

Mary Wright of Spout House Farm – Martin Jones interviewed Mary and Ron Wright in December 2011.



November 2011: Mary receives a bouquet of flowers and a presentation set of gardening tools from parishioners Worth Sides and Jane Hartshorne, in recognition of Mary's 42 years arranging the flowers for weddings at All Saints. Her husband Ron is on the far right.

Part 1: Memories of Spout House Farm



Spout House Farm, probably painted some time between 1960-70.

Q: Do you know when this painting was done?

Mary: Not exactly. It think it was painted from a drawing, which was done years ago before the farm was altered. It would have been done at least forty years ago, perhaps longer.



Mary Whitmore, as she was then, in her Queen Victoria school photo on the occasion of the coronation of King George VI in 1937. The full class photo can be seen on the All Saints' website [Queen Victoria photo page](#) ('Queen Victoria School 1937').

Q:What was your family's connection with Spout House Farm?

I was born in 1926 on the farm itself. It belonged to my dad (who was called Reg) and mum, and before they had it, my grandfather had it. My family name is Whitmore. My grandfather had Spout House Farm, and what we called 'Top Farm' on Sandyfields Road, also called Greenhill Farm.

Q:Would your grandfather have owned those farms in Victorian times?

Yes, I would say so. My grandfather bought Spout House Farm from the Law family, who had owned it for generations.

Q: What kind of farm was Spout House?

It was a dairy farm mainly. We grew vegetables, potatoes and wheat too and other foodstuffs to feed the cows with. It was 'organic' in those days - there was none of this 'patent' stuff until later on (ie chemicals for killing weeds). Years ago, we used to go up and down the rows with a hoe, to get the weeds out – you didn't get anything out of a bottle then. We had a man who would do it.

Q: Did your grandfather pass on the farm to your father?

No, when my grandfather died, Lord Dudley bought it and we farmed it as tenant farmers. When Lord Dudley had finished with it, my dad bought Spout House back again, in 1947/48.

Q: Who farmed it?

My brother farmed it for a long time and then he met an Irish girl, married her and they went to live in Ireland where he has a farm now.

My father sold Spout House Farm to Five Oaks/Crescent builders around the mid-1960s because they wanted it for building, but they never actually built on the land. When my brother went to Ireland we finished farming as a family at that point.

I lived at Spout House Farm from 1926-1958. I married Ron in 1950 and we moved to our present house in Cotwall End Road in 1958.

My father had a house built on the corner, a bungalow, and he retired there. Ron Baker would know better when the farm was sold to Crescent Builders.

Les Pugh was one of the directors of Five Oaks and Crescent Builders. He lived up Moden Hill, and also in Catholic Lane for a time.

Revd Sargent married us in 1950 (Sat Dec 16th), so today (the day of the interview) is our 61st anniversary. The snow was about 4-5inches deep on that day in 1950. We came to our house in Cotwall End Road in 1958 – we'd had the house built, it was started in 1957, and we moved here in March 1958.

Mr Turner bought Greenhill Farm, but I'm not sure whether that was from Lord Dudley. Greenfield View (off Southerndown Road) is actually named after Greenhill Farm.

As you are going down Sandyfields Road, where the golf course is there is a lane coming down to Cotwall End Road. Greenhill Farm was right on the corner there. There are no signs of it now. The golf course is on the land that belonged to Greenhill Farm. It used to take one hour to go up the big hill (now the first hole of the golf course) with a hoe, and one hour to come down with a hoe. One year we grew mangles, the next year it might be wheat, oats or potatoes.

Spout House was a working farm and there were four shire horses on it but I don't think Greenhill Farm had horses - I think the farmer (Bill Turner) had a tractor. Some of Greenhill

Farm went down the Brownswall Estate: on the flat, as you're going down Sandyfields, that was all Greenhill Farm, and it was arable. It dropped over the back to Wood Farm. Greenfield View was built on Turner's Farm; the farm stretched right down to Baggeridge.

