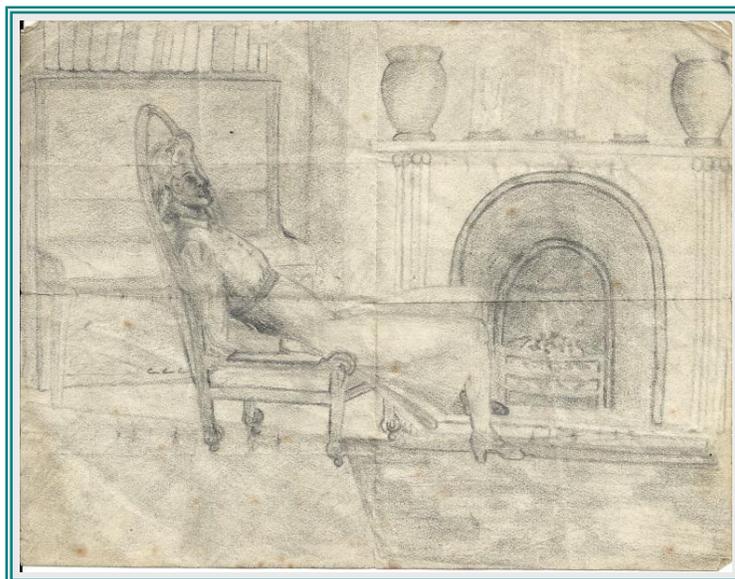


Brief Encounter: Part 2

Bryan Morris

Hello again. I have been reading David Gibbs' Merriott Local History Group website with great interest and recently seeing Nigel Stephens photo of the Girdlers has prompted me to continue my memories of your lovely village.

On the Girdlers front I have found an old drawing of my mother Anne Morris sitting beside the black leaded fire place in our front room of the Girdlers in the early 1940's. It's a rather faint drawing but you can just make out the ornaments on the mantelpiece including the glass domed birds which I referred to in Part 1. The drawing itself is rather poignant as it was drawn by a sailor who was badly burned and disfigured during the war. I remember



that his fingers were mainly stumps, which makes the drawing even more remarkable. He was very embarrassed about his burns especially his face but that didn't worry mum, she took him under her wing and he became a regular visitor to the Girdlers with tea and toast by a welcoming fire. His name was Gerald Tolley and he lived I think with his parents up Shiremoor Hill.

I have recently been doing a bit of research on the Girdlers and it may interest the current owners to know that in 1881 the house was owned by the Barnes sisters whose occupation is listed as "Land and Glass Shares". They were certainly there until 1891 and then in 1901 the house is shown as being owned by the Roden family whose head, Fred, is a Managing Clerk at the web factory which was presumably down Tail Mill Lane. By 1909 it was owned by Arthur William Taylor who was a tobacconist from Islington. He lived there with his mother Grace and two spinster sisters Julia and Emily. Grace passed away in 1909 and Julia died in 1935 followed by Emily in 1940 just before we moved in. Arthur as I said in Part 1 died on the 20th April 1945. The Taylor's link with Merriott was through their mother Grace who was a member of the Langdon family in Chiselborough. At the end of 1945 the house was bought by Pat Wheaton for his family. We left Merriott in early 1949 and my next contact with Girdler occupants was in 1995 when we passed though Merriott on our way back home from Weymouth. We stopped off and I was waving my hands about showing my wife Joan where we lived in the house when the owner came out and after hearing my tale kindly invited us both in and gave us a detailed tour of the house and garden. He and his wife were of course most interested in my description of the house which hasn't changed a lot except for the plumbing and electrics, the ceilings are still as uneven as ever.

