

Berkshire Old and New



No. 38

2021

Berkshire Local History Association

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Journal of the Berkshire Local History Association

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Contents

Editorial note	3
The Dodgson Diaries: Woodley in World War Two <i>Ann Smith</i>	5
Getting the picture: a Berkshire country photograph <i>Jonathan Brown</i>	23
The Berkshire Bibliography, 2021 <i>Katie Amos</i>	27

Berkshire Local History Association

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Berkshire Local History Association was formed in 1976. Membership is open to individuals, societies and corporate bodies, such as libraries, schools, colleges. The Association covers the whole area of the County of Berkshire, both before and after 1974.

Editor Dr J. Brown. The editorial committee welcomes contributions of articles and reports for inclusion in forthcoming issues of the journal. Please contact Dr Jonathan Brown, 15 Instow Road, Reading, RG6 5QH (email journal@blha.org.uk) for guidance on length and presentation before submitting a contribution. The editor's judgement on all matters concerning the acceptance, content and editing of articles is final.

Details of books or journals for inclusion in the bibliography section should be sent to Katie Amos, Reading Central Library, Abbey Square, Reading, RG1 3BQ.

The Association would like to express its thanks to all those who helped by assisting with the various stages of producing this issue of the journal.

Cover illustrations

Front: No sheep in the road at West Ilsley in 2021.

Back: Miles aircraft produced at Woodley during and after the Second World War. Photos from Reading Libraries.

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Editorial Note

This year's *Berkshire Old and New* is somewhat shorter than usual. The reason is simple. There haven't been the articles submitted to fill a normal edition of three or four articles. Perhaps there is less research and writing going on about our county's history at present, which could be a concern, not just for the future of this journal.

I hope to have enough articles for *Berkshire Old and New* in 2022; in the meantime, I hope you enjoy this edition.

Jonathan Brown

The Dodgson Diaries: Woodley in World War Two

Ann Smith

John Wallis Dodgson was a chemistry lecturer who had taught at Reading University. He retired in 1934 and moved to St David's, Reading Road, in Woodley – now number 93.¹ It was named after the hall of residence where he had been a warden. He lived there with his wife Phyllis who was 30 years younger than him. He kept a diary from 1939 to 1950 which gives us a fascinating picture of life in Woodley. He called it 'The War and Us: A Daily Record of the World War 1939-45 in the Village of Woodley' by J.W. and Phyllis Dodgson. She did not write diary entries but gave her husband stories and reminders of incidents. He was inspired to write a personal account, because he recognised that the outbreak of war was a significant event, and felt that future historians would be interested in the experiences of ordinary people.

The Dodgson Diaries are held in the special collections of Reading University Library at the Museum of English Rural Life.² Other sources used include local newspapers and oral communications, information from the Museum of Berkshire Aviation, books, Woodley Parish Council minutes and St. John's Parish magazines.

Today Woodley is a suburb of Reading in Berkshire. In 1939 it was a village with an airfield and aircraft factory – Phillips and Powis, which later became Miles Aircraft.

John Dodgson. Photo taken at Woodley Airfield in the 1930s. Reproduced by permission of Reading University Special Collections.



Evacuation

The Second World War started in Woodley with the arrival of evacuees from London on 1 September 1939, two days before war was declared. The British Government and the general public knew war was coming. The Dodgsons had already put up their blackout curtains.

Miss Player, who lived at The Warren, was the billeting officer for Woodley. Evacuees were received at three centres: Mr Fryer was in charge at The Village Hut, Mrs Leonard at The Bull and Chequers and Mrs Victor Smith at The George. The Dodgsons were given Mrs Thorne and her infant son Leslie from Battersea, who returned to London after two weeks. Many evacuees missed the bustle of London and went back home, because no bombs fell during the phoney war and there was no real danger. The Dodgsons had Dr and Mrs Pinchbeck as evacuees from October 1939 to Easter 1940. He was a teacher at Archbishop Tenison's Grammar School in London. The whole school was evacuated to Woodley and occupied South Lake House, now The Waterside restaurant. Their third and last evacuee was Leonard Lush, a 15-year-old pupil at the school. He was with them in 1944-45. The Dodgsons liked him so well, that he visited them regularly after the war, and attended Mr Dodgson's funeral in 1950.

Evacuees were not always popular in Woodley. People could be legally obliged to take evacuees. Hosts complained that the money from the government was inadequate to feed them – 10s 6d for the first child and 8s 6d for every other child per week. Some families found that the children wet the beds, they were dirty, had lice or bad habits such as breaking furniture. Mr Dodgson was concerned about the effects of evacuees on their hosts. He collected stories from a wide range of friends, neighbours and correspondents.