THE FARM, THEN AND NOW



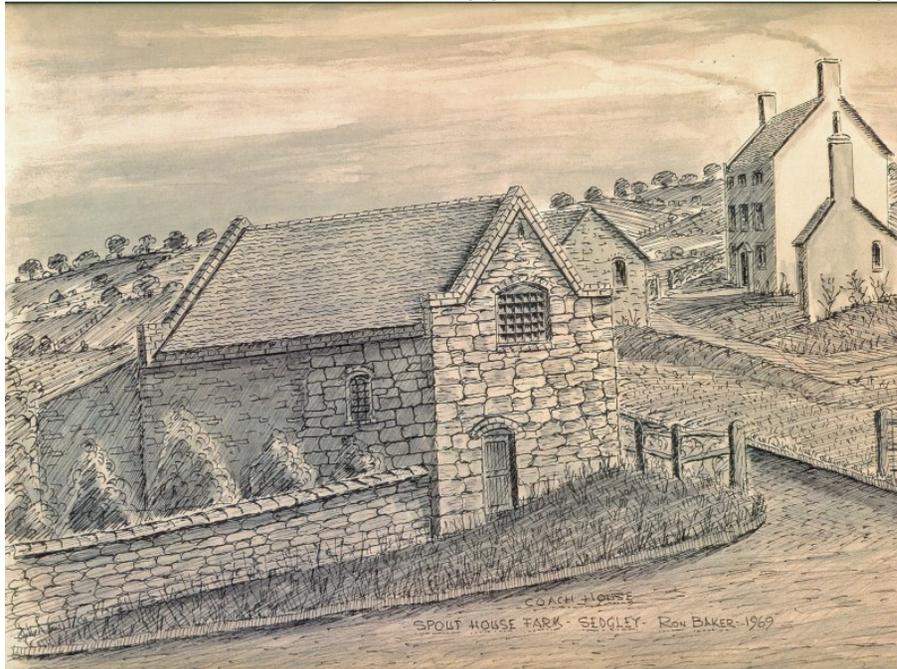
Ron Baker's drawing of Spout House Farm, dated 1950.

In this drawing (above) there is a barn by the house. Nowadays there is a glazed vestibule/conservatory between the house and barn and there may actually be a swimming pool in there – where cows used to be kept. The building on the left consisted of three big bays and they used to keep the straw and oats and sometimes potatoes in it. There was an engine house on the far side of that barn. On the far right is a Dutch barn and bales of hay were kept in it. Before hay was baled, it stored loose hay and they used to cut it with a knife. Our family lived in the farmhouse.



Spout House Farm in 1979, by Ron Baker

The part on the right of the barn (above) was the engine house. The engine was used to cut mangel-wurzels with, to provide food for the cows and other farm animals. The big double doors were wooden, and you could actually drive a lorry in through them. The holes at the top of the building were to let the air in. (Note: this style of construction, featuring layers of decorated bricks in the upper courses seems quite common in the Sedgley area.)



Spout House Farm in 1969, by Ron Baker

The building on the left as you enter the farm was used as a stables; the door at the front was bricked up in our day. The small building attached to the side of the farmhouse was where all the cooking and the washing took place.



The former farmhouse in 2011

On the ground floor of the farmhouse there were big lounges to either side of the hall, about 18' square each. There were two big bedrooms on the top floor, and a bathroom which my father had put in. My bedroom was at the top of the house on the left. The window in the middle on the top floor was the landing window - the landing itself was very big.



The arable barn in June 2011.

The double doors have now been replaced with glazing. Inside the former barn is now a large living room space. The buildings to the right of the barn are quite recent and did not exist in their present form in our day. The area adjacent to the barn was a battery house for hens, and out of picture to the right were pigsties.



The farmhouse and former cow barn in June 2011

At the front of the cow barn used to be one big window, and one big set of double doors where the cows went in. Over the back of the farmhouse was a big field which used to go up to an opening that led up to Sandyfields Road. To the left of the farmhouse at the front were orchards, with apple trees and pear trees. There were also chicken houses and fowl - the fowl used to run wild. The farmhouse now has windows at the back that weren't there in my day.

It would be nice to know whether the hall floor is still there in the farmhouse. It was a wonderful floor made up of coloured patterned bricks. Underneath the hall there was a cellar, where we used to sleep when the war was on, especially during the period when the Germans were bombing Coventry.

