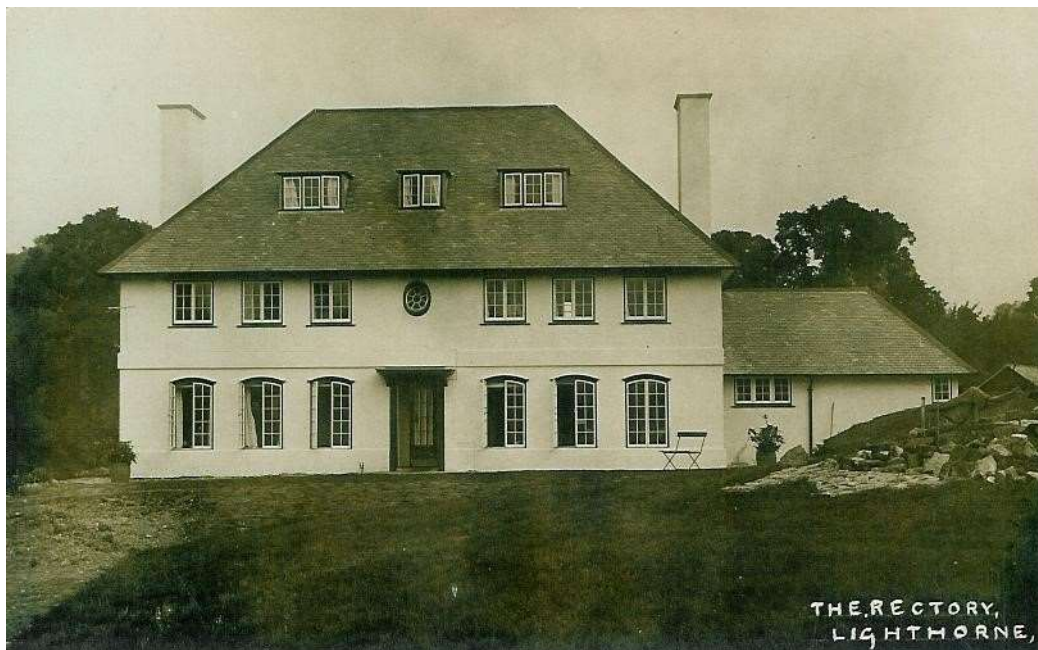


Lighthorne 'Now and Then' - A Personal Reflection

by Wendy Heaney (2024)

During our lives there is often one place which is like a magnet, continually drawing us into its heart. Lighthorne for me is one of those places. Only eight years of my life were spent in the village, between 1951 and 1959, which for me is a small span of time, having now celebrated my 81st birthday! We came to Lighthorne from Coventry, in response to the Bishop's request, that my father, the Revd. William Shakespeare Newton, should take up the incumbency of Lighthorne and Chesterton, which subsequently has expanded into the parishes of Moreton Morrell, Ashorne and Newbold Pacey, not forgetting Upper Lighthorne. Today the clergy are able to travel around the villages by their own transport; in the 1950s my father cycled in order to visit Chesterton and outlying parts of the parishes. Visits to Chesterton usually involved me accompanying him, in order for me to open all the gates stretching from the Banbury road to Chesterton village.



Postcard of the new rectory, circa 1930 (Colin Such)

