

Cottingham and Middleton

...memories



Pat Aldaya, nee Carlyle (born 1942)

Born on Christmas Day 1942, Pat lived with her family in a ramshackle cottage in Middleton until just after the War, when she moved with her family to Corby. Pat moved to Cottingham with her husband Alan in 1969, and in 1987 purchased Willow Cottage, the former shop and bakery that stood right next to her former (since demolished) childhood home. In 2005, Pat and Alan turned Willow Cottage into a thriving business once more, running it as a B&B. Read Pat's fascinating memories of Middleton's cottages, businesses and people from the early 40s right through to the present day.

The Old Cottage, Main Street (1940s)

My name is Pat Aldaya (nee Carlyle) and I was born on Christmas Day 1942 at St. Mary's Hospital on London Road, Kettering. It used to be a workhouse but became a hospital many years before I was born. At two weeks old I was taken back to our cottage in Main Street, Middleton. It was probably number 13 next door and to the left of Cannam House and at the time I believe that Main Street was known as High Street. This may or may not be so but I still have my father's driving licence from that period and on it he wrote his address simply as High Street, Middleton, but that may have been a mistake on his part.



The cottage we lived in was pulled down in the late 1950s or early 1960s. In the old photograph opposite, a copy of which was obtained from **Ian and Lynn Saunders** who lived in Cannam House, you can see the end gable of the thatched cottage and the tenant is seen standing next to the picket fence in her crinoline dress. Going by the style of dress it was probably taken around 1855.

In 1939 during the Second World War my father, **Frank Carlyle**, rented the cottage for five shillings (25p) a week and used it to sleep there during the blackouts. He lived in Leicester with my mother Connie and my older brother Bill and had started to build up his business as

an ophthalmic optician in Corby. He would go from house to house offering to test peoples' eyes and gradually built up his clientele until he was able to rent a shop at 76 High Street, Corby (now demolished) which stood opposite the Rowlett School.

This was 1938 and he was Corby's first optician. He was superstitious and believed that anything with the letters OR or RO in them were lucky so he decided to 'get in on the ground floor' of Corby and his practice grew along with the town. Rather than have to drive back to Leicester during the wartime blackouts he decided to put a camp bed in the cottage and stay overnight during the week.

He rented the cottage from **Henry Burgess** who lived next door in Cannam House and he was a terrible landlord who never did any repairs. I think he was a solicitor in the firm of Burgess & Jeffries in Kettering. The cottage was riddled with mice and was damp, dark and dreary but eventually, in 1940, my mother and brother moved in there as they feared that Leicester might be bombed. It was to this cottage that I was taken as a two-week old baby in the first week of 1943.

The cottage had a small kitchen with an equally small old fashioned black-leaded range into which my mother put screwed up newspapers. When she heard the newspapers rustling she would set fire to them in the hope of killing the mice in there. There was a small bathroom type wash-hand basin in the corner of the kitchen with a cold tap and when the water was off mother had to take a bucket up The Hill to the spring to collect water. The front door was at the side of the house and the corridor from there turned right and up a slope to the front room. The window of this room looked out into the front garden with its picket fence.

A few feet from the front door and to the right, was the kitchen with its window facing the front garden. The stairs, with a door at the bottom, was to the left of the front door and at the top you stepped onto a large landing. This was used as a bedroom in previous times (not very private) and off this were two bedrooms. One to the right, my brother's, over the kitchen with a window overlooking the front garden, and one straight ahead, my parent's bedroom with its window in the gable end over the street. I think I slept in the large landing bedroom. In May 1945, I can distinctly remember a flagpole with the Union Jack being flown from the front bedroom window over the pavement to celebrate the end of the second World War. I would have been almost 2½ years old. My brother had a tent to play in which was actually a parachute made of silk and leather but I don't know where it came from.

During the war my mother was expected to billet soldiers who were staying in the area. I think she had two staying in 1940/1941. They kept their armoured tank at the end of the driveway at the side of the cottage. This driveway was between our cottage and number 11 (Willow Cottage) where we lived from 1987 to 2010. One day, as the soldiers manoeuvred the tank out of the drive and turned left, the gun barrel swung round and hit the cottage opposite (**Cornerstones**) knocking a hole in the side wall. For many years afterwards the repair could be seen and probably still can if closely inspected, although it's now hidden behind the stone wall. But at the time there was a garden gate between the house and the smaller stone wall that was there at the time.

When I was born it was rumoured among the local gossips that I was probably the offspring of one of the billeted soldiers. I had very pale almost white blonde hair as a child. My father was 43 years old and had a full head of white hair. The rumour was 'That blonde haired baby girl couldn't possibly be the child of that white haired old man' implying I was the child of one of the soldiers. I wasn't!

Dad was a volunteer in the Observer Corps in the village. He and a few other village residents from Middleton and East Carlton used to man the observer post which was located in a field on the way to Pipewell. I remember being taken up there in my pram by my mother, probably to take sandwiches and a flask of tea. Dad was wearing a uniform, but I didn't realise the significance of it. As this would have been before the end of the War I could have only been 2 years old and possibly younger. I think there are still the remains of a look-out post or 'pill box' in a field to the west of East Carlton.

