

A place full of variety

Lew is bigger than Bampton if you take Weald out Acreage wise.

Over the sixty plus years living at Lew, we have seen and met a wide variety of people with fascinating professions and experiences. Almost every building has a story to tell about them. Hope you like my selection of them.

So, I am going to start at the South border of Lew at the base of Mount Owen and work my way through to the other end, Station Road just south of the old Bampton Railway station.

Just a few yards outside of our boundary, was Coalpit Farm which has now been renamed as Bampton Heath Farm. It was owned by the Wilkins brothers, whilst the farm buildings were in Bampton much of the land was in Lew. On retirement the two Wilkins families moved just a few yards up the road to become members of our village. This farm housed one of the largest Grain Dryers in the country. A Cargo ship sank in the Severn estuary during the early 1950's and the Wilkins Brothers had the contract for drying the salvaged grain. Residents from New Road think that their road is busy now with all the new houses there, it's not as busy as it was then, with many big Lorries doing a daily runs from Avonmouth. The brothers had a sister known as Mary Ellis whose claim to fame was that she delivered War planes during the Second World War with the Air Transport Auxiliary. She often visited her brothers by landing her private plane in a field on Mount Owen. Her home was on the Isle of Wight, so it was the easiest way for her to visit them. She died in 2018 aged 101. Bert Wilkins' wife ran a very successful Boutique in Bampton.

Next up the road is Mount Owen Farm where the Whitely Brothers ran an award winning herd of Jersey cows. They sold their enterprise at a time when farmers needed to look at diversification to make a living; the incumbent farmer came up with the idea of changing it to a Maggot Farm to supply the fast growing pastime of fishing with bait! It absolutely stunk the village out as he imported dead animals to start the Maggot procedure off. Thank goodness that venture did not last too long.

Next along the road was Lew Lodge where a lovely man called Pierre Chablis, created a very successful Winery, what else would you expect with a name like

that? Pierre was a very quiet man who kept himself to himself and it wasn't till after I retired from farming and set up a Private Car Hire company that I really got to know him. It was always a joy to go on a long journey with him as he regaled me with his stories of working for the French Resistance during the Second World War. He was involved in 'terrorist' work behind the German lines, blowing up railway lines and causing much mayhem. All was going well for him and his team until one night on returning to their secret hide out the Gestapo were waiting for them and that was the end of his war effort.

Next on the same side of the road was David Taylor, whose form of diversification was to set up a Snail Farm. I am not sure as to whether his French neighbour had any influence on this commercial choice.

Around this time Ton van den Burge developed Ditcham Farm. He was the President of the British branch of the Meuse Rhine Issel breed of Dutch cows, (dual purposes breed for the production of Milk and Beef). It was always great to see Ton on duty at all the top Agriculture shows in this country.

In the 1980's for a short time Ditcham Farm became host to a rather unusual group that not many villages in this country could equal. I have already mentioned a variety of enterprises but, this one really made us unique, it was a Naturist club. Now don't get them confused with Naturalists like I did, just to clarify a Naturalist is a person that is interested in all things to do with 'Mother Nature'. A Naturist is very much the same, except that they do not wear any clothes!! This was brought to my attention by the fact that being a member for over sixty years of Oxford City's Twinning organisation, involved in promoting the exchanges of Sport and Cultural groups between Oxford and Leiden in Holland, we encouraged a group of Naturists to exchange as well as a group of Naturalists.

This group created a lot of local interest and I lost count of the number of people who asked me questions about them. One neighbouring land owner, not from Lew I hastily add, showed a rather over enthusiastic interest in them and this was noted by their leader spending a lot of time in the area. So she went and questioned him about his interest. The conclusion she came to was that the landowner's interest was not too healthy, so she insisted that he become a member and if there were any more problems, a letter would be

sent to his wife! The only thing that fascinated me about their presence, was 'How did they fry their eggs in the morning without the hot fat splashing on their intricate parts'? Never did find out!

