

MEMORIES OF UTTOXETER (1919-1990)

DORA FOWLES, NEE LEVEY (1912-2000)

FOREWORD

I came to know Dora Fowles, nee Levey in the early 1990s when she was in her eighties and living at Hawthornden Crescent, Uttoxeter. She was a regular contributor of old postcards to the local Uttoxeter newspapers. She was a keen photographer and during the 1960s and 70s she regularly took slide photos of Uttoxeter events and scenes. She was best known for her shop The Beehive an art and needlework shop at the corner of the High Street and Bradley Street. Soon after I met her I started writing down her memories of Uttoxeter with the intention of publishing them in a book along with those of Ernest Martin Mellor the Uttoxeter chemist and John Walker the Uttoxeter baker. Unfortunately circumstances at the time prevented this happening but I am very happy that Dora's memories can now be published online to be read by probably a lot more people than would have read the book. Dora gave me her slide collection to do with what I wished. Some I donated to Staffordshire PastTrack the county council's online photographic record and can now be seen at the click of a mouse. Some appear in this memoir. The majority were given to John Walton of Uttoxeter for his Museum of Uttoxeter artefacts which now operates from his museum at Beamhurst and is run by John with the help of his wife Laura and daughter Bethany. Laura has recently converted the slides to photos and put digital versions on the museum computer. Dora's efforts were not in vain and her photos and memories are now saved for posterity. Dora died in 2000 aged 88.

Jim Foley 2013

DORA FOWLES' STORY

I was born Dora May Levey on 30 July 1912 at The Cottage, Hinchbrooke Castle, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire where my father Arthur Levey was head gardener for Lord Sandwich whose ancestor the 4th Earl of Sandwich gave his name to the common sandwich. My mother Mabel Warren came from Huntingdon and was a tailoress for the Ladies' Court in London. It was in Huntingdon that she met my father who originally came from Orpington, Kent. I had a younger sister Nancy, born in 1916 who is a retired nurse and now aged 80 lives in Bromsgrove. My father was a soldier in the Great War of 1914-1918. When he returned home after the war he found his job as a gardener with Lord Sandwich had gone and he had lost his house which went with the job. He heard about a position as gardener for Captain Henry John Bamford of Oldfields Hall, Uttoxeter and applied for it. He was successful and with the job came the tenancy of Oldfields Cottage opposite the Hall. Captain Bamford eventually married Miss Wood and they had six children, John, Sue, Patricia, James and twins Robin and Gillian who survived their mother's tragic death during childbirth. Tragically many years later James and Robin were killed in an air crash while going on a skiing holiday to Austria. George Orme's son David was also killed in the crash. Sue Bamford, now Mrs Deaville, lives in Doveridge, Gillian now Mrs Sandy lives off Hale Road, the late John Bamford's wife, Dilys, nee Quinell, lives in Balance Street and Pat Bamford lives in Walton on the Hill, Stafford.



Oldfields Hall when it was the home of Captain Henry John Bamford

My home life was extremely happy. Although my parents had very little money we never went short and they were a happy couple. Part of my father's wages was our accommodation at Oldfields Cottage and he was also entitled to fruit and vegetables free.



**Oldfields Cottage opposite Oldfields Hall, Stone Road.
The home of the Levey family.**

We had a wonderful choice – peaches, nectarines, passion fruit, cherries, strawberries, raspberries, grapes and all the usual vegetables as well as asparagus and sea kale. Our meals were substantial in those days. We had stews, dumplings, bacon and eggs, boiled suet puddings, lots of vegetables and potatoes, homemade bread and cakes, rice pudding and porridge to name a few and all cooked on the old iron range.



Dora Fowles with her parents Arthur and Mabel Levey in the 1970s in the back garden of Oldfields Cottage 1963.