There was a huge cellar under part of the house and extending into the front garden. It was an arched cellar and you went down steps from the hallway to get to it. We used to have an 'Aladdin's Lamp' and we had to take beds and sleep down there when they were raiding Coventry and Birmingham (from 1940-1942). We did actually have an air raid shelter, but they recommended using the cellar instead.

There used to be a German prisoner of war who worked on the farm - Will Holmes was his name. He married Bertha, a lady who lived in one of the cottages at Ellowes Hall Farm. You can still use a bridle path at the top to get there.

When we had Spout House, the Dorrells had Wood Farm. Mrs Dorrell was the sister of the people who owned Jack Darby's Picture House.

At the top of Cotwall End Road was another little farm that was kept by the Westwoods. He had ducks, pigs and poultry. Where the Brownswall Road shops are, right up to Gospel End Road was where his field was. The house was up the corner on Sandyfields Road. There were two or three cottages there too. There were no houses in Cotwall End Road in those

days, just a little cottage next door to us, where the garages are.

I've heard that at the Nature Reserve, where the bungalow is now, and by the ponds, there used to be a community of monks and the pools were used for keeping carp as a source of food. Jack Kinsey farmed Cotwall End Farm for years.

Further down the road was Conquerors Farm, then there was Saney's Pit. During the war they used to work the coal pits down there - there were also two Williams' Pits. The Timmins' farm was called Conquerors Farm.

The Timmins' eldest son Joe was killed at Thompson's (a large Wolverhampton company that made military equipment including airscrews for Spitfire and Hurricane aircraft) in around 1940-1 in a tragic industrial accident on a drilling machine; they also had a daughter who still lives in the south of England, and another son Arthur who is still alive and lives on the Broadway in Dudley.



The front of the arable barn in June 2011

We used to drive the tractor in through the double doors (now glazed) and out the other side. The threshing machine was put in the engine house on the bottom right. The building was on two levels, with lofts on either side on the first floor. In the right hand loft there used to be a chute and the mangel-wurzels came down the chute into the engine house where they were ground up for feeding to the animals. The engine house itself consisted of wheels and a great big belt. The cuttings for the animals were passed outside from the space where the little window on the ground floor on the right now is. The door on the right wasn't there – in our day it was a much bigger opening which has since been bricked up. The building you can just see to the far right wasn't there in our day either.



The former stables, in June 2011

The 'lean-to' on the right of the picture used to be the diesel shed where the tractors, ploughs and machinery for the farm were kept. There was a great big tank for diesel fuel (TVO – Tractor Vehicle Oil) fuel in the corner of the shed on the left. Near where the car to the left in the picture was the manure heap.



The driveway to Spout House farm in June 2011.

Over to the right of the driveway (out of picture on the right) was the duck pond. There was a 'spout' (a natural spring) with running water that ran in the duck pool, which gave its name to Spout House Farm. It was at the bottom of the main house. There used to be a tree there, and the tree's roots were in the water. There was a big set of double gates on the roadway - nowadays the entrance pillars are much further back. The water used to run out of a 4" pipe into a big tank. The cows, horses and humans all used to drink from it. There was no mains water or electricity in our day. First we had Calor Gas, then piped water, and then seven electric poles were erected that supplied the house with electricity. At the bottom of the old lane, where the bungalow now is, there used to be an electric meter.



Another view of the former farm buildings in June 2011

To the far right was a piggery. There was a big muck heap in front of the buildings. When we were courting, we used to go to the pictures at Jack Darby's. We used to come out of the farm, go down the road about 100 yards, and where the wall is at the back of the Nature Reserve (there used to be a massive pool there) we used to walk up through the '24 Steppings' under a dilapidated archway.

The farm has changed out of all recognition from the time we knew it. All the buildings have been altered. I would have thought they would have taken 'before and after' photos that would have shown the changes.

Brenda Baker used to do drawings of the farm.

Where the house next door (105 Cotwall End Road) is, there are two garages. There was once a cottage there where Mr and Mrs Taylor lived and they used to go across the road to the well to fetch water. It was called the 'Gooseberry House'. Before the Taylors, the Watkins lived there (around 60-70 years ago).

