

# *Trentham Memories*

**Sybil Austin née Gould**



**Trentham Heritage Project**

**An interview with Sybil was recorded at her home in February 2018 by two members of the Trentham Heritage Project. These are the memories she shared.**

Sybil was born in Trentham. Apart from a brief period at Oakhill as a child, and after her marriage, she has lived here all her life. She was born at 3, Paddock Cottages. Her grandparents, Edward and Henrietta Snape, lived on Longton Road in a cottage which became a shop and newsagents.

Sybil and John as children with their parents



Trentham was very different when Sybil was a child. The cottages, which were no longer tied to Trentham Estate, and the more recent Victorian and Edwardian houses were there but she remembers 1930s estates being built around Margaret Avenue and Boma Road.

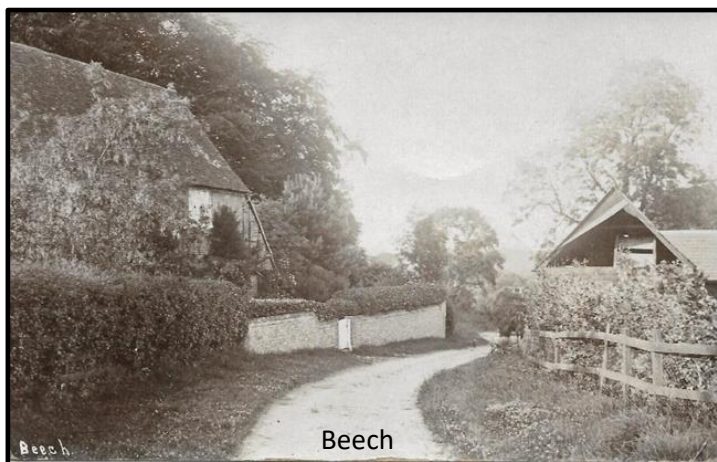
When her mother was a child everyone lived in a tied cottage and worked on the estate. Sybil's father was different, he worked in Hanley. Paddock cottages were converted to homes to keep young people in Trentham and Sybil's parents had one of those.

Her Grandfather was a woodsman at Beech, working on the sawmills. The Duke asked him to oversee new planting on the Trentham Estate and offered a large cottage. There were seven children.

Sybil remembers a washhouse in the yard, lots of gardens growing vegetables and a pig sty.

Most cottages had a pig sty. The pigs were killed in rotation and shared, due to lack of cold storage.

As children, Sybil Austin and her brother John spent lots of time in Trentham Park. They had a season ticket to the gardens. There were lots of free rides as they knew the train driver, an uncle had the boat on the lake, another uncle ran the archery. They paddled in the stream in the park but were warned to keep away from the reservoir as it was bottomless. There were deer in the park.





Sybil's mother had also been free to roam the park and the estate where they worked. The children all had chores as well as school, but were not restricted otherwise.

Sybil's father was a "townie", a manager in the Co-op. All her uncles worked on the estate. Her parents lived first in Cranberry Cottage, lodging with "Nana" Calvert, before moving into Paddock cottages. Cranberry cottage was the Post Office back then. It still looks the same today, apart from the road widening.

Cranberry when it was a post office



Trentham Methodist Church and Sunday School

When not at work, life revolved around the church for Sybil's mother. She and her siblings went to the Parish Church on Sunday morning, followed by Sunday school, then the Methodist Sunday school in the afternoon. Mother talked of Sunday school prizes, the anniversary festival with new dresses. The children all enjoyed going.

Trentham Institute was another meeting place before WW2. The Parish Hall off Longton Road had lots of activities: Sybil was involved in Cub Scouts, netball, dancing. It was the hub of Trentham and shouldn't have been let go after the fire.

Sybil's mother went on one outing on a canal barge, but Sybil does not recall her mother speaking of other outings. The canal and railway were important in bringing visitors to Trentham and the family had a tea garden serving passing visitors and selling refreshments.

Important characters in the village included the vicar, Archdeacon Malcolm Graham. Sybil's mother told her about the Duchess's school for girls in Park Drive. The girls had scarlet cloaks, replaced every three years, and Sybil's mother was really envious.

There were two police stations in Trentham, one in Park Drive which was for Staffordshire and one in front of the Parish Hall on Longton Road for Stoke on Trent. Policemen were more prominent in her mother's day, often to be seen on bicycles. Some people used horses to travel. There was no public road transport beyond Hanford Bridge for many years.



The Police Station in Park Drive

Nurse French delivered Sybil. She was a wonderful person, far more prominent in the community than a doctor. Dr Peat came to Trentham in the 40s before the introduction of the NHS and lived on the corner of Oaktree Road, before the introduction of the NHS.

Special occasions / events for Sybil included dancing displays. Her mother talked of going to the Hall in 1910 for the coronation of George V. Previously the whole school used to go to the Hall at Christmas for a party and be given a present. The Duchess would be there.

Harvest festivals at church were very important.

Sybil went carol-singing at the Priory. They were always invited in for mince pies, she remembers the impressive hall. It seems incredible to her that the Priory was allowed to be demolished, as it was such an important place, a huge part of Trentham's history.

Sybil and John were Catholic and did not attend Trentham school. She went to St Theresa's when it opened, later to St Dominic's.



Her mother remembered and spoke well of Mr Forse, the headmaster of Trentham School, who died in World War One, and Mrs Forse, who also worked there. She lived in Boma Road, as did Miss Mallabon the music teacher. Mr Forse took boys and girls separately into the yard for “physical jerks”, with dumb bells. Practical subjects, needlework, knitting and embroidery were taught. The pupils had a copy book for writing and had their knuckles rapped if the writing was not clear. Sybil says her mother enjoyed school – the village children were very close to each other.