My father's hobby was bee keeping. My sister and I helped him turn the handle of the extractor to get the honey from the combs. The honey was then transferred to a ripener and when it was ready to put into jars we helped again. If there was a swarm of bees my mother blew a whistle and my father would come from the nearby gardens of Oldfields Hall to deal with the swarm. If ever there were any swarms of bees in Uttoxeter my father was always the man they fetched to deal with them. While waiting for my father to come to a swarm in our own garden my mother used to syringe the bees with water to keep them from flying off or flying too high. When I was a child there were deer in Oldfields Park where the Leisure Centre now is. When they got out of the Park my father had to sort it out and get them back. My mother having been a tailoress for the Ladies' Court in London we were naturally brought up to sew. My mother never bought any clothes as she always made them herself. We had 6d a week pocket money. In those days the lavatory or toilet as it is called nowadays was outside and we had to draw our water from a well.

When I was a girl living at Oldfields Cottage there were no houses in Holly Road. My friend Olive James, Bob Barker's aunt, lived at Copes Park Farm in Byrds Lane and the only other house was The Moorlands near the corner of Holly Road where Mrs Harris, who had an ironmongers shop in Market Square, lived. The rest was all fields. Uttoxeter Town Council bought Copes Park Farm for building and soon after the council houses were built there. Weaver Lodge was then a house owned and lived in by Robert Bamford with his wife whose maiden name was a Hawthorn. Mr Hawthorn, a solicitor in the Market Place, lived there after them and now it is a pub. At the end of Grange Road at its junction with Holly Road was the Workhouse for people with no homes or people who were on the road. In those days there were many homeless tramps about. Hawthornden Manor was owned by another branch of the Bamford family, Samuel Bamford who also married a Hawthorn. Later it was bought by Sam Elkes of Elkes Biscuits fame and later sold for development.

The Hermitage Rest Home on Holly Road was given to the town by a member of the Bamford family, Dr Charles Bamford. After his death in 1934 his wife Mary Ellen Bamford had the eight black and white bungalows in Holly Road built for old and distressed people of Uttoxeter to be run by a trust. Joseph Bamford lived at St. Mary's Mount in Holly Road now a retirement home. He was the grandfather of Joseph Cyril Bamford who founded JCB the now world-renowned makers of earth moving machines. There was also a member of the Bamford family, Samuel's son, who lived at Eversley House in Bramshall Road. In those days everyone looked up to the Bamfords who were Catholics and many people became Catholics because of this.

The Harley Jones family lived at Heath House when I was a child. It is now a clinic. Mr Rushton had a greengrocer's shop in Carter Street and also went round the streets with his horse Billy and his cart selling groceries. He would be out quite late at night on his rounds and had a lamp so that people could see his produce.



Mr Rushton delivering fruit and vegetables in Hawthornden Close with Hawthornden Manor behind.

Mr Lewis ran a taxi service from premises in New Street. His wife used to play the piano at the old cinema, the Flea Pit we called it, down Queen Street. The films in those days were silent and had no sound whatsoever so Mrs Lewis provided a musical background varying the music and the tempo according to what was happening on the screen. The cinema, which was owned by Mr.Thorley, was very popular.



Queen Street, Uttoxeter late 1960s.

There were lots of interesting shops in Uttoxeter in those days. Brisbournes, Ormes, Wilks, Wadhams were all good drapery shops. There was a bakehouse at the bottom of Smithfield Road owned by the Parker family. There was also a fish and chip shop. There were two little bakery shops in the High Street, one owned by the Misses Turvey which was popular for its College Cake and the other by Misses Marsh and Sandham which made lovely homemade bread and cakes. In a row of shops across the bottom of Market Place Miss Heath had a high class drapers shop and Mr Wood had a high class grocer's shop which sold wonderful home-made gingerbread. He eventually moved to the High Street where the old electricity shop had been. Mr Deaville had a little grocery shop in Carter Street and later moved to Windsor Road where it is now run by Mr Madan. There were many high class shops years ago in Uttoxeter. Mr McCann had a photographic shop up from the Town Hall where the Lunn Poly Travel Agency shop is now. There was Byatts the grocers, Pakemans, also grocers, in Market Place and Sam Elkes had his café and cake shop at the corner of High Street and Carter Street. There was also a room there for meetings called the Hadden Room. When the biscuit business expanded they moved to Elkes Biscuit Factory on the Ashbourne Road. Mrs Byatt was the landlady at the Royal Oak pub in the High Street. At the top of Bridge Street was a little watch and repair shop run by Mr Woolley. I had a watch from him for my 21st birthday. It's still going. Mrs Potter had a very nice shop at the top of Bridge Street. The Wheatsheaf pub was owned by Mrs Barker, Bob Barker's grandmother. Mr Ernest Mellor had a chemist shop in the Market Place. His eldest daughter Janet was an optician. He had two other daughters Margaret and Gwyneth.