Part 2: Memories of doing wedding flowers at All Saints' Church

Q: You've done the flowers for weddings at All Saints' for the past 42 years and you recently received a presentation in church to mark this. How did you first began this work?

Mr and Mrs Reed and Mr and Mrs Polly were the people who first got me involved. I had always worked in an office - I was a secretary. I left and we had a business down in Lower Gornal for a while. When I gave the business up, I had time on my hands and they asked me if I would help them do the flowers, so I said yes.

I worked with Mrs Polly and Mrs Reed for about two years. We used to run a tombola stall and if there's anything I hate it's to go and ask people for presents, because it's the same few who contribute year after year. I said I'd do the weddings, and the money that I make out of it would be used to buy the tombola prizes with. All the money I ever made went back to the church. Years ago there were 50-60 weddings a year but now people don't get married so much do they? We'd be fortunate if it's 19-20 weddings a year now. That's how it originally started.

When I'd done the flowers for some time, there was a Miss Woodcock there who always used to do the rota for the altar. Then she was taken ill. I'd been helping Mrs Polly and Peggy Reed for two years and they asked me if I'd take it on and I agreed. I had to do a rota for the altar, then I went right on to weddings and I've been doing it ever since.

Q: Where did you first learn how to arrange flowers?

I went on a flower arranging course and Mrs Polly and Mrs Reed were the teachers – it was held at The Dormston. So by working with Mrs Polly and Mrs Reed in the early days I was actually gaining instruction from professionals!

Nowadays they offer a City and Guilds qualification but I never took that – if you've got the talent, you've got it in my opinion! I learnt as I went along, and read no end of books and bought loads of magazines to get ideas.

Also, Ron and I went to all the flower festivals in the area including Claverley, Kinver and Droitwich. Mrs Reed organised the very first Flower Festival at All Saints and Mr Polly and I did a balcony display in red white and blue for it.

Ron: "Sometimes I'd come back from work and then have to go over to Worcester to fetch hops for a flower arrangement - at night time! That and Grandad's Beard – I had to go and find that in the trees at the roadside sometimes. In the end I found a place near Malvern where you could pick your own fruit – and they had loads of the Grandad's beard there!"

Q: When people come to Vestry Hour to book a wedding, they're offered the opportunity to have flowers done by the church itself. Could they do them themselves?

Generally, I found that the vicars didn't want to be concerned with flowers. It meant getting

the pedestals out, and liaising with a third party - they preferred someone 'in house' to do it all.

If there were three weddings in a day, you could never get all three families to agree. So when they came to me I used to ask them how much they wanted to spend, and sometimes they'd say that they would spend £50, but are the others contributing?

I'd say I didn't know, and I couldn't ask them until you say how much you're spending. If the second bride was in agreement, that would be OK, that's £100 to spend on flowers. But if the third bride said "Mrs Wright I can't afford that, I can only afford £20", the first and second would have to drop down to the level of the one contributing least.

They had a choice of colour. If one wanted blue, and one wanted red, and one wanted yellow, a little of their colour went in with white, to please everybody. Sometimes they wanted the flowers back after the wedding, ie "I've paid for them, I want them back". So I used to come in on Monday, put them in boxes and they fetched them.

Q: It must have been very awkward when two brides had very different ideas on what they wanted. And sometimes there would be three weddings wouldn't there?

There were four in a day sometimes, especially when Revd Bernard Harris was here, in those days there were four weddings most Saturdays. To get them to agree was hopeless!

Q: What other things did people get upset about?

If there were two or three brides and they couldn't agree to share costs, I would put the flowers in for the first wedding, but I was told not to let them stay in for the second wedding - I had to take them out. "If she's not contributing as much as me, I'm not paying for her", they said.

Len Millard was very good. Sometimes I had no need to go up, he'd just put the flowers that were removed in the back for me. If they didn't want to collect the flowers, Len would bring them back in for the Sunday service.

