

The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm

The house was quiet and the world was calm.
The reader became the book; and summer night

Was like the conscious being of the book.
The house was quiet and the world was calm.

The words were spoken as if there was no book,
Except that the reader leaned above the page,

Wanted to lean, wanted much most to be
The scholar to whom his book is true, to whom

The summer night is like a perfection of thought.
The house was quiet because it had to be.

The quiet was part of the meaning, part of the
mind:
The access of perfection to the page.

And the world was calm. The truth in a calm
world,
In which there is no other meaning, itself

Is calm, itself is summer and night, itself
Is the reader leaning late and reading there.

--Wallace Stevens

Budgies

Tuesday, 22nd April 1952 Discovered 2 blue
Budgies. Showery weather. Cherry blossom
nearly over. Strong wind last night blew off
lot of apple fruit spurs.

Friday, 2nd May 1952 Howland will take all
the Budgies. Showery violent rain at times.
Dick asked us to mind their dog, 'Incline',
for the weekend...

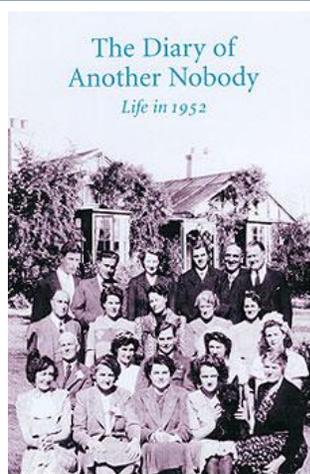
3 more Budgies out, 7 in all. Another egg.
Bill didn't fetch Audrey's mother because
they are expecting Aunt Ethel. Audrey did a
lot of weeding. ...

Cesspool

Thursday, 6th June 1952 Cesspool emptied.
Friday, 6th June 1952 Finished cutting the
front hedge. Saturday, 7th June 1952 Lovely
day. ...

Budgie died. Very busy at work with Eddie
on holiday. Cut down old canes among
raspberries. Watered them and plum tree
with cesspool water. ...

Spent evening watering - particularly the
Victoria plum with water from the cesspool.
Took Mike to his Nan Nan's and had lift
home in Mr. George's Sunbeam ...



The Diary of Another Nobody: Life in 1952 gives a fascinating account of British rural life in the early 1950s from the quietly observant pen of Hubert Arthur Berry, a working class Englishman living in Flackwell Heath, Buckinghamshire. Neighbours, friends and family were very dependent on each other. There was no telephone, motor car or television. It snowed in the winter. The summers were hot. The garden was cultivated to subsidise the food bill and to get fresh vegetables and fruit, still a scarcity after the war. Sugar, tea and coal were still rationed. Recreation included playing games, evening walks and a pint; there were no less than seven Public Houses in this small village. The wife was a mother and housewife - and very few mothers went out to work. Relatives and friends called almost daily to socialise.

Mrs Foster

Started to clear centre bed ready for turfing. Wednesday, 9th July 1952 Fine day. Started to dig out patch in centre of garden. Mrs Foster, 17 Buckingham ...

Mrs Foster is very good. David is a bit niggly this evening. Hope he sleeps well! Thursday, 18th September 1952 Fine day. All well. Very cold last night. ...

Mrs Foster paid off today. Wednesday, 8th October 1952 Fine day but very misty. Mike is very good. Audrey managed quite well. Terrible train crash at Harrow ...

Audrey

Audrey burnt tarts and spoilt cake - curse the cooker. Friday, fourteenth April 1952 (Good Friday) Two cars and a motor cycle combination in the drive for birthday ...

Audrey did spring cleaning. Another Budgie, 16 in all. Tuesday, 22nd April 1952 Discovered 2 blue Budgies. Showery weather. Cherry blossom nearly over. ...

She also laid some lino in the lavatory and Mike's bedroom. Tuesday, 29th April 1952 Audrey and Mike and I went to Gill and Don's. ...

Audrey spring cleaned Mike's and the spare bedroom. They look better! Tuesday, 6th May 1952 Showery and rather cold again. Rather worried about Apple ...

Audrey spring cleaned the hall. Wrote asking for cesspool to be emptied. Tuesday, 13th May 1952 Fine warm day. Audrey's Mother and Father brought us Aster, ...

