

Cottingham and Middleton

...memories



Hilda Bradshaw (1918–2011)

Hilda Bradshaw (nee Vickers) was born in Manchester and brought up in a village near Scunthorpe. She came to Cottingham at the tender age of 15 to take up a position 'in service' to the Lucas family at Bury House. Hilda later moved up to become a parlour maid before marrying a village lad, Fred Bradshaw.

Hilda's memories were captured in October 2008 by Del Robertson. Pic taken 2008.

Moving to Cottingham aged 15 was a big step for Hilda who describes herself as always being painfully shy and quiet as a youngster. Her sister Lily had landed a job in service at Belton House near Uppingham in Rutland, then owned by Admiral Hutton, and when Lily suffered a short illness, Hilda left her home in Scunthorpe and went to Belton to cover for her until she was well again. The Huttons recommended Hilda as a good and reliable worker to their friends Captain Lucas and his wife at Bury House in Cottingham, and Hilda was offered a job 'in service' for the household.

She recalls she had to ask her mother permission to leave the family home – “You couldn't just walk out like nowadays!”

'In Service' at Bury House

On taking up her new post in Cottingham, Hilda initially carried out general chores for a while before moving up to 'Parlour Maid' which was very much a trusted position. Her wage rose from about 7 shillings a week to nearly 10 shillings!

She wore two changes of uniform daily – a dark blue cotton one with white collar and apron for the dirtier jobs in the morning and then a brown dress with a 'dainty lacy panel' in the afternoon and evening.

Morning tasks included cleaning and lighting the fires and taking a tray of tea and then a brass can of water for their employers to bathe. Breakfast was served at 9am. Once the Lucas' (and guests if staying) were up and about the bedrooms were all thoroughly cleaned and beds made. Light lunch would be taken by the householders at midday then, in the afternoon, Hilda and her colleagues were given a couple of hours off which they often spent resting in their rooms. In the evening, a three course dinner would be served between 7.00pm and 7.30pm. Dishes would be held for the diners to help themselves and, after dinner, drinks such as sherry or whisky would be taken in the sitting room – “They never offered me any!”

Greasy dishes and pots would be taken to the kitchen (or scullery) for washing while silverware and delicacies such as special glassware would be taken to the 'Maids' pantry' to be restored to their former glory.

Hilda stated that the Lucases generally treated their staff very well but she did object to being expected to stand for Mrs L even if in the middle of her dinner on her break.

Other staff employed at Bury House at the time included Frank Boynton, who was groom and managed to get a petrified Hilda onto a huge hunting horse on one occasion; Reg Horsley who was gardener and later became landlord of The Spread Eagle; Ruth Cannam who worked as a Parlour maid with Hilda and the cook was “a big bonny woman called Ann”.

The Lucas Family

The Lucas family would take a month long holiday in summer. They were very keen fisherfolk and spent many holidays fulfilling their hobby. During this break, Bury House staff were expected to thoroughly ‘spring’ clean the House from top to bottom. Hilda professes “We used to enjoy ourselves then work like mad just before they came back!”

Mrs Lucas had pet names for her husband Geroge – ‘Spratty’ and ‘Lynx’. The couple had a son Harry and a daughter Joyce.

Harry would often spend time with the local lads and used to go for a pint with them to The Crown in the village (at The Cross) or to The Sun at Great Easton. His parents did not approve! Harry moved to Rockingham Road when his parents sold Bury House and later met a sad end after moving to the Norfolk Broads where he lived on a houseboat. He apparently drowned.

Joyce liked to attend local hunt meetings but had an all too frequent habit of falling off her horse!

The Lucases also has a nephew ‘Master Ronald’ who was a Captain in the Army and was nicknamed ‘Tiger’!. Hilda describes him as a “very smart soldier” who was always pleasant and polite to the staff and was a “good tipper”. The Lucases took him on like one of their own family.

Time to Dance!

Staff were allowed one and a half days off each week and also every other Sunday. Permission could also be sought for Saturday evenings off, once dinner had been served, and the girls used to attend villages dances on those evenings and had to dash to get ready.

There were regular local dances at village huts in Middleton, Great Easton and Drayton. Sometimes a few people would club together for Sid Smith to take them in his taxi from Cottingham, but Hilda recalls many occasions where they would walk across fields in their finery all the way to Drayton and back taking the route via Occupation Road in Middleton.

The dances were very enjoyable nights and a “proper dance band” from Market Harborough would provide the entertainment – “They’ve probably retired by now!”

Hilda also revealed that she used to sneak out of Bury House on other occasions and used to tip toe in up the back stairs to avoid detection.

Wartime and Marriage

Hilda recalls soldiers being billeted in Bury House during the war. Some were American and they were initially in rooms above the stable block. When some were eventually moved into rooms above the maids’ quarters, the girls insisted on locks being immediately fitted to the inside of their doors!

Hilda remains eternally grateful to the Claypole and Cannam families who were very supportive to her in her early years in the village.

Hilda had been dating a Corby lad for some time and was quite sweet on him but village boy **Fred Bradshaw** took a shine to the young Hilda and seized the opportunity to play the gallant gentleman and used to meet her from the bus when she returned from her dates in Corby and would walk her down to Bury House to ensure her safe passage home.

Romance blossomed and they were later to wed. Hilda still has pangs of guilt over her beau from Corby "I had the job of facing this poor bloke. Perhaps he was pleased!"

Fred was assigned to firewatch duties at Wallis and Linnell factory on Rockingham Road during the war. The factory manufactured clothes and most of the village girls worked there at some point. Fred was also in the Home Guard and was part of a group of local lads that used to train regularly at East Carlton Park.