Many years ago there were two Penny Bazaars in the High Street. Mrs Becks had a sweet shop where Woolworths now is. Mr Fox had a garage where the carpet shop now is in Smithfield Road. Chells had a butcher's shop where the Orange Mobile phone shop is today. There were two fresh fish shops in town. Now there are none. There was a pawn shop in the town owned by Mr Bowler. On Mondays people took their Sunday Best, the clothes they only wore on Sundays, and pawned them and on Saturday fetched them back again. Mr Vernon Cotterill, nicknamed the Mad Butcher, is a real character and knows a lot about Uttoxeter during the past 45 years. He had a butcher's shop in the High Street for many years. Previously he worked for Deaville's Butchers. His wife Nurse Cotterill, nee Jefferey, was District Nurse for years with Nurse Bell. There have been many changes in the town since I was a child in the 1920s.

Wednesdays in olden times were always busy in Uttoxeter as it was Market Day and all the farmers for miles around came to town with their wives. There were no lorries or tractors with trailers to bring in the cattle so they were herded along the roads to the cattle market at the Smithfield Market as it was called at the back of the Town Hall. There was always panic on those days as the cattle were arriving or leaving the Smithfield Market and high panic when the bull gates were opened. Everyone rushed to the nearest house for shelter. We had many shop windows broken when the bulls saw their own reflection in the glass fronts and charged at what they believed were rival bulls. On the first Wednesday of the year a special market called the Gayboy Market or Gawbies' Fair was held in Uttoxeter. Farmhands and servant girls looking for work would gather in the Market Square and local farmers would choose suitable workers from those gathered. Usually they were contracted for a year and only paid at the end of the year but would have free board and lodging at the farm or house where they were employed. It was also called a Servants' Market and there would be a fun fair with swings and various stalls. Another market was the Damson Market held in Balance Street. The street would be full of horses and carts from surrounding farms and villages with damsons for sale.



The busy scene in Balance Street on a Fruit Market Day.

On Boxing Day the Market Place was full of huntsmen and women and their hounds from the Meynell Hunt. When they met the Market Square was always packed with onlookers. It was a lovely sight to see the meeting in the Market Place.

Wakes Monday was always a holiday. Wakes Cakes were a favourite in those days and I think Mr Walker still makes them. The Wakes Sports took place on Oldfields Sports Ground and my father was always involved in the organisation. My father was a good sportsman, was a soccer referee and served on all the local sports committees.



The Uttoxeter Carnival Sports Committee in 1925. My father Arthur Levey is seated on the extreme left.



One of the floats at Uttoxeter Carnival in 1925.

My father continued working for Captain Bamford until he was well into his seventies and we continued to live at Oldfields Cottage. Oldfields Hall was eventually sold to Staffordshire County Council in the late 1950s and became Oldfields Hall Girls' School. It is now a Middle School for boys and girls.

There were no buses in those days and everyone walked or biked. Farmers had their horse and carts and pony and traps. Goods arrived by train at Uttoxeter Station. Mr Beech and Mr Leadbeater who worked for the railway brought the goods to the shops on a van or horse-drawn cart. It was wonderful when Stevensons started running the Circular Bus Service. What a luxury it was after years of walking or cycling.

I went to Heath School, now renamed St Mary's First School where Mr Land was the headmaster. Teachers whose names I remember were Miss Marshall, Miss Adams, Miss Woolman and Mr Harold. There were other teachers whose names I can't recall. We were taught English, Arithmetic, Geography, History, Religious Education and Writing. Girls were taught sewing and cooking, laundry and how to look after a baby. We were also taught to knit socks whilst boys were taught woodwork.