Wycombe

He attended Wycombe Technical Institute (now The John Hampden Grammar School). ...

... and a nearby train station; a transport system that could take you shopping to the main town, High Wycombe and to the place of work four miles away. ...

Must be lovely at Branscombe. Mike and I in bathing costumes. Desultory work in garden. Went to Wycombe in the morning and took mangle to be mended. ...

Mike

Planted main crop potatoes. Mike pulled up clematis. Mac and Dick for tea followed by my Mother and Audrey's Ma and Pa. Went for a pint with Bill. ...

...3rd April 1952 Showery weather. Budgie died, leaves 15. Not being fed. Audrey bought a coat from Maidenhead - went with Mother and Peggy and Mike. ...

She also laid some lino in the lavatory and Mike's bedroom. Tuesday, 29th April 1952 Audrey and Mike and I went to Gill and Don's. ...

Mike went to Nan Nan's. Audrey spring cleaned Mike's and the spare bedroom. They look better! Tuesday, 6th May 1952 Showery and rather cold again. ...

Nan Nan (Grandmother)

Am taking Mike to his Nan Nan's this morning. Wondered should we buy an Easter present for Suzanne. The blossom is nearly out. Blast the rain! ...

Mike went to Nan Nan's. Audrey spring cleaned Mike's and the spare bedroom. They look better! Tuesday, 6th May 1952 Showery and rather cold again. ...

Mike went to his Nan Nan's today. Audrey spring cleaned the hall. Wrote asking for cesspool to be emptied. Tuesday, 13th May 1952 Fine warm day. ...

Mike went to his Nan Nan's. Audrey sprung clean the lavatory and bathroom. Insurance man called. I bought pair of sandals Tuesday, 20th May 1952 Wet day.

How do we see the 1950s now?

Some American views: Prosperity, suburbia, smiling Eisenhower, cars with tail fins, Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, "golden age" of TV; McCarthyism, atomic bomb 'shadow', war in Korea, Soviet threat, Sputnik, Nikita Khrushchev, Castro in Cuba, Reds in North Korea, Vietnam, and China, integration and bussing in Montgomery, Alabama, and Little Rock, Arkansas, the "beats," jazz, emergence of rock 'n' roll, Jackson Pollock, civil rights, environmentalism, the counterculture, "movements" on behalf of women, Latinos, and Native Americans.

Some British views: austerity, stuffiness, rationing, TV, washing machines, spivs, Nasser and the Suez Crisis, Khrushchev, Castro and the Cuban Missile Crisis...



Another life in Flackwell Heath in the 1950s

Sally Scagell: A 1950s and 1960s childhood

(An abridged version of the following appears in Ottakars Local History of High Wycombe)

My earliest memories are of the house and garden in Flackwell Heath where I started out in life although, to be precise, I was actually born in the old Wycombe Shrubbery Maternity Hospital on Amersham Hill. The view that would have met my newborn eyes as I was held up at my nursery window in Fennels Way would have been of the cows in Fennels Farm fields, opposite, and the distant view

of the rooftops of the council estate along Oakland Way.

Both my parents were born in High Wycombe, my mother was a member of the Skull furniture family, and so our connections to the town were deeply rooted, with aunts and uncles, cousins and cousins-once-removed scattered liberally across the Buckinghamshire landscape. All my parents' generation had gone through the war and my older sister, Wendy, and I were brought up against a background of lingering wartime austerity, Wendy being one of the last babies to experience rationing.

My parents started their married life in Marlow, but moved to Flackwell Heath in 1955. Flackwell Heath was still a quiet backwater, lying virtually undisturbed in the Chiltern Hills between Marlow and High Wycombe. Much of the land was farmed and there still existed some of the orchards for which the village was famed. Access to much of the area was by tiny country lanes and the main routes – Treadaway Hill and Blind Lane – were narrow and steep. Loudwater railway station, on the Wycombe to Bourne End line, was popular with local London commuters, the M40 not yet having been constructed and the idea of 'one family, one car' still a distant dream. The connecting road to Daws Hill Lane was still to be built and the only way to get to Wycombe from that end of the village, if you wished to avoid the London Road, was down the lane past Hard-to-Find Farm and along through the woods until you saw daylight again at the

American Air Force base. This was a circuitous route to say the least and so the main route to Wycombe was down Treadaway Hill, or one of the tiny lanes which ran down the chalk hillside into the Wye Valley, and then onto the London Road below.

