they weren't dressed like they are today.

Father used to send to Grimsby for fish, two of my brothers were working and we were a bit better off. We would get a box of fish and it would arrive on Monday morning by train packed in ice, that was called the Fish Train. As we didn't have fridges then the fish had to be eaten quickly so we shared it with our neighbours Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Duncafe.
The little shop on Mill Bank adjoining the old Roman Catholic Church.

Declaring the Poll at the Wrekin Hotel – Sir Charles Henry, Liberal. Note the shop opposite the Hotel on the corner of Market Street. At that time it was two shops, Jarvis Game and Poulterers on Market Street and Southertons the Florist facing The Square.
MRS. HILES

My father-in-law kept the Plough Inn on King Street just opposite Albert Road. Two of their children had measles very badly and they both died, they are both buried in Wellington cemetery and there is a little stone with their initials on and they are just opposite to where my mother and father-in-law are buried.

My father-in-law eventually left the Plough Inn and went to the brewery on Regent Street. It was then called Hiles Millfield Brewery, it was quite a large firm and they employed quite a few people. Winnie Haycocks father was employed there.

The beer was sold in small barrels called firkins and they were delivered by horse and cart. They supplied a lot of the pubs in Wellington.

My father-in-law had quite a ‘paddy’, the Hiles temper. He was loading lorries one day with Winnie Haycocks father, he had one load and Mr. Haycocks another but father-in-law couldn’t lift one of the barrels so he asked Mr. Haycocks to help him, Mr. Haycocks said he would when he had lifted his own barrel onto the lorry, of course father-in-law was so impatient, he couldn’t wait and as he started to lift the barrel himself, he burst a blood vessel.

My husband was only two when his father died and four when his mother died, he was the youngest of the family, there were ten years between him and his brother, his brother was fourteen, his sister Violet was sixteen and another sister was eighteen. The mother kept the business going for two years until she died. She left a will leaving the four of them £1,000 each but most of that went in solicitors fees.

After the mother died the business was discontinued and a Mr. Burden took over the guardianship of the children. Mr. Burden had been employed at the brewery, they went to live in King Street and Mr. Burden looked after my husband. When my husband left school, whoever was living in Dr. McLure’s house got him the job down at the Gas Company, he worked there for forty-three years and died when he was fifty-five. He was gassed three times and that contributed to his ill-health.

Opposite The Plough in Albert Road there was a pub called The New Inn run by a Mrs. Weaver. She had two sons, Jack and George. George worked for Dan Newell and Son as a solicitors clerk, all the girls were after George but he never married.

There are a great many changes taking place in Wellington which I don’t like, for instance, where the National Bank is now, that was the village green and there were small shops down one side of it. My husband used to remember it like that and on Saturdays he used to go to the swimming baths then round the market and later he would go up to Arthurs and buy himself a big Bath Bun.

My Uncle Charlie Ralphs kept the Rose & Crown on Bell Street where the opticians is now. He was also a bookie. I can also remember Pierces in Market Street having a bicycle shop.

There were some good old characters in Wellington, Snookes and Joker were brothers, they were cattle-drovers and I remember them very well, they lived in High Street. There was also another cattle-drover, Mr. Gillear but where he disappeared to I don’t know.

I remember the Wrekin Hotel in The Square, Mrs. Ray was the manageress, she used to have a parrot which did a lot of shouting. A lot of visitors to Wellington used to stay there. The best rooms were at the front, facing the Square. The entrance in Market Street was to the kitchens which had a very big staircase leading up the backway to the bedrooms. No one seeing it today can imagine it had once been a very grand hotel.

From my point of view there wasn’t very much to do in the evenings because I used to stay with gran. I know there used to be a very poor cinema up Market Street, downstairs was the cinema and upstairs there was a very large room which was let for wedding receptions and dancing. Mrs. Gwynne’s daughter from the shoe shop got married and had her reception there.

Before the advent of the cinema most of the entertainment took place at the Town Hall. I’ve
heard there were splendid dances held there. White drugget was laid on the floor round the
dance floor and people sat at small tables there, they were very elegant occasions then, the
men would wear kid gloves and black patent shoes with of course a tail-coat. I didn't go
to any of the dances but I've heard a lot about them. When a gentleman asked a lady to dance
he would bow and ask “May I have the pleasure?” not “Come on!” In those days girls led a
much more sheltered life and no girl would be unaccompanied, more often than not there
would be a party of people and there was usually a matron among them as chaperon.