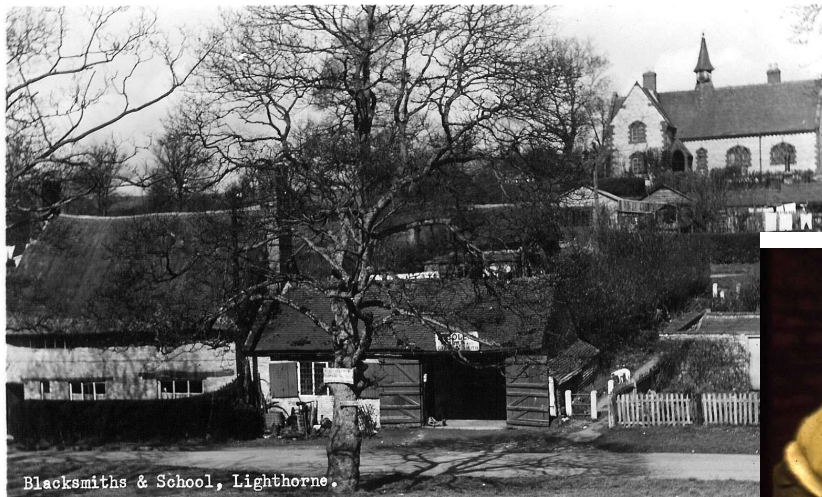
We lived in the rectory along the Moreton Morrell Road, known as Dark Lane, in a beautiful mock Georgian style house, now known as Northbrook House. It was built in 1930 as a smaller replacement for the original rectory to the east of the church. During the 1980s Northbrook House was sold into private ownership at a time when the Diocese was selling many of its older rectories and replacing them with more modern accommodation. I can distinctly remember it being a real family home where we enjoyed some wonderful Christmas celebrations. It was a place where all were welcomed each and every day. My sister held her wedding reception in the rectory having been married in the Church of St. Laurence. The low downstairs windows in the building were a great temptation for children intent on climbing through them to explore different rooms!

It was from my home in the rectory that I ran down the drive struggling to catch the 8 am Stratford Blue bus into Leamington from the village green. On the occasions when snow was present it involved a walk to the main Banbury road. Having looked at a recent timetable I notice there are still some buses which continue to serve the village. Occasionally I was fortunate in having a car lift from a family who lived in Rosemary Cottage, but I can still remember the bus being a real community affair with many exchanges of homework ideas!



Stratford Blue bus no. 33 (John Hill)

When leaving the bus on my return home I loved the sounds and smells coming from Cole's forge, on the village green. I can still savour them today.



Early 1950s postcard view of the forge (John Hill)



Allan Cole, the blacksmith, 1962 (John Hill)

There are three events which have always remained with me during those Lighthorne years. The first is a historical pageant produced by Miss Clare Verney at Bishops Farm. I think the year was 1951 or 1952. Recently I have been reminded that Grace Boyles (with the beautiful voice known to the congregation of St. Laurence) became Britannia in the pageant, an excellent choice of casting. Despite my tender age, I was asked by Clare to recite the poem 'The Battle of Blenheim' by Robert Southey. It appeared to be a daunting request with 11 verses to remember. However the prospect of wearing a very neat style Queen Anne costume gave me great encouragement, although I remained

in awe of Clare. The other participants all appeared to be in groups, but I can remember walking entirely on my own as we entered the grass bank stage. It took me quite a number of years to realise that the poem was probably a scathing criticism of war. Drama I know continues in the village ranging from pantomimes to more serious drama and the Lighthorne Festival of One Act Plays in June and regular Folk Club evenings at the Antelope. All well supported and much appreciated.



Lighthorne Village Show
Saturday 23 September 2023

After way too long a gap, the Village Show is happening again!

Whether its growing vegetables, fruit and plants, baking scrumptious cakes, bottling and jam making, or creativity in art, photography, woodturning, metal making..... This is the chance to show off your talents. It doesn't matter if you're 4 or 94 years old, there will be a place for you.

Judges will view all entries in the morning and everyone is welcome to come and see the displays from our talented village people and celebrate their success. Homemade cakes and refreshments will be served with tea or even a glass of fizz to help wash it down.

A list of classes and entry forms will be delivered through all letterboxes in the next few weeks. So for now SAVE THE DATE

GET GROWING
GET BAKING
GET MAKING

Lighthorne Village Hall 2.30pm to 4.00pm



The second event which was very much part of my childhood was the Lighthorne Annual Flower Show, when the ladies of the village (most of the entrants in the cooking and baking section were female in those days) displayed their culinary skills by producing some amazing sponge cakes, scones, home-made chutneys and jams. The gardeners showed their prowess in producing marrows, potatoes and onions of enormous sizes, together with lovely cottage-style flowers. I spent a few short months at the village school and we were invited to exhibit at the Flower Show. I was never very good with the practical skills of sewing and knitting, but I did manage to win first prize for a painting I produced of life under the sea. I follow Lighthorne Parish Community on Facebook so I was delighted last year when I saw an advertisement for a Flower Show in the Village Hall. How good to keep these traditions alive enabling and enriching community life.