Flackwell Heath was divided into two parts, Northern Woods at the top of Whitepit Lane, and the main village at the top of Treadaway Hill. Neither the Carrington nor the Juniper Hill schools had been built and the children of the village were taught in the small Victorian school house on the corner of Swains Lane. The village centre, (already well endowed with four pubs not to mention another two – one at either end), had a general store, originally known as Jennings and later Luttmans, which was part grocers, part butchers, part bakers and part post office. There was also Wilks drapery shop, Stapeleys the chemists, Chettles the newsagents and a little shop near The Magpie pub for miscellaneous items and always referred to as Dolly Walker's. However, for serious shopping you needed to catch the No 25 bus into Wycombe.

High Wycombe in those days was still relatively small compared to the urban sprawl that it has now become. There was a cattle market once a week by the Guildhall, a street market in the High Street twice a week and there was half-day closing on Wednesdays. The principal shop was probably Murrays department store but the Co-op, Woolworths and Marks and Spencers were all close seconds. There were several clothes shops – I remember my mother regularly visiting one in White Hart Street – and of course my father's shop, J.G. Peace Ltd, Tailors and Outfitters. His main competition was with Hull, Loosely and Pearce and with Woods, as all three sold school uniforms (though, alas, never the ones that we needed). The telephone number of the shop was High Wycombe 23, just to give some indication of how small-town it all was.

Most of my clothes at this time came from the Ladybird range in Murrays childrenswear department. I loved going to Murrays because they had a Noddy and Big Ears rocking machine that cost only a few pence for a ride. Our shoes were Clarks or Startrites and came from a shop along Easton Street. My memories of Wycombe are all triggered by things that would have been inevitable lures to a child – the roundabouts, slide and swings on the Rye, for example, which were more exciting then than they are today – health and safety is always at a cost! The ice cream booth, on the way to the Rye Clinic from the swings, and the rocking horse in the clinic itself were also great attractions, though not the experience of receiving your first polio inoculation! I have a vivid recollection of throwing up an entire tube of Smarties at the horror of what had befallen me.

Our shopping jaunts into Wycombe often included lunch in Lyons. I always had sausage and mash and my sister a bowl of watery tomato soup and a side plate of chips. This is where my father would often come for his lunch since it was only just across the road from Town House, his shop in Castle Street. One day he found that the interior of Lyons had been altered and the hatstand removed. He hurriedly wrote a letter of complaint and the hatstand was immediately reinstated.

We were rarely allowed in my father's shop during working hours but my memories of it are vivid, particularly its smell. Apart from the damp mustiness of the stores and washrooms there was always a smell of furniture polish in the shop itself. It had a red and white chequered linoleum floor and highly polished wood fixtures and fittings which probably account for this. Once a week after school my sister and I would be collected by my mother and be whisked along Birdcage Walk to the top of Castle Street. We would stop and buy cakes for tea from the bakers

on the corner, a cream meringue for me and a chocolate éclair for Wendy. Then we would be taken along to Town House and up to the room on the first floor next to the secretary's office – we could hear Mrs Paige typing up the invoices. Here we would have our cakes and a glass of milk before my mother took us to the ballet class held at the Bucks School of Music in the High Street.

My sister and I loved playing in the mirrored cubicle, in the cutting room, where you could move the full length mirrors so that your image was reflected back and forth hundreds of times. The shop staff were Mr Sydney, the shop manager, Mr Howard the shop's outfitter, Mr Gregory, the cutter, Robinson and Austin the two sales assistants, George the delivery boy (although he was well past retirement age) and, of course, the tailors and workroom girls. A lady called May was in charge of the workroom at the rear of the shop and supervised the female staff. The workroom girls were always friendly but I was rather frightened of a deaf and dumb tailor because he could only grunt his greetings and I was too young to understand that he was only showing his courtesy to me, the boss's daughter. My father who worked in the shop (taking measurements and supervising sales) left any staff disciplining up to Mr Sydney. This meant that he remained on good terms with everybody and was well liked.



