

Alice Bradley's *Memories of All Saints'*

Our parish church and village life remembered.



Church member Alice Bradley

Alice Bradley's kin have been associated with All Saints' Church for at least 180 years. Her maiden name was Wedge - a family gravestone in the churchyard dates from the 1830s, carrying the names of some of her forebears.

A heart-rending inscription tells of two little Wedge boys, aged just 4 and 2, who died in 1830 (possibly early victims of the cholera epidemic that swept the village in that decade). They are buried in the vault with their parents, who only survived them for another ten years or so, both dying in their thirties.



The Wedge girls: Mary, Marjorie, Joyce, Elsie and Alice pictured on their last day before leaving Hall Street in 1935. Alice's jumper was a cast-off from her Aunty which had shrunk in the wash! The picture on the right shows her in the middle with her sisters in the same location in the 1980s.

Alice was born at number 1, Hall Street, Sedgley on 22 November 1922, the eldest of five Wedge girls (Alice, Mary, Marjorie, Elsie and Joyce). Her father was a skilled woodturning machinist who over his career worked for several of the large car factories in the Midlands.

There were ten years between Alice and Joyce - as little girls they all used to play together in the

Bull Ring, no doubt getting to know traders such as Mr Egginton the chemist, and Mr Sproson Vinrace the grocer.

As Alice was growing up, the condition of her family's stone cottage deteriorated until ultimately, when she was 12, it was condemned as unfit for human habitation. The local council wasn't building any new housing in Sedgley, so the Wedges went to live in Glen Road, Upper Gornal. They returned to Sedgley five years later, settling in Westfield Road. Their house backed onto open cornfields, where there was a hay rick, and the children used to play in summer.

Life was quite stark in those days. As a young child she recalls seeing sheep carcasses being cut up for sale at **Hartill's** shop in the Bull Ring on her route from Hall Street to Queen Victoria School – a sight that has remained with her ever since.

The Wedge children were often sent to the shop for a 'tuppenny pudding basin of faggots' and Alice remembers Mr Hartill the proprietor, a larger than life figure who had a fine waxed moustache. He often roasted a pig at the annual church fete at the vicarage.

In the 1930s, the church was the hub of the village community and Alice attended **Sunday School** morning and afternoon. Children were rewarded for good attendance at the annual prize giving: she received a hymn book the first year, then a bible the following year. Alice still has the bible, given to her in 1930 when the vicar was **Revd Marley** and the curate was Revd Allcock.

The superintendent of the girls' was Miss Woodcock, remembered to this day with a plaque near the altar at All Saints', in recognition of her long service. Alice recalls seeing her riding her bicycle up Gibbons Hill Road to church every Sunday morning.

The Sunday School building was in fact a former 'National' School, built in the 1830s. It occupied the site where Iceland now is, extending right up to the White Horse Pub. To get to the school you would enter from Vicar Street and walk across the yard (now Iceland car park).



All Saints' Sunday School on the corner of Vicar Street and Dudley Street. The site is now Iceland supermarket!

Up to the age of seven, Alice went to the Junior section which was in a separate building from the main school. Alice remembers sitting on little chairs with the rest of the children, being taught in groups.

At seven you would go into the Seniors and stay there until leaving age. Activities consisted of reading bible stories and singing hymns. Attendance was not compulsory and while some children left as they got older, most stayed on. Occasionally she resented going, but generally enjoyed it because her friends from Queen Victoria School were there for company.

In the 30s and 40s the church used to be full every Sunday. In those days the balcony was used and, as a child, Alice used to run up the stairs and take her place with her friends by the rail right at the front.

Alice recalls Sunday School outings with great affection. She remembers going to Gorge Fields for Sunday picnics and spreading out in little groups over the fields. They were each given a bag with a cake, orange, sweets and sandwiches. Revd Marley, whom Alice remembers as “a tall man”, accompanied them on the outings and played games of cricket with them.

Another highlight was the **Annual Church Parade** that took place in the first Sunday in July, starting from the old Church Hall at the top of Dean Street. On the anniversary of the church’s consecration, the churchwardens set out extra chairs in the aisles because there were so many

people. Everybody used to buy new clothes to dress up for the occasion – Alice’s mother started saving and setting clothes aside for the girls after Christmas each year. Sunday School staff used to select the best behaved child to present the vicar’s wife with a bouquet of flowers.



Alice remembers plentiful offerings at Harvest Festival in her youth

The ***Harvest Festival*** was a big occasion in the church year and everybody brought something to the altar. Alice remembers elaborately baked harvest loaves, fresh fruit and vegetables and even sheaves of corn being brought into church and being amazed at the sheer abundance of the displays, which were given to less well-off parishioners after the service.

The ***Old Church Hall*** in Dean Street was similar in size to the one we know today. It was a popular Sedgley venue in the 1930s and 40s, frequently let out for various types of entertainment - Alice remembers going to Saturday dances there at sixpence a time.

There were also concerts featuring popular entertainers of the day – Alice recalls going there with her mother to see a lady called ‘Mrs Elliott’ (Alice can’t recall her full name) who came out on stage in top hat and tails singing ‘Burlington Bertie from Bow’.