Finally to the third event the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second. I believe in 2022 Lighthorne celebrated the late Queen's platinum jubilee with a whole range of events taking place between 3rd and 5th June. I can imagine it would have been so refreshing and joyful after our 'lockdown' period. This jubilee celebration was of course marking the coronation of the late Queen, held on June 2nd 1953, when I was living in Lighthorne. This coronation came during the post war years when austerity was improving, but food continued to be rationed and everyone remained cautious in their budgets. Mrs Lilian Lewis, a dressmaker who lived at Old Rose Cottage, in Post Office Lane was doing a great trade in the village and I can remember certain clothes she made for me.



Lighthorne 2022 jubilee mug (Colin Such)



Invitation card to Lighthorne 1953 coronation festivities (LH132)

It became very clear that the village community was looking forward with great anticipation to marking the coronation of their young Queen and a special committee was formed with Mr. Lucas from the Old Rectory as chairman. On June 2nd we awoke disappointingly to a damp morning. (This seems to be a feature of coronations!) Following a service in the church, Lighthorne people gathered in the Old Rectory's spacious front hall, around a small screen, to watch the coronation service on the television. On this occasion Mr. Humphriss did not complain about the hymns selected for the service as was his usual custom, mainly over a pint with my father in the Antelope.

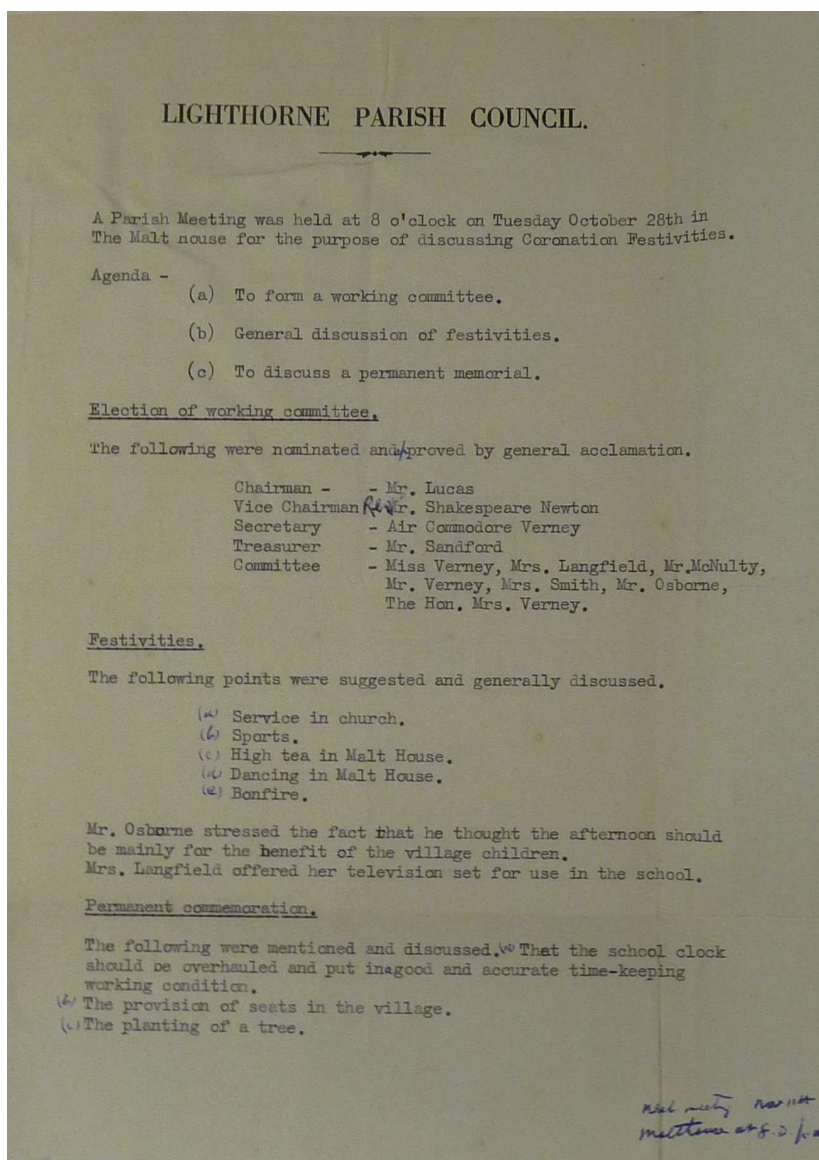
I believe that Mrs. Langfield, headmistress of the school, also made an open invitation for people to gather in School House. Following a damp morning the day brightened into a sunny afternoon and a sports event was held as planned 'for the benefit of of the children.' The day concluded with a high tea in the Malthouse alongside much dancing and rejoicing.

