

## **ALBURY HISTORY SOCIETY - [alburyhistory.org.uk](http://alburyhistory.org.uk) - RECORDING SCRIPT**

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### **[040 Albury Memories by Alfred Howick](#)**

There is a set of 33 slides for this talk.

Albury Village Hall, April meeting. Recorded at Blythwood, Shophouse Lane, Farley Green on 9 March 1989.

37 minutes.

by

ALFRED HOWICK

I think I ought to start my little talk about Albury, with some events which occurred before I was able to remember anything.

① My father came to Albury about 1908 when the estate was still enjoying active development. The estate's properties at that time (before the First World War) covered most of Albury, & much of Chilworth.

The reason for my father coming to Albury was that he worked for Belshams of the Strand, London at the time, & Belshams had been commissioned by the Albury Estate to install an electrical generating plant & all the associated equipment. As was the practice at this time, when plant of this nature was to be installed in an area where there was no local labour conversant with running the new plant, Belshams left an engineer with the newly installed plant, to oversee the start of works, very frequently in these cases the engineer stayed on, & so it was with my father.

At this time electricity was practically unheard of in country areas. Before the end of the First World War my father had served in the Royal Flying Corps, lost his first wife & family, and had his home moved. He married again, & I was born in February 1920, the first son of his second marriage. There was much speculation about my continued existence, despite the efforts of the village midwife & the local G.P. Davidson.

② Nevertheless I was born in Weston Yard, Albury, in the house now occupied by Mrs. Etherington, in what might be called the centre bedroom. This house had been built, & previously been used as stabling for five horses, but had been used for human dwelling by at least one other

③ family, a Mr. & Mrs. Miles, (no relation of Mr. Miles the butcher that I know of) before my father took up residence. If you are ever favoured with a peek inside this charming cottage as it is today, you will find little resemblance to the way it was when I was young.

In all fairness, the cottages built by the Estate in the late 19C were fine examples of the builders profession, but it was my fathers lot, in keeping with others, to have a farm building which had received a minimal amount of conversion.

Some of the traces of former usage for farm purposes were looked upon with pride by us young lads, it was a case of who had most harness hooks or hay loft trap doors, but some of the features were somewhat less creditable, like the unplastered stone walls with their meagre coat of whitewash on the stones in the thick walls, which had been better dressed on the outside than the inside.

- ④ My mother, who had seen & worked in some of the best houses in the country, spent many years trying to obtain a painted finish to the walls, she cajouled & prevailed upon the agents of the Estate for materials, & must have cost the estate a bomb in paint alone. Another improvement
- ⑤ that she managed to get done was the extension of the depth of the stable windows, both to offer more light, & to afford us the opportunity to see out. One feature not attended to in our time was the sloping stable type floor in a room we would now call a utility room, my mother wanted to use it as a kitchen. The sloping surface was originally to permit the drainage of effluent, although the cobbles had been skimmed with cement. We enjoyed at least 2 benifits which were way above the norm for cottagers at that time. Firstly we were allowed the use of a minimal amount of electricity for lighting, this concession the result no doubt of the nature of my fathers employment. The other distinct benifit was a water closet, a luxury unheard of among cottagers. The previous occupants of our home had to make do with a dry closet situated about 100 yards
- ⑥ distant from the house, on the other side of the pigeon house, this arrangement must have caused them considerable stress at times. It was some years before I was to revert to the dry closet situation, both of the self emptying type, & of the communally collected type, & it is not so very many years ago the last of these that I know of locally



disappeared. The communal collection was carried out in the village late in the evening by estate workers, & caused much comment from us young lads as the cart & contents slowly made its way round the village. So far as I remember the contents were disposed of over farm land.

The previously mentioned privileges caused some strong feelings among those who were less fortunate. It should be said that apart from feelings of envy, there were those who claimed that humas was good for the garden & that electricity was the devils concoction, rejected by some when later it became available to all in about 1930.

Although we tend to refer back to the disadvantages I lived at a good time & enjoyed a good home.

