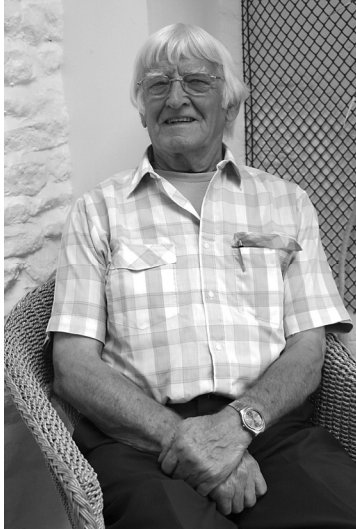


Special Feature

The Wild Gardens and the Diehard Gang

For most of us today, the Wild Gardens are a pleasant walk, perhaps accompanied by children, to feed the ducks and admire the wild flowers. For Gordon Duester, born and bred in Shipton eighty one years ago, it is childhood memories of the Diehard gang, being marooned on the island, climbing into a tree house and crawling through a tunnel under the avenue of lime trees.



Just Gordon

Gordon (pictured above) lived with his parents, two brothers and three sisters in a small cottage at the top of Simons Lane (then known as Little Lane). His father worked in the original Till yard near the Lamb. Once he had reached seven or thereabouts, Gordon would roam the village during his free time with his chums just like Richmal Crompton's heroes. One of their favourite haunts was the woods and ponds which now constitute the Wild Gardens. This was private property belonging to the Hall family who owned Shipton Court but entrance was easily achieved either at the present main entrance or through the gateway to the pasture where the Tall Trees Nursing Home now stands. During the War the cricket ground was unused and it was even possible to play inside the pavilion. A hard dirt track ran from the main entrance along the inside of the wall on Dog Kennel Lane, around the ponds and down the Avenue to the main

entrance. Bill and Ted Hall, sons of the Hall family, together with their friend Tony Burgess, son of the Blacksmith at the Forge would drive an old banger around the circular track. They were about ten years older than Gordon and his friends and had the resources to build a tree house in the woods and a homemade motor boat powered by a motor bike engine.

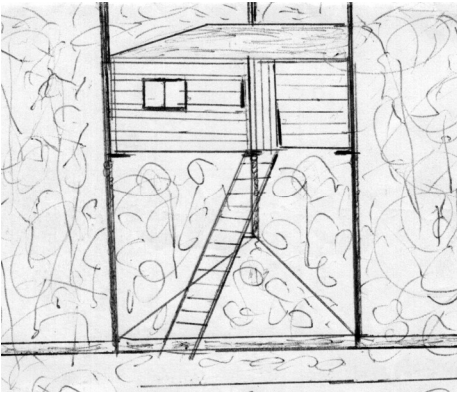
Diehards Let Loose

Gordon and his friends (his brother Norman, evacuees Dave and Ray Dalton, Philip Pittaway, Ivan and Mike Stroud, Cyril Harris, Peter Hawks, Philip Coombes, John Coveney and Frank Gregory) stumbled upon these treasures during their clandestine explorations. They spilled a can of creosote being applied to the tree house and were discovered. The older boys forced them to clear up the mess but otherwise took a benevolent approach to the youngsters. The Hall boys were about to leave childish pursuits; Billy Hall was killed just a few years later during the War. The group decided they should form a gang and call themselves the Diehards.

Famous Five Comes Alive

They were then allowed to play in the woods and even use the tree house, the motorboat and a full size punt. Gordon has produced a sketch from memory of the tree house. This was

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Gordon's sketch of the tree house. Living quarters were on the left, storage on the right.

constructed between three trees at a site approximately where until recently beehives were placed, between the path going down to the small pond (then known as the Lily Pond) and the present site of Tall Trees.

With the boats they would journey to the island in the centre of the large pond.

Once his brother Norman fell off the punt and had to go to his Grandma's to dry off (his mother would have delivered summary justice along with dry clothes). The island was immaculately tended with

magnificent trees reaching down into the water. Before they had received permission, Gordon and a friend had been marooned there for an hour when adults had suddenly appeared and their companions had taken flight.

Carp Diem

Once the Lily Pond lost its water and the village boys helped save the flapping carp by lifting as many as possible into the larger pond. In winter there was skating on the larger pond and ice hockey with makeshift sticks and a large pine cone serving as the puck. Another target for exploration was the stone passage built under the Avenue and designed to allow the movement of sheep between the pastures on either side.

There may have been a world war on the other side of the walls – Mosquitoes being assembled in Witney, American troops housed in the Court itself and with their vehicles at Bradley's garage - but for a gang of Shipton boys, the Wild Gardens were a veritable other Eden of peace and normality for a few years.

Alan Vickers

Get Ready for the BIG Lunch!

Here in Shipton we are already planning to celebrate our **Queen's Diamond Jubilee** with a '**Big Lunch**' to be held on the recreation field at the New Beaconsfield Hall. We hope that the whole village will join us to share lunch and activities together.

As part of the celebrations we hope to mount a display of old photographs of the celebrations for the Queen's Coronation in 1953, her Silver Jubilee in 1977 and possibly even further back to celebrations involving past monarchs. So please dig out your old photo albums and see what you can find. It doesn't matter how poor

the quality of your snaps please contact Alan Vickers on: 01993 830102.

Alan is a whizz on his computer and can 'make good' even the fuzziest shots.

Were you or someone in your family born on 6th February 1952, when the Queen acceded to the throne, or 2nd June 1953, Coronation Day or possibly 2nd June 1977, Silver Jubilee Day?

If so please let me know - there may be a special role for you on our own celebration day!

Christine Halliday : 01993 831134 or email christine@sinnelsfield.co.uk