



# **SAY GOODBYE TO OLD NAILSEA**

**PENNANT REPRINTS N<sup>o</sup> 8**

**NAILSEA**

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## SAY GOODBYE TO OLD NAILSEA

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**T**he Time 1923 or 1924 The single decker open front bus which had brought me via Backwell turned left a long distance beyond the Great Western Railway onto, what I found was called, Ashayes or Ashhaze road<sup>1</sup>.

We passed Little Nailsea and as we entered Old Church road there was Nailsea Field with its one time beerhouse<sup>2</sup> standing well back from the road. Branches of the hedges scraped both sides of the bus, but of road traffic that morning there was none except maybe a few semi-scared walkers who diligently draped themselves in the hawthorn bushes as they strove, unapprovingly, to accustom themselves to a monster from a nearby city, an alien in a peaceful land.

The destination of the bus was Nailsea Old Church and I had come to see Mr Gallop, the landlord of the Ring O' Bells<sup>3</sup>, where for centuries good Vestrymen had gathered, each with his own unlabelled chair or particular place on the settle, each with his own churchwarden pipe and any man of substance with his own mug for cider or strong ale. There the business

of the church and parish was discussed at length and most likely a policy approved for the next Parish Council meeting, for the old stalwarts had been elected at the formation in 1894 and some of them had been on it ever since.

My business quickly finished, for I was a teetotaller, I turned into Back Lane, with three cottages on the right hand side, followed by a secluded house behind a high wall. The tower of a winding shaft of Forty Fathom pit<sup>4</sup>, covered with ivy by now, but used as a pumping shaft for Grace's pit or Sixty Fathom a mile or less away at the bottom of Engine Lane, which is the beginning, you may have noticed, of the area known as West End. Incidentally, a family lived in the engine house of Grace's pit until the 1950s. What a life!

On the other side of the road to Forty Fathom was, and is, Goss Lane, originally called Gorse or Gorsey Lane. The road from Bristol to the Old Church ran past the Friendship Inn along Chapel Alley [past the United Reform Church] down Silver Street, up Union Street and Church Lane to Church Barton and Holy Trinity. According to some old deeds Goss Lane began by Union Street and finished at Silver Street; there was no road from the pit to the church, but when that portion of the road was made it became the back lane to the Church and logically the whole of the road was designated Back Lane in the course of time.

Years ago, I have been told, Bristol Water Works took over Forty fathom pit for the water supply, but this statement I have never checked. The allotment field comes next and this, Dr White the younger told me, was let on perpetual lease to the Parish Council so long as its use as such is continued. It was let to the Council by Dr White's aunt, or one of them, I understood. Have you ever noticed the old rifle or carbine butts on the far side, a relic of the days when Nailsea had its own Volunteer Company? At a dip in the road at the end of the field the local vet lived for many years.

The boundary of the parish of Christ Church comes down the middle of the road from Silver Street and here turns on its way towards Station Road and Lodge Lane. Not very far from the road, developers found an old coal pit shaft when building houses on the Mizzymeade Estate; it was supposed to be connected with Forty Fathom. Apart from the exceptions mentioned there were fields on each side of the lane until one neared Silver Street, where on the corner lived a retired Army Colonel and his daughter a talented miniaturist.

On the left hand corner was a windmill and a deep well for supplying water to two large greenhouses belonging to Mr Bougourd, a florist and greengrocer who occupied premises in Silver Street near to which was once the village club. The windmill was dismantled in 1921 and about three years later the six semi detached houses were built where the greenhouses had been. The top one became the manual telephone exchange. Continuing back in the direction of the Church, the first Council houses were built in 1928, with more later in Orchard Road and Ridgway; the last mentioned being named after Mrs Ridge who lived at one end of the road.

Later came private development in Chancel Close, Trinity Road, Ploughed Paddock and Goss Lane, whilst on the other side, running parallel with the new ring road - Queens Road - modern council houses were built. This does not complete the changes, for Meadway Avenue was built down the line of a brook whose waters run from a spring in the grounds of Nailsea School, and opposite Meadway is Greenhill Close, built in 1964, or thereabouts. After the war a young man finished with the Army and set up in business on what is now the corner of Meadway Avenue as a car repairer and the owner of a hire car. After years of steady expansion he took a better site in Clevedon road.

The name Back Lane was changed to Whitesfield Road as strangers who came to live there did not like the seeming

denigration. The Parish Council was reluctant, but the far seeing ones won the day and when Mr Cliff Bougourd suggested Whites Field to commemorate the giver of the allotments, it was approved and adopted.

Walking up towards Silver Street, we see, on the opposite side of the road a monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria*) which was much smaller in 1924, and beyond it a stone Maltese cross on an outbuilding of Orchard House. This was for many years the residence of Dr White who was a member of, or chairman of, the Parish Council for many years, and presumably the building noted was his surgery. His gardens and fields were extensive. The kitchen garden, for instance ran westwards from the house to the back of the bungalows in Camp View, where the high wall of local stone still remains. There was a small quarry on the land, which made wall building much easier.

Thin seams of coal run up this side of Silver Street. There were several shallow shafts, now filled in, and years ago I was told of a local resident who knew of these seams and would descend into the quarry, remove a large stone and, no doubt, with a certain amount of risk, help himself to the coal that was there for the getting.

When Dr White retired from practice he was given an illuminated address by the Parish Council which reads as follows:

To Dr John William White

*This testimonial is a recognition of your long service of 50 years in the village of Nailsea, the greater part of which you were the only Doctor in the Parish, also of the unbroken period of 35 years as Chairman of the Parish Council and parish meeting with the record of not having missed a single meeting. We therefore say that the best tribute that we can*

*pay you is to put it on record that you have stuck to your guns like a man and deserve all the credit this meeting and the parish can give you now that you have retired. We earnestly hope that the retirement you have so richly earned will be spent in peace and happiness.*

Signed by ten Parish Counsellors, Chairman and Clerk, January 1932.

**Footnotes prepared by the editor in 1978 and amended 2002**

(1) Ash Hayes Road as it is now called is rather different to what Greenhill would have seen in the 1920's. Owen Taylor, who has lived there for many years tells me that it was widened when it was tarmacadamed and he lost 19 feet from his front garden. He remembers buses running about every two hours along Ash Hayes Road to the Church and then out to West End.

(2) This beerhouse was the "Wheat sheaf" and eventually became Field House before the development on the site in 2001.

(3) Ring O' Bells - The Nailsea and District Local History Society has not been able to find evidence supporting the fact that it was a place "where for centuries good Vestrymen had gathered" although this is not to say that there was not a beerhouse near the church. The cottages on the site of the Ring O' Bells seem to date from about 1820.

(4) This was sited on the NW corner of the Junction of Whitesfield Road and Queens Road and was demolished c1956.(Ref "Nailsea Then and Now" David Cains/ Margaret Thomas 1982)

This article was written c1970 and has been previously published by Nailsea and District Local History Society c1978 as the first in a series "The Greenhill Papers". It was also published in Pennant No 6