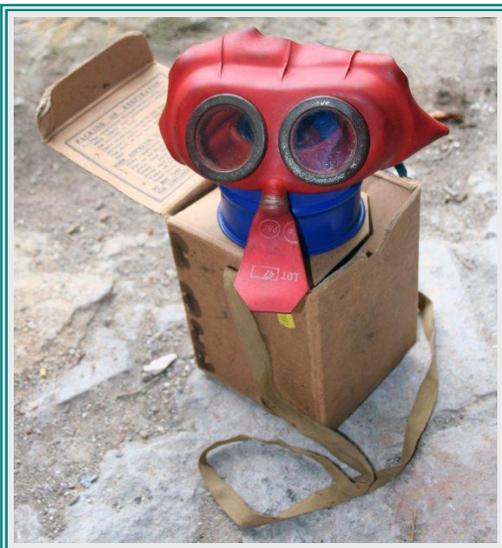
My last uncanny meeting at the Girdlers was in November 2004. I had made contact with Richard Stoodley and we arranged a get together in Merriott. On the evening of the 30th November 2004 we were standing outside of the Girdlers chatting about old times when a car drew up alongside us and after a while the driver said that she had overheard our conversation and had to tell us that she lived in the Girdlers in the 1940's. It was non other than Judith Wheaton, the daughter of Madge Wheaton who was our landlady after Arthur Taylor died. Richard invited Judith back to his house and we had a wonderful evening of reminiscences. What a coincidence, as Judith said in a later letter we should have done the lottery that day.

My other memories of Merriott in the 1940's are descriptively and colourfully covered in Sue own even more fully covered '*A Miscellany of Merriott Memories*'. So this is going to be a bit piecemeal with odds and ends which I believe haven't been covered by David with questions and I hope answers that you may give.



Here's one for you. What is the real name of the well known source of water on Church Street which I'm sure most of you know? I remember it well as a source of a cupped handful of cool water on a summer's day on my way home from school before I set off across Clapper Hay and the fields down to Lower Street. It never seemed to run dry so I presume that it comes from a spring. I've heard it referred to as Bundle Shute and Bunnel Shoot. What name is and it's source and has it ever run dry?

Do you remember the gas masks that we all had to always carry to school during the war years in their cardboard boxes and had to carry out drills in the *little yard behind Miss Bunsten's class*. Some of us had the black versions but most of us small children had the red ones to encourage us to wear them. I remember hearing them called Mickey Mouse masks for obvious reasons.



Also during the war years does anyone remember the strips of silver foil which were occasionally dropped by German aircraft. It was actually dropped to jam our radar transmitters but we never realised that and used it for fun and decorations. Then I recall that someone said that we would catch some dreadful disease from it so that was an end of that.

Strangely enough I remember catching German measles during the war and was in fear and dread that my friends would find out.

I have seen the reference to Pye Corner on the website and remember it well as the small private road down to Moorlands House. Since my dad worked there during the war I thought that I was entitled to use it so I used to wander down there and pick flowers for my mum. That good gesture backfired when mum said that it was private land and if I went there again she would tell PC Taylor. That may not mean much to the modern youth but I can assure you that PC Taylor ruled the village with a rod of iron. Like with Miss Winch at school, misdemeanors were swiftly dealt with by a clip round the ear. Or in Miss Winches case a wrap with a ruler across the knuckles. Does anyone else have memories of PC Taylor? Or at least ones that they care to share.

One of my ways home from school was down the side of the Big School towards Hitchen which was then mainly fields. A little way towards Hitchen I used to turn left across the edge of a field then go over a stile or through a gate past what we called Holy Well or Holly Well which I recall as being the source of a spring. It is very overgrown now but in my time it was quite a feature in the village. Was it called Holly Well because of the predominance of holly trees and bushes or was the Holy more significant?

Talking about Hitchen when it was fields does anyone remember the rook scarers that the farmers used to frighten off the birds? They were bangers on ropes which used to burn for about 6 hours with a banger going off about every 30 minutes or so. They were housed in a so say child proof stand which around about Guy Fawkes day proved to be not very effective. The bangers were lethal, when they were taken off the ropes they had a very short fast burning fuse and the explosion was far greater than any of the Brocks or Standards offerings. Many a young lad had ringing ears and even worse after chancing their luck with them.

On that loud note I will finish for the time being. Until next time.

Take care.

Bryan