Manor Farm was also a milk producing farm when we arrived in Lew but was soon sold and the new incumbent, a rather eccentric character wanted to try all sorts of ventures including Holiday Lettings and Motor Racing. The thought of something like that going on in our village soon inspired the villagers to form a group called LEWG, 'Lew Environment Watch Group'. This group, using their influential contacts were very active in preventing any such shenanigans. I attended the funeral of this character recently as it was his wish to be buried in our little Churchyard. I was amused to hear tales about him trying to get to the Morris Clown Pub in Bampton, one that he regularly frequented. His wife confiscated his car keys as she did not want him to go there, so not to be out done he still went but on the lawn mower! Another tale that I knew about him was, that he had gone to the Morris Clown in his Rolls Royce Convertible on a hot Summer's evening, parked it with the roof down and spent a wonderful evening enjoying the hospitality. His friends drove him home as he was over the 'drink-drive' limit, leaving his car at the Pub with the roof still down. During the night there was a thunderstorm that filled the inside of the Rolls Royce with water!

This family was followed by Peter and Jane Boggis and their wonderful family of sport personalities, who were very supportive of our Church and the community, allowing us to use their facilities for fundraising events. Three of their daughters were all very sport minded and achieved many National and International accolades. Kitty with her Horse Eventing. Charlotte represented her country at Rugby and Lucy who was a brilliant Gymnast became nationally known as 'Tempest' in the famous T V Show 'Gladiators'. Indeed an incredible family.

Lower Farm was run by Jimmy Watts who actually lived and farmed in Black Bourton. He brought fame to Lew with his National award-winning flock of Oxford Down Sheep which I now think are classed as a rare breed. The next sale of Lower Farm signalled the end of traditional farming there. The new owner was an entrepreneur and a partner in the 3T's Water sports Club at Standlake. He was followed by a good friend of mine, Vic Grinsell who ran the

very successful VJG Frozen Foods Company. Now Lower Farm is under another new ownership it has become a holiday Centre with the capability of hosting over 100 people.

Adjacent to the entrance of Lower Farm is Yew Tree Cottage, one of the more recent houses to be built in Lew. For many years it was the home of Alan and Wendy Eldret. Alan was the man in charge at SIFANS a large Industrial unit in Witney. Him and Wendy, his wife were great supporters of Lew Church, often holding Fund raising at their home to raise money for it. Alan was the treasure for quite awhile and was responsible for getting a modern Electric heating system installed. They were great supporters of the village and did a lot to create a cohesion between the inhabitants. Alan was our representative on the Curbridge with Lew Parish Council and worked so hard to get a speed limit imposed on the main road through the village. I think he will be very pleased with the current situation now that we have electronic Speed Indicators installed. Yes definitely his Legacy to us. Yew tree Cottage is now part of what is called The Cotswold Manor Hotel and Spa.

On the opposite side of the road were two Council Houses, built specially to accommodate Farm Workers, though when we moved here they housed two friends of mine, who were cousins that went to Bampton School with me.

Mrs Adams lived in the first one with her son Teddy, she lost her husband in the war and brought up Ted on her own. She was the caretaker of our church and was responsible for lighting the Coke Fire to have the church warm for us for every Sunday Service as well as filling and trimming the Oil lamps that were still being used until she died. Tony and his sister, Betty Adams lived next door. Hugh and June Thomas now live in number one. Hugh took over the coaching of young members of the weightlifting club when I retired. Hugh has run a successful building business with 'Wood burning Stoves' as his speciality. He is always ready to help out, so definitely a 'handy man' to have in our village.

Just inside our boundary before the Railway Bridge was another Milk Producer and local 'wheeler dealer' character, Bob Brickell. I went to school with his children when they lived in Bampton. Every one of them led successful businesses.

Going up the road towards Bampton was Lew Post Office with our own Telephone kiosk outside. The building consisted of two cottages; one was the Post Office and next door was a cottage that often housed working staff from Lew House. The Post Office was typical of the era, you could get groceries, fizzy drinks, postage stamps, Family allowance and your pension there. Even today we still have a Post Box providing us with a daily collection. The Post Office was run by the Grandmother of a friend of mine, David Rose who still lives in Bampton. In the days before Post Codes were invented, Lew had one of the shortest addresses one could ever wish for, it was just Lew, Oxford. We inherited a letter embosser that simply put on the letterhead 'University Farm, Lew. Oxford'! Our Post Ladies at the time, Freda Bradley and Alice Puttock came from Bampton, where the letters were also sorted, they were born there, went to school there along with all the children from Lew, we all knew each other personally, so there was no need to include house numbers etc either.

