

I remember.

Excerpts from memories of some older Chinnor Residents

Duck Square

Originally Duck Square was made up of very simple lathe and plaster cottages built around three sides of the square. The fourth side was a row of sheds. These were demolished some time after World War 11

Mary Darmody remembers what it was like to live in one of the cottages in Duck Square in the 1940's. There was no electricity and no sanitation. It was a wonderful collection of little cottages and sheds, some of them half hidden underneath rambler roses, elder blossom and stinging nettles.

There was a lovely orchard full of ancient apple trees and dotted around underneath them were Walt's pigstys and chicken houses. The hens and ducks wandered around freely during daytime but were all shut up at night to help protect them from the ever hopeful fox.

In the middle of the square there was a well, the life's blood of the square as it were. Every single drop of water that was used for people and animals had to be drawn from it. It had a very long rope on the end of which was a large hook to hang the bucket on. Mum would put her bucket on the hook and let it drop down into the dark green, mossy depths of the well. Then she would wind it up again, full of freezing cold sparkling water. Sometimes when the bucket came to the top there was a little lizard like creature in it. Mum tossed them back into the water, she said they helped to keep it clean.

Mary Darmody

A full transcript of Mary Darmody living in Duck Square are available in Chinnor Library – but you can read on here

1

DUCK SQUARE by Mary Darmody.

I would like to take you for a walk, a walk back in time, will you come?. Come with me and look and listen - it's not very far, just along Station Road.

There is a dreadful noise coming from Duck Square, even the cows in Coniger field are lining the fence and lazily scratching their backs on the barbed wire as their attention is drawn to the square opposite.

The squealing of pigs is commonplace in Duck Square. The landlord, Mr. Walter Hopkins breeds them. The pigstys always seem to be inhabited by dozens of little piglets. They are very sweet, forever pushing and jostling each other for their mother's milk and anything else which comes their way. Sometimes you can hear the strident squeals of a poor unfortunate pig being dragged by a rope and pushed from behind by Walter Hopkins to be slaughtered. In his brown smock and gaiters, Mr. Hopkins is rather a stern little man. Up the yard they go followed by an excited band of children, all eager to see the poor pig meet his untimely end.

The man who comes to do the killing puts a small shot in the side of the pig's head, it is all over in a matter of seconds. The throat is then slit open and all the blood flows out. In the meantime, Walt sets light to a nearby heap of straw so that the hair can then be scorched off the body. After this comes the part we all eagerly await - the butchering and carving up of the carcass. This is very skilfully carried out in no time at all and the bladder is blown up by Mr. Hopkins's grandson and is usually kicked merrily around the yard with great energy. When darkness falls and we are all ready for bed we know Mrs. Hopkins will be along with half a pig's head for us. Mum uses it to make into a delicious brawn and how we enjoy it! You see, being wartime there is not much meat about so this is all the more welcome.

The pig's head is not the only thing that comes our way under cover of darkness. Eggs should all be handed over to the Ministry but a few manage to find their way to our breakfast table now and again, thanks to dear Mrs. Hopkins.

All the baby chicks come under her care. Oh! they are lovely. We feed them on mashed hard-boiled eggs and soon they are chicks no longer but are strutting and squabbling around the orchard with all the other hens. The cockerel is another noise associated with Duck Square. It is always crowing noisily when we wake up. Once, not so long ago we were woken up in the middle of the night by a frantic Walter Hopkins. The foxes were after the chickens, you never heard such a commotion in all your life and we all gave chase at dead of night in our nightwear. It was great fun but the crafty fox got away and quite a few poor hens were left dead.

To be continued.....

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