A further event added to Lighthorne's coronation day celebrations. Mr. McNulty organised an outing to the Battle of Britain Fun Fair in Battersea Park, in conjunction with a viewing of the coronation lights, travelling there in a typical 1950 style coach. I was fortunate enough to have a front seat which I shared with Wendy Sharp, daughter of John and Rhoda from Church Cottages. Travelling back to Lighthorne we made a break for a fish and chip supper, inspring community singing on the way home, 'Land of Hope and Glory' being a strong favourite.

These amazing festivities will not be forgotten by me, probably others too and as a certain reminder I have the coronation mug of Queen Elizabeth II presented by Lighthorne Parish Council on proud display at my home in Hertfordshire. The minute book of the committee is in the archive of the Lighthorne History Society (LH131). I have noticed the following endorsment inside the front cover

We hope that this book may be preserved amongst the village "archives" and might be used again in the (we hope) far distant future for the coronation of King Charles III

So we have come full circle to our current day; wonderful events celebrated in differing circumstances and periods of history, each continuing to hold the community spirit of Lighthorne as a focus.



Notification of forming of 1953 coronation committee, from the minute book (LHS 131)

In October of 2023 I returned for a walk around Lighthorne, my general impression being that there had been a great deal of development over the many years since I had lived in the village, mostly homes with extensions from the original, now having a car parked in the drive or along one of the lanes. I immediately thought of how the 'violet cart', as it was known by the residents of the village, would have faired when emptying all the privy toilets, with small spaces in which to manoeuvre. Thank goodness for the modern bathroom! I spoke to a few people along the Bank who were occupied with maintenance work. They were all very friendly towards a stranger, always a good feature of the village. There were several buildings in the village which hold memories for me, the first being Pratts Farm where during the fifties the Thomas family resided. I remember visiting the farm with my mother and playing with Mavis (now Piper). I feel sure she had a rocking horse although I may be wrong on this point. She was a lively friend with lots of enthusiasm and energy for life. We remain in touch today. The farmhouse is a very impressive building and remains recognisable to me.



The Tompkins family, 1950, Pauline is 2nd from left on front row (Bill Tompkins)

Further down Old School Lane is Curacy Farm which I believe is being rennovated and developed. Pauline Tompkins, who lived there, became a good friend during my short period at Lighthorne School. It was a treat when I was invited to tea, joining other members of the large family and being seated on benches to relish and enjoy large plates of bread and butter, all prepared by Mrs. Tompkins whom I remember, as an unassuming and gentle lady. Members of her family have now moved to outlying farms and my friend Pauline died several years ago. I was so pleased to have had a conversation with her at an event in the village hall highlighting some memories of Lighthorne, held in good time before the pandemic.

The Malthouse (now Malthouse Cottages), adjacent to the Antelope brings back some recurring

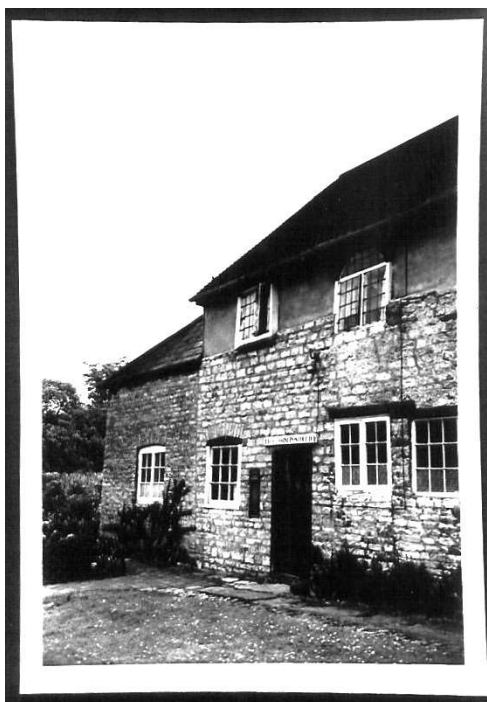
memories not only of coronation celebrations , but also staged dramas and village dances to one of which my local boyfriend came.