Wellington used to be a very bustling place then but it was much safer, people could go about
their business without being mugged. It was a much happier place than it is now and it was
more like a village community.

I remember J.L. & E. T. Morgan the drapers. My cousin Nancy Ralphs used to work there.
They employed a lot of people, it was a very large shop. It was right opposite the church,
where the hairdressers is now. Old Mr. Morgan had a big moustache and a ruddy complexion
and he used to stand there with his hands behind his back and he wore a frock-coat. He also
kept a farm out Eyton way. His daughter married a naval officer, she was a very bonny girl. It
was a terrific splash, all the navy was there and half of Wellington, it was quite an event.

Going down Queen Street on the corner of Charlton Street was a house and surgery where
Dr. Hawthorne lived and worked. Dr. Wedd was another well known doctor and he lived in
New Street in a Georgian house which is now Currys. When we went to see him we would
have to walk down a dark passage which would scare us half to death. Dr. Wedd was nice but
abrupt, he was my father-in-law's doctor and also my husband's, when my husband was very
ill we were living in King Street and one day as he was getting into his car he called me over
to him and said “Of course you know your husband is like his father used to be, he is getting
through it", but we had something to put up with with his father, the Hiles have ·such a tem­
per it would flare up and then it would go as quickly as it came.

Dr. Wedd moved from New Street to Tyrone House on Church Street which had been the
home of Mr. Crane the solicitor. Mr. Crane's office became Dr. Wedd's surgery. On retirement
Dr. Wedd went to live in Crescent Road. His wife died and he was left there with his bachelor
son, his other two sons had married. He was quite old when he died.

Millfield in those days was a little narrow path, and there was a windmill there, later it
became Regent Street when the houses were built.

There were a lot of fields in Wellington, an important one was the Wool Field and the bottom
of Spring Hill (now North Road). This field belonged to Mr. Groom of Dothill. When he died he
said that the land was not be sold for houses, anyhow he had been dead so long and the
Council collared hold of it some how and that's what happened to it.

The Wool Field was a great big field and farmers used to bring all their wool to it. It was
brought in big bales and sold there, it was very interesting watching all the activity. It was a
three day sale, the great tents were erected to house all the wool. Farmers came from miles
away and mill owners would buy from there. Barbers were the Auctioneers. At the end of the
day most of the farmers would come into town to the pubs and live it up.

Where I live now was part of the Wool Field, my Aunt Morty (her birthday was on 1st May)
and we would come down to where our garden is now and pick May blossom for her. There
was no road, nothing, there were all friends all down to the bottom to Pearce's to the top of
Whitchurch Road. Tall Mr. Pearce who married Miss Barber, he used to live where the Priory
Nursing Home is now, then he moved to Whitchurch Road after a while. All the way round by
the hedges was water running, all the way down to the bottom, when they came to build the
houses they had a terrible game trying to fill that drain in. They were water meadows.

There used to be some fun in Wellington on Friday nights, we would see people queuing up at
the pawn shop which was opposite to Woolworths, they were pawning their clothes and they
would redeem them on Monday. Most of the people were local, one woman who used to live
down here was a regular hand at it. She used to have some beautiful things given her because
her husband used to spend all the money on drink. She had one child after another, so of
course everybody gave her some beautiful things. She would take them up to Wellington to
the pawn shop and have the money to live on and keep the children, and she would fetch
them out again, perhaps at the weekend.
On Sunday night there was such a commotion, Winnie Davies, she used to keep a little shop down Glebe Street, she came up shouting for all she was worth, I opened the door, and she said “Mrs. Hiles will you ring the Police to come quick, whatsis-name from next door has come in drunk and picked our milk bottles up and thrown them and smashed the windows”. Anyway Winnie’s sister came down on the Monday to wait for Hannah off the council to come, anyway he didn’t come so I had to watch out for him in the afternoon, I saw him and explained what had happened and he went to see the man and called him everything he could lay his tongue to. They evicted the family and took them to Audlem House.

