

Reminiscences

After the formal business of the 2006 AGM three speakers, Margaret Walton, Joan Walton and Ron How, recalled some of their memories of the Hawridge and Cholesbury area.

Margaret Walton

Margaret recalled the time before World War II. She had been born at Vale Farm, Hawridge, where her father had been a farmer. There had been a well outside what is now Jenny and Oliver Parsons' home. Her father had used to graze cattle on the commons. The cattle had eaten the young tree shoots with the result that it was possible to see from Heath End down the fields and across to the school.

At school, all activities had been in school or on the common – with sports days being held on the common. During this time the commons had less bracken – it would have been damaged by children playing and animals grazing. Also rabbits would have nibbled the shoots.

During the war there was a search light position at Hawridge Court, possibly as part of the defence for Bovingdon airfield. The USAF had an outpost (of its Bovingdon base) by the cricket pitch. There was also an air-raid shelter just off Horseblock Lane, which was only for use by the school children and teachers. A large dent still marks its position.

Also during the war doodlebugs fell in the area – one on a Wednesday, at around 16:55, just in front of Glebe House in Heath End and the other on a Thursday at around 11:30 in a field just beyond Tankards Dene.

Joan Walton

Joan had also been born at Vale Farm and had moved to her present house when she was about 3 years old.

Joan had been a founder member of the Commons Preservation Society. The Society had been formed with the introduction of the 1965 Commons Registration Act which had required all common land to be registered. Joan had been the Chairman of the Parish Council at the time and opened the inaugural meeting of the Society on 12 October 1967 with over 50 people present. Peter Knowles-Brown of Braziers End had been elected Chairman of the Society and an annual subscription of 10 shillings had been set. Joan still had a set of minutes from the inaugural meeting. There had been a fear that common land would be taken over if it was not properly registered. When determining which properties had rights that could be registered, one of the main criteria was whether the owners had been liable to pay rates to the poor of more than £4 in 1867.

The first annual party of the Society had been a bonfire party near the Full Moon with wood from the commons. The format had changed to a garden party when the event became too large to control properly and fireworks became very expensive.

Ron How

Ron had moved to the area (what used to be the turkey farm at Woodlands Farm in The Vale) on 8 February 1943. He had come into contact with the Society some six months after it had been formed when a tractor was needed. Before the war grazing cows used to keep the trees down as well as eating weeds and grass, however after the war this was no longer the case.

In his time in the area, Ron had taken many photos showing the commons clear of trees. The commons used to catch fire frequently in summer, which also helped to keep the commons clear of trees – but the fire brigade always came along to put the fire out!

One of the first implements the Society had bought was a swipe which, he understood, was still in service today. From October until March there had been a working party every Sunday morning.

Driving the tractor on the commons with bracken 4-5 feet high when spraying was “very hairy” owing to the slopes and rabbit holes. “Agrilux” had been used to spray the bracken and some Japanese knotweed (which had first been found some 20 or so years ago).

At the annual parties, the fireworks had been launched from just below the cricket pitch with the bonfire halfway between the pitch and the Full Moon. However, as Joan had already commented, the rising cost of fireworks made the cost of this type of party prohibitive.

In closing his remarks, Ron noted that when Tom Haggerty was treasurer, he had also kept the tractor fund separate from other monies, much as Mike Fletcher does now.