

Wheathampstead Nicknames from the Early 20th Century

by Eric (Labby) Seabrook in collaboration with Ginner Hawkins

In days past it was not unusual for most people to have a nickname of some sort, usually derived from your work or character. This was so at least up to the start of the Second World War. Sadly this tradition has been lost. These are a few village nicknames remembered by Eric Seabrook. The list was written in the 1950s as he remembered nicknames from his childhood in the early years of the 20th century.

Brusher Woodward. Worked for Collins furniture dealer, and was frequently seen brushing the dust off furniture, particularly if it was standing outside on display for sale.

Ponky Wilson. Very descriptive and the less said of him the better.

Susser Hill. He was a groom, and like all grooms when grooming, he sussed, "Pssd, pssd" (*sic*); it was done to keep dust out of your nostrils. My own father used to do it when grooming one of our horses.

Ubble Rolph and Noker Rolph. I cannot remember anything about these two but I do know that Ubble's wife prepared and cooked chitterlings, and very tasty they were too.

Whippet Coats. He was a thin chap, could he run! Lived at Upper Gustard Wood by the golf course, hence his nickname.

Whizzer Collins. This was the original Collins, the founder of the furniture business, when the shop was at the lower end of the High Street next to the old workhouse yard and nearly opposite The Bull pub.

Squidger Riddle. Squidger was the old country name for sparrow, and he was a bright faced perky lad, like a sparrow.

Ginger Pargeter. He had a mop of bright ginger hair and his forebears must have plied the trade of pargetting.

Bushel Arnold. He had a big head, and it was shaped something like an acorn, and he lived not far from us in Necton Road, Marford. Nicknames can be cruel, wait for the next one.

Strawberry Harding. He had a large red bulbous nose. See what I mean.

Ikey Clark. There was a family named Clark, who lived in a small cottage in Rose Lane, two boys and a girl. The boys were known as Ikey Clarks, this puzzled me, the name Ikey in village parlance meant someone who thought themselves above their station in life. No way could this be said of the Clarks. With reference to the girl, she had a peculiar walk, sort of up and down and was called "bouncing girl", but that name was the name of a horse. I will explain. There lived at Marford a well known competitive horseman named Fred Kelvey, his stables were at Coleman Green where he erected his jumps hard by Bunyan's Chimney and his best horse was Bouncing Girl. I remember the

inside of the doors of the stable were covered with certificates of prizes that Fred and the horse had won.

Daggle Elmore. Lived at the Folly, worked for Titmuss the miller. Anyone whose Christian name was Charles was either Dag or Daggle.

Fishy Draper. Here's a tale of village scandal. He was a crafty individual and was carrying on with a married woman named Ada Hill. You know what I mean "carrying on", and they were not discreet about it, in fact Ada Hill was a "cuckold", this annoyed the women of Marford. One Saturday morning when visiting my Granny Hawkins whose cottage was next to my father's yard and stables where he kept his horses and cart, I saw all the women of Marford congregating outside Ada Hill's house. Some were carrying tin trays and table spoons, some saucepan lids and spoons, one was carrying a tin bath and a rolling pin, and they proceeded to beat these articles with the utmost vigour. This was the old custom of "Rough Music"; it was heard all over Marford, continued for about a minute. It told Ada Hill they were not going to put up with her shenanigans. When it was over they dispersed back to their homes and I would say that I am one of few individuals who has seen and heard a session of "Rough Music". When I asked my Mother about this, she said, "Well Georgie, Mrs Hill has been a naughty lady and they don't like it, and that's all you need to know. But when I went back to school on Monday morning I soon found out what it was all about; "big ears".

Togo East and Daddy East. Togo lived at the Folly, Daddy lived in East Lane. What a coincidence East in East Lane. They were not related.

Peeky Gale. He was the village lamplighter when it was illuminated by paraffin oil lamps; he had to maintain them, light them in the evening, extinguish them in the morning. If there was a convenient tree the lamp was affixed to that instead of a lamp-post. All this was carried out by Peeky in a light horse-drawn cart with his ladder; think what a job it was when windy.

Scrappy Swallow. Scrap merchant, his scrap yard and cottage was opposite the Cherry Tree pub at the Folly.

Hoppy Hampton. One of our teachers at St Helen's School had a pronounced limp, one leg shorter than the other owing to an accident earlier in life. Was rather heavy-handed with the cane as my pal Bill Ward found to his cost. Bill had been inattentive in class, dropped his pen and was searching for it under his desk, bending over with his bum arched up, when Hoppy spotted him, came hopping round the class cane in hand and brought it down smartly on Bill's backside. This made Bill straighten up, banging the back of his head on the underside of his desk. Bill never dropped anything again when Hoppy was taking class. He also played cricket for the local team, was wicket-keeper when fielding, but when his side was batting had to have a runner to run for him.

Charger Wootton. Son of the Woottons who kept an ironmonger's shop on the site where Collins Antiques showroom now stands. On going to school one morning we found the shop burned to the ground during the night. What added to the conflagration was they sold paraffin and there was a tank of it in the yard behind the shop. Now Charger going to school and coming home from school was, in his imagination, riding a prancing horse and would prance sideways along the pavement with reins in his hands,

and it didn't do to walk behind Charger when he was riding this imaginary horse, because he would let out a backwards kick with one of his legs; he was the horse.

Craty Pearce. There was a small factory at The Folly down a lane leading to a pub by the river called the Royal Oak now a private residence. This factory made ladies' straw hats, these were placed in a large wicker crate on wheels with handles like a wheelbarrow. When full it was Pearce's job to wheel this up to the station, placed on board a train and transported to Luton and taken to one of the many places where the milliners completed the trimmings with ribbons and other adornments. So that is how Pearce earned his nickname, Craty, job-related.

Ticker Basely. He was the local clock and watch repairer, had a small shop near the mill. Here we have another job-related nickname.

Blinker Gatwood. He was nicknamed Blinker because he could not keep his eyelids still, always on the blink. Was the local shoe repairer, sold boots and shoes from a shop in the High Street opposite Church Street. He also was verger at St. Helen's Church and in that office, I was told by my father, was godfather to one or two of the village lads. This happened when parents brought a son to be christened without the second godfather as is required by the baptismal service of the Church of England and so Blinker was pressed into service to act as the second godfather.

Nanny Neal. Douglas the son of the station master at Wheathampstead. He kept a goat which he used to tether on the banks in the goods yard; this kept the herbage down and fed the goat. I met Douglas again many years later as a fitter in the running shop at Bentley Motors, Cricklewood when I obtained a job as a road tester. We were delighted to see each other again and the last I heard of him was that he was living in Dunstable.

Lordy Cavan. Even a member of the nobility was known by a nickname. Field Marshal the Earl of Cavan a most distinguished soldier and one time Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Living at Wheathampstead House the home of the Lamberts was known by us disrespectfully as "Lordy".

Conclusion

I am indebted to my friend Labby Seabrook (Eric). It was he who compiled the list of nicknames from our knowledge of those characters we both remember. So I come to the end of my story of nicknames, but before I close I know there is a question in your minds. Yes I too had a nickname. In my youth I had a mop of auburn curly hair, alas all gone and my nickname "Ginger" that, schoolboy-like, became abbreviated to "Ginner". I hope you have enjoyed this and found it interesting, amusing. From Old "Ginner" Hawkins.