I once received a letter addressed to Bampton Barn Dance Band which I was running at the time, with no county, or first line of the address was mentioned. Yet it was delivered within twelve hours of posting in Swindon, definitely 'Good 'ol days'!

The Post Office was right next to our beautiful little Church which was built in 1842 and until the early part of the twentieth century; Lew enjoyed the privilege of having its own vicar a Revd Jackson, who actually lived in Bampton, now we share the vicar with Bampton, Clanfield, Aston and Shifford. The church was designed by the well known Architect William Wilkinson when he was only twenty two years old. He went on to design and build many Police Stations and Prisons, at least five in this area alone, including Witney, that's why I think that we have only got one door in and none out! Yes the vicar does have a guaranteed 'captured' audience! Later in life the Architect also designed the Randolph Hotel in Oxford. One thing that makes our Church unique is the fact that for a wedding we only ring one Bell, yet for a Funeral we ring all of them! That's the beauty of only having one bell.

A Churchyard often has lots of stories to tell about local History. One of our stories is of Augustus Family, a family that came over during the time when many families from the West Indies immigrated to the UK. The Father, Arthur

was employed by the Captain as his Butler; he was assisted in the house by his wife Alice, they had a large family who settled in well, attending our local schools with some members of the family still living in this area some seventy years later. My happiest memories of them were every Sunday they always attended the afternoon church service; they were very shy but added a lovely friendly atmosphere to the afternoon. Arthur tragically died in a fire in their apartment at Lew House. There are four headstones marking members of the family's final resting place.

Captain Radclyffe's establishment, which I will cover in a separate chapter as he was indeed the greatest character in our village. Lew House is exactly opposite the Church. Within the grounds near to the Church is a stone cross which according to some historian's dates back to the Middle Ages and was probably a market meeting place. I have seen statistics that state that in 1801 there were 221 people living in 36 houses in Lew, compared to the census of 1991 when there was 59 people living in 29 houses.

Next to the Church is Church Farm, which was the home of many of the Captain's farm managers. I never envied them their jobs. The Captain was a Horse man through and through and obviously one of the best trainers in the country, but his farming skills left a lot to be desired. On one occasion after his manager had advised him that the hay crop was still not dry enough for baling, he came and picked me up while the manager was having his lunch, for me to give my opinion which was of course the same as the manager. It wasn't fit! There was a period of time when not surprisingly, he changed his managers more times than I had holidays.

The next building up was the Captain's new milking parlour, a rather unusual set up as it was designed as a 4x4 abreast set up in Farming parlance. It was right on the side of the road where all the excrement from the cows would go down the road if the drains got blocked.

Coming to the top of the hill are two Council Houses built for use by Agriculture workers. When I came to Lew, Will Fowler and his family lived in one and Stan Gough and his family in the other. Both men were fantastic gardeners with the result that their gardens were always immaculate and full of vibrant colours and brilliant vegetables. Fred Fowler, Will's youngest son

went to Bampton School at the same time as me and we were in the Bampton Scouts together. During the 1960's when Skiffle Groups and Rock Bands were all the craze, Fred formed a band promotion agency, known as BFP Promotions. I used him on many occasions to get me good Bands for the Weightlifting Club when they were entertaining visiting teams. You could get the top Band in the area for £20.00. I've still got their invoices!

There is a separate Chapter on the Weightlifting Club that occupied the Congregational Chapel which was built in 1841 just one year before the Church. The Weight lifting Club was responsible for being the first local organisation to get Lew on to National Television. I have so many stories to tell of the Chapel that housed the famous Bampton Weightlifting club from 1959 to 2003, so there will be a separate chapter on it. Likewise University Farm that Mary turned into an AA award winning Hotel and Restaurant. In 1982 it was awarded the Runner up Farmhouse B & B for the year in the United Kingdom. I have proof that University Farm was there during the Civil War. The earliest date that I have is 1746

In 1875 the Chapel became the Village School. At one time I was in possession of the actual school minute book which had a lot of information about the Teachers and the running of the school. When Mary my wife was running the Farmhouse Hotel she had a Canadian guest come to stay with his wife who claimed that his mother was once the Teacher at the school. With the help of the school minute book, I was able to clarify the facts and show him that when his mother married and therefore changed her name, a new contract was drawn up in her married name and her salary was included in the minutes! As far as I know, sadly this book is now in the Church Archives somewhere in Oxford. I still have the Manager's Minute Book which states that the school closed in 1921. It is now a private house.