Mr Dodgson worried that the high water table and lack of mains drainage in Woodley was insanitary. In wet weather sewage floated in gardens and there was a bad smell from the Airfield. He wrote to Wokingham Rural District Council that Woodley was not fit to receive evacuees. His house, like most in Woodley, had well water and a septic tank, which was emptied once a year. In 1939 the Parish Council's annual meeting discussed the lack of street lighting and pavements in Loddon Bridge Road, which had contributed to recent car accidents.³

The 1939 Register

The government compiled records of people: names, addresses, dates of birth and occupations on 29 September 1939. This was the same information asked for in the census every 10 years. The last census was in 1931 and it needed updating, so that the government could issue identity cards and ration books and identify young men to call up. The 1939 Register gave a lot of information about Woodley at the start of the war.⁴ It was still a village

despite the growth of Miles Aircraft and the Airfield. Houses had names not numbers. Many were crowded because families took in lodgers as well as evacuees.

There was a shortage of rooms in Woodley because, as well as evacuees, airfield workers and members of the army and RAF needed accommodation. The Royal Engineers were in The Hut on the Recreation Ground and other soldiers occupied Sandford Manor. Bulmershe Court was requisitioned by the War Office. There was an anti-aircraft battery there and a Royal Army Medical Corps post. A regiment of American soldiers was stationed there later in the war. The Dodgsons heard bugles every morning. They welcomed American servicemen from the nearby camps to tea and at St John's church. But they worried about English girls getting pregnant and hoping to marry Americans.

In the 1939 Register, Lane's Farmhouse, off Loddon Bridge Road, was occupied by 11 aircraft workers. John Slade, a flying instructor for no. 8 Elementary Flight Training School at Woodley Airfield, lived in Eleven Elms Cottage. The Falcon Hotel on the airfield (built in 1937 as a clubhouse) had 24 people, including the chef Henry de Trafford, Christopher Broad a flying instructor for the RAF, 4 medical officers for the RAF and 18 others who worked at the hotel or the Airfield.

The nearby Tippings Lane Council Cottages were very crowded:

- 1 Charles and Emily Smith, with Jean Pottinger. He was a bricklayer.
- 2 Robert and Annie Holley and 4 others. He was a builder's labourer.
- 3 Henry and Gladys Wheeler and 5 others. He was a panel beater and metal worker.
- 4 Harry and Beatrice White and 3 others. He was a gardener.
- 5 Robert Holley and Vera and their child. He was an aircraft worker. He had the same name but a different date of birth from Robert Holley at no. 2.
- 6 Albert Hollis and 3 others. He was a builder.

In Denmark Avenue there were 23 houses, and 81 residents. The first 13 houses, with names not numbers, were larger and had more residents, and many aircraft workers lived or lodged in these houses. Numbers 1-10 Denmark Avenue followed but had fewer residents. There were 27 men in the road, 15 of them working at the aircraft factory, and 30 women, two working at the factory. Specific jobs included aircraft general labourer, detail fitter, rigger, tool store keeper, woodworker, paint sprayer, aircraft subcontractor, progress chaser, and draftsman. The two women were an aircraft fabric stitcher and a rib maker.

At the other end of the social scale, there were people living in big houses with servants. Florence Fryer lived at Duffield House in Duffield Road with a cook and parlour maid. Eliza and Grace Player lived at The Warren Cottage with Lydia Blondell, domestic servant. The younger generation of the Player family lived in The Warren: Cecilia Player and Grace, who was assistant section leader of Berks. County WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air

Force), also Amy Player, student. There were two other women described as performing unpaid domestic duties (which usually meant housework): Alice Hickey, Doris Burton and her daughter aged 3.

War Work

Phyllis Dodgson became the Honorary Secretary of the Infant Welfare Clinic in Woodley. She volunteered for the ambulance service but became frustrated when she turned up for driver training to find that there was no sign of an instructor. She was also a member of the Woodley Women's Institute, the WVS and the Nursing Association, and helped at the American Red Cross Club in Reading. She collected money for the Spitfire Fund, Wings for Victory week, War Savings and Salute the Soldier Week, and raised money for the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Sometimes Mr Dodgson became cynical about the endless wartime campaigns for civilians to raise money. He recorded that Mrs Goffe at Wheelers Green Post Office had taken £10,000 for war savings in one campaign. This was good for local morale as villages competed to see who could raise the most money. But many Woodley people cashed them in the next day.

In 1942 Phyllis was called up to work in the airfield canteen for 8d an hour, twopence less than the Dodgsons paid their daily help. Local people said Phyllis was more useful doing voluntary work, as she was active in so many organisations. They supported her appeal and she was exempted from war work.



Mothers and babies at the Village Hut in the 1940s. Photo courtesy of Bernard Jones and Shirley Hiscock.