A look along Main Street

Main Street was very quiet. Cars rarely passed by but I do remember an old traction engine parked in the street opposite Manor Farm which was pulling a cart with a tank of molten tar being heated underneath by a furnace. It was obviously road mending. My mother took my 7 year old brother Bill to stand next to the tank of tar and made him breathe in the fumes. He suffered from asthma and bronchitis and she believed that this would help relieve it. But with the road being so quiet and safe for children to play in I would sit on the kerbside with a few of my mother's kitchen utensils and a jug of water. In the gutter was a lot of dust as road-sweepers, either human or mechanical, were a rarity. I would mix the dust with the water and make mud pies rather like playing with the sand on a beach. Simple pleasures for a child with next to no toys.

Middleton Confetti

Between our old cottage and number 11 (Willow Cottage) was a driveway which led down to an orchard. The orchard is shown on old maps but the houses of Cannam Close now stand there. Also at the bottom of the drive stood an outbuilding that held two separate latrines. One served our cottage and one served the cottage at the back of ours where a **Mrs White** lived. She was later re-housed in Berryfield Road when those houses were built and our cottage and hers were demolished. My father had the task of emptying the latrine buckets as we had no 'night soil man' at the time who would come round and empty residents' buckets, presumably at night. Father would take the bucket down to the orchard, dig a hole and empty the contents of the bucket into it. The trouble was, if it was a windy day, the toilet paper, which was torn up newspapers, would flutter around, and so it was nicknamed Middleton Confetti.

Willow Cottage - shop and bakery

Willow Cottage was a shop and bakery when I was a child. The shop part was our living room after we'd bought it in 1987, but as a toddler I would go in there and then through the ancient oak door at the back of the room (the door is about 400 years old) and down two steps into the bakery part at the end of the building. There I would watch Mr Campbell, Walter's father, taking the loaves out of the brick oven with his peel, the long handled wooden contraption used for removing the loaves. I'm sure I wandered in there on my own and was probably just tolerated as next door's toddler being curious. When she was 9 years old our daughter, Saran, would cycle down to the shop from our previous home in High Street, Cottingham to buy sweets. The previous owners, called Roberts, bought the house when the shop owners, Chapmans, retired about 1980 and renovated it turning the shop part into their living room.

Cannam House (formerly Burgess House)

I was told that Cannam House had the date 1803 fashioned from cobblestones in front of the door. They've since been replaced by paving slabs. The date of 1803 was apparently when the house was given its present façade. To the right of the house is the ground floor brick addition that was originally built as a billiard room. It was later used as a nursery school before being transferred to the converted barns at the rear of **Manor House Farm** and the nursery school was renamed **Wellingtons**. Henry Burgess, with due influence, refused to allow the front railings of Cannam House to be removed for The War Effort, and thank goodness he did. Most other railings in the village had been removed for this purpose as some bright spark at The War Office decided that the metal could be used to make armaments. It turned out later that most of the metal gathered from around the country was totally unsuitable resulting in many tons of railings being completely wasted and a lot of history lost in the process.

Allotments

Across the road from Cannam House was a gate which led up the slope to some allotments. The gate was the entrance to the garden that belonged to Cannam House. In one of the two old photographs taken about 1855 it shows Mr Burgess and his wife in that garden – probably Henry Burgess's parents. My father would take me to his allotment through the gate. I'd be about 3 years old and I remember someone had planted parsley along the edge of his allotment and dad told me that I could eat some. It was the first time I'd tasted it and I never eat parsley now without being transported back to those allotments where numbers 14 and 16 Main Street now stand.

Middleton Forge

Further down Main Street stood the old forge, now a house. I would wander down there with my little tin pram and stand watching the blacksmith shoe horses. He would tell me in no uncertain terms to keep well back from the horse but I was curious and wouldn't heed his warning.

One day the horse kicked backwards and its hoof dented my little tin pram. Was I upset? I ran home bawling my eyes out because it had been damaged and the blacksmith used a few choice phrases as I ran off up the road. This was during the war when there were no children's toys being made, at least none that my parents could either afford or come by. But this pram was found by my maternal grandparents, Ernest and Annetta Jones, who lived in Leicester. They perhaps came by it from a neighbour who was going to throw it out. But it was my pride and joy and to have it damaged seemed like the end of the world.

I've never been particularly fond of horses ever since. For the next few years, despite dad hammering out the dent and painting the pram with some silver paint he found somewhere, the pram bore the scar of that incident and I never felt the same about it again.

The Red Lion

In **The Red Lion pub** the landlord and his wife were **Mr & Mrs Moffatt**. I think Mr Moffatt was called Harold but known as **Curly Moffat** because he was as bald as a coot. They had three children, Graham, Rita and another daughter. **Graham Moffat** (6.12.1919 – 2.7.1965) was a child actor and was the chubby boy in the Will Hay films of the 1930/40s. I remember him coming home to the pub occasionally as he would be away a lot filming.

