

Snippets taken from an interview with a local resident

I can't remember how old I was when we moved to Gestingthorpe, I was about one, I guess.

My father, him and his father, were in business in Henny – wheelwrights and carpenters and that sort of thing. Of course at that time, in the thirties, farming was absolutely terrible, nobody wanted the land and they couldn't make any money, or anything else. Anyway, he saw this job advertised for old lady Oates up the Hall for an estate carpenter and a wheelwright, because all farms had wagons, tumbrils, and horses and that... So he applied and got it, and that's how we came to Gestingthorpe and we lived in the little cottage, where Damian lives – there were two little old places, almost opposite Pump Yard.

When I was young there was a bullock yard along there, and barns all alongside the road, they all belonged to the Hall and the Priors used to hire the farm, Hall Farm, they used to farm this little old one over here, Pound Farm, and then the Priors came there. I don't know what time they came, but they've been there a lot of years, and they've bought it now. Mrs Oates used to farm it, two or three old boys used to work up the Hall, and you know, it was like every other farm there was nothing arable, it was just various feed stuffs and whacking great high hedges and things. They never ploughed the fields up and grew corn or anything like that. They had a few cows, pigs...

I remember my father telling me – he used to be a barber, my father was, and he used to cut their hair – all the blokes – short back and sides. And he was up the Hall one time, cutting old Bill Nice's hair, Peter Nice's great uncle, and he was cutting this old boy's hair and somebody said "Here comes the Old Woman", meaning Mrs Oates. Of course he had to stop (it was in work time) and he said the old boy went about with half a haircut for nearly a week before he could finish it! Yes, he cut all one side and not the other.

She was a funny old girl, Miss Oates was. She was difficult, to say the least. The notes I've had come to that school about me, the least thing – if you met her in the street and you didn't say "Good morning, Ma-am" and touched your hat, there'd be a note come to school about it. Yes, you see they were bosses of the village, her and Reverend Greening, who lived down in the Rectory, you know, where Douglas Hughes lives. Gestingthorpe was just one parish then, there weren't five, like the Reverend Donaldson had.

I don't know what happened there on the farm, but my father had to leave the Hall, not for anything he'd done or anything like that, I'm not sure why, it may have been when the Priors came to Hall Farm. Miss Oates' brother, Brian, he had the fruit farm at North End. Well, there was a bungalow there and we went and lived there.... and then we came back down to Gestingthorpe, they'd just built six council houses down the road and we moved to one of them

Miss Oates didn't have a car – now we're coming to old Harry Rippingale – she used to hire him - he did have a big Ford, beautifully comfortable car, all leather seats.... Of course, even when he was on the buses, he always had a little bent pipe, always had that on when he was driving, and she told him to put it out when he was driving her one day, and he didn't like that! "Old waarmen (woman)", he said, "I'll never take her out again!" And he never did, as far as I know.

There's not many people like him, you know!