

## **Sue Thorne's recollections of happy childhood days in Woodhouse Eaves and other memories**

*(With recollections from John Thorne and Stan Michalski)*

Sue Thorne was born in Loughborough, the daughter of a hosiery manufacturer, and lived there until 1948 when, at the age of 11, she was given a message at school to say when she left school at the end of the day she should not take her usual bus but another and would be met off it at the other end of its route... Her mind was racing with possibilities when she caught the bus that duly deposited her in Woodhouse Eaves! Her father had bought Long Close House by auction and so began a happy and recurrent association with the house and the village. The house, which probably has a history back to medieval times when it was a hunting lodge, was later split in 2 as it was so large (10 bedrooms) and the part that was converted from the servants' quarters, (now Heygate House), was lived in by Sue's family.



*Heygate House, 2017*

Sue joined the choir at St Paul's church where she was also confirmed and later married to John (60 years ago in 1957). She described her youth in the village with a closely knit family of friends including Elizabeth Stapleton from Chimney Cottage, Beacon Road, Davis Hughes who was the son of the school master who lived in the school master's house and Paul Squire who sadly died later in an air accident. Gwynneth and Fred (Wilson-Whitford) were part of the group as was Jennifer Stubbs, from a family of cattle farmers and butchers, and 'Berry' (short for Berrisford) who lived in the big house on Bird Hill. This house was later pulled down and replaced by Paterson Drive. Gwynneth now plays the organ at St Paul's church.

Sue summed up her upbringing in Woodhouse Eaves as a "safe, lovely life" with a lot of freedom to roam with friends. They had activities including talks at the Youth Centre. This building, now opposite the top of Rawlins Close, belonged to St Paul's Church as a church hall and was initially the Infant School, then it became the Youth Centre. At the time when Sue was going to talks in the Youth Centre, it was "one room with a balcony and stage" and the children at St Paul's School (including Stan) used to walk down the road in crocodiles to have lunch in the building which they then called the "Dinner room", it was sold by the church commissioners around 60 years ago and is now a private house (see photo) Sue later said she had enjoyed "nattering with her friends" and "learning so much from each other".

When she was very young Sue developed a lifelong passion for horses. Her parents would not buy a pony but she met Bess Gerard of Fountain Cottage, Beacon Road, who had stables and horses, she gave Sue a chance to ride many horses and gain wide experience with them. Fountain Cottage had once been a public

house before being privately owned, the land and stables behind the Cottage were later sold and Perry Close was built on this land. As a groom Sue could ride with the hunt for free and she also took up show jumping when invited and side saddle riding (See *The Side Saddle Association*, Autumn 2017 newsletter p10) - skills she passed to her children who both still ride. Sue can no longer ride owing to arthritis but has judged at horse and pony shows for many years.

Stan and Sue recollected how, in their teens, the land now occupied by Rawlins Close was then used for stock due to be slaughtered for the butcher's shop nearby (now Johnson's butchers). At that time there were 3 butchers in the village, Ida Hughes had the butcher's on Mill Road and George Reeves (for whom Stan worked on a Saturday morning as a youth) owned the butcher's opposite the Curzon Arms, now both private houses.

There were more shops in the village in 1948 - apart from the 3 butchers there was a farrier and a potter opposite the Bull's Head pub, a haberdasher's next to the 'paper shop', another farrier towards the village centre and a cobbler. A building with a low roof, two houses to the left of the current pharmacy, on Main Street, was a baker's. Sue loved being sent to fetch bread from this baker's although by the time it got home the top crust was missing!



***Photograph from 1968 shows the back of Long Close, the three gables on the left, and the Victorian extension sold off in 1950 and now called Heygate House, with the two higher gables on the right. Originally featured in the Leicester Mercury.***

Sue recollected once going into the vaulted cellars of Long Close House in her youth and seeing slates with the names of particular wines scratched on them, now strewn on the floor. A previous owner, Colonel Heygate, having retired from the forces, was later asked to return to work in London and the house was used as a recovery home during this time. It was rumoured that Colonel Heygate had bricked up his store of valuable old wines in his cellar while he was working in London!



*The wedding of Sue and John Thorne at St Paul's, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1957*

In 1957 Sue and John married and had 2 children and for many years they lived elsewhere in Leicestershire before she and John bought Kingswood House (later Heygate House) by auction and lived back there with their family until they sold it and moved to Beacon Cottage Farm on Dean's Lane. Some time later, and as they were getting older, they decided to move back to the village and were able to buy Kingswood House once again. They have owned it ever since but moved to Rawlins Close a couple of years ago for convenience. Later this year they are planning to move back into Heygate House for the third time in their married life!

**Oral history told to Sue Young and Stan Michalski, March 2018.**