④ I started school at Albury a few weeks after my fifth birthday, there were no facilities for the average persons children to enjoy any introductory classes, & few parents were either able or aware of pre-school preparation. Some were, & those children were able to read better at the age of 5 or 6 than some of those who left at 14. The bright ones were soon away to other schools where their abilities were better catered for. There were 3 classrooms, infants, middle & top class, each with about 25 - 30 children, the head master was Mr. Greenalge.

⑧ In Weston Yard alone at one time there were as many as 12 children of school age, only 2 of which travelled to other schools. The elder girls had a quite a maternal responsibility during our first months at school & it was only after their influence had faded away, that we found ourselves getting into trouble at school & at home, varying from

⑨ lateness or late & dirty having done a climbers traverse of the banks of the Warren.

On one occasion things got rather serious when a group of us walking across the heath found a live match, it was not long before a reasonably servicable box was also found. We were made, we could have a nice little bonfire. Such was our ignorance that to ensure success we gathered plenty dry grass & stacked it under a gorse bush. It was hot & dry as only

heathland can get, & when the match was struck the speed which the flames went up & over our heads frightened us near to death, we took flight towards the school. As the plume of smoke & flames grew the look on our faces I imagine left no doubt as to who the guilty ones were.

The fire was got under control mainly by the estate forestry men & was

⑩ confined to the triangle of heath next to the Bungalow & outbuildings, the buildings were very much at risk. We had a visit during the afternoon from the local constable, & we were a frightened group of 6 year olds. Later in our school life we were able to make amends as fires were not at all uncommon & sometimes we were called on to help fight the fires.

For lads with a turn of hand to practical things there were many jobs around the school, which varied from digging old tree stumps from the school garden to erecting playground seats, cycle coverage etc., this did the world of good to our academic achievements, but as boys contemplating a job of work within a year or so we lapped it up.

I'm going to backtrack a little now & mention a few things way before my time which affected our way of life.

Albury as we know it must have received quite a boost in its development as a result of Drummonds eviction of the village from the Park, & later building of cottages by the Duke, many of them bearing his crescent & the date. Apart from various small builders, the estate operated their building from Weston Yard, which had been much more of a farm. When I was born there was still much evidence of this building activity, all the buildings at this time which were not converted for habitation were converted into workshop or stores usage, with all trades represented. There was very little dependence on outside supplies.

Albury is well situated for many basic building materials, including building sand & sand for bricks, chalk for lime & some stone, timber for structure & finishing, all near to hand. It must be remembered



that transport & power for moving & working materials was still very much muscle power in those days. Despite this the transfer to labour saving machines was not always looked upon favourably, & a number of incidents with machines caused raised eyebrows.

(12) The electricity generating plant was installed in the Old Mill which had just been vacated by Messrs. Botting. Electricity was generated from both a water turbine & a gas engine. The water turbine was installed in the same position that the water wheel had previously occupied<sup>d</sup> when driving the flour mill. The turbine was considered more efficient, the water being in a sealed system from top to bottom level. To exploit the full power available, it needed to be run as many hours a day as possible. This was seldom achieved, however, as the turbine required a steady flow of water, & if the seal in the column of water was allowed to be broken by interruption of the flow, all sorts of problems accrued due to loss of power. Looking at the stream today one would think that it ran fairly constantly, but one had then to cope with interruptions both natural & human.

On windy autumn days keeping the gratings clear of leaves was a continuous job, not aided by the practice of mill owners to dump their rubbish downstream rather than clear it properly - this debris also needed clearing, & another practice of mill owners was to hold up the flow of water for their own purposes.

So much for free power. The accent on its usage became more intense with the competition<sup>ti</sup> of mains electricity. In good conditions the power rating was about 10HP. The turbine was, as I mentioned, supplemented by a gas engine made by Ruston & Proctor of Lincoln & rated at 13HP., driving a separate dynamo. Before we get carried away with considering this to be an easy alternative to running the turbine during difficult times, we must consider that there was no gas supply in Albury, & no bottled gas available at that time.

Like so many things at that time, if you wanted something you made

it, a philosophy that has rubbed off on me a bit. Anyway the answer was to run a producer or gas plant. This was no soft option as before any wheels could turn, the mucky business of heating suitable coals to produce the gas, & subsequently cleaning it before it could be used in the engine, had to be carried out. Mercifully town gas was used as soon as it became available in the village, but was used sparingly.

