

## Round and About in the Parish..

It was suggested to me that I write about the AA man (Mr Leslie John Sheen) who was stationed at Wych Cross. I'm not quite sure of the date he started there, but from newspaper reports he was the AA Patrol man, certainly by 1928, and he probably finished around the 1950's or 1960's.

Vi Rivers has given me permission to quote from her book "My Life in Chelwood Gate". Vi says... *"we lived at the Toll House which was split into two parts; Mr and Mrs Miles and their daughters had one part and our family had the other section". Whilst Mrs Miles and Vi's mum were hanging out the washing they got talking and had a natter. They didn't notice that Vi had escaped through a hole in the hedge. But the AA man, who had a box opposite the Roebuck spotted Vi crawling down the road and noticed nobody was with her. He picked her up and took her back. Vi's mum was still talking to Mrs Miles and he said to her - "Kate, you women will have to stop this nattering". "Oh my goodness" said Vi's mum "where did you find her?" He replied "crawling down the road". Luckily at that time there was very little traffic around.*



This photo shows the Toll House together with the finger post sign and the brick and stone sign behind it. I understand the stone is still there, and although I have scrambled around in the undergrowth I have not been able to find it.

I have been lent an aerial photograph (from about the 1950's) of the AA box which was opposite the Roebuck, near to the Wych Cross Place entrance. The box is to the left of the photo, and it is rather hard



to spot, (but it's there) and I have included this photo because of the wonderful Roebuck gardens.

Vi's parents moved from the Toll House and then Mr Sheen took up residence. His portion of the house faced the Nutley side of the road (rather than the A275 side) and he was certainly there at the time of the 1939 Register when he was aged 43 and described as a Motor Mechanic. Ron Edwards has told me that when Mr Sheen started work in his box, a lady who lived in one of the cottages always came out to give him a cup of tea (the cottages have gone - as too has the Toll House) and the layout of the roads has been altered.

Vi Etherton who was evacuated to Danehill in about 1939/40 has told me that as a small child she would sometimes wait at the end of the path (Beech Cottage) for her father to come home. Occasionally Mr Sheen would pass by on his way to Wych Cross, wearing his AA uniform. He teased Vi as sometimes he would stop and ask if her mother would like some eggs. Off Vi would trot to enquire if eggs were needed. The answer was always "No, thank you". Back Vi would trot again down the path only to find that Sheeny was half way up the road. Vi says she fell for it every time.

Max Butler remembers Mr Sheen parked up by Danehill Farm, right on the edge of the road by the (former) pond where there was a gap in the railings and he parked there for about an hour and a half every evening.

Vi Etherton called Mr Sheen, "Sheeny". Nicknames were very common in those times. Peter Croggan, who lived with Bob Lucas and his wife, at Ivy Cottage, Wych Cross (now demolished) was also an evacuee and he called Mr Sheen the Runner Bean - if you're a gardener you will understand the pun!

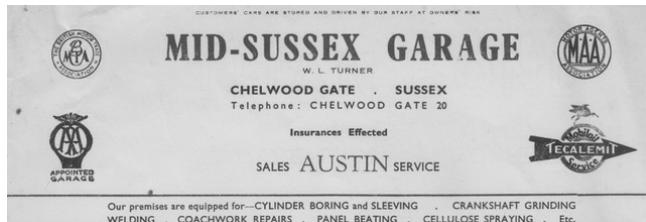


The area by Wych Cross was a very dangerous stretch of the road and it's believed the Toll House was demolished to give drivers a clearer view. There were fatal

accidents at this junction, one being in June 1931 and there are also other reports of crashes at the site.

Robin Wood used to cycle from Chelwood Gate to Wych Cross and Mr Sheen let him leave his bike behind the wall of the cottage. From here he was picked up by transport from his employer, and went on to East Grinstead. This was during 1956-1959.

Mr Sheen would ride his motor cycle and side car 'round his patrol area' looking out for people who were in need of assistance - always of course assuming they bore the AA badge. Whenever he could, he would carry out the repair by the roadside, but if the job was too big, the Mid Sussex Garage (which was then in the Beaconsfield Road) would come out and tow the car back to their garage for repair.



My thanks to Patrick Awcock, Max Butler, Ron Edwards, Ian, Vi and David Etherton, Vi Rivers, Ray Smith and Robin Wood.

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