Other vague memories of the shop include being taken up the narrow stairway to the roof, to look over the parapet at the circus parade passing by in the streets below. I was rarely allowed beyond Mrs Paige's office and this may have been one of my few peeks at the workrooms on the second floor where some of the tailors sat cross legged on the tables.

Our trips to Wycombe were always for a purpose and I rarely remember being bored. Sometimes we would go to the library, Flackwell Heath not yet having one of its own. The entrance hall always seemed very imposing and there was a large oil painting of a Mr Griffiths, a benefactor of the town, hanging above the stairs. He was a distant relative of ours, a great great grandfather, and it was under his watchful gaze that my mother deposited us in the children's section and went in search of a Monica Dickens or an Agatha Christie. The children's section had little stools, their circular tops painted red, blue, yellow or green, placed around little tables. In spite of it being a light, airy room the books still smelt like the rest of the library – institutionally musty.

My mother used to have her hair done at Valeries in Crendon Street and I would sit on a stool and watch the hairdresser at work. There was always a smell of perm solution and setting lotion. It was just before the time of aerosols and hair spray was a yellow sticky liquid squirted out through the plastic nozzle on the bottle. When my mother was tucked under the dryer she was given coffee in a glass cup and saucer which was poured from a coffee percolator and smelt wonderful. Opposite Valeries stood Gilbert's china shop and my sister and I would often stop and look through the window. The prices must have been fairly reasonable for we often bought small ornaments or glass animals to decorate our bedrooms. Cunningly my mother avoided taking us

past Child's, the large toyshop at the crossroads.

As children we seemed to spend much of our time gathering sweets from elderly neighbours. Mr Fabel, next door, always gave us Murray Mints or boiled sweets (this was in payment for removing the newts from his fish pond), and Dr Lowe's mother-in-law, in the house next door to that, always had lovely chocolate home-made fudge on offer. There was also a Polish man, from the hostel at the end of our road, who would set up a barrow by the side entrance to Fennels Woods at the weekend and sell Polish fudge. It was the best vanilla fudge you ever tasted with my mother's coming a close second.

When I was about five the new parade of shops was built on the corner of Swains Lane in Flackwell Heath and Gaieties became the centre of our lives. Until then most of our pocket money had been spent on a quarter pound of sherbet lemons or a packet of Spangles from Chettles. Gaieties, however, sold toys! On Saturday mornings we were regularly to be found looking in the shop window, deciding what to spend our pocket money on. If we had managed to save up half a crown (12½p) we thought we were lucky.

Regrettably we still continued to stuff ourselves with sweet sticky candies and even the terrifying visits to Mr Jolly the dentist failed to stop us. Mr Jolly had a dental practice opposite the Rye and we attended regularly for check-ups. This was before fluoride was discovered to be so beneficial and so virtually all my generation have mouths which contain more metal than dentine. In spite of the National Health this came at a price – our sanity! There were no anaesthetics or gum-numbing injections on offer unless you were going to have a tooth removed so a filling usually meant suffering real pain. In spite of his name, Mr Jolly did not suffer wimps gladly and I dreaded the six-monthly appointment. I remember being returned to school my eyes full of tears and, unable to see through the blur, I walked straight into a lamppost and nearly knocked myself out – a trick I should have applied earlier on my way there.

The highlight of village life was when the fair came to the recreation ground and I spent all my time, and all my money, on the roundabouts. A Mrs Peach ran the carousel and I recall my father getting us a free ride. Flackwell Heath Carnival was another event which we looked forward to and I remember my cousin and I dressing up as Hansel and Gretel and being pipped at the post in the fancy dress competition by World Cup Willy. My sister and I both won prizes in the painting and photography competitions however.

Other pursuits included playing on the swings in the recreation ground, a walk through Fennels Woods to the Mead along London Road or a bus ride to Wycombe and a visit to the Rye (both journeys accompanied by adults). We were fortunate that my father had a little Ford Popular and some weekends we would be taken further afield to Bekonscot Model Village, Ruislip Lido or Burnham Beeches.

