

BETTY WASKETT



30 years ago I came to the village which was to dominate the rest of my life.

I was born and lived most of my life on the other side of The Forest and had never heard of Damerham. As the other older properties around our then home at Butts Ash disappeared under housing estates we decided to sell up and move further out. A chance perusal of the local paper led us to look at the cottage which became our home for 21 happy years. We visited the village on a sunny summer afternoon and it reminded us at once of the happy years we spent in the South of Ireland. Unspoilt by horrid road signs (there was one old finger post on the grassy triangle in the centre of the road to South End - Both alas gone under tarmac) with a population of around 400 - mostly local families and only 18 children at the school and everyone seemed to be related to everyone else! - just like Ireland.

Each morning and evening I walked with my dogs on Ashridge- then a wonderful unspoilt place. The only person I ever met up there was Ralphie, the woodsman, many animals, deer, hare - a huge badger set, all kinds of fungi and wild plants - no horrid alien plants and birds.

It was a perfect place. Along the top ran a footpath - once an ancient 'green road' which went down to the site of the original village at what is now called 'The Common'.

Presumably the village grew around 'Holywell', a spring never known to dry up. When the

Black Death plague arrived the village was destroyed and the survivors moved to the present site of the village, one old habitation survived, known to us as 'Fred's Shed'.- it has now been adapted to modern living.

Rising up past our cottage was the lane known as 'Nodden's Hill'. The name probably derived from Wotan or Odin. Under the garden at Hilltop Cottage is a paved floor of great antiquity - maybe the remains of an old place of worship. Maybe the Vikings were there - we know they came up the river to Fordingbridge.

Ashridge has a secret area with piles of oyster shells, pieces of ancient pottery and mosaic. On a winters day a shadow picks out the site of the old road which lead to a Roman camp. In my garden I often dug up pieces of ancient lead glazed pottery, (I was a potter for many years and know something of it's structure). Maybe there was once a potter working nearby or perhaps it was just a rubbish tip. The old chalk pit, that was our garden, had been used for many centuries. Ashridge is on a clay soil and on the Daggons side are the remains of pits where clay was dug out for the famous Verwood Potteries.

Most of our end of the village belonged to the Damerham Parva and is now known as Manor Farm. After the first world war the land and cottages were sold - ours changed hands for £40! There were 4 cottages, with one well for water, in what became our garden and a chalk cob cottage, opposite our gate, which stood until the late 1960's. There was a very pretty chalk cob cottage on the road side at Greenbanks which was destroyed in the 1970's when the new house was built.

Due to health problems we made the sad decision to leave and move to Fordingbridge but Damerham will always be my home.

Although it has changed much I still look on it as my place and it's people my family. I belong - and if when I'm dead you see a ghost on Ashridge - it will be me with my little dog - back home again!