

Village People

By Christina Oxley

Memories of Mrs Hilary Isaac (nee Adams)

Hilary has lived in Northlew all her 90 years. Hilary's father was born in 1901, he inherited the family farm, Overlake Farm Kimber, he was the 3rd generation to run the farm. The original farmhouse was a Devon longhouse with the family living at one end and the animals at the other. Sadly, it burnt down around 1913 and so a new house was built in 1914. Hilary was the first girl to be born in that house in 1930, in fact the first born of five children, her two brothers still live in the village, one sister in Hatherleigh and one all the way down in Cornwall, all 5 siblings are still fit and well.

All the family lived & worked on the farm, along with two further workmen who lived in cottages on the farm. Livestock included pigs, sheep, cattle, and chickens meant a well-mixed farm.

Hilary attending the local village school which consisted of three rooms until the age of 14. The school was in the same location as it is now, although was much smaller than it is today. The main hall of the school was divided into three rooms, with different ages, infants, middle and junior, being taught together within three classes.

School lunches consisted of packed lunches, to eat her lunch she would go to sit in her Aunty and Uncle's shop next to the school. On Tuesdays and Fridays all the children would be walked to the Church Hall, (next to the current village shop) where they would have a cooked school dinner. On leaving school at 14, Hilary worked on the family farm, housekeeping and working wherever she was needed every day. Hilary also remembers attending Sunday school at the Methodist Church, with the highlight being the annual outings around Devon and Cornwall.



Hilary's family shop and the Church Room

Her Uncle built and started a bakery on to the left of the house, the living room of which was the Village Shop, he also opened a butcher's on the right where you can see a shed in the picture, this is where the current Square Shop is. In 1963 her mother and father took over the running of the shop, and in 1973 with a young family of 3 boys, Hilary took the mantle from him, keeping it in the family and running it until retiring in 1995. Running the shop for all those years was very rewarding, providing a valuable service and living and being at the heart of the community, knowing all the locals and where they lived.

Pat Durston and her husband Ted took over the shop, Pat still lives in the main part of the premises, although she hasn't run the shop for many years, she does allow the Square Shop to operate from part of her property.



A newspaper article from when Hilary handed over to Pat

Her earliest memories are of having no electricity on the farm, although her father had a generator. There were not many cars around either in those days, her father was one of the first to get a car in the village, around 1920, he normally drove around in a Woolsley, they also had a telephone which was unusual to say the least! Hilary clearly remembers he first phone number which her brother still has today albeit it a few digits longer! Hilary can remember a time when there was no parking in the square, she even has a photo to prove it!



The Village - before all the parking.

The village itself was very self-sufficient having five shops, two of which were run from the family home's living rooms. These were a sweet shop, also selling cigarettes and a few groceries, a newsagent's and some more grocery shops. The village also had a couple of farriers, three tailors, a cobbler's and three builders. There was also a slaughterhouse behind one of the central houses, directly behind where the phone box is now.

She remembers Mr Born, the man who started the first bus service from Northlew with an open backed lorry about 10 years before Hilary was born. This then grew into a larger bus company running buses to Okehampton. He then moved Born Buses premises, to where Carmel Coaches now stands. There would be buses running to town once on Wednesday and on Saturdays' at 10am, 2pm and 7pm. Saturday being the high light of the week as the evening bus would be full of people who then went to the Cinema. It was also Market Day along with the Pannier Market, (where Red Lion Yard is now).

As a rural farm worker the Second World War did not impact too much of their daily lives, there was of course rationing but they managed very well with all the farm provided. Sadly, there were more losses during World War 1 when 22 villagers were lost.

Hilary met William (Bill) Isaac in the early 50's and they married in 1956. Bill originally came all the way from Highampton, and as newlyweds they lived in one of the workmen's cottages on the farm until they moved into their own home in the village. Hilary and Bill had

3 boys, Peter, Nigel and Trevor. Hilary and Bill had a very long and happy marriage, sadly Bill passed away in 2005, leaving a huge space in the family and the village.

Living in Northlew all her life Hilary has seen the village grow massively and can also remember the six, (then council) houses being built on Station Road, which at the time felt like the edge of the village. She also remembers the house her and Bill retired to being built, never expecting to end up with the keys! In her lifetime she can remember moving into a house with no indoor loo, just a bucket outside and her father installing a bathroom for them! Other big life changing improvements in housing have been running hot water, with a Rayburn providing this as well as heat in the kitchen and other rooms, homes within the village having central heating too, that was a good invention!

Hilary remembers the village having lots of clubs over the years, Darts and Football not to mention the Northlew Silver Band which has been running for over 100 years. Hilary was a lifelong member of the WI, from the age of 15 until 2002, holding most club positions including president. Hilary also remembers the Lambretta rallies that were held in the village when Mike Karslake lived at Kesterfield, the kind of event Northlew had never seen before.



Photo taken at one of Mike Karslakes' Lambretta Rallies

It was not until 2006, at the age of 77 that Hilary flew for the first time, off to Lanzarote on a well-deserved holiday.

We have only scratched the surface of Hilary's life in Northlew and all the changes she has watched and been part of. Thank you so much Hilary for sharing your many memories of Northlew and for sharing the photos too.

Editors note, you can read lots about Mike Karslake, Mr Lambretta on facebook, just search his name.