Phyllis also spent a lot of the war bottling and preserving fruit with the WI. In 1942 the Queen visited McIlroys department store to inspect the preserving workshop, where Phyllis worked.⁵

John Dodgson kept up with former colleagues at Reading University and often dined in the Senior Common Room. Many of his diary entries recorded university life in wartime. From 1941 to 1945 he returned to lecturing because so many younger colleagues had been called up for the armed forces or essential war work. John Dodgson was a freemason and treasurer of the Reading lodge. He did voluntary work as secretary of Reading Council of Social Services at Watlington House in Reading, was a member of the Berkshire Archaeological Society, the Athenaeum club, the Natural History Society, the Woodley Parochial Church Council and the Institute of Grocers. He read the lesson at St John's Church in Woodley every week. He corresponded with former staff and students of Reading University and sometimes reproduced whole letters in his diary.

He was critical of the waste and bureaucracy of wartime. He said it was hard to get people to collect metal for salvage because Woodley residents could see previously collected garden railings in a Southern Railway siding nearby.

He did not think well of ARP (Air Raid Precautions) wardens, and recorded stories of their laziness or incompetence. Their role was to enforce the blackout. Some of his neighbours in Reading Road became ARP wardens. Mr Phillis who lived a few doors from the Dodgsons was one. Mr Phillis lost his son Bruce in a bombing raid over Dusseldorf in 1944. Mr Goodson, an ARP warden living in Western Avenue, had rented a room to an Irish lodger. Plans of the Airfield were found in his room when he left. The discovery was reported to the Wokingham police. Mr Dodgson never found out what happened later. Ireland was neutral during the Second World War, but the government feared that Ireland might be used as a base for a German invasion.

Mr Dodgson recorded the building of a machine gun post at the junction of Reading Road and London Road, and a reinforced concrete strong point guarding Loddon Bridge.

Woodley Airfield

On a walk to Woodley Airfield in September 1939, John Dodgson discovered the road and footpaths to Hurst had been closed. Searchlights were switched on in October and there was an anti-aircraft battery, as well as defences and camouflage paint at the airfield. Fences were patrolled, and there were several lines of barbed wire and armed sentries at gates.

In 1939 the aircraft firm Phillips and Powis had 1000 employees. The company name was officially changed to Miles Aircraft in 1943 but local people called it Miles years before then. Employees were recruited to be

ARP wardens and fire watchers and to join the Home Guard. The Airfield Home Guard was commanded by Flight Lt. Tommy Rose, the chief test pilot. The trees that gave their name to Eleven Elms Cottage were cut down because they were a landmark which could identify the Airfield. Buildings were camouflaged and false hedges disguised the grass runways. Air raid shelters were dug but some were too far from the factory buildings, so nearer shelters were built. There was an underground hospital.⁶

In 1940 Miles was awarded the Spitfire repair and service contract. At the peak of wartime production in 1940 there was a seven-day, 24-hour working week. Extra buses were laid on by the Thames Valley Traction Company to take workers from Reading to the airfield. There were also factories in Liverpool Road and Basingstoke Road in Reading, and a shadow factory in Swindon. This was supposed to be secret, but the wife of Mr Groombridge, who worked at the airfield, told Phyllis.

Miles took over the derelict Davis Farm near The Falcon Hotel and built a wind tunnel. The land was also used for the Miles Aeronautical and Technical School from 1943 to 1949. By 1942-3 the eastern end of the airfield had an officers' bath house, accommodation for officers and men, a sergeants' mess, dining and recreation rooms. Some airmen were in Nissen huts in the grounds of Sandford Manor. By 1945, 5000 people worked at Miles.⁷ Jobs were well paid. Mr Dodgson recorded that a neighbour's daughter, who had worked for the Co-op in Reading, was called up to work in the aircraft factory. She was happy to change jobs, describing it as a rest cure for which she earned £2 a week more. Mr Dodgson criticised Miles Aircraft's poor work practices: 'they could not survive 3 weeks in peace time'. Mr Williams, their neighbour, was a storekeeper at Miles and sometimes had valuable tools stolen.

Air Raid Shelters

Air raid shelters were built within 1000 yards of the airfield, on the playing fields, Headley Road and Colemans Moor Road. Twenty-eight shelters were constructed by August 1940, which could hold 1344 people.⁸ Local residents feared air raids on Woodley because of the airfield. Houses were cheaper near it.⁹

Other parts of Woodley were not considered to be at risk. Mr Dodgson recorded that the parish magazine in May 1940 said: 'As Woodley has been scheduled by the government as a D area (relatively safe from air raids), air raid shelters are not considered necessary.'¹⁰ Pupils at St John's school were supposed to shelter in the school or church, because the buildings were regarded as substantial enough to protect them. Woodley Council School had opened in June 1939 for older pupils. It had shelters because its large windows and lighter construction were not considered 'splinter proof'.