We all walked to school for 9 o'clock, went home for dinner and finished at 4 p.m. The children from Bramshall and Stramshall walked to school as there were no buses in those days and brought sandwiches for their dinner. We had no homework and no books to carry to school. We did P.T. – Physical Training in the school yard. We girls wore black stockings and shoes, navy blue gym dresses and blouses and if our hair was long we had to tie it back.

Each year Mr Bagshaw of Bagshaws Auctioneers paid for all the school children to go to Alton Towers which in those days had no rides or amusements but had wonderful gardens. It was a lovely place to walk around and have a picnic. We went on the train from Uttoxeter Station on the Churnet Valley Line to Alton Towers. Mr Bagshaw gave each child 6d to spend. It was a wonderful day which we all looked forward to.

Close by to our school there was a little sweet shop run by Mrs Blore next to Windmill Row. We children would visit it for sweets at lunchtime and on our way home. The sweetshop was owned by

Mr and Mrs Henry Gerrard who lived there. There used to be an old windmill called Heath Windmill nearby. In the 1920s when only the bottom half of the mill remained it was demolished and William Austin used the bricks to build his house in Holly Road. The games we played years ago were Hopscotch, Whip and Top, Skipping, Hide and Seek, Blind Man's Bluff, Charades, Rounders, Tiddlewinks, Draughts, I Spy and Patience. After I left school in 1927 an open air swimming pool was built at the Recreation Ground. It lasted for many years until an indoor one was built.

Sunday School was held in the Church. All the children sat in the gallery. There was an elderly teacher, Mr Mellor, who sat at the back with a long pole. When he saw us talking he tapped us on the shoulder with the pole. The vicar was in the pulpit which was very high and it meant he could watch us all. We went for long walks as part of Sunday School either mornings or afternoons. When we went to church at night we were not allowed to knit or sew and we had to keep quiet. Our Sunday School outing was to the Stepping Stones at Dovedale. Again we went there by train from Uttoxeter. I remember the donkeys taking us across the River Dove were trained to stop in the middle of the river so you could enjoy the view. I belonged to a Bible Class run by Miss Elliott and Miss Hodson who were teachers at Bradley Street School. A Church Youth Group was started by the Rev Prince. We met weekly and walked to the villages to have services in their churches. Our charity work was for the Mission to Seamen.

In the 1930s I became a Cub Mistress and ran my own Cub group. We met in an old wooden building at the back of the Lion Buildings near the War Memorial. My cubs took part in the annual scout concert. We had to stop our meetings during the Second World War as we were not allowed to meet at night. I was also a Sunday School Teacher and continued until I married in 1948. I joined St John Ambulance and eventually became secretary and officer-in-charge. During the war we manned the First Aid Post day and night at the stables at Hawthornden Manor on Stone Road.

Because I was working during the day I did three nights a week. I also helped on the mobile ambulance. The British Legion building was the base for the America Doughnut Dig-out. Volunteers served doughnuts and drinks to American soldiers and airmen billeted in Uttoxeter and the surrounding area. There was an American base at Cheadle and a special bus collected them and brought them to Uttoxeter.

After the war one of our duties was to attend race meetings at Uttoxeter Racecourse. We were paid 10/- for the day which was a lot of money in those days. That was the only duty for which we received remuneration. All the rest was voluntary. I went with one of the other St. John Ambulance officers to see a Comforts Depot they had opened in the Potteries. As a result we opened one in Balance Street where people could borrow items like wheelchairs, crutches, commodes etc. There is still a Comforts Depot at the St John Ambulance H.Q. in Carter Street.



Shops on Uttoxeter High Street with the Art & Needlework Shop on the corner. The house next to Titley's was once the Midland Bank and the house beyond it was once a preparatory school called Ladbroke House.

