

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP

We were very lucky to have two fine Saturday afternoons in October for walking and talking in Sand Down Lane. Altogether, around 30 folks attended, with residents or former ones helping by telling their stories or giving information they had researched. Both walks became pleasant community events.



We started by the main road to consider the School House built by the county in 1927 for the headmaster. There was a problem with building lines and the construction was delayed. It may be noticed that the resulting house is of narrow depth. The first long-term headmaster, Frank Bellman, served from around 1880 until he retired in 1925, an amazing 45 years. He lived at Mount Pleasant. During WW2, Mr. PJ Voaden was in residence in a difficult time when the number of children was doubled by the evacuees from London. Reg Mear was the last headmaster to live in the School House, where he stayed with his family until he built the bungalow opposite in the mid 1970s. Interestingly, both Reg and Frank Bellman lived well into their 90s.

The Police House, a near neighbour and survivor from the days of the village policeman, was built around the same time. Initially, in 1922, the police had hoped to reserve one of the new council houses to be built at Sweetham. However the Rural District and Parish Councils felt they had more deserving families, but importantly, they wanted the village policeman to be living near the main road as traffic control was such a big part of his job. The last village policeman died in the mid 1950's although the police continued to use the house for staff for some while.

Christine Fraser and Ann Mitchell then took over to relate the stories from Glebelands House and Glebelands Villas.

Ann told the story of the big Hookway family who lived at No. 1 Glebeland Villas from the mid-1930s until the mid 1950s and ran Glebelands Tea House.

Christine then described how the Down family came to own and live in Glebelands House and how they used the land:

A family story by Anne Mitchell

Wilfred and Dorothy Hookway married in 1927 and settled in Exmouth, where Wilfred was a Commercial Traveller in the woollen trade. He travelled regularly to the Channel Islands, until he was made redundant in the 1930s slump.

In 1935 they came to live in Newton St Cyres with their six children, and Dorothy opened Glebelands Tea House, which was very successful. She then had three more children. The cafe catered for many regulars, including the Exeter Ramblers Group, and offered Sunday lunches for business people from Exeter. There was a good bus service every 30 minutes between Exeter and Crediton – No 7 for 7p return.

The cafe was open every day of the year except Christmas Day, with a special set cream tea consisting of bread and butter, sandwiches, scones and cakes for 1/6p. Everything, including the bread, was home made. Service was on starched white tablecloths with the best china and cutlery. In the summer the tables were taken into the garden. The three daughters Barbara, Pamela and Anne were all roped in to help with the cafe and look after their younger brothers – by this time Frank, Gilbert, Michael (his twin Derek died), David, Ian, and Peter. Dorothy was also adept at knitting, crochet, tatting and embroidery, which was another sideline. She also belonged to the Women's Institute Learners Guild, which was very active at that time.

During the spring of 1944 there were many American troops in the area, some of whom brought their steaks for Dorothy to cook. Their large vehicles were parked around and sometimes found the narrow roads difficult, taking chunks out of the brown painted cob cottages in the village. Sometimes they would bring their girlfriends in the evening. As may be imagined, they were popular with the Hookway boys, with their gifts of sweets and chewing gum.

After Dorothy's untimely death in 1951 at 44 years of age, the cafe was closed. Anne was the only daughter still at home and the younger boys lived there for some years. Her father died in 1957. She had married Dennis Mitchell in 1956. He lived at Cecil Park, Langford (which is now Langford Park Nursing Home) and his family had cider orchards, dairy and poultry. They lived there for the next 23 years, until 1979, when they built a bungalow, Creedy Down, at Langford.

Anne and Dennis moved to the village at Sand Down Lane in 1993, where Dennis died in 1997. He was a very keen church and cinema organist and had an organ that lit up and changed colours (as in the cinema) in his home at Cecil Park. Anne now lives at Woodlands in the village.

They have two children, Susan and Philip. Susan is married to John Down from Chulmleigh and they have three daughters, Sophie, Lucy and Hannah. Philip lived in Japan for 15 years, teaching, and is at the moment living with Anne. Most of the family have stayed and live locally in Devon.

Anne, who stood before No1 Glebelands Villas to tell her story, is still out and about and busy at 91. She had to be reminded to tell everyone that the house has had quite a big extension since the Hookways lived there. It had been a very small house to accommodate such a large family, with the main room as a cafe.



Glebelands villas. The right-hand villa was the Hookway residence

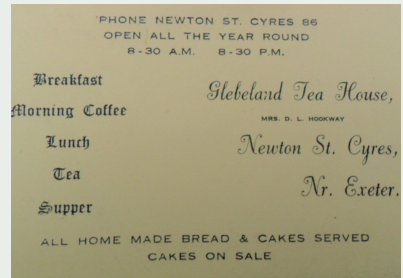


Photo of service bell and business card

Christine Fraser then described how the Down Family came to live in Glebelands House and how they used the land.