Woodley Airfield as shown on the Air Ministry map of September 1945.

On the night of 26 June 1940 Mr Dodgson recorded that residents of Loddon Bridge Road ‘stormed the gates of the school to get access to the air raid shelter.’ He called air raid shelters ‘houses of indecency’. On 26 October 1940 he wrote about air raid shelters: ‘The men leaving the two public houses in the village have found a use for them. The wardens hope it is not their duty to clean them.’ He and Phyllis had a strong point under the stairs in their house and did not go out to an air raid shelter. They had a bucket of water and one of sand, food and a travelling bag packed with clothes in it. He was 70 when war started and going deaf. He sometimes slept through the air raid siren and only learned about it from his wife at breakfast!

Woodley residents remember air raid shelters surviving for years after the war. In 2020 during the lockdown, Brian Hunt found one in his garden in Reading Road. The dry summer had caused a visible outline in the lawn, which he dug up to discover a substantial concrete shelter. It was built by the wartime owner of his house, George Cripps. We know from the 1939 Register that he was a street mason – a builder specializing in street works.¹¹ There is still an air raid shelter in Hurricane Way. There are three surviving pill boxes near the River Loddon.

Andy Petty remembered: ‘A pill box by the Museum of Berkshire Aviation had a gun and ammunition left in it. I used to play with the gun but not the ammunition. I found a sleeve of .303 bullets by the River Loddon. I put bullets in a vice and used a hammer and nail to strike one and make it explode. I found a .303 rifle by the river and the police took it away. Old army tents were just dumped after the war. I used the material to make a den in the bank near my house – in Loddon Bridge Road – with metal tins for a chimney.’¹²

Bombs in Woodley

On 26 October 1940, Mr Dodgson recorded in his diary: ‘Nearly all the bombs which have fallen in Woodley have fallen without any air raid siren. Seldom when the siren has gone have bombs fallen.’ During the war, there were many false alarms but only seven raids were officially recorded in Woodley. Information about bombs in Woodley comes from ARP wardens’ reports and other official sources, compiled by Mike Cooper for his book *Early Closing Day* about Reading in wartime. Mr Dodgson’s diary entries were usually confirmed by ARP wardens’ reports (marked ARP after the entry):¹³

16 Aug 1940: 4 HE (high explosive) bombs fell on Woodley Airfield. A Miles Magister aeroplane was damaged. ARP

24 August Mr Dodgson recorded a timed bomb which fell on the airfield.

12 September 1940: 8 HE and incendiaries started heath fires near South Lake. ARP

16 September 1940: 10 HE bombs fell on Woodley Airfield. Mr

Dodgson recorded that four exploded immediately and school children were sent home. The timed bombs were surrounded with sandbags by the military and exploded later. ARP

3 October 1940: 4 HE bombs (the logbook of the Elementary Flight Training School recorded 8) on Woodley Airfield. Mr Dodgson recorded that they fell between the hangar and The Falcon Hotel. Bombs also fell in Reading including at Suttons Seeds trial ground. ARP

6 October 1940: 3 HE bombs on allotments north of the airfield. One person was injured and two houses in Headley Road were so badly damaged they had to be demolished. One was Poplar Cottage. It had been condemned along with nearby cottages, but the demolition was postponed because of the war. Mr Dodgson recorded that the house of Mrs White's sister-in-law was badly damaged. Mrs White was his cleaning lady. Mr Campbell of the airfield rescued a woman from the house. A German plane machine-gunned two women who were delivering milk, and a paperboy. All escaped injury by hiding in ditches. ARP

12 October 1940: 4 HE bombs in Bulmershe woods. Mr Dodgson recorded that they fell between the house and the canal. The canal led from South Lake to North Lake in the grounds of Bulmershe Court. There was a Royal Army Medical Corps post there, but no one was hurt.

26 October: Mr Dodgson recorded on 28 October 1940 several UXBs (unexploded bombs) at the airfield, which fell on the night of Saturday 26th. Mr Campbell's farm near Sonning was hit by bombs the same night. They broke the water main and the Campbells were still without water. The Wee Waif Café on London Road was also hit, and lost its gas main.

30 January 1941: 2 HE bombs east of Butts Hill Road. ARP

22 June 1942: 2 HE bombs in Richardson's field, south of North Lake and east of Crockhamwell Road. ARP

On 16 March 1942, Mr Dodgson recorded a plane which landed on ground behind their house in Reading Road, because it could not find the airfield. He recorded in May 1943 that a training plane crashed on the roof of Richardson's farm. The pilot was killed, the co-pilot badly injured and the plane exploded, setting fire to the house. The family escaped when they heard the plane in difficulties but the house and furniture were destroyed.