On leaving school at the age of 14, Alice went to work at **Greenaway’s** in Dixon’s Green Dudley, where they made gents’ trousers. Her job was to snip the cotton off the seams – she earned just six shillings a week. She was later reassigned to a steam iron, putting creases in the trousers, but the hot steam and fluff from the material constantly made her throat hoarse, so she left there to work at the **Ever Ready** factory in Wolverhampton, where she assembled torches and bicycle lamps. She more than doubled her wages to fifteen shillings a week and her mum was “over the moon”! She even took part in a strike when a promised bonus was denied to her workmates.



The Villiers factory in Wolverhampton where Alice made fuses for Ack Ack shells; and wartime anti-aircraft 'Ack-Ack' artillery in action in 1944.

When she was 16, war broke out and in Alice's words, "it upset everything". She was directed to shift work at **Villiers in Marston Road** Wolverhampton, to assist the war effort. The company employed female workers in many of its departments, as male employees were gradually called up to serve in the army. You worked on a rota of mornings one week, afternoons the next week, and nights the week after. She recalls: "It really upset your system!".



Alice in her late teens, in wartime

Her job was making fuses for anti-aircraft (Ack-Ack) shells, many of which were destined for the defence of Malta. On the lighter side, Alice joined her friends at the WRVS on Penn Road, Wolverhampton, who ran dances on Saturday nights. It was the highlight of her week.



Guy Motors, Fallings Park, where Alice's father worked. The company made armoured vehicles for the British Army during the war.

Alice doesn't recall much heavy wartime bombing in Wolverhampton or indeed in Sedgley. However, her father worked at **Guy Motors** in Wolverhampton where he was a volunteer works fireman. One night the Germans dropped incendiary bombs, which had to be extinguished because they lit the way for their heavy bombers.

In Sedgley, Alice remembers being out in the street one day, when an aeroplane flew right over her and her friends and dropped a bomb on the bottom field near the Beacon, leaving a big crater.



Alice married Ted Bradley at All Saints' in 1946. Her dress and veil were borrowed - and Ted wore his demob suit.

During the war, Alice met her future husband, Ted. He was a regular soldier in the Royal Fusiliers who served in India, North Africa and Italy. He joined the Allied invasion forces for the assault on Germany after the Battle of Caen in 1944, and was one of the first troops to cross the Rhine. In

1946, **Revd Sargeant** married them at All Saints' Church. But before they took their vows Alice recalls receiving a half-hour's "talking to" in front of the congregation, in which the Reverend "laid the law down", at one point taking a cross out of his pocket and shaking it in front of them in true 'fire and brimstone' fashion.

It was a time of great post-war austerity and Alice had to borrow her wedding dress and veil from friends. After the wedding there was no money for a honeymoon and they had to go back to live with her parents at first, then moved into rented rooms at The Paddock, Coseley - a period Alice describes as "hard times".



Mr Wedge, Alice's father, was in All Saints' Scout Troop in around 1914.



Alice's daughter Christine (right) was in All Saints' Brownies in the early 1960s.

However, the couple were eventually given a council house in **The Vista**, Sedgley. Alice gave birth to a son in 1949 and two daughters in the 50s. As soon as they were old enough, Alice took them to Sunday School. Her son joined the All Saints' scout troop (a family tradition as her father had been in the troop as a boy) and her daughters joined All Saints' Brownie pack.



Alice worked on a power press at Orme, Evans and Co. making metal goods in the 1950s

In the 1950s much of Alice's time was taken up with earning enough to keep her family. She worked at **Orme, Evans and Co**, a bucket and jug manufacturer in Great Brickkiln Street,

Wolverhampton, where she used a power press to stamp out parts from big sheets of metal; also spot and seam-welding the components together.

She remembers wearing goggles and a big leather apron, and occasionally being burnt by stray sparks from the welding. The machinery was so loud that she was eventually diagnosed as suffering 45% 'nervous deafness' and took the advice of a specialist who told her to change her job immediately.

She went to work part-time in the canteen at **Beacon Centre for the Blind** so she could look after her children when they came out of school. Later she became the manageress of Repairwell's dry cleaners in High Street, Sedgley.

She remembers Mr Egginton, the proprietor of the nearby Egginton's department store in the Bull Ring, who wore a patch over his eye, his face having been badly disfigured in a gas attack during the First World War.

He was "a lovely man" who, coincidentally, was her family's first landlord, owning the stone cottages in Hall Street where Alice was born. Later she worked for **Woolworths**, first in Dudley, then in their Wolverhampton store for ten years.

Tragically, her beloved husband Ted died aged 56, in 1971. Faced with the need to work and run her house, Alice wasn't able to attend church quite so frequently. However when her sister Elsie died aged 68 in 1996, she found coming back to church helped with her bereavement.

By this time **Peter Ashby** was vicar and Alice joined the **Mothers' Union**, many of whom she already knew.

She also joined the Mothers' Union Choir when it began in 1998 and took an active part in rehearsing and performing. She fondly recalls outings to Hereford Cathedral Flower Festival and Llangollen Music Festival.

Although Alice no longer takes part in MU concerts, she still participates when the choir sings at church weddings, the fees from which make a valuable contribution to church funds.

And of course, she can usually be found in church on Sunday mornings.

Alice was interviewed by Martin Jones, around 2011.