(14) The mill used to house the electricity plant & provide free power but it is situated over a mile away from the Park House where most of the energy was used. As the system ran on 110 volts for all household requirements, & had the disadvantage of volt drop due to its being direct current, it called for constant vigilance, particularly during times of heavy load when the Duke & Duchess were in residence, and particularly on dark winter nights or when parties were held. Notice was not always given when this was to happen, then as the evening wore on the lights would get dimmer. There was something to be said for having our house on the same system, as our would also dim, although not to the same extent as the Park House as we were nearer to the plant. At the first sign of dimming my father had to make adjustments, no matter what the time of day or night, & I too had a fair amount of running about on this

account, & I was not on the payroll!

(15) The plant as supplied had a storage system in the form of about 140 large lead/acid accumulators, situated on the first floor of the old mill, extra supports being required to carry their weight. The arrangement was such that 2 separate 110 volt circuits were used for lighting, it being possible to couple both supplies together for the few small power requirements on the estate. So far as I can remember, the carpenter's shop had both an electric saw & an electric planer. There was an electric pump situated by the stream near the laundry in the park, which was used for water for the Park House & sometimes for topping up the village supply reservoir in the Warren. I believe there were also a few small

motors on laundry machinery. If a number of these motors were run at the same time they consumed a large part of the power available & little was left for recharging for overnight use.

I mention the electric storage arrangement because with the supply being a double system, & because of the need to keep essential needs supplied, it was sometimes possible to transfer energy from one system to the other. This was achieved by a balancer machine which was essentially 2 motors & 2 generators all coupled together in line, & wired one motor and one generator to each system, & which could be switched to transfer energy either way & so restoring a balance.

If the older people reflect on how we first used our new found electricity supply, we might recall that we only had one light point in maybe some of our rooms, & we can compare this with the norm today, where we have at least 2 light systems per room & perhaps a dozen outlets in a kitchen, & not so very many less in other rooms. To some extent so it was on the estate, particularly when heating & entertainment became available. It must be said that these private plants were never able to supply space heating as we know it today.

My father kept this system going until about 1949 without any increase in generating capacity & in spite of competition from the more recently available mains electricity.

I would mention that when I was working before the war in the centre of Guildford, & within almost a stones throw of the main generating station, the street lights went up & down with the movements of the machine table when we ran the large reciprocating machine at night. My next job was not much of an improvement in this respect - a new factory, but due to the prohibitive installation costs there was no mains electricity. Once again we made our own. If we ran our machines to full capacity on a cold day we were in trouble.

On reflection I have an admiration for my old father who got over 40 years of work out of this early form of electricity supply, generally



to the satisfaction of his employer, & certainly with less interruptions to the supply than we get today. On a personal note my father, like a good many others, did not take kindly to work in the house, which of course caused some family stress. Imagine then the reaction when a call from the spinster house keeper at the Park caused him to stop whatever he was doing, no matter what the time of day, & fix it quick. It did not go down too well!

#### THE PLUMBER

I mention this trade next as it has a slight similarity in that both have pipe work & are mainly concerned with metals. Also in this instance both involve using water power.

(16) For obvious reasons I can only relate things as I saw them as a young lad, & without the closeness I enjoyed with my father's work. On the credit side the plumbers shop was within sight of our windows & Mr. Barber was an exceptionally good tradesman. He also put up with some of us young people extremely well, but got a bit irate when we messed up his work or his materials. A few lads can cause a lot of damage on an outdoor lead-cutting floor which was situated in front of the workshop, & used for cutting shapes or roof jobs. The lead being in rolls was susceptible to damage. Among many jobs that fell to the plumber besides the normal iron or lead pipework, was the manufacture of chimneycowls of all sorts & sizes. These cowls were made by hand to work freely in the wind & to suit the conditions required for a particular chimney. They were all made without power tools, & all were a credit to look at on completion

(17) Reference has been made to water power before, but the plumber had an extremely demanding commitment, in that it was he who saw to it that the pumps were kept running to supply the village with water. The pumps were situated at the bottom of Parkers Hill & at the bottom of New Road Hill, they were driven by water wheels & ran continuously. Lubrication was primitive & required daily attention, & the levels in

the reservoirs checked. One of my jobs early in my apprenticeship was to  
 18 help re-install the wheel at the bottom of New Road Hill & assemble the  
 rebored cylinders. This would have been in about 1937. So far as I know  
 19 these pumps ran until the supply was taken over by the water authority.  
 It must be remembered that piped water was a long time coming for some  
 people. Little London in 1923 & 1942. I remember when the water supply  
 to the school failed in about 1929, we were favoured with some well  
 20 water from Mrs. Sherlock who lived just down below the school. Beautiful  
 stuff it was too!