In 1961 an unexploded bomb was found in Duffield Road. About 100 people were evacuated from their homes while it was made safe.¹⁴ In 1999 a 1000kg UXB was found by building workers near the railway at Sonning cutting. Three thousand people including teachers and pupils at Willow Bank School were evacuated while Lieutenant Damian Walker defused it. The newspaper report stated that local schoolboy Noel Chappell saw the bombs drop in November 1941 but no-one believed him at the time. His recollection of the event was recorded by the Museum of Berkshire Aviation.¹⁵ There was no official record of bombs falling in Woodley in November 1941.



Richardson's farm. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Simmons¹⁶

Rationing

Mr and Mrs Dodgson received their ration books in November 1939. They registered with Mr Saunders, the Woodley grocer at 404 London Road, near the junction with Reading Road. They also shopped with Mr Francis, the butcher in Headley Road. He became an Emergency Food Officer for Woodley, responsible for stored food in case of an invasion. Food was kept at the Hut on the Recreation Ground, St John's School, Woodley Council School, the Shepherd's House pub and at Woodley Institution in Reading Road. The grounds of Woodley Institution – a home for elderly and homeless men – were ploughed for growing potatoes.

Mr Dodgson was interested in the price and availability of food and often wrote in his diary about what he could buy that day. He sometimes recorded what he ate. Here is one typical entry:

Breakfast: scrambled egg (dried egg), coffee. Bread, margarine and New Zealand honey.

Midday meal: braised oxtail (not rationed), potatoes and cabbage, apple dumpling.

Tea: bread and butter, berberis jelly, oatmeal scones, home-made cake.

Supper: cold roast beef and salad. Cheese, margarine & biscuits.

He and Phyllis received regular food parcels from their American friend Dr Hutchings.

He recorded when foods were rationed in his diary. Meat was rationed but not offal. It was impossible to buy offal because it all went to the army. Phyllis wrote a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* about the price of rabbits, and was sent several rabbits in the post by well-wishers. In February 1940 cheese and eggs were rationed. Mr Dodgson recorded that many eggs came from Ireland and went bad by the time they were in the shops. Dried egg was

R.L.I.A.

LICENCE NO. 102/187

MINISTRY OF FOOD

LICENCE TO SELL FOODSTUFFS BY RETAIL

THE FOOD CONTROL COMMITTEE FOR THE DISTRICT OF
WORKINGHAM WITHIN THE
COUNCIL OFFICERS, BRUTE END, WORKINGHAM.

HEREBY LICENSES
Henry Edgar Lee

AS A RETAIL DEALER IN THE FOLLOWING FOODS
IN RESPECT OF THE BUSINESS CARRIED ON AT
"The Fountain" Headley Road, Workingham

BACON AND HAM, UNCOOKED.	FLOUR.	MILK, FRESH.
BACON AND HAM, COOKED.	FRUIT, BOTTLED OR CANNED.	MILK, CANNED.
BISCUITS, RUSKS AND CRISP-BREADS.	FRUIT, CRYSTALLISED.	MILK, DRIED.
BLANCHING POWDER.	FRUIT, CURDS.	MINGEMENT.
CORN FLOUR AND CUSTARD POWDER.	FRUIT, DRIED OR EVAPORATED.	NETS.
BREAD.	FRUIT, FRESH.	OATMEAL AND OAT FLAKES.
BUTTER.	GAME.	PICKLES AND SAUCES.
CAKES.	HONEY.	POTATOES.
CANNED BEANS.	JAM AND MARMALADE.	POULTRY (INCLUDING TURKETS).
CEREAL BREAKFAST FOODS.	LARD AND COMPOUND LARD.	RABBITS.
CHEESE (INCLUDING PROCESSED CHEESE).	MACARONI, SPAGHETTI, AND VERMICELLI.	RICE AND EDIBLE RICE PRODUCTS.
CHOCOLATE AND SUGAR CONFECTIONERY.	MARGARINE.	SAGO AND TAPIOCA.
COCOA.	MEAT, CHILLED, FRESH OR FROZEN.	SAUSAGES.
COFFEE.	MEAT, CANNED OR PRESERVED OTHER THAN CANNED CORNED BEEF, CANNED CORNED PORK.	SEMOLINA.
COFFEE ESSENCE (INCLUDING COFFEE & COCOA ESSENCE).	MEAT, COOKED.	SOUPS, CANNED OR DESICCATED.
EDIBLE AND COOKING FATS.	MEAT PASTES.	SOYA FLOUR.
EDIBLE EGG PRODUCTS.	MEAT PASTES (INCLUDING STORAGE ROLLS).	SYRUP AND TREACLE.
EGGS.	MEAT PIES.	TABLE JELLIES.
FISH, WET.	MEAT PRODUCTS (INCLUDING CANNED MEAT, CANNED CORNED BEEF, CANNED CORNED PORK).	TEA.
FISH, CURED AND DRIED.	MEAT ROLL OR GALANTINES (CANNED).	VEGETABLES (OTHER THAN POTATOES).
FISH, IN CANS, GLASSES OR OTHER AIR-TIGHT CONTAINERS.		VEGETABLES, BOILED OR CHIPPED (OTHER THAN CANNED).
FISH PASTES.		VEGETABLES, DRIED.