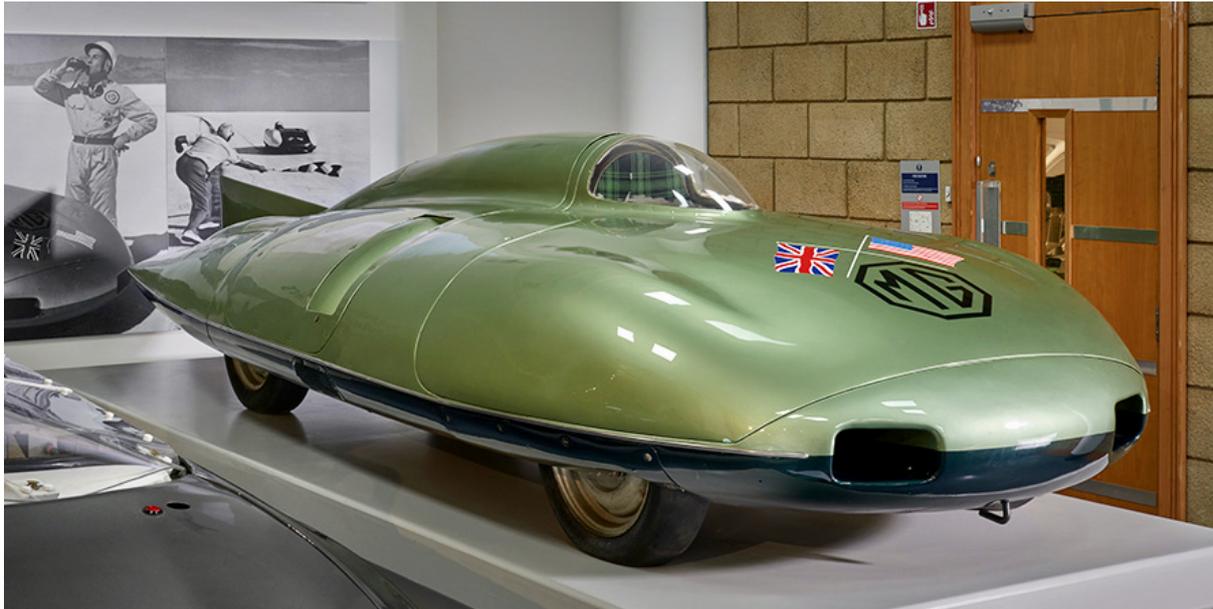
In the Old Thatched Cottage along the lane that serves two cottages, was an incredible Character called Tom Haig. He was indeed related to the Haig Whiskey Family and did his personal best to keep their Distillery in production, there were many occasions when we have had to take our truck out to bring him and his bike back from the Pub. Like Pierre Chablis who I mentioned

earlier, not many people knew what was contained in Tom's Life Story. He was in the RAF during the Second World War as a Navigator often Crewing in Blenheim Bombers which he thought were death traps. On one occasion he volunteered; a rare thing for service men; to deliver a squadron of these bombers to the Far East, his thinking was that working from within the UK his 'life expectancy' was about nine days, by volunteering for this trip he would avoid any 'hot spots' and he could extend his expectancy by at least two weeks.

On leaving the RAF, he pursued his joy of racing cars and got a job at the M.G. factory in Abingdon as their test driver. Tom would often come home to Lew at the weekend with a car that looked like an old 'banger' yet sounded more like a 'souped up racer.' He would deny any comments about it being a secret project but after a few drinks would let slip that he was off to Scotland to put some miles on the clock to test its reliability! Once he came home with an old Morris 1800 and according to the exhaust tone it was obvious that there was a six cylinder 'hot' engine fitted under the bonnet. Six months later M.G. announced their new M.G.C sports car with a six cylinder engine. Tom with his co-driver entered the 'Mille Miglia' race in Italy on three occasions and I am told that on one occasion they won their class.