Before leaving the centre of the village I must not ignore Bishop's Farm, immediately thinking of brother and sister, Bobby and Clare Verney, probably considered by a few as being rather eccentric characters, nevertheless greatly loved by the village and renowned for their hospitality. During my time in Lighthorne the Suttcliffe family were boarding at Bishop's Farm. Their daughter Madeleine became a travelling companion on the school bus and an interesting friend. She gave me a short course in horse riding skills, in order for me to take care of her horse whilst she was absent for a few days. I remember when Madeleine visited the Rectory she was fascinated by a sundial in the garden and we had many discussions concerning the direction of the sun.

Pausing to look at the village green, I bow to Marie Cook of Chesterton who was a May Queen in the mid 1950s. Together with several friends I was an attendant, most of us wearing dresses probably made by Mrs Lewis and we carried small bunches of spring flowers.



Bobby and Clare Verney in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", 1914 (ex LH275)



The old post office, 1967 (Ben Knight)



Kate Mountford, who donated land for the building of the village hall in 1960 (John Hill)

Turning into Post Office Lane I reflected for a moment on the Post Office, as I recall visits to collect stamps, post letters and even buy cheese which had to be carefully weighed by Kate Mountford. I believe there were other groceries available too at a time when rationing continued. I remember Kate had a lovely welcoming smile when the bell rang as you entered her domain. I suppose you could say the experience recalled that wonderful classic book 'Cranford' written by Elizabeth Gaskell. My visits to the Post Office remain a treasured memory, and it is very gratifying to see how

the building has been beautifully renovated into a five bedroom house. Connected with communication was of course the village telephone box. It is so good that the Parish Council was able to adopt it from BT in 2008. Despite our digital communications today we are reminded by the presence of the red telephone box of a time when life was lived at a considerably lower pace.



Church Cottages depicted on an early C 20th postcard (Colin Such)

The grade two listed Church Cottages in Church Lane hold some special memories. Continuing my walk around the village it was a joy to see them retaining many of their original features, including small windows and doors and I'm sure now there is much improved sanitation, with modern bathrooms. The "eyebrow" dormer windows were retained when the corrugated iron and thatch roofs were replaced with tiles in the 1950s. I knew May Smith at number 1 Church Cottages. She helped my mother at the Rectory with domestic chores and gave assistance in many other ways. May had such a lovely presence around the place, full of fun and a breath of fresh air in the community.

Next door to May and her family, in number 2, were Cyril Hackelton and his wife May (the daughter of Albert & Mary Hunt.) There were very few times when passing the cottage that you could avoid hearing the latest information about the village. They were the modern day 'Facebook', ready to impart all their knowledge and contacts, wonderful characters who were firmly rooted and loved in Lighthorne. Cyril's affection for the village is displayed in the lovely church lychgate, which was a bequest from his will.



Cyril Hackleton in the doorway of no. 2 Church Cottages, 1995 (Peter Johnson)

Number 3 Church Cottages was the home of John and Rhoda Sharp and family.

John I believe was both a District and Parish Councillor, as well as being a long time churchwarden and there is a memorial plaque to him in the church, a mark of respect for all his commitment to the

community of Lighthorne and beyond. Wendy Sharp, their daughter, was a friend of mine and we both shared the same Christian name. In the village, in order to differentiate between us, Wendy Sharp was known as Wendy 1 (having been a long term resident) and I was Wendy 2. I participated in many Saturday afternoon teas with the Sharp family, followed by a television programme of the fifties called 'Whirligig', designed for young people but, of course, enjoyed by everyone as television was such a novelty.