In 1927 when I was fifteen I left school and started work for Mrs Harris at the Beehive Drapery Shop where Titleys used to trade, nearly opposite the Methodist Chapel on the High Street. In those days work started at 8.30 a.m. with one hour for dinner, half an hour for tea and you then worked through until 6 p.m. on two nights, 7 p.m. on two nights, 1 p.m. on Thursdays and 8.30 p.m. on Saturdays. The wages were 2/6d per week. The equivalent in today's money would be 15 pence but you could buy a lot more with 2/6d in those days than you could with 15 pence today.



Dora outside The Beehive in Bradley Street in 1962.

No seats were provided which meant you were on your feet all day and there was no morning coffee. When the Second World War started so did early closing as it was impossible with wartime shortages to black out the shops. Mrs Harris had two daughters, Amy and Nellie and a son Harold.



The shop on the corner of High Street and Bradley Street in December 1962.

I stayed with Mrs Harris at the Beehive for twenty five years. When Mrs Harris died the shop was bought by Fred Fowles and his wife Ruby. I stayed on and worked for them. They had one son Morris who spent thirty years at sea and was a captain for B.P. on their oil tankers. When Mrs Fowles died I continued to work for her husband Fred and eventually we married at Bramshall Church on 21 June 1948. I was 35. Fred had multiple sclerosis but was a wonderful happy person. Fred bought the shop on the corner of Bradley Street and High Street which previously had been a grocer's shop owned by Mr Howkins and before that had been a watchmaker's shop owned by Mr Yates. We ran The Beehive and the corner shop and had ten happy years together before Fred died on Christmas Eve 1958. Morris my stepson is now himself retired and visits me regularly. He has a son and daughter and four grandchildren. I stayed on at The Beehive for six months after Fred died and sold it to Titleys the electrical goods retailers. I continued to run the Art, Needlework and Wool shop until I retired in 1972 and it was taken over by Mr Lyne. The building was reputed to be very old. It had deep cellars and a big attic. There were narrow staircases to a big attic which had a concrete floor. It was said that there was a tunnel from the cellars to the old Manor House nearby.

I retired when I was sixty in 1972. I've lived in Hawthornden Close for thirty seven years. Mr Rushton with his horse and cart delivering fruit and vegetables was a regular on the streets of Uttoxeter over the years. Once a week he came here and was as regular as clockwork and in all weathers.

For years I was a member of the W.R.V.S. and did Meals on Wheels. In those days we met each Wednesday in Church Street opposite the church. There we sewed, sorted out and planned. I have been a member of the Old Peoples' Welfare Committee for many years. We give a party for the housebound and a £5 voucher to the needy for Christmas. We raise the money by holding coffee mornings at Wilfred House where the committee holds its meetings. I also go each month to the Blind Peoples' Day Centre and have attended this for twenty years. As I can't do much now I help with the sandwiches. The Blind Group are self-supporting and come to the meetings from quite far away. It is a lovely afternoon for them at Wilfred House. When Wilfred House first opened I helped serve refreshments every day. As the older folk stopped coming the scheme eventually finished. I used to belong to the W.I., the Flower Club and the Widows Club but had to give them up. I still go

to church every Wednesday to help at a stall at our coffee mornings. I usually do all the sewing for that. I used to be a keen amateur photographer and took many slides of Uttoxeter over the years mostly from the 1960s and 70s and include street scenes, the annual Uttoxeter Carnival, the demolition of Bunting's Uttoxeter Brewery building where The Maltings Shopping Centre and car park now are and the opening of Uttoxeter's first launderette in the late 1960s by the Coronation Street star Elsie Tanner.

Dora Fowles, nee Levey, Hawthornden Close, Uttoxeter 1992.

Dora Fowles died on July 17, 2000 aged 88.

Below are a few examples of Dora's slides. Some of these can be seen on Staffordshire PastTrack. A number of slides were donated to John Walton of Beamhurst Museum.



The crowd awaiting the arrival of Coronation Street Star Pat Phoenix – Elsie Tanner - to open the Launderette in Smithfield Road in the late 1960s.



The old Bunting's Brewery just before it was demolished.



Buntings old Brewery building being demolished seen from the first floor window of The Beehive, Bradley Street.



Summer Buggy one of the floats at Uttoxeter Carnival in June 1969.

Memories collected by Jim Foley in 1992.
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