GLEBELANDS HOUSE and GLEBELANDS VILLAS were built by Charles Batting of Cullompton in 1926 and would have been considered to be quite well appointed, both soon having both electricity and running water. The latter was from a large tank at the top of the grazing field fed from the well at the bottom of the field via a pumping station. However, it was not until the 1990s that the three properties were connected to mains water. Mains water came to Newton St Cyres in the 1950s but the tank remains as a reminder that previously, properties had their own individual arrangements for water supply, often from shared wells but also from small reservoirs.

Nick Down's grandfather, Charles Down (a dairyman), and his wife Winifred nee Cole, purchased the three properties and fields by auction in 1930 and then lived at No. 1

Glebelands Villas until 1935. Then Wilfred and Dorothy Hookway of Exmouth moved into No. 1 with six of their 9 children, and ran The Glebelands Tea House.

Norman Down, Nick Down's father, inherited No. 2 Glebelands Villas (and Glebelands House) in 1954 and cultivated his market garden on the adjoining field, supplying his shop at 33 Sidwell Street Exeter.

GLEBELANDS HOUSE: This had been let to a Captain Knapman. Norman Down and his family moved into the house in 1958 and there set up his poultry business at the side of the house. The property is now owned and occupied by Nick and Yasmin Down.



To the south of Glebelands House along the lane edge of the field remain two concrete steps, all that is left of Charles Down's summer house, a wooden bungalow that later provided a temporary home for several families in turn.

The summer house and the water tank

Our next stop was at Manesty, home of David and Brenda Valence.

David greeted the party by welcoming us to the bungalow where Mrs Thatcher once had lunch. David's account:

The name Manesty came from Manesty woods near Derwent Water, Cumbria. Dan and Jean Cook moved to Devon from Cumbria when Dan was appointed as an Education Officer with the county and they lived in the School House. He then bought nearly half an acre of land from the Quickses and had Manesty built in 1957. Dan became Chief Education Officer for Devon and during his time here, Margaret Thatcher, as Minister of Education, paid a visit to Exeter University, Newton St Cyres school and subsequently came to Manesty for lunch, along with Reg Mear, headmaster, Friday 4th July 1971.

We bought Manesty from Dan Cook and moved in on 4th October 1990 from Woodlands, having lived there for over 23 years. At that time, there was no mention of the triple ditch located on the site and it was probably not known locally. The first reference we now have was in 1975 from an aerial survey by Cambridge University following a very dry summer. It seems to be one-sided only through Manesty garden but parts showed a triple ditch around an area in the field at the back, extending to over half an acre.

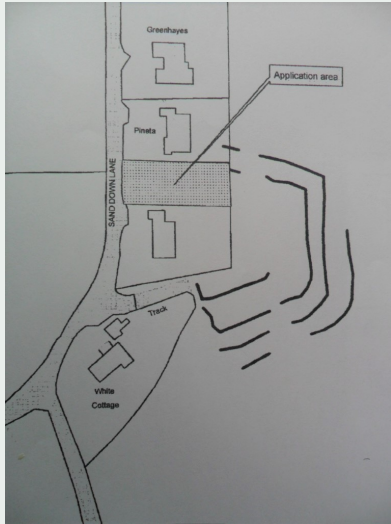


Diagram showing the plan of the ditches as shown by aerial photos (Devon Historic Environment Record)

We obtained planning for a dwelling in the lower part of the garden, which was built during 2006/7. This was when we first knew of the triple ditch, and part of the planning conditions was a ‘dig’ within the area being excavated only. This lasted for four whole days, and we were obliged to pay £1,000 for the cost.

The dig and report by Devon County Historic Record showed the ditch at that point to be around 5 metres wide at the top and 2.8 metres deep with a 0.4 metre flat bottom. Exposure was over a distance of 6 metres. A small number of finds were recorded which covered a vast period of time:

Two lithic flakes, worked stone from the Paleolithic period, a sherd of late-prehistoric pottery, and within the footprint, but in the plough soil of the field behind, a rim sherd from a second-century Roman flagon.



Photos of excavation site

This was not the only prehistoric site revealed during aerial surveys in the 1970s and 1980s in the large field called Sandown between the lane and Ford and Hayne farms. In contrast to the site at Manesty, which has a fabulous view of the surrounding countryside, there has also appeared a site of single-ditched interlocking enclosures on a lower north-east-facing slope just to the south west of Ford Farm. These have not been excavated and appear on the Devon Historic Environment Map as Bronze Age to Iron Age.