At the other end of the village at Waterloo Ponds the cottages  
 had well water or springs. You could see the frogs swimming about in the  
 shallow well that served the first two cottages beyond Vale End. We all  
 learned at an early age that springs & wells were not to be tampered with.  
 Life, if harder was simpler. People who had no piped water knew that the  
 water in the well or spring was what their next cup of tea would be made  
 from, they certainly didn't need Green Peace to tell them what pollution  
 was all about.

#### THE BRICKLAYER AND LABOURER

21 I believe that I am right in thinking that during the time that my  
 father was engaged with the electrical installations, & employed by  
 22 Belshams, he lodged with Mr. Jim Gadd, the one portrayed as a boy in  
 that excellent picture of Estate workers building the school house in  
 1899. A friendship resulted which lasted the rest of their lives.  
 Mr. Gadd's father & uncle undoubtedly were leading lights in the Duke's  
 building programme in the late 1800's, & when one looks at the standard  
 of workmanship of even workmans cottages at that time, one cannot fail  
 to admire the standards maintained. A recent attempt by a well meaning  
 22 architect when replacing the old picturesque South Lodge by including  
 buttresses in the front elevation went pathetically wrong. I believe  
 that these still stand as a monument to our inability to produce a bit  
 of classic decor.

I am told on good authority that if we wanted gauged arches like



(23) those portrayed on Albury School they would have to be machined by modern factory methods as a set & put in place on site. Those at Albury School were shaped & built on site & are a delight to see.

I have heard that a bricklayer, Mr. Mant, when putting in the arch over the door onto the loading bay at the mill at Waterloo Ponds went home dissatisfied with his efforts. He felt so strongly about his work that he went in exceptionally early the next morning, removed the offending arch & rebuilt it to his satisfaction before the working day began. Such was the pride of true tradesmen. This was on an industrial building where it is hardly ever seen. The same man, I believe, was responsible for the Estate Office brickwork, which I believe is looked upon by some as the best bit of work of its kind in the area.

I saw little of the bricklayers as theirs was very much an 'on-site' job, but the yard was the place where some of their materials were stored & also the surplus items from the various jobs, these included a small stock of items such as standard bricks & tiles, & also the special ornate items. When one looks around today there are buildings crying out for some of these items, but of course they are now long since gone. In the times I remember, the stacks were kept clear of rubbish & re-stacked about every other year.

#### THE TIMBER TRADES

(24) In spite of the extreme variation between the winning of timber <sup>from</sup> standing trees to the final manufacture of items by joiners & carpenters, the whole process prior to about 1920 seems to have been carried out on the estate in the yard & workshops immediately to the south of my old house.

(25) time was the established carpenters shop situated just behind the abattoir. I mention this timber or carpenters yard as, to us, it was something of a no-go area. It was situated immediately behind our house & was something of a yard within the yard. The painters & glaziers also operated from there & the agents office & the main stores led from this yard. It was the place from which much of the direction of work took place.



(26)

When I was about 5 years old some trunks of trees of considerable size (about 4ft.6dia.) still lay about the yard near to this sawing & woodworking area. My parents seemed to consider these tree trunks, in one place reaching 5 to 6 feet high, a suitable backdrop for family portraits, one very big enlargement adorned our living room for many years. As far as I know these trees rotted away. In 1920 the estate mechanised their transport & conversion of round timber by

(27)

investing in a Fowler Traction Engine & a large capacity Stenner & Gunn sawbench. This set was capable of being transported from one area to another to minimise the haulage of very large trees. I am told that it was first set up just inside the woods at Park Palings, opposite the Alms Houses. So far as I can ascertain, it was not too successful &

(28)

was fairly hastily shifted to a more permanent situation in a covered mill at what was called the brickyard, where the saw still operates

(28A)

today. Over the years I have had occasion to carry out work on this machine, & what I have seen indicates to me that it saw a lot of work in its new situation, especially considering that sawing was not considered a year round operation.

