

Hall Cottages, Long Lane, Mulbarton

I am George Skipper, I was born on 12 October 1928 in what was then called Hall Cottages. I lived there with my parents Alfred and Lily Skipper and my brother Dick who was three years older than me. In late 1947 I moved to London and my Father and his second wife (my mother died in 1938) lived there until he died in 1958. I used to visit them until that time but from 1958 until the recent week-end I had only visited the village on one occasion.

As you probably know, the pair of cottages together with the one on the corner of Rectory Lane were part of the Mulbarton Hall estate. My Father was a chauffer and moved to Mulbarton Hall in 1920 where he lived above the harness room in the buildings that were removed to build the new school. Mother was in service for Mr Sergeant, owner of the Hall, as Head Parlour Maid. They married and moved into the cottage on a date that I am still trying to find from local records.

Mrs Massingham bought the Hall around 1927 and Dad continued as chauffer. Mr Warman was Head Gardener. The rent was five shilling per week, but when the Norwich City Council bought the Hall in 1947 when Mrs Massingham died they put his rent up to six shillings and seven pence. Dad stayed on as gardener and worked for N C C. Jill Wright kindly introduced us to your tenants Paul and Paula, what a delightful couple. When they heard that I was born in the house, they welcomed us inside and I got quite a surprise.

By the way, on my last visit to the village in 2001 I called on Michael and talked at length about our memories. He recognised me and then pointed out that we had not met since 1939 when he went into the Army. He may have seen me when I visited my Father but I didn't see him. As you say, a true gentleman. While I was there he showed me some changes and I recognised the original door between the back and front rooms. Mrs Susan Carver who we called Howes, lived there when I was at home and I knew that side of the pair of cottages quite well.

I can tell you what it was like when my family lived there. You will know of course that the garden plot used to be quite large. The width has not changed but it extended along Long Lane to somewhere near where Rosary Close is now. Dad kept lots of chickens in three large pens and the rest he used to grow vegetables except the front garden. Immediately in front of the house he grew a wonderful display of dahlias and the other side of a wide path was a herbaceous border. The other cottage had the front garden and a back garden that reached across the back of both houses to a point in line with the south wall of our house. That line also defined the centre of two toilets that were set about six feet from the hall fence. These were brick built with a sloping roof and a bucket under the seat that was emptied at a point in the garden that Dad kept for that purpose. When we looked out of the backroom window we saw Howse's chickens and a Doctor Harvey apple tree.

Directly in front of the front door of the house was our gate from the road. Enter the gate and walk toward the front door, turn left round the well to enter the yard, right into the yard and right again to face the front door. At the corner of the house was a large galvanised water tank to catch the rainwater, which we used for washing. There was an old sock on the drainpipe to filter the rainwater.

Enter the door. Immediately to the left was a table with a washing up bowl and a paraffin heater for cooking. Under the window was a square table close to the wall with four chairs. On the right was the door to the front room, which is still there. Forward to the end to find an open fireplace (this was replaced in about 1940 with a Triplex enclosed fireplace with oven over). To the right was a built-in oven with fire underneath that was used on Fridays for baking and the week-end joint. To the left was a space occupied by a free standing cupboard. Dad told me that when he first saw the house there was a built-in copper in that position with fireplace under for boiling the washing. He noticed that there was a gap between the brickwork of the copper and the back wall.

He put a long chisel in that gap and pulled, the whole lot fell on the floor at his feet. He arranged for the copper to be rebuilt in the "Wash House"

Dad reckoned that the front part of the house was about four hundred years old and the back was added later. We gathered some proof of the old outside back wall when the board covering the wall fell off and hit us on the head as we were having lunch. It revealed dead ivy growing up a wooden beam (not the one that is exposed now to the right of the door, that's always been there).

Now to the front room through the door from the back room. The right hand wall is flush with the front of the fireplace but there is a cupboard immediately to the right of the fireplace. There is another cupboard, a coal cupboard, it always smelled of musty coal, to the left of the fireplace. In the front wall there is a window, as now; then comes the front door, which was only opened when we had a visit from the doctor. On the wall opposite the fireplace is the door to the pantry; along to the left was and still is the original staircase. There were no useable walls in this room with six doors all in use. The east - west main ceiling beam has always been exposed.

Upstairs we pass our books on the shelf on the landing, which was simply a studded partition taking up part of the room to leave an L shape. The front window was as it is now, that must have been some good wood. Of the two current windows in the south side, only the right hand one existed. I knew there was a fireplace in this room but it was always covered by a board. Now to the back room. This was our bedroom so as the youngest and shortest I had the low side. The house was condemned before the war due to the low ceiling in this bedroom. The two beams have always been exposed but were whitewashed.

There was no electricity in the house until 1946. Drinking water came from the well (also used to keep butter fresh in the summer), washing water came from the water tank at the corner of the house. The space between the house and the brick building across the yard was empty. The room across from the back door had a fireplace and a built-in copper that was used every Monday for the washing or for Saturday night baths. Under the window facing the house was a table to take the large wash baths for the laundry; the rest of the space was taken up by a pram and bicycles. The next room was the shed. As you enter the door, in front to the left there were four bins holding chicken food. To the right under the window was a workbench, and in the far corner was a large heap of coal. A ladder was leaning toward a small door in the gable end and either side of the ladder was a loft area for storing apples, pears etc.

The sole heat source for the house was the open fireplaces. The back room (kitchen) fire was burning all the time and the front room fire only at Christmas time. In the wintertime Dad would say that it was nearly as cold outside as it was in the house. Lighting was by paraffin lamps and candles.

I hope this may fill in a few gaps in your knowledge about the old house.
Regards, George Skipper
(11 Sep 2009)