

An hour in Bredfield with Sheila and Kath Woods.

I met Sheila and Kath (Sheila's sister-in-law) at Ivy Cottage, Sheila's home, on 7.2.23 to chat about their memories of childhood and life in general in Bredfield. They kindly agreed to let me record our conversation for this article. Though Peter (one of Sheila's close neighbours) has lived longest in the village, Sheila Woods' claim to fame in Bredfield is as its oldest resident.

As a child Sheila lived at Dennington and then moved to Boulge, where she stayed in an old farmhouse set back about a mile from the road, and her Dad was a cow man. Sheila said the house needed a lot doing to it, and though the landlord was a nice man, he wouldn't do much to the building. Her Dad managed the small farm of about six cows, a few pigs, some chickens and ducks – "plenty enough work for one man". Sheila remembers that the cows had to be milked every morning at five o'clock. I asked if she had helped her Dad with the milking. Sheila said she was "no farm girl!" herself, despite living on the farm, but that the summers there were lovely. Everything stopped for her Dad for milking again every afternoon ("even at Christmas time") when around 5pm he would move the cows back into a shed called a Netta.

Dick, who later became Sheila's husband, lived at Hasketon, moving there with his Mum, Dad and siblings. Before Sheila had met Dick, a work scheme became available, and he paid about £10 to move to Australia, to work as a carpenter in the bush there. He found the heat too much to bear, and so before the five-year scheme was up, he returned to Suffolk, met and married Sheila in the registry office in Woodbridge, and put his savings into Ivy Cottage.

Initially Sheila lived with her mother-in-law and Sheila's young baby David, born in 1958. She thinks it was probably in 1957 when the building work to Ivy Cottage was being completed. The house was not visible from the road back then, as it was (as the name suggests) covered in "huge thick branches of ivy", which Sheila admitted she didn't like*. At that time, the front of the garden was hedged and they later replaced it with fence panelling. Near the back door and towards the road was a tall walnut tree. Dick told Sheila that he would nip up from his birthplace and home when he was young (The Cottage in Ufford Road - originally three cottages for farm workers), pinch the nuts and be chased away by the two spinsters who owned Ivy Cottage at the time. The walnut tree is no longer there – Sheila thinks it intruded into the narrow road and so was cut down.

Sheila's Aunt and Uncle (her mother-in-law's sister and husband) also lived in Bredfield – in Caters Road and at The Rest (now North Farmside).

Kath came to Bredfield in 1969 when she married George, whose family lived near the pump. Kath and George initially lived in a cottage that belonged to the family. They built and moved into Woodcote, where Kath remained until 2020*. She now lives in Woodbridge, where she grew up, and keeps close contact with the village. Kath kindly showed me a whole album of photo memories of the groundwork (with very deep footings!) and building development stages of Woodcote, many of the photos including her children, and grandchild.

We talked about the landscape changes in the village, starting with the scrubland being replaced by new housing across the road from the playing field. Sheila and Kath also remembered Gurry's Dairy by the village pump, and the adjacent house where Mr and Mrs Gurry lived. The milk from the farm was delivered from the farm in vans, which of course served Bredfield residents.

Kath recalls the pump supplied water for villagers originally, and a crown was added to the ironwork in commemoration of the Queen's coronation. The iron monger forge space has undergone various transformations - to include an auto repair shop, Potions and Possibilities (Julie Foster's aromatherapy supply company which had a presence at the Suffolk Show) and a stretch limousine company. Terry Pearce was the last of his family to work at the forge – initially employing a number of staff, then working alone before renting the space to other services.

It was a big change for the village too when the school closed. In this school, Kath's son was one of the last children to be taught through all of the school years. He went on to study at Kingston Middle School (now a nursing home in Woodbridge).

Other buildings and features of the village we touched on were the Quaker Burial Ground, the old barn building opposite Moat Farm House which John Richardson built and in which he lived. John's father owned a number of cottages in Bredfield.

We spoke of villagers past, like Bill and Jack Backhouse. Bill lived in Aster Cottage in Caters Road (where Kev and I now live) and was someone Sheila always found very welcoming – “come in, gal” he'd tell her when she visited. Jack, Bill's brother farmed glebe land around the village. Both Sheila and Kath remember that if a bus was passing through the village behind his tractor, he would refuse to pull in to let it by, no matter how irritated the bus drivers became. “He was his own man”, Kath reminisced – he was known well by the village children and Kath's son “Woody”. Whenever he cut the field grass at the back of their house, he and other children would climb onto his tractor to talk to “Jack Back”.

We also spoke of Win Masters, a lady who was instrumental in getting the village shop** team up and running, and Betty Read (who lived where the Todds now live). Betty got the Community Council going, and ran the fund raising to build the community hall. Many people in the village contributed to the building of the hall – Sheila's husband, a carpenter by trade, laid the floor, and Kath's husband completed all the decorating, whilst her brother-in-law was one of the bricklayers. Other well-known characters like Arthur Nelson were involved in the village hall completion and his wife, the post mistress, ran the old village shop, now the old Post Office House.

Separately Sheila remembered that villagers took their radio accumulators to Mr Geerings when they needed charging.

Kath and Sheila have fond memories of the Castle pub and its various publicans. In order as far as they could recall were: Carol and Billy Parker (when the Woods' children were small), a lady on her own, a whisky rep, Charlie and Tracy, Ivan and Felicity (when the pub was “full to the brim” with Sunday trade), Andy and Sarah...and the carol singing at Christmas with Steve the organist. “Christmases don't seem Christmases any more”, they both agreed.

I was curious about the old images on the village sign which represented past activities. Kath was a member of the Ladies Group, which ran a free-of-charge Christmas meal for Senior Citizens for a few years. This social group met at 8pm so that more women could attend, often for a talk of interest to the group: Kath's nephew on his postcard collection; Alvina King's son James, who grew up in Bredfield and became a BBC film critic, and who very humbly described his various interviews with celebrities; Kath's daughter-in-law talking about her work involved in school teaching with children with hearing difficulties; and Anne Henderson on her career as a casting director.

One of my final questions to Kath and Sheila was about funny stories and characters of the village. “There's only one funny person in Bredfield” Sheila replied, “and she lives at Ivy Cottage”!

My sincere thanks to Kath and Sheila for generously wracking their brains for memories and sharing their stories for this project.

**Has this conversation stirred any memories for you which you would like to share?
Do you have different memories of the people and places in the reminiscence above?
Would you like to be featured in “An Hour in Bredfield with.....”?**

Drop me a line on welivehere.bredfield@gmail.com

*A photo of Ivy Cottage as was, and photos of the development of Woodcote can be seen on the Spring photo project page

**An album of photos of the development of the shop is available to view in Bredfield Village shop