I recently worked in a very old farm cottage where a new floor was part of the work to be done, & when I looked at the pit sawn oak flooring that was removed, the thought of the work involved in cutting all those boards by hand seemed phenomenal.

As I have mentioned, the new carpenters area was not a place where we were very welcome, but on the odd occasion, maybe escorted, we could see all the woodwork being carried out necessary to build & maintain the Estate buildings. I believe that finer work was also carried out on furniture & fittings for the Park House.

#### THE FARMER

(29)

Although Albury was & still is considered an agricultural area I have never been involved closely with this side of Albury life & so I'll leave this topic to someone better informed than myself. I will

30 however, mention the work done by men & horses. The horses were prepared long before dawn & worked all the daylight hours during a large part of the year. There was very little protection as we know it today against bad weather, an empty corn sack thrown over the shoulders to soak up some of the rain being standard kit. I remember seeing Mr. Tullett going up & down all day long behind a plough in ten acres & then going home to the farm as light was fading to look after the horses. I admired the work of those men, but I don't think that I was of the same breed. Men with working horses did not get many long weekends away, & precious little pay.

32 Cottage gardens seemed almost obligatory & even in my youth were considered a substantial contribution to the families welfare. Most cottagers also kept allotments which, together with their gardens made a massive area of land to be worked & tended by hand.

The social aspect of gardening was very evident at the beginning of the season. Just before Easter the allotments were almost all being worked evening & week ends, although the work at this time of year, digging & planting was hard, there always seemed to be time for conversation & merry banter. I will never forget a farmer who worked an allotment next to mine, In spite of the fact that he could produce all the potatoes he wanted on the farm, he saw fit to join the other men growing their vegetables on the allotment. All I can say is that his son did not continue this practice.

Without todays choices of food we tended to be governed by things being in season, with any change being the result of preserved fruit or vegetables. This was a time consuming occupation for the lady of the house who had no labour saving equipment. Our parents spent much more of their time per day in providing for those needs of life which we take so much for granted today. Some of us may continue the practice of gardening, but we must surely admit that we do so by choice, & not by any real feeling of Necessity.

SLIDES for "ALBURY MEMORIES" by ALFRED HOWICK

(2) *Introduction Slides*

- 1 Entrance to Estate Yard
- 2 Early picture of Weston Yard
- 3 Miles - the buthcher's shop
- 4 Mother at the cottage *SUSAN HOWICK WITH SONS*
- 5 Enlarged stable window
- 6 Pigeon House - Albury Estate Yard
- 7 Albury School
- 8 Senior girls class
- 9 Albury Warren
- 10 The Bungalow, Albury Heath
- 11 Estate Cottages, Farley Heath
- 12 The Old Mill, Albury
- 13 Electricity plant - Old Mill
- 14 Albury Park - the Mansion House
- 15 Electricity generating plant - Old Mill
- 16 Plumbers' Yard & workshop
- 17 *VALE END - WATER PUMP SITE*
- 17A Water pump. *VALE END*
- 18 Pump House - New Road
- 19 Interior of Pump House
- 20 Mrs. Sherlocks' well
- (2) 21 Estate workers building the school
- 21A *ESTATE WORKERS - SHOWING TIM GADD*
- 22 The Old South Lodge
- 23 Gauged arch on the school
- 24 Carpenter's yard
- 25 Carpenter's Workshop
- 26 Children by tree trunk *ME & MY BROTHER ALFRED 21 DEC 1927*
- 27 Fowler Traction Engine
- (2) 28 Old saw mill
- 28A *OLD SAW MILL - LAND FILL SITE*
- 29 Haymaking - *OLIVE HEATH 1927*
- 30 Horses hauling tree trunks



SLIDES for "ALBURY MEMORIES TALK - CONTINUED

31 Mr. Tullet and horses

32 Cottage Garden - *LITTLE LONDON*

33 Allotment

*CLOSING SLIDE.*

Tape duration 35 minutes.