One woman who lived near us asked for flowers - money was to be no object and she was willing to spend £200-300. When they tell you that, you know it's not true - I knew it would end up as £50! In the end I did it for £50 and when I rang her to ask for the money she said: "I don't know why you should charge at all." I said that I did charge, but all the money goes back to church. So I asked her: "Does your husband work for nothing?" and she hung up - you'll never ever please everybody!

Q: Tell me about the church youth club.

They used to have a youth club up at the church -. Ron and I met there. We always went to the youth club, in fact there were two youth clubs. One was in Dean Street in the old church hall, held on a Sunday night. Where Lloyds Chemist is now, there was a long building housing another hall, and on a Wednesday night the youth club was held in there. It had a billiard table.

Q:Your life has been very much connected to All Saints' hasn't it?

I always say: "I was baptised at All Saints, confirmed at All Saints', I met my husband at All Saints', and we got married at All Saints'!"

Q: There are very few people who could say that aren't there?

Lil Parton could have done (sadly Lil passed away recently) and possibly Brenda Baker could, although I don't think Brenda came to the youth club. She did many other church-related activities though.

Q: Has the layout of the inside of the church changed much?

I can go back to when it was all beautiful trellised woodwork. And a great big organ at the back with pipes up to the roof. There used to be a wall in front of the Choir. The baptistry was at the back, near where the vestry is now. You were baptised up that corner. When you went in the doors of the church you turned right – that part's been made into a children's corner now. That was where the font was and that was where you were baptised. There is no water connected to the font today - they have to take it over in jugs.

Years ago when it was in the corner, it was connected to the mains.

Part 3: All Saints' Flower Festivals in pictures



'St Mary Magdalene', by Mary Wright, at the All Saints' Flower Festival, July 2009

There have been four flower festivals at All Saints' in my time, and they have all had a specific theme. The first one was held about forty years ago. The themes were: 'Peace and

Prosperity' (1986), 'Industry and Technology', 'Sport' (I can't be precise on the dates for these last two) and the most recent one was called 'Saints Alive' featuring floral interpretations of saints, held in 2008. At one time Sedgley used to have a Flower Club that met in the church hall.

PEACE AND PROSPERITY FESTIVAL (1986)



Wide view of the altar displays at the 'Peace and Prosperity' Flower Festival, 1986.



'Peace' arrangement at the altar, 1986.



Left, Mr Reed; centre Mary Wright; right Mrs Reed with the Peace arrangement, 1986.



Mary Wright (left) with Revd Bernard Harris and Mrs Reed, with the Peace arrangement, 1986



A balcony display, 1986



Famine, by Valerie Chevasse, 1986



Plenty, featuring a harvest loaf, 1986



An arrangement in the Alcove, 1986



Coloured theme around the pillars: Yellow pillar, 1986.

**'INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE AREA' THEMED FESTIVAL (Date unknown)
Organised by Mr and Mrs Reed**



A mining display.



Oil industry display.



Telecommunications display.



Glass industry display

SPORT AND LEISURE THEMED FESTIVAL (Date unknown).



The 'Sport and Leisure' themed festival, with fishing nets

Part 4 – other recollections of Sedgley, and All Saints'

All Saints' vergers

In our day (40s/50s) Seth Pugh was the gravedigger/verger at All Saints'; when he passed away 'Joby' (Job) Evans became the verger. He lived in a little house in Dean Street, right opposite the entrance to the church. I remember Dean Street when it was all little houses up from the post office. The pawn shop was at the very bottom; the lady who kept the post office, Mrs Webb, had jet black hair – she was a very smart woman in the village.

Delivering milk round Sedgley and Lower Gornal villages

In the early 1940s when I was around 12-14 years old, I used to help deliver milk house to house around the village, using a horse and milk float cart. My sister also did it. We delivered in Sedgley and Lower Gornal, carrying 3-4 churns on the float. People used to have a half pint or a pint. We would get it out of churns (which held 10-12 gallons) using a ladle.

We put the milk into cans - my father had one can and I had the other, and we covered opposite sides of the street. We then poured the milk into customers' jugs – if the customer was out they'd leave their jug on a shelf outside their house with their order on a bit of paper. It was time-consuming, but it was how it was done in those days. We left the farm about 9.30am and got back around 3.30pm. Our horses (one horse was called Dolly, and

the last horse we had was called Tommy) worked hard: they had to do a lot of travelling.