I have been unable to research the lady who lived at number 4 Church Cottages, but she remains a very vivid character to me known as Miss Ridley. Each Saturday morning I went to her well furnished cottage for a piano lesson in order to learn about the 'Rudiments and Theory of Music' and where I was offered a sweet after the lesson. I never became a great pianist, but her tuition, in future days enabled me to read music sufficiently well to sing in a number of choral groups and my first experience of singing was in fact in the Church of St Laurence.

These cottages hold such powerful stories which I am sure will continue differently in many future years.



The old rectory on a postcard, circa 1910 (Colin Such)

The Old Rectory, situated to the east of the church, was during the 1800s the home of the clergy. It was the seat of entertainment and both 'Jack and the Beanstalk' and 'As You Like It' were performed in the well crafted, open air Beechwood Theatre, in the garden. Over the years fetes have been held in the garden, and in recent years it has been part of the Open Gardens Scheme, mentioned on the Rectory Society website, www.rectorysociety.org.uk. Initially when I arrived at Lighthorne the Lucas family were occupying the Old Rectory. (Mr. Lucas is mentioned as being chairman of the Coronation Committee.)

The next occupants of the Old Rectory were Felicity and Adam Butler. We invited them to the Rectory (now Northbrook House) for a welcome to the village tea. Adam explained to us that his father, government minister Rab Butler, would be spending occasional weekends in Lighthorne and attending church services. Adam always gave us notice of impending visits. I'm not sure whether he was politely suggesting a shorter and non political sermon! The village were always pleased to welcome Rab to morning services. When Samuel the first child of Felicity and Adam was born Princess Alexandra made a private visit to the village to attend the baptism of Sam where she was

standing as a Godparent. My parents were invited to tea following the baptism and I was locked in at home sworn to secrecy!

I became good friends with Glynis a lovely Welsh young lady who was employed as both a groom and au pair to the Butler family. I believe eventually she became a member of the church choir. I enjoyed some coffee evenings with Glynis in the part of the Old Rectory where she resided. Glynis told me all the about the horses and their antics. Felicity and Adam kindly invited both of us to go and see the Doyle Carte Opera Company at Stratford in a performance of 'Yeoman of the Gaurd'. This was my first introduction to Gilbert and Sullivan.

I believe eventually that Felicity and Adam were given prestigious titles. I have come to learn however that their involvement with Lighthorne was as fellow villagers, showing kindness and respect to all. This was duly reciprocated. On my visit in 2023 I was pleased to see that their graves were positioned in a place facing the Old Rectory, a family home of many happy years; a home which now awaits new occupants to continue its story.

I could not have left the village without a visit to the church which was my introduction initially to Lighthorne. I was aware that I was among many friends resting in the churchyard or who were memorialised inside St. Laurence's and I remember them with great affection. There have been few changes since the fifties; I felt my feet sink into a very smart red carpet and I noticed a corner especially designed for children, a great idea to mark the changing times of young families and their needs within the church. I stood by the font where at least two of our family members had been baptised. I progressed up the nave aisle and sat for a moment in the seat where I was a chorister opposite the pew of the officiating minister which was usually my father. Behind me sat Grace Boyles (née Fennell) with a lovely soprano voice, giving me confidence and encouragement.



The beauty of the stained glass inside St. Laurence's is well worth recording and an article about it can be sourced on the Lighthorne History Society website (LH134(E)). I was moved by a more modern window of Spring Flowers which held a certain poignancy, dedicated to Vicky Stephenson.

I realised that the number of bells had increased since the fifties, there now being six, Sir Adam Butler being the project manager of the new installation. I was fortunate in being able to hear them ring, when I attended the dedication service, with my husband, in November 2006, at the invitation of the Butler family.



1995 window by Chris Lund of Coventry commemorating the life of Vicky Stephenson (Colin Such)

I left Lighthorne realising there had been many changes, but in all respects it remained the attractive village lying in the Dene Valley full of peace and tranquility.

Lines from 'The Village' a poem by Prabir Gayen.

You are my soul
Your air water and fire
O my mother village
I am made of your soul
Your loving joy nourished me
Your green fields soothed me
Your birds and clouds and trees
Your people innocent and mild
I am grateful to all of them.