Hilda had the choice of joining the forces during the war or going to work in a munitions factory in Coventry in support of the war effort. Fred, having been a sailor and knowing their reputation, was fearful of losing his beloved to a mariner and therefore Hilda went off to the munitions factory. "He thought 'at least we could still see each other'".

She was employed doing bench work and helped make parts for airplanes.

She still vividly recalls the frequent air raids and regular trips to the air raid shelter with the family she was staying with. The man of the household had a somewhat frustrating habit of refusing to leave the house without his beloved cap - this despite bombs falling all around and two small children being in the house!

Apparently the flames of the burning city could be clearly seen even from this area.

Life after the War

After the war, Hilda's family moved to the last house on the left in Rockingham Road, Cottingham as you leave the village.

She recalls that the Police House opposite had a cesspit which developed a leak and that this contaminated the families' drinking water. Nobody was poisoned thankfully but the water had an 'acquired taste' for a while!

The family kept chickens and pigs and cured their own bacon and hams that used to hang on the wall at the end of the bed.

In her later life Hilda has been kept busy with a lot of charitable work.

Together with a Mr Roebuck she was instrumental in setting up the OXFAM shop in Market Harborough.

Hilda and husband Fred also served 'meals on wheels' for many years around the parishes of Cottingham, Middleton and East Carlton.

Village facilities

Hilda recalls several shops in the village including **Chamberlain's** in Church Street (the old Post Office) and **Coles shop** on High Street which sold sweets and ice cream and also had a car and bike repair shop. There were three shops on the corner of Corby Road at 'The Cross' - **Stapleton's** general store (later Buckby's shop), on the corner where the lounge of the house attached to the new Post Office is now; **Smith's** next door to Stapleton's (where the last Post Office was) which sold clothes and the **Co-op**, located in the ivy-covered house next to the new Post Office.

There were also two bakeries in the village, **Bidwell's bakery** on Corby Road and **Holmes' bakers** in Church Street. They had two daughters. Gladys (now Perkins) had to do deliveries on foot. Her elder sister went to Grammar school.

Hilda also recalls several pubs in the villages – the **Royal George**, **Spread Eagle** and **The Crown** at the cross, the **Red Lion** in Middleton, which was originally thatched and the **Woolpack** at the junction of Main Street and Ashley Road. There was also a Club Room on Church Street, opposite the entrance to Water Lane.

Clubs and Church Groups

Hilda was a member of the **Women's Institute choir** run by Mrs Stewart. The choir was well regarded, won many trophies at the Oundle Music Festival and even sang at the Llangollen Eistedfodd. At Christmas, the choir went around Cottingham and Middleton singing carols.

Mrs Kisby ran a '**Darby and Joan**' club providing a well deserved night out for village pensioners. Food was provided - Hilda helped out. This was held in a building that stood on the corner of Church Street where the Patio area of The Spread Eagle is now.

Mr and Mrs Albert Ingram ran the **church choir**. Albert was main chorister and had a powerful voice. His wife was the organist. They cycled from Stoke Albany every Sunday. Other members of the choir over the years were (apart from Hilda and husband Fred), Ron and Midge Claypole, Reg Claypole and Liz Allen.

Hilda recalls Canon Ruby, Rev Roberts, Rev Fred Adams, Father Geoffrey Ward and Father Brian as all residing over the church during her time there. Hilda was also responsible for organising flowers for the church and for cleaning the church brass. Hilda and Fred, together with Ron and Midge Claypole also instigated and ran the **Church dances** held at the School.

Village Characters

Nell Roberts lived in a cottage on the left in Corby Road- a bit above the green where Cottingham village sign now stands. Nell never missed a trick and was a permanent feature at her front door keeping an eye on what was going on. She was such a permanent fixture in fact that when Hilda's husband Fred painted a village scene of that area from a post card image he added Nell standing in her doorway! The painting still hangs on Hilda's lounge wall.

Miss Hatfield lived to the grand age of 102 years. Her family home named 'Hatfield' was built by her father and stands next to the Spread Eagle pub. Quite a character who travelled widely as lady's maid to a titled lady. Miss Hatfield was once interviewed by the local Evening Telegraph. She was asked why she had never married and responded "I've never met anyone I've loved more than I've loved myself!"

Hilda has thoroughly enjoyed village life in Cottingham. She has made many friends and has treasured memories of her time here.

Early Years and memories

Hilda was born in Manchester in 1918 and, In 1920, moved with her mother, Martha Vickers, and two sisters Lily and Yvonne to the small village of Santon near Scunthorpe. Her father was killed in the First World War and is buried in Iraq (then Mesopotamia?). Hilda never knew her father being just a baby when he fell. Her mother later remarried and this resulted in further siblings, step brothers Len and Gordon and a step sister Phyllis.

Hilda's earliest memories are of her mother cooking huge pots of mushy peas in the oven at home. Other villagers would bring jugs or bowls to the house to buy peas. Brandy snaps were another favourite.

At school, Hilda was good friends with Myra Tugby who's father was a manager at the local steelworks. Hilda recalls that Myra always had lots of wonderful toys in the house that they used to play with together. Myra was an only child and obviously quite privileged (at least in material terms) in comparison to Hilda's own family.

Hilda recalls that one day when she was at Scunthorpe secondary school she suddenly found herself doubled in pain and in tears. She ended up being carried to the headmaster's office by two strapping senior boys. An ambulance was immediately summoned and Hilda was taken to hospital where it was discovered she had appendicitis.

The secondary school pupils wore brown uniforms while the local grammar school uniform was blue in colour.

Hilda's mother Martha was an active W.I member and also had a number of part-time jobs helping others.

There wasn't a great deal to do in the village so as a youngster Hilda would keep herself amused doing what kids do.