



## Porton In The 1950's

Porton village in the 1950's was defined by four topographical landmarks, Targets Corner, The Village, Chapmans Corner and The Railway Line. Each of the four areas were quite separate and were quite different in several respects.

The Salisbury to Tidworth A 338 by-passed the village on high ground so there was no through traffic as such. An unclassified road from Amesbury to Porton Down, which was known as Porton Road, crossed this A338 (Tidworth Road), and this cross roads was called Targets Corner. From Targets Corner the unclassified road dipped into a shallow rural valley for a quarter mile to the village centre and its lowest point where the Bourne River flows. Another quarter mile and the road, now known as Winterslow Road, met another cross-roads of five roads and was named Chapmans Corner. The village buildings effectively finished some 300 yards further on at the Railway Bridge.



Targets Corner on the A338, some seven miles from Salisbury through the Winterbourne villages, was named after Targets Farm which was nearby and which had been in the Target family for many years. Apart from the farmhouse there were very few houses nearby. House building had stopped at the start of World War Two and there were very few new-builds in the village.

The unclassified road from Amesbury, now known as Winterslow Road, entered the Porton village which had a cluster of houses and cottages and a small general store. A narrow road turned right towards the village of Gomeldon. In the 1950's a principal resident was a Major Simmonds, the Chief Recruiting Officer for the Army whose office was in Salisbury. He would retire in the late 1950's and purchase the village public house at Semley, Wiltshire. Further along Winterslow Road, towards Porton Down for just over three hundred yards there was the big cross roads, Chapmans Corner.

Chapmans Corner was the meeting place of five roads and an area of houses and businesses built much later than the village buildings. It was named after a business called Chapmans but like Targets Corner it was not a Corner at all. Why, no one knew. The roads that crossed here were the Amesbury to Porton Down, (Winterslow Road) Idmiston to Gomeldon, and Station Approach roads. Just before



this cross roads was the parish church, St Nicholas. At the cross roads itself were various businesses. A grocer and wine merchants, the village blacksmith, the church and vicarage, a post office, a garage, a local parcels carrier. Station Approach was a road which went uphill to the partially used railway station and a hotel/public house.

The Grocery, Wine & Spirits business, The Stores, had a small runabout van and two mobile shops that served surrounding villages from Ford in the south to Cholderton in the north. The Stores still had a bakers' oven in situ though not working in the 1950's and many outbuildings plus garages for the vehicles. It also had a good cellar for the fine wines. The extensive living accommodation

attached to the business was called The Laurels



because there had been a large laurel hedge around the property in earlier years, which was removed by 1950. Outside The Stores was the village telephone box, an important feature in the 1950's.



Originally the village Blacksmith was located on the road towards Porton Down near the railway bridge over Winterslow Road but had moved to Chapmans Corner by the 1950's. It was on the left hand side of the hill towards Gomeldon and the Blacksmith was

known as Fred. (Surname unknown.) Fred was also the village odd job man and coalman, always jovial and well liked who would walk around making the call of a cuckoo irrespective of the time of year. It was extremely realistic and no one was ever sure whether the cuckoo call was real or Fred unless it was the cuckoo season. Otherwise it heralded his approach.

St. Nicholas Church was midway between the topographical points of Targets Corner and the railway line on Winterslow Road. With the cemetery attached to the church and the largish garden of The Stores the area was open. The vicarage was on the right hand side of the hill to Gomeldon near the Blacksmith's smithy. The church was active and the vicar was forever tearing around the village roads in an open top sports car of pre-war vintage. He was always in a hurry.

At Chapmans Corner the south side of the road had a pavement right up to the railway overbridge. It was the only concession to pedestrians in the whole village. The village Post Office was near here. This also sold newspapers, magazines and general stationary.

Next was Porton Garage, a very important business because it was the only petrol station in the area. It was Independent. The owner used to race cars at the Brooklands Racing Circuit prior to the Second World War. There were two pumps on the forecourt, one for petrol the other for diesel. Each had the facility of being able to pump fuel by hand should the electricity fail. At the rear was a workshop for vehicle maintenance and repairs. The business could repair anything from a broken bicycle chain to replacing an engine in a lorry. The owner was one of the first people who was able to secure the contract/franchise to supply Lyons Maid Ice Cream by van. He had two vans, with iced block containers in two cool boxes, serving the populations of surrounding villages, an activity previously dominated by the Walls Ice Cream company. One of the vans was the bulbous Morris 10 which had the accelerator between the brake and clutch pedals.

The village Parcels Carrier always wore a half-bowler hat, and drove around Porton and Idmiston collecting and delivering parcels using the Porton railway station as a base. He lived near the railway line overbridge, drove a tall upright one-ton Ford van without any rear doors and large open spoked

wheels and which had a top speed of about 15 mph. It was of unknown vintage and quite unique as was a large adult tricycle powered by an aged gentleman by hand-wheel who lived nearby. This had to travel on the roads but he was never in any sort of accident-surprisingly.



Up the hill of Station Road by the railway station was the village public house, the Railway Inn. The Publican was from Poland who had come to the village as a refugee and who had had a hard time in previous years.

By 1950 the railway station had closed to passengers but the sidings were kept open for coal delivery and parcels and anything that could or had to be delivered by train.

The village was not on a main sewerage system nor did it have gas.

With the railway station being closed the only public transport to Salisbury, some seven miles away, was by bus. This was provided by the Silver Star Bus Company, based at Porton Down. The bus service was started in 1923 by Shergold & White and was very popular for various reasons with the passengers who used it. One obvious reason was the fact that the drivers and conductors were local people themselves. By the 1950's their buses were new double deck vehicles which ran a regular time table service to and from Salisbury and were well used. Coming from their Porton Down garage the village bus stop was outside the Post Office where at least there was a pavement. They would then turn right at Chapmans Corner and travel to Idmiston village, on through it until the road met the Salisbury-Cholderton A 338 where a very sharp left turn was required to travel to Salisbury via the villages of East Gomeldon, the Winterbournes and the railway again at St. Thomas's bridge, Bishopdown. This somewhat tortuous route along narrow roads was repeated on the return service. The Salisbury Traffic Commissioners would not allow the Silver Star buses to pick up or stop within the city boundary with the exception of a stop inward and outbound at St Marks Church, Salisbury. This might have been because within a short distance from here there were four large private schools plus Leehurst Convent School for Girls and thus many pupils. The route terminus was on the Blue Boar Row, Market Square, Salisbury, at the Cadena Café. Silver Star did have a small parking garage near Milford Street, Salisbury. The company secured early on the right to run a separate direct service each morning and evening for workers from Salisbury to the Porton Down Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment this was without any stops and they used the Targets Corner cross roads to turn off or on to the A338 thus not going via Idmiston. The company started to run express services at weekends to Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, and later Newcastle on Tyne, Swansea and even Edinburgh and Glasgow from Bulford and area for military personnel.

Porton in the 1950's was a quiet village although it did have aircraft noise from planes at Boscombe Down aircraft experimental unit and the high speed steam and later diesel trains which ran from London to Salisbury and the South West.