

Whilton Local History Society

The society met on 13th September 2012, when the subject was "Who was who in South View?"

After 1946 there was a drive to replace devastated urban housing, and improve rural dwellings. Clement Attlee built over a million homes, 80% of which were council houses. By 1948, 2000 houses had been built in Northamptonshire, but older housing stock was poor. Daventry Rural District was typical of the county with a quarter of its houses inspected being declared unfit for human habitation and beyond repair. Whilton was not alone in having no provision of mains water, electricity or sewerage, and much rural housing was damp and pest-ridden. Lack of agricultural labour emphasised the need for council housing.

The site for the first Whilton houses was acquired by August 1946. Other sites had been considered, and the area of the modern allotments was purchased too. Eight houses were built on what had previously been glebe-land, overlooking the valley once known as Deepdale to the north. There was some controversy over naming these houses, as the suggested "Townley Row", after RD Councillor Townley, was not popular. The village protest was even recorded in the national press, with the caption: "Row over a row". Deepdale or Glebe View might have been more appropriate than the compromise of "South View".

By April 1946 plans for six houses at Whilton were approved. Type B were priced at £2,509.16.1½d per pair; Type E were £4,882.5.1d per block of four, although Major Fancott of the RDC said the prices must be reduced. In October the Housing Committee recommended building four houses for the agricultural population at Whilton. These completed the council housing for Whilton. Plans to build more never came to fruition, mainly because villages with better services were considered more suitable for development. Thus Whilton has 9 and 10 The Gardens, but numbers 1 to 8 were never built.

The first South View houses were built by the local firm Holland and Marks, the Marks family coming from Whilton. Jack Wright worked for them as a carpenter and joiner. Jack and Kathleen Wright and Don and Vi Welch were the first tenants, the Wrights moving in on 28th February 1948.

The builders struggled to complete with post-war shortages in labour and materials, including grates, window frames and chain link fencing. In May 1948 the Housing Committee was dissatisfied with the progress of construction. After discussion the builders promised, "that one house would be completed in a fortnight, one in a month, one in five weeks and the fourth in eight weeks from the date of this meeting."

In Whilton, as in many villages in this district, the council houses were built before modern services arrived. Pipes and taps were provided and water pumped up from a farm spring, although much of the village still depended on wells or stand pipes introduced in the war. There was no public sewerage, the septic tank in Number 1 serving all of South View. Other villagers were still disposing of buckets of night soil until 1953. In 1947 it was noted that the Whilton houses would be fitted with cast iron independent coppers as electricity was not available in the parish. The houses were wired for electricity, which finally arrived in 1951.

These houses were much sought after. Priority was given to returning service men and agricultural workers. On the whole these ground rules were kept. Men from the services moved into the first four, and the fifth was let to the widow of Oliver Adams, who had died at Arnhem. All of these had young families. Number 6 was for the large Poole family, who had had to leave the village in the previous year. In vain, they complained that their four bed-roomed house was too small. Number 7 was let to Arthur Gittins who worked on the Emery farm. The letting of Number 8 to farmer's son, Frank Ashby, rather than an employee, caused some protest, and he was forced to pay a higher rent.

Residents have happy memories of childhood freedom, and of playing in the wilderness on top of the high bank at the front. This overhung the narrow lane into Whilton. Children made dens and tracks and swung from the overhanging trees, scaring motorists below. Eventually the County Surveyor noted that, 'Along this length of road there is a steep bank and high hedge. The Parish Council are concerned about the safety of children who play on this bank.' By 1966 the ownership of the bank

was transferred to the County, the bank and hedge were removed, the road widened, and the bank shaved back, giving the modern frontage of today.

Memories abound, from the thrill of having a first bathroom, to gatherings of young men with motorbikes, and neighbourly support in times of illness. There was irritation over the tenant who climbed his apple tree to see what was happening over the fence and amusement that chickens kept for the pot lived to a good old age with the duck.

Of the ten council houses, only two are now rented. Otherwise tenants took advantage of Margaret Thatcher's "Right to Buy" scheme between 1980 and 1998. Kathleen Wright is proud to be the one original resident; four houses are occupied by families or their descendants, who were there fifty years ago, but whereas the first residents all had children, there are only two teenagers today, a reflection of changing times.

South View and The Gardens marked a step towards modernisation for Whilton, and a huge improvement in living conditions for those fortunate enough to be the early tenants. The residents have played an active part in parish life for over 60 years. They have produced Parish Councillors, WI members, gardeners, allotment holders, and produce show winners. Over the years there has been much kindness, and some tolerance, and still today there is a co-operative spirit, which reveals itself particularly in mowing the grassy bank, looking out for one another, and pride in the appearance of South View.