FOOD OFFICE STAMP, R.L.I.A.
WORKINGHAM
FOOD CONTROL,
COUNCIL OFFICERS, BRUTE END,
WORKINGHAM.

CODE No. **S. 102**

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE FOOD CONTROL COMMITTEE

SIGNATURE *Jeffy Hall*

DATE **4 MAR 1942**

(257) 40200 W.L. 42200/20700 200K 100K W.P. 500. Gp. A

The Ministry of Food licence for The Fountain, a shop in Headley Road. New owner Henry Edgar Lee took over the shop in 1942. He was only allowed to sell food in tins and packets. Photo courtesy of his grandson Mike Lee.¹⁷

also used. In July 1940 tea and fats were rationed. On 14 December 1940 there was a government decree telling people not to buy more than seven days' food. In February 1942 soap was rationed, in April coal and in July sweets.

In 1944 there were fuel shortages with new restrictions on railway travel. No fuel was to be used for heating between April and the end of October. In May 1945 the meat ration was cut because the Americans cut their exports of meat to the UK by 75 per cent. Fat and bacon rations were cut. Beer was never rationed because it was regarded as essential to keep morale up!

Paper was rationed and the Miles magazine was limited to four pages during the war years. Mr Dodgson wrote his diary with two lines on every ruled line to save paper.

Mr and Mrs Dodgson were enthusiastic gardeners. He often recorded the quantities of fruit and vegetables harvested. He was annoyed at the government bureaucracy that made you apply for a licence to sell surplus produce from gardens or allotments. Phyllis and the WI took part in local campaigns to bottle and preserve produce. She made peach jam which consisted of carrot and orange peel!

The End of the War

By 1944 it was obvious that the Allies were going to win the war. Wokingham RDC had already started asking Woodley residents what new developments they hoped for in the post-war period.



The VE Day party behind The Fountain, photo courtesy of Mike Lee.

VE Day

On VE Day, 8 May 1945, John and Phyllis Dodgson had a celebratory glass of Army and Navy sherry. 'The war in Europe is over but strangely enough I cannot feel very joyful and as I read of excited crowds in London It all seems so foolish. I cannot express my thankfulness by shouting, I can't get away from the thought that this is a very solemn occasion!'

There were street parties in Norton Road, in Headley Road behind The Fountain, at The Bull and Chequers and at the airfield.



VE Day photo from The Reading Standard, 11 May 1945

He disapproved of the celebrations in London and Reading.

'I did not go down into Reading, the streets as far as I did go were peopled by school children taking a holiday, carrying little flags and either wandering or rushing about. The houses were decorated with bunting and flags were flying from the biscuit factory and other places. Many had begun to decorate yesterday. Even our Woodley cottages are gay with flags. Phyllis came back on the Maidenhead bus and joined the Woodley one at Shepherd's Hill. She had got off there and bought a few pounds of flour for use if the bread is not delivered.

'The Thames Valley staff are not getting a holiday but are being given five days pay. This company can well afford it, they have been running crowded buses for years past.

'As we have no wireless we went at 3 o'clock to the Morris's to hear Mr Churchill officially announce the end of fighting in Europe. Then we heard the sound of rejoicing in London (Buckingham Palace, Parliament Square and Trafalgar Square), Edinburgh, Belfast, Liverpool, Coventry, Cardiff and the bells of Westminster Abbey, York Minster and the Dorset village of Puddletown. Mr Churchill told us that the surrender to the Allies takes effect at a minute after midnight, but the ceasefire has been given already to avoid



The VE party at Norton Road arranged the tables for the children in appropriate formation.



Victory fete at Woodley from The Reading Standard, 25 May 1945.

loss of life. He told us that the Channel Islands will be set free today, this has pleased everyone greatly....

Our lunch today was cold beef and potatoes boiled in their skins, followed by Rum Omelette. How Phyllis has managed to save the rum I don't know, I have not bought any for years.

Today seemed strangely quiet to us. We are rather glad to be away from the turbulence of the town.'