Later we got a Ford van to do the deliveries. When I was in my later teens I was in the Women's Land Army and I worked on the farm until I was 19, when I went into office work and became a secretary.

Billy Nicholls (the cousin of Lawrence Nichols) worked for my father on the farm during the war. A lady called Betty also used to work at the farm and go out with the milk – she died about three years ago.

There were other milk deliverers in those days: the Bradleys, the Westwoods (at the top of Moden Hill), and the Timminses. There were two people employed on Spout House farm as cowmen.

Greengrocery in Lower Gornal

I had a greengrocery business with my sister in Louise Street, Lower Gornal for about eight years. My mother's mother owned it – it was called Wood's. It had been in her family for years. When I sold it, it became a shoe shop, then a post office and it's now it's an opticians – and the post office is next door.

The winter of 1947



In 1947 we had a terrible winter with snow that blew in drifts to the tops of the hedges. Nobody had any potatoes. At this time potatoes were kept in a 'bury' (a mound of potatoes

stored with soil on top with straw so the air could get to them) and we had to apply for permission from the government to open the buries.

They announced it on screen at the Clifton cinema: "Mr Whitmore will be opening a bury tomorrow morning for customers to buy potatoes". People came for miles and a huge queue of people formed the down the whole length of Cotwall End Road. Each person was allowed 10lbs.

Ron says: "I came back on leave from Germany, and went to visit Mary. The snow was over the tops of the hedges - at least six feet high. Mary's father had taken the shire horse through the drifts to clear a path. I was in my army boots and overcoat, and there was a queue of women up the road – I virtually had to fight my way through them because they thought I was trying to queue-jump!



A potato 'scoven' with ball ends to the prongs, to avoid piercing the potatoes

"The queue ended in the rick-yard, in the open air outside by the Dutch Barn. The family had a five gallon drum with a fire in it. Mary's dad was there filling the women's bags, Mary was taking the money and her mother was weighing out the potatoes – they were frozen to death. I told Mary to get up the road and get a cup of tea for herself, and I took over the heavy work filling the bags using a scoven (a cross between a shovel and a fork that had rounded ball ends to the prongs, so as not to pierce the potatoes) while Mary's mum

and dad took the money. I remember there was a line of four big buries, about 12 yards long in total."

The old pipe organ



Mary has given us this picture of the old All Saints' pipe organ. The set of red cassocks were purchased in October 1993, so the picture would probably have been taken some time after then. Kennedy Slater says the organist in the photo could be Stuart Eaton rather than Mel. The area around the altar used to be wood trellising at one time.

Thank you very much Mary and Ron, for your wonderful reminiscences.

Date of interview: 16th December 2011

DRAWINGS: Thank you very much to **Ron Baker** for the use of his excellent drawings of Spout House Farm in this interview.

SALE: At the time this article was written (Jan 2012), the farmhouse and former milking shed were for sale - the sales particulars show the layout and pictures of the interior as described by Mary in the interview.

COMMENTS

Christine Buckley commented on 13/1/12:

Trevor Genge's book, Volume 5, page 19, has two pictures of Spout House Farm, including one with a pile of mangel-wurzels, and a tractor in a photo by Andrew Barnett.

Trevor Genge says that Mary's father is probably one of the people on it - as the photo was taken about 1960.

In Trevor Genge's Volume 4 there are two photos on page 25, one from c1970, one from 1947 - the second very clear.

The photos in Volume 3 are of fields belonging to Spout House farm, but not the farmhouse (pp. 38, 40).

With regard to the fishponds at Cotwall End, anyone could have 'stews', or fishponds in the medieval period and later. There is no chain of ponds on the 1835 OS map.

The Laws were a strongly '[recusant](#)' family (ie Catholics who refused to attend Anglican churches), who provided the land for St George's Chapel, the precursor of St Chad's RC church, in Sandyfields. A record of where the Laws were based may show up in the Manor Court records - their landholding could be traced to the Barons Dudley.