Espleys was the chief pork butchers of the town (it was known as Big Espleys, because at the top of New Street was Little Espleys). They did their cooking on Mondays and when they started they had awful difficulties getting the coolers working, they would send to the gas company who would send who they could, when they got there it was such an awful job they would have to put four fitters on, my husband and three others, Harry Blockley, Harold Rowley and I can’t remember the other one, every Monday morning at 6.15 a.m. when he was on duty the phone would go and he would say “Oh that’s Espleys”. They couldn’t get the gas to work to put the hot water on, so George used to go.

Next to Espleys was Liptons the grocers, then Bates & Hunts, that was a funny little shop, it was very old fashioned with bow windows. The porter who used to do their deliveries was Mr. Hughes who lived in Ladycroft. Bates & Hunts was a very interesting chemists, they sold wine and spirits as well as the usual things. They had lovely large coloured bottles in the windows. Next came Cornishes the drapers, it was a large shop which went back a long way, they had six people serving and there was a department upstairs as well. They sold very good curtain material which attracted a lot of people.

Next to Cornishes was Sidolis. At the end of the row was Jones fish shop, then there was a turn into Yorks Yard, then there was Big Yorks shop, George Edwards, who lived next door to me in King Street worked there. Next to Yorks was Barlows the hairdressers, they also sold fancy goods. At the end where Beards the butchers is now was as chemists shop, the chemist was a very fierce looking man with jet black hair and a great big black moustache, he didn’t get on very well with anybody and people used to think he was a German spy. He married Miss Blakely and they went to live at Admaston, he was a brilliant chemist but he suddenly disappeared. Further along the top of High Street was Captain Webb’s Grammar School. Quite a lot of boys went there because they did quite well. There was another school on Mill Bank which Mrs. Owen ran, they were mostly young children. Above Webbs Grammar School was the Wesleyan Chapel, then came a lot of little shops and you had to go up a lot of steps to get to them. My cousin had one of them as a cobbler’s shop. Then there was a very narrow alley and there were houses on either side, they were a rum lot of people living there. That alley came out at Glebe Street. There was a big black and white house that stood back from Glebe Street and it had a very nice garden, my Great Aunt and Uncle lived there, and Mr. Ellis the painter lodged with them.

When granddad was a guard on the railway coming home late at night when the pubs were closed and the husbands had gone home, if you weren’t careful what you were doing going up High Street you could have a cup thrown at you, you could hear them rowing and cursing and throwing their crocks about. Granddad lived in a terraced house by Christ Church. Miss Millichap lived in one and her nephew in another.

There were some funny little cottages up High Street, quite a few were off the road, you could see the front door but there was no back door, you went down off the pavement to some of them. Heavy thunderstorms caused flooding to these.

There were also some very very old cottages on High Street, they were all built very close together. They would be rented cottage and the rent collector would collect each week, a rent book would cost a penny then.

Coming further along was Owens the pork butchers, they had their own slaughter house and shop, past that were a lot more little houses and in one of them lived Florrie Round, she had a family of fifteen children while she was living there. On the opposite side were two houses, then the Coach & Horses reached by steps, another row of little cottages, then a house with a lot of steps leading to it. There was also railing around it. Rosie Roberts lived in that house. There is a true story attached to one of the little cottages, there was a terrible smell around the cottages and the powers-that-be had all the drains up trying to find where the smell was
coming from, the houses were condemned and one of the residents was taken into a home, when the house was demolished a body was found there in a trunk, it was either his wife or his sister. After inquiries were made it was learnt she died from natural causes and after such a considerable time no further action was taken.

The Hand & Heart and the Coach & Horses were almost next door to each other, then there were two cottages and two red brick houses and a grocers shop, the shop is now an antiques shop. Past the grocers on the corner was the Red Lion.

Coming down King Street was the Girls High School, the Drill Hall where the Territorials trained and for years the K.S.K.I. trained there.

The Girls High School is the New College now. It was girls and boys, the girls in one part and boys in the other, the boys later moved up to Golf Links Lane to the Grammar School, it is now Ercall Wood School. There were scholarships in those days. Our Jean went in for it when she was ten years old but she failed on one subject, she entered for it again the following year and passed.
MRS. JONES

My husband George was apprentice to Mr. Arnold who made leather goods, his shop was next door to Lloyds Bank. Mr. Arnold made saddles, handbags and the usual leather goods. Saddles were made to measure and farmers used to take a lot of repair work in. One of the most interesting bags made there was for Dr. Jaboor for carrying his instruments. Most of the leather used came from Liverpool of Manchester. There was another saddler Mr. Roberts of Market Street but they didn’t make anything on the premises. Roberts are still in the business of selling leather goods. My husband used to make the leather satchels for Wellington High School, boys and girls but then they became too expensive so they started buying ready-made ones.