He'd have been about 24 or 25 at the time and after his film career he was landlord of **The Swan** pub in Braybrooke. He had a pet raven which squawked alarmingly which was perched on a post in the back garden of the pub.

Graham's sister Rita was my little playmate. She was a Downs Syndrome child but that didn't matter to me as there were so few children of my age to play with, so I made a friend of Rita. She was about 10 years older than me and I was only 2 or 3 years old. Her mother used to dress her up in very frilly clothes which was all the more remarkable because of the rationing of dress material during the war. My mother reckoned it was because Mrs Moffatt was over-compensating for Rita's shortcomings. But I liked Rita and we got on well, possibly because, in effect, she was my age group. But I did remember asking my mother why Rita did certain things which didn't seem sensible to me, as young as I was, and mum would tell me it was because Rita wasn't as clever as I was. I wouldn't have understood any other explanation anyway.

The present **Red Lion pub** was built in the mid 1930s to replace the previous one. I tell people that I was in The Red Lion the night before I was born which would have been Christmas Eve 1942. After mum had been in The Red Lion for about an hour that night, as dad had asked her to join him there to meet his new friends, she walked up The Hill to the nearest telephone box that was to the left of the gates of East Carlton Park. We knew it just as Carlton Park and the phone box has since been removed. Mum telephoned her parents in Leicester to tell them that she was still on her feet and there was no sign of the baby. That walk up The Hill, along the old Market Harborough road and back was enough to start off her labour and I was born the next day. I certainly remember the interior of the pub as I was taken there as a toddler and the skittles table was in the bar to the right of the building. As far as I know it's the same skittles table that's there now (2012).

Other businesses and houses

Because so few people had private transport in the 1940s, Main Street, like all villages in those days, had many of the facilities that were needed by the villagers. Apart from the **blacksmith's forge** there was **The Woolpack pub** on the corner of Ashley Road and three or four shops and a **Post Office**.

At the back of The Woolpack and upstairs in the buildings at the back was the original meeting room for the **Rockingham Forest Wheelers Club**, which was formed in the mid 1950s and my brother **Bill Carlyle** was one of its first members. He donated The **Fritz Cup** for time trials as his nickname was Fritz due to his crew-cut hairstyle. There was also a fish and chip shop at The Woolpack.

There was even a doctor's surgery (**Dr Blackstock**) at number 18 which transferred across the road to an old cottage, now demolished, down a path to the right of Cannam House. Number 18 was originally an agricultural building with the remnants of a hayloft at the back and on the date stone at the front you can just make out the date 1883.

At number 23 (**Michaelmas**) was the shop run by **Mrs Spriggs**.

Located on the left hand side through the archway adjacent to number 50 was a shop and **Post Office**, now a house.

Number 34 with the stone plaque on the front displaying the words **Birmingham Street** has been a rope making factory, a pub and a shop. Perhaps Main Street was called Birmingham Street in the dim and distant past because the road would have originally led to Birmingham.

Number **20 Main Street** is supposed to be haunted, or at least the gardens and orchard that were at the back. I can remember being told that the daughter of the owners in the early 1940s was mentally unstable. Eventually she hanged herself in the orchard and it's said that she can still be heard screaming. I can certainly remember going to the front door of the house as a toddler to fetch my brother back home for a meal, only to be told in no uncertain terms to go away and hearing the girl screaming somewhere in the house.

Returning to Middleton (1969 to 1987)

My parents, brother and I moved to Corby in 1946 after the War. Dad had saved all his Observer Corps pay and used it as a deposit to buy a newly built house at 10 Richmond Road, Corby when building started again after the War. It was always my desire to go back to Middleton which I did, but in stages - first to Cottingham in 1969 just two years after marrying my husband Alan, and then to Willow Cottage at 11 Main Street, Middleton with our two children in 1987.

We lived at 3 High Street, Cottingham from 1969, adjacent to The Spread Eagle pub. The house bears a date plaque of 1865. My mother told me she could remember a tailor living there and he used to sit cross-legged in the front window sewing. She also seemed to remember that whoever lived there collected rents for Henry Burgess – I think it was a Miss Ingram. Little did my mother think that her daughter would eventually live there.

In 1987, we moved to Willow Cottage. The previous owners, the **Roberts**, had left a stone bearing the date of 1616 sitting in the hearth. The stone must have been found by builders when the Roberts were updating the property after buying it from the **Chapmans** who ran it as a shop. The stone was freshly carved but had a corner missing which is probably why it was discarded and never used, but we believe the stone dated back as far as 1616, as the date was in the old numerals used in the 17th century and there was also an oak door between the lounge and the back of the house that was of 17th century construction. My husband Alan had the stone set into the front wall of the house.

In 1995, we replaced the railings at the front of the cottage that had been taken during the War. These were copied from the ones at the front of **Vine House**. We did this partly to stop dogs wandering into the front garden and partly because it was in keeping with the cottage and the rest of the street.