

## Round And About In The Parish

Wally Dixon was born in 1892 and during the 1939-45 War he was an Air Raid Precautions warden.

Wally was a lengthsman for Sussex County Council which meant that he and another Council employee were responsible for looking after a length of road, in their case the stretch from the Roebuck to the Sheffield Arms. The job came with a tied cottage, Beech Cottage.

The other lengthsman was Mr Gaston (yes that is the correct spelling) and he lived next door to Beech Cottage as both of these cottages were owned by Sussex County Council for this purpose.



Before WW2, all of the grass cutting and clearing was done by hand using swaps and scythes. It was only post-war when a grass cutting machine was purchased.

Anyway, Queen Mary used to come and stay for the weekends with the Soames family at Sheffield Park both before and after war. Before that visit, Buckingham Palace would contact the Soames family and ask that the roads and the verges were suitably tidy for the royal visit. This was then conveyed to Wally although it's not sure how, as he never had a telephone. Wally had to pay special attention to the verges as Queen Mary always sat on the left of the car.

Mrs Soames had confirmed to Wally's wife, that she hid all her

favourite or valuable items when Her Majesty visited. Queen Mary would often express admiration for an object during a visit and if it wasn't immediately gifted to her she would just take it before she left. I said to the person who told me this that I couldn't possibly repeat their comment, but to my surprise in the Daily Telegraph in April there was an article which said exactly that, in their words "*Queen Mary had something of a reputation for swiping other people's best furniture and clothes etc....*"

Then the editors of the Fletching Parish Magazine told me "that the late Eve Thubron could have confirmed this story although it was believed it was trinkets rather than clothes or furniture that she 'admired'. Mrs Thubron - , a descendent of John Dryden, grew up at Canons Ashby, the family 'seat' now belonging to the National Trust. She remembered that Queen Mary came to visit and - knowing of her reputation - Mrs Thubron's parents arranged for all treasured items to be stored temporarily in the kitchen. The Queen arrived, and unfortunately had read of the splendour of the kitchens at Canons Ashby and asked to see them....."

Going back to Wally - The road men had a tin hut beside the road between the Police House in Danehill and the Nurse's house. Even though it was very close to home, neither Wally nor Mr Gaston could go home when they were supposed to be working but had to eat and wait out the rain in the hut so that if any bosses came along they knew where to find them.

During the war Wally got an extra cheese ration which was distributed by Mr Tester at County Hall in Lewes. This was sent to Reg Edwards in Chelwood Gate (he lived in one of the cottages on Stone Quarry Road) who in turn took it round to the local ESCC employees. The Dixon ration was shared with the Gastons next door, so one family received it one month and the other family received it the following month. So that there could be no dispute etc Wally's wife, Annie, wrote everything down in a notebook and got Reg to sign it.

In 1951 Mr Gaston and Mr Dixon were working on the straight piece of road going from Paygate Cottage in Furners Green to the Sheffield Arms



when Mr Dixon was hit by a drunk driver. The impact was so great that the machine was sliced in half with Mr Dixon and the cutting blades going one way, and the remainder of the machine going the other way. Mr Dixon never worked again after that.

The family was allocated a newly built council house in Maresfield and were allowed to remain in Beech Cottage rent free until it was completed. Unfortunately Mr Dixon died and so this arrangement came to an end and Mrs Dixon had to leave the tied cottage pretty sharpish. As there was now just Mrs Dixon and her

daughter, who was 13 at the time, they were only entitled to a 1 bed flat rather than a house. The daughter, Violet, only had six months left at school so it was cheaper for Mrs Dixon to pay the bus fare to send her to Danehill every day rather than pay for new school uniform and PE kit for the school in Uckfield. In those days you could get from Maresfield to Danehill with only one change of bus!!

Photo of Wally and Annie Dixon with their adopted daughter, Violet.

My thanks to Ian and Vi Etherton.

**Jill Rolfe**