10 May: arrangements were being made to send evacuees back to London, women and children first, then schools at the end of term. 'I walked into Reading after lunch, it was much beflagged but otherwise quite quiet. I attended a meeting of the proposed Reading Civic Society. The traffic lights now show a full circle of red, amber and green. They appear strangely brilliant.'

11 May: Reading was preparing official celebrations. A platform was erected outside the Town Hall and more flags were appearing. An article in the *Reading Standard* said that Reading was 'en fete'. There was a service in St Laurence's church attended by the University, the Corporation and the judge who was holding the assizes. There were great crowds and dancing in the streets round bonfires. 'No wonder Woodley seemed more quiet than usual, we have been out of it all and are not sorry.'

The *Reading Standard* newspaper reported that the Victory Fete was held on Whit Monday, 21 May, on the Recreation Ground. Four thousand people were there, and the fete was opened by Mrs F.G. Miles, wife of the owner of the Miles Aircraft Company. The band of the Royal Berkshire Regiment played. There was a display by the National Fire Service under section leader H.T. Edwards which included an old horse-drawn fire engine. There was also a baby show, bring and buy, stalls and an auction. £500 was raised for the Red Cross. It ended with an evening dance in the village hall – The Hut.

Monday 21 May Mr Dodgson wrote: 'Today Woodley is holding a festival in aid of the Red Cross. St John's band and side shows on the Recreation Ground. Among other things, there's a baby show. We shall stay at home and work gently in the garden.... The Buses are full today, we suppose they have brought people to the Red Cross fete.'

Clement Attlee refused Churchill's offer to extend the wartime coalition until Japan was defeated. The King dissolved Parliament on 15 June. Ian Mikardo was elected Labour MP for Reading at the general election on 5 July. He and the other candidates had spoken at a meeting at Miles Aircraft.¹⁸ There was a 10 per cent swing to Labour, who held a 145-seat majority in the House of Commons. Mr Dodgson was sorry that Labour won. Results were announced in late July because so many servicemen were still overseas.

On 7 August Mr Dodgson read in his newspaper that an atomic bomb, invented by British and American physicists, which was 'especially devastating', had been dropped on a Japanese city. The next day, he learned that four square miles of Hiroshima were reduced to dust with terrible loss of life. He talked about the bomb in the university common room and agreed 'man's scientific knowledge is far ahead of his moral development and that he cannot be trusted with these ultra dangerous weapons.'

On 10 August a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

Phyllis went to help feed Mrs Hunt's chickens and heard that Japan had surrendered. At the American Red Cross Centre in Reading, Mrs Tanner – a volunteer working alongside Phyllis – had a young American soldier thanking her and Phyllis for their kindness, saying perhaps they had sons in the forces, and that was why they were doing it. Mrs Tanner finally said: 'I had two sons in the forces but I haven't now.'

On Sunday 12 August Miles had an At Home attended by 3,400 employees, friends and children. There were factory tours, flying trips with test pilots Tommy Rose and Ken Waller, a Fire Brigade display and a display of Miles Aircraft products. The queue for entry extended from the gates to the roundabout. Mr Dodgson recorded it in his diary but he and Phyllis did not attend.

On 15 August Japan surrendered. Mr Atlee said: 'the last of our enemies is laid low.' John and Phyllis Dodgson celebrated with a glass of sherry from the last bottle. At 7.30 they went to a service of thanksgiving at church. Later in the evening they went to a 'children's bonfire and celebrations in the field behind Mr Morris' house. He lighted some pieces of magnesium ribbon which gave a good light and children exploded fireworks. The country is rejoicing and with reason.'

Mr Dodgson continued writing his diaries until his death in 1950. They are a unique source of information about daily life in Woodley during World War Two and after.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Gill Holmes who researched several volumes of the Dodgson Diaries. Thank you to Brian Hunt, Mike Lee, Andy Petty and Richard Smith for their oral history contributions which are recorded in this article.

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Getting the picture: a Berkshire country photograph

Jonathan Brown

In the pre-digital age I would often amuse myself wondering what it would be like for the curators of the Japanese national photographic archives, faced with the thousands of transparencies of families standing in front of the world's tourist attractions. What if there were to be an archive of Instagram images?

Such a profusion of material can lead us to take photographs for granted. Not only that, we can easily fail to take them seriously. They are there to add a little embellishment to the article we've already written, it's about to be published and we rush along at the last minute to find the picture. We've all done it.

This article is about a photograph. There is only one – I have resisted the temptation to add more. It was chosen first, and it provides a chance to take a little time looking at it as one might a painting in a gallery, to ask a couple of questions of it and to see what we can learn from it. We can consider what went into the making of the photograph and what is contained in the image.