When Mr. Arnold closed down we moved to Watling Street next to Reades Garage taking over a shop which Mr. Francis kept as a greengrocery, then afterwards his brother had it, he was a grocer, my husband George then took it over opening it as a sports shop. He used to supply all of Wellington Town, we were there for about twenty-six years and then we packed up. Roger Alvally then used the shop as a school of motoring for three years, while we lived over the shop, and then we eventually came to live here.

I would like to tell you a bit about my mother, when she was eighteen she worked for a Mr. Proctor in his sweet shop up High Street between Jordans the butchers and Steventons the florists. One morning there was a traveller in the shop, Mr. Proctor was a bit of a show-off and he said to mother “Oh Lizzie you’ve got to do the washing”, so she said “Oh no I’m not doing any washing but I don’t mind doing a bit of cooking for you”. He said if she wouldn’t do the washing she could go home and mother flatly refused so she told him she would go home and home she went. At night he went up to the house and apologised to her, he asked her to return but she refused and told him she was starting her own business. A week later she got a stall in Wellington Market and bought some scales. She had just started walking out with Dad then and she hadn’t much money so Dad said “Start up and I will lend you a bit of money” and that’s how she started. She sold the first lot of sweets out on Thursday, bought more on the Friday and sold them on Saturday. She said if she didn’t make a go of it she would go into service, well she did make a go of it and she had a sweet stall on the market for 63 years and she died when she was eighty-four years old. I took over the stall when she died.

You could get 2oz or 3oz of sweets for a penny then, there were bon-bons, pear drops, hum-bugs, various toffees, the toffee usually came on trays and my hands would be sore with cracking it. The bulls-eyes were specially made for Mum by Holmes of Wolverhampton, they’re closed down now. When they arrived on the trays we used to turn them out on the trays and they never went sticky at all, they used to give them a special boiling. We no longer have the stall at the market which was under the clock, it was bought by Mrs. Pickett.

The market people in those days were very sociable, nice and friendly. We got along very well with everybody. My granddad was in the market with a greengrocery and fish stall, he also sold rabbits, skinning them himself.

Our family goes back quite some time but I haven’t bothered doing the family tree. The Dolphins were my grandparents, Mr. Dolphin the butcher and my grandfather were cousins. Mr. Dolphin was a nice man.

Granddad used to go out in the horse and cart up to Dawley and people used to come up to me and say “I remember your granddad, he used to give me an orange on Fridays”. Oranges were 1/- for twenty in those days and granddad could afford to give them to people who were buying vegetables and rabbits.

Mother said when she used to go to Dawley with him he would have the rabbits arranged round the barrels.

The outside market at Wellington was different to what it is now. The crockery man (Johnny Burrows) used to stand in the middle of a ring of crockery, you could buy a tea-set for 3/6d then, before that to attract the crowds he would sell a lot of seconds.

There used to be a fair held at Wellington at the rear of the market where the Clifton is now. During the War we had to have our stalls under the old potato market. The Market Hall was
used for storage during the War.

Mr father, Harry Teece was in business as a furniture maker having his own business in St. John Street, we lived there as well. He made reproduction antique furniture. There is a chair in Christ Church made by him. Dr. Mackie had a dining room suite with dresser and chairs made by my father, his son who had a garage in Birmingham wanted father to make him a similar one but father was too old then at seventy-two. It would take father about a week to make a chair, he was very good at carving and he taught my brother the trade as well. Father had six men working for him at one time, there was Mr. Darrell from Haygate Road, and also a Mr. Wem. I don't know how much the furniture would be worth now but the dressers were sold for about £14 then, my brother Bernard was selling them for £200 each before he died. The dressers had special names, the ones with twisted legs would be Welsh Dressers, and the other kind was a Queen Anne. One was inlaid and other wasn't.

Looking back Wellington has changed out of all recognition from when my father was alive, all the old family businesses have gone apart from Briscoe's Store, in High Street.

Furniture made by Mr. Teece of St. John Street:

a. A modern sideboard  
b. Queen Anne style dresser  
c. Hand carved chair