Sadly, school days are remembered with less pleasure. Both my sister and I started school life at St Bernard's Convent on the London Road. We would be driven there each morning by my father on his way to work in High Wycombe and collected by my mother who came down by bus. I was only there for a couple of years when it was decided that I should go to prep school. There were three preps in the area, Godstowe, Crown House and Wycombe Preparatory, in that order. I went to Wycombe Preparatory. This was behind the the Baptist church and was a very small school with only three classrooms. We sat at long tables and our pencils and crayons were stored in cloth bags attached to the back of our chairs. If these became too full the chair would

tilt over every time you got up. This was before central heating and the classroom was heated by a coal fire during the winter months. Our half pint milk bottles would be placed in front of it until morning break so that the contents could be raised beyond freezing. This meant that you either drank it tepid or scalding hot, both being equally unpleasant. At the end of the day we would place our chairs on the tables and say a prayer before going home. It was several years later that I finally took stock of this ritual and discovered to my utter disbelief that putting the chairs on the tables bore no religious significance whatsoever but was merely to help the cleaners – I felt well and truly had!

I was fairly miserable at Wycombe Prep because of a much larger girl who taunted the younger children. As a compromise my father, or one of his workroom girls, would come and collect me for lunch thus saving me the hell of another hour in the playground. Thus I became a skilled seamstress, using my lunch hours to learn the tricks of the trade from May, sewing tiny stitches into tiny dolls clothes. However, three good things about Wycombe Preparatory do stand out in my memory, the nature walks with Miss Birchmore on the Rye, the shell gardens that we made each week in order to gain a gold star and the May Day celebrations when we danced around the maypole in the Baptist Hall, the room smelling of late spring and early summer flowers.

The move to Wycombe Preparatory saw me having piano lessons with Mr Bailey, again at the Bucks School of Music but I got bored with playing scales and eventually gave it up, much to my deep regret in later life. I had greater success with my membership of the Junior Red Cross Society which I joined when I was about 13 in Bourne End, rising to the dizzy heights of senior cadet and gaining my Grand Proficiency medal.

Home life in the 1950s and 60s was very different to the way we live today. There were no supermarkets and few labour-saving devices. Even a fridge was still considered something of a luxury. Middle class women of the day were not expected to go to work but were required instead to be efficient and economic managers of the home. Thus my mother busied herself with home cooking, dress making, gardening and, of course, washing and ironing. Although sheets were sent to the Marlow laundry there was no quick answer to the enormous pile of ironing except the introduction of the steam iron.

Marty, our daily help, did much of the cleaning and tidying and her husband helped with any odd jobs around the house and garden when required. Molly Martin, for this was her true name, became a second mother to us, babysitting in the evenings or at weekends or taking us to the Christmas pantomime in High Wycombe. Mr Martin worked full-time in the furniture industry so for serious decorating work Mr Savings was called in or someone from Hughes the builders merchants in the village. There was also a builder called Mr Field who would stop to eat his packed lunch, of wholemeal cheese sandwiches, in our kitchen. He would sit in the dog's chair, though nobody liked to tell him this, with both the dog and me looking hopefully up at him.

My mother usually ordered her groceries by phone (we shared a party line with next door) and they would be delivered to the door on a weekly basis and paid for by cheque. These were the days when it was common practice for a hardware van, vegetable or drinks lorry to stop outside the door in the hope of selling their wares. Marty always bought her soft fizzy drinks from the Corona man but alas he never came down our road. A Mr Clark owned the hardware van and my green plastic potty came from him, I remember being mortified as I was handed it off the

lorry! A Mr Horley delivered our groceries, and most other requirements could be dealt with over the phone.

My mother also acted as nurse and matron during our bouts of childhood illness. We had the usual round of infections – Whooping Cough, Chicken Pox, Measles, Mumps, German Measles, Tonsillitis etc. Both Wendy and I had our tonsils and adenoids removed – it seemed the natural thing to do in those days – and we took it as a necessary part of growing up. Fortunately we were operated on at a hospital in Windsor, unlike my mother a generation earlier who had them whipped out on the kitchen table! We also had our fair share of broken bones and I well remember the painful journey by car into Wycombe, over the bumpy Loudwater level crossing, to the old Wycombe Hospital at the bottom of Marlow Hill. The hospital was very small in those days. The floors were wood or linoleum and the corridors were cold and bare, painted green from floor to waist height and then cream to the ceiling. It smelled of cold tar soap and disinfectant. Because my sister and I didn't attend the village school we had few local friends of our own age but one day, while we were searching for a lost tortoise in the woods, we met Susan and Linda who lived along Oakland Way. I thought Susan to be very grown up because she ran errands for her mother and we would queue up in Luttmans waiting to be served. There was a chrome shelf in front of the counter which you were supposed to rest your shopping on but we would sit and slide up and down on it instead. I recall we spent much of our free time from then on dressing up and swopping dolls. It was Susan who introduced me to the Saturday morning Cinema Club at the Odeon in High Wycombe. You were lucky if you could watch an entire film without getting a handful of sticky popcorn in your hair from the kid behind.