There was not much time for hobbies. At 13 her mother was apprenticed to a dressmaker, having shown aptitude through making dolls’ clothes. All the children did chores and Sybil’s mother loved looking after the piglets. The children often did the baking for visitors to the tea garden.



Mr and Mrs Forse

Family outings were not usual. Farmers, even with just a smallholding, rarely had a day off. There was no public transport nearby and too far to walk with small children.

Their family was mostly self-sufficient. There were deliveries by a visiting horse and cart, both in her mother and Sybil’s time, one selling fruit and veg. The family baked their own bread and had milk from their cow.

Sybil remembers at the end of WW2 being sent to buy 12 x 1penny bananas from the delivery man. Her grandfather may have sold surplus milk to other people in the village - he was quite entrepreneurial, taking on the news agency. The papers were collected from the railway station by the children, who delivered them before school. There was also a milk churn opposite Bankhouse Farm. A man used to take milk from the churn and deliver it on his bicycle. Food storage was difficult. Sybil wondered whether people were allowed to use the ice house in Park Drive?



The location of her grandfather’s newsagents

Cooking for Sybil's mother was done on a huge range, which was banked at night and never allowed to go out. There was always a cauldron heating on top. They baked their own bread, churned butter, made jam, grew their own veg.

A favourite meal was lobby, with little meat but plenty of veg, suet dumplings and lovely gravy. They also ate rabbits caught by Sybil's father – they were pests in the garden and he trapped them. During the war he would take rabbits to the butcher's shop where he was working and portions were added to the meagre meat ration.

Sybil's father opened the first self-service shop in Blurton. Unfortunately theft was rife.

Eating out was a rare treat for special occasions. Sybil remembers birthdays at Café Monica, owned by Mr Taylor. It was tiny, four tables, with black and white tiles. The waitresses wore black uniforms with organdie caps and aprons. There was a comport with scones and cakes. Eating out was expensive. Special



occasions were often celebrated by visiting other people and having nice things to eat.

Picnics were very common, walking to Hanchurch or Barlaston Downs. You could buy from a cottage a tray of tea for your picnic (tray, jug of tea, jug of hot water, cups and saucers) for which you paid a deposit.

The family rarely went to Hanley, but Sybil's mother walked to Stoke once a week, with John in the pram, to do the shopping.

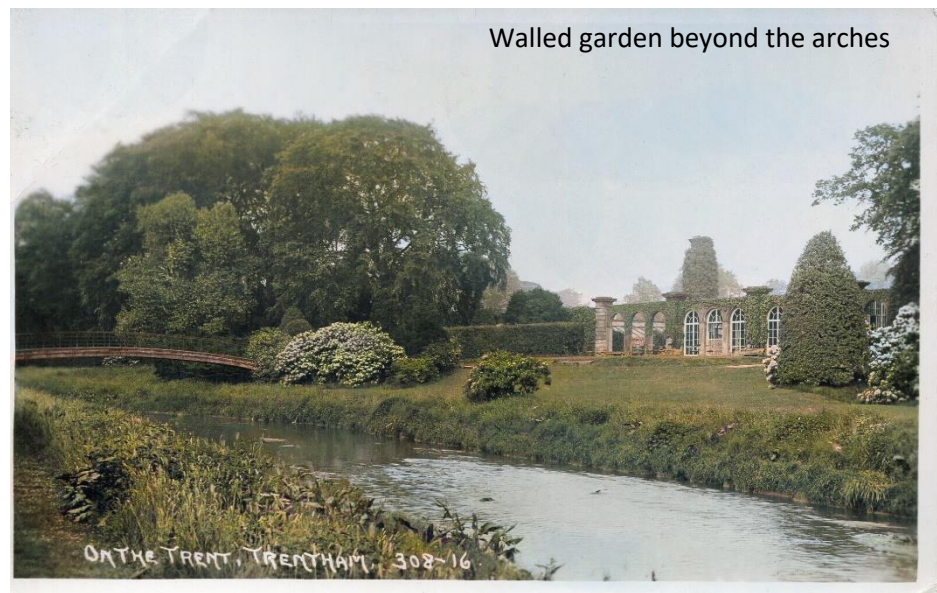
Hissey's farm had a telephone, number 49145. This served the farm and the garage, but Sybil's family were allowed to receive calls. This meant crossing the field pursued by a "psychopathic" bantam which had to be chased off with a dustbin lid. Very few people had phones.

Sybil's uncles survived WW1. They were ordinary soldiers fighting in dreadful battles, including the Somme, but never talked about their experiences as it was too awful. The family at home were self-sufficient so did not feel the effects too much, although it was difficult to get clothing.

Sybil's mother became a dressmaker, it was easier to buy cloth than clothes. Bought clothes were made of stiff material which was difficult to wash, dry and iron. Children always wore clean, white pinafores which were starched and ironed. One of her mother's specialities as a

dressmaker was “farmers’ wives knickers” which had an extra wide gusset to allow the women to sit comfortably astride a milking stool.

Boys often started work before they were 13 and did jobs around the Hall, helping the labourers. There was a wonderful walled garden, where you could buy fruit, veg and bedding plants.



Walled garden beyond the arches

Sybil and John’s own experience of World War II was that they never went hungry. Father had two allotments; mother was a very good manager. They missed sweets due to rationing and meat was rationed for long after the war. A couple had 2s 4d worth of meat for a week.

The sirens were scary when they sounded and heavy bombers went over. They learned to distinguish British from German bombers. There was an Anderson shelter in the garden which they used at first, but later they became more blasé and birds nested in the shelter so they couldn’t use it. Fortunately, there was little bombing round here.

*The interview session ended at this point.*