In retirement Tom helped me out with growing vegetables and maintaining the gardens for Mary's Hotel and Restaurant at the Farmhouse. Quite often if Tom had over indulged on a morning visit to the local pub he could be seen sat astride the ride-on lawn mower complete with a top hat and tie, looking rather suave. Trouble is though the 'light green / dark green stripes' were not as straight as we would have liked

One subject that angered Tom immensely was that of the M.G. Raindrop. This was a car that was specially designed by MG to establish a new world land speed record for the company. Tom did all the hard and dangerous testing work mainly on the runway at RAF Brize Norton. When all the work was completed they shipped the car to America for setting up the world record – without Tom! Stirling Moss was given the job and glory for setting the record. Tom was not happy.



M.G. Raindrop. Tom Haig was the Test driver involved in the development of this car. A lot of tests were carried out on the Runway at RAF Brize Norton when it was under USAF control

Now, the Old Thatched Cottage is owned by Racing Steam Engines enthusiasts. Jeff and Ann Shackell

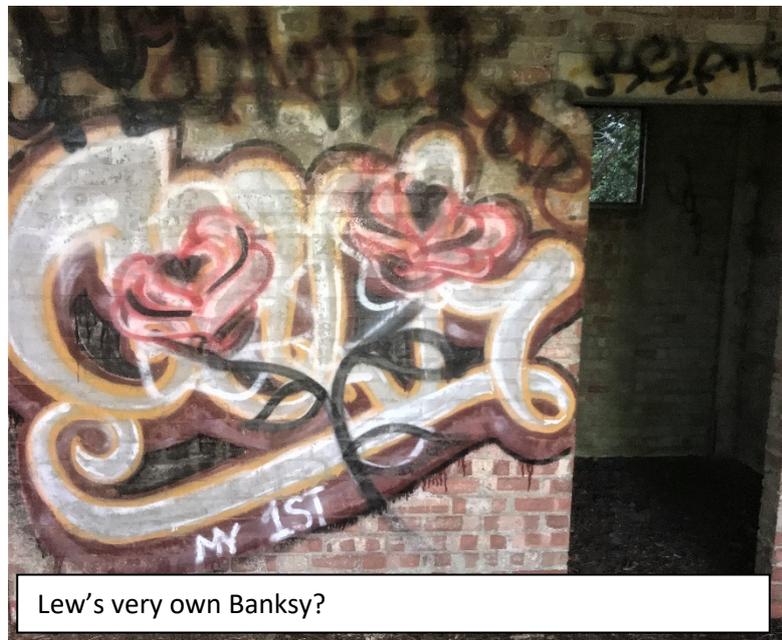
Yes it all happens at Lew.

Next to Tom's is Pedlars Patch where a lovely lady called Alice Cooper lived. Cooper is a surname that has been in Lew for many years and was indeed my wife's maiden name though not related to any of them. Alice owned a Haberdashery and Woollen shop in Witney, she designed knitting patterns and knitted for the famous Jaeger Fashion Company. Our daughter Julia has now lived there since 1999.

Warren Close was originally two cottages attached to University Farm for the workers. When we bought the farm there were ten workers employed on the farm. The total acreage farmed by George Woodford included a lot of land that was rented from the Captain, this made the farm in excess of 400 acres. As a family we were able to run the 216 acre farm without extra employment, so we had no need of the cottages and sold them to buy more land in Bampton. One occupier of Warren close was Ian Richens, who with his wife owned F M Green a well-known Insurance Broker in Witney.

Just down the road from the farm was an old Nissen Hut, it contained Asbestos so has just been demolished. Hidden next to it, is a small red brick building which mystifies so many people as to its purpose. Well I have privileged information about this building as my dad spent many nights on duty there during the war. It was Lew's last bastion of defence in case Hitler came over. The Bampton contingent of the Home Guard, which consisted of many farm workers, shared the responsibility of manning this vital post along with the Witney contingent. Dad often talked about the wonderful camaraderie that existed in those difficult times and helped to give comfort and security to the populace. Dad claimed that one of their team was elected on a rota to stay awake allowing the rest of them to have a sleep, after all they had farming to do the next day!