The photograph comes from the collections of the Museum of English Rural Life.¹ It was taken in Berkshire. The signpost conveniently locates it to just outside the village of West Ilsley. The road to the right is going to Catmore, and the flock of sheep is moving west along the road towards Farnborough. The Harrow Inn is by this junction, out of the picture on the left. The photograph was taken in the middle of summer on a warm day – hence the children's summer clothing and the shepherd's broad-brimmed hat.

Having made a comparison with viewing a painting in a gallery, one of the questions which might be asked is: is this an art photo? Or, more broadly, why was the photograph taken? There are clearly distinctions between the photographs taken by amateurs and professionals, photos for commercial, documentary, scientific and domestic purposes – and, indeed, those photographs intended to be works of art. Even when, as often, we do not know who the photographer was or the purpose behind the creation of the image, awareness of the different categories helps establish the context, just as we would ask why a document was written.

To return to the first question, is this an art photo? It might be, in that it clearly has elements of art about it: in the composition, in the placing of the children and the shepherd, and, indeed, the surrounding countryside. This photographer knew what he was about, and was looking for something more



Leading sheep along the road at West Ilsley, c 1934

than a simple country scene. Yet it does not quite have the air of the work of someone who moved in artistic or art-historical circles. The reproduction, incidentally, has not been cropped or edited from the original negative.

The identity of this photographer is known. He is Eric Guy, who was a commercial photographer based in Reading and Basingstoke from about 1930 to 1963 when he retired. During the 1930s he worked in various partnerships, including for a time with P. O. Collier of Reading. Theirs was a partnership of contrasts. Collier was much older, having been in business since the early twentieth century and had specialized in photographs of local town and village scenes, which he sold mainly as picture postcards. From about 1940, he worked on his own. In contrast to Collier, Eric Guy's interests were in the countryside, on the farms and estates. He earned most of his living photographing rural subjects in his local region of Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire. He worked on commission from some of the large farms and estates: Englefield, Burnham, Roadknights Farms all feature in Eric Guy's output. He took on advertising work for a tractor manufacturer. And he produced many photographs for publication, mainly in the farming journals *Farmer and Stockbreeder* and *Farmer's Weekly*. As likely as not, this was the purpose behind the photograph of sheep that we have here. He hoped it would be used as a general 'nice' illustration on a magazine page.

As a professional photographer with his line of business, Eric Guy was not given to pulling out his camera whenever he saw a passing flock of sheep and taking a quick shot, after the fashion of, say, Cartier-Bresson. His photographs were carefully prepared. Hard though it might be to pose a flock of sheep, that is essentially what has happened for this staged photograph. Shepherd, children and sheep are precisely in position. There is no sheep dog in sight; if there was one it was crouching behind, maintaining discipline in the flock, so that the shepherd could step ahead confidently. There was little movement to be frozen by the camera shutter: the sheep were going slowly enough for some to be inspecting the ground in the hope of finding some grass on the road surface, which was of crushed stone, not tarmac.

It almost certainly took a lot of time setting this photograph up, and only for the one shot. Eric Guy was using a camera with quarter-plate glass negatives (3¼ x 4¼ inches) – fairly portable, but nonetheless bulky – and no motor-driven shutter able to shoot off a whole roll of film, from which the best exposure could be chosen later. And, coming to it now, we think 'that's good' and quickly pass on.

But we could, perhaps, be asking a second big question: how representative is this image? Does it depict a common scene or one that was abnormal? It is useful to have an idea about this when we come to using archive photographs. The answer is not always obvious. A shepherd leading his flock down the road was common enough when this photograph was

taken. Motor traffic was not so heavy along the country roads as to make livestock in the road a hazard. That was the 1930s; just from the general air of the scene, it looks 1930s. It was not dated at all in Eric Guy's job book, which was sketchy, to put it mildly.² From the context of this book a date of 1934 or so can be deduced. By that time, lorries were being used regularly for transporting livestock, even for relatively short distances. This scene was, after all, not necessarily such a common one. Photographers such as Eric Guy were busy depicting the traditions of sheep management which were under pressure from contemporary agricultural economics. The editors of the farming magazines, likewise, wanted to show something of good old farming alongside the articles about the new machinery. Those most conversant with the breeds of sheep would recognise what these were in the picture, but Eric Guy did make a point of noting that they were of the Kerry Hill breed. They were not the most common of breeds in Berkshire agriculture. Was this, then, a typical scene after all?

The background offers some further interest. The pasture field on the corner is bounded on the road side by chestnut paling fence – which was then still common – and on the opposite side by mixed hedging. The field contains some English elm trees; the pollarded tree on the boundary appears to have suffered some damage.

There is no need to over-analyse, but even with a small amount of interrogation, photographs can help historical study more than perhaps we allow them to.

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Katie Amos

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