Hair-washing nights, when we were very small, were looked upon with a sense of foreboding. There was no conditioner in those days and our hair would easily tangle. We had no hair dryer and would have to sit in front of the coal fire to get it dry whilst we watched TV and ate Marmite soldiers. When we finally did acquire a dryer it would affect the power to the TV and we couldn't get a picture. Our television in the early days was small, monochrome and only had one channel, the BBC. We would sit glued to Children's Hour and watched all the favourites of the time – Muriel Young, Wally Whyton and Pussy Cat Willum, Leslie Crowther and Peter Glaze in Cracker Jack, Valerie Singleton, John Noakes and Christopher Trace in Blue Peter, Johnny Morris in Animal Magic and Desmond Morris in Zoo Time. Later, of course there was Dr Who which I usually watched through half shut, terrified eyes. You couldn't become addicted to television then because it simply wasn't on for long enough. We switched off anyway at 6 o'clock when the news came on – the news was boring. During the 60s the news bulletins were all about Vietnam which, to a child, was all a long way a way and wasn't happening to us.

At about this time my mother bought herself a Mini and with her greater mobility she was not only able to collect us from school but also able to take us somewhere nice on the way home. Sometimes we spent summer evenings swimming in the outdoor pool on the Rye in Wycombe, or in the lakes at the recently converted gravel pits in Bourne End, but best of all we liked Burnham Beeches with its swimming pool and the fairground next door. Unfortunately my mother was always a nervous driver and her route to anywhere was determined by how many right hand turns she had to make. She has long been teased that the reason we went to Pipers Corner School and not Oakdene, which was much closer, was because she didn't like the busy right turn at Holtspur. Thus my education was determined by my mother's driving skills. Had mini-roundabouts been

developed a few years earlier than my school days, and perhaps my entire future life, may have been completely different.

Our proximity to London meant that once in a while we took the train to Marylebone for a day out. I have an early memory of my father's excitement at taking a diesel train as opposed to the old steam one. Our London treats were usually at Christmas when we would sit at the front on the top deck of a double decker bus and see the Christmas lights along Oxford Street and Regent Street. We would usually visit Hamleys toy store and then go to a Christmas show – The Wind in the Willows, Peter Pan etc. Sometimes a visit to London would include a visit to Earls Court or Olympia to see Holiday on Ice or the Girls and Boys Exhibition or The Ideal Home Exhibition. Sometimes it would simply be to get school uniform from Harrods or DH Evans, which was equally exciting.

Christmas was usually a quiet affair. We would receive a hamper from Fortnum and Masons just before the Christmas festivities, sent from my father's stepfather. It was always great fun to unpack the tins from the straw and then play in the empty basket. We always enjoyed decorating the Christmas tree and loved the twinkling fairy lights. On Christmas morning we woke up early and unwrapped our stockings. After breakfast we were allowed to unwrap our main presents which were left under the tree in the lounge – perhaps a dolls crib for me (the dolls bedding sewn by Marty), a desk and chair for Wendy (freshly painted by Mr Martin). Then we watched the morning TV programmes where children in hospital would be given their own Christmas presents by well known celebrities.

Although we would have had ITV by then and, later, BBC 2 it was still black and white. I remember seeing my first colour television set at the Ideal Home Exhibition, probably in 1967, and there were long queues to watch it in the House of the Future. And the future wasn't very far away, we bought our first colour set in 1971, the year we went decimal, the year I took my O-levels, the year my father retired – and, almost simultaneously, my childhood was over ~