I see that some youngsters with artistic tendencies have graced the walls with some beautiful Graffiti paintings. I have checked them out to see if Banksy did them as that would have meant an increase in the value of the Hut, but no such luck.



At one point we were bothered by a lot of people parking in the lay-by and dumping their rubbish in the hut, so I sought the advice of our local Police Officer, he checked to see if there was any evidence to see who was dumping it without success. He then advised me to clear it all out onto the Lay-by and report it to the Council authorities, who would, he said come along and clear it all away! That was a big mistake! it didn't work out quite like that. A passing local Councillor reported me to the authorities, they deemed that as I had put the rubbish there on the lay-by, whilst in theory was correct, I was therefore responsible for it and that if I did not move it within three days, they would charge me with 'fly tipping' and would remove it charging me nearly a

thousand pounds for their labour. I've never worked so hard or so fast in my life to get rid of it. But I did with no questions asked.

When we came to Lew in 1959, opposite the Nissen hut was Lew's only Street Lamp. For years this puzzled me as to why there was only one and positioned right on the edge of the village. The answer of course had nothing to do with Lew. The light was an aid for the Control Tower at RAF Brize Norton and was installed during the American occupation of the airfield. Evidently there were several lights in the area that assisted the Control tower in discerning what distance the visibility was in the area. Bampton Church had one on their steeple.

Lew Heath Farm on the corner was the home of a very successful Pig breeder and is now the base for Alford Pallets. Nigel has been a member of the Lew community for a very long time. His first involvement was with John Campbell Farm Supplies who used University Farm as their Base supplying Farmers over a wide area with their needs. Along from Nigel towards Brize Norton is a Bungalow where the occupant's father was the chief buyer of farm animals for the British Beef Company that operated in Witney, a very useful connection for the farmers of Lew. He taught me how to carve up the carcass of a pig or a sheep to put into my deep freezer, the pig was often one of our own 'home bred' ones, the sheep I bought from him for me to carve. I have never tasted any meat so tasty.

As I mentioned earlier, when the inhabitants of Lew are challenged, they can be a formidable group to cross swords with.

On 26th March 1996. The Government claimed that there was a Link between 'Mad Cow' disease and Jakob-Creutzfeldt in humans. The government advisor, a Prof Neil Ferguson who incidentally is still working with the government on the current Covid 19 problem, claimed that within five years many thousands of people would die from it. Current figures prove that now, 25 years later, according to my research, that the deaths have not reached 200. This absolutely ruined the cattle industry in the UK. Europe would not accept any of our animals and nobody would buy British Beef. Why is it that those with a little knowledge always get themselves into high positions with the government and cause absolute mayhem, and then escape with some kind of

honour? Edwina Curry did the same thing ruining the Egg industry claiming she had no regrets for it!

The inhabitants of Lew, being a very patriotic group were regular supporters of the St George's Day Ball that was promoted by Carterton Town Council. As soon as the Menu was published and the tickets made available we booked and paid for 14 tickets. Ten days before the event, the Town Council kowtowed to pressure from the Press and without warning or issuing any alternative to those requiring Beef, withdrew the option. Lew at the time boasted an award

winning restaurant with a Staff to match who were willing to help us overcome the problem. A team was set up and agreed to cook, carve and serve to the Patrons from Lew at the dinner, a large joint of Roast Beef. A letter stipulating what we were about to do was sent to the Mayor at the same time as a letter to the local press. At first a degree of opposition was expressed from the council but was



Lew making the news with our stand for British Beef!

soon withdrawn after they realised that the Staff from the Farmhouse Hotel and Restaurant were all fully qualified and able to provide food for the Lew residents. We were adamant that we were not going to back down. So the council withdrew their objections and a compromise was agreed, they arranged for the caterers who were booked for the Dinner to provide



The Lew 14! Sadly there are only six of us left.

the Lew residents with their Beef.

It was a 'win win' situation all round. We got our Beef. We made a stand for the Farmers. The publicity it raised ensured a 'sell out' for the council.

The Mayor of Carterton made a public presentation to us in admiration of our loyalty to British Farming. It was after all St George's Day and a great day for the people of Lew.



Lew celebrate Rev David's farewell in style on a Lew Steam Engine and trailer