

## LOWER LODGE

When Herman Biddell built Archway House in 1892 for his retirement from farming, he also built Archway Cottage for David Amoss, his coachman and faithful family retainer. Some 20 years later, in 1914, he built Lower Lodge in Brook Lane for Caroline Pipe (1851-1943) who had been the family nanny.<sup>1</sup> Caroline had come to Playford in 1876 in answer to an advertisement in the local paper put in by Herman's wife, Harriet, for a 'nursemaid for two young children' adding that 'an under nurse is already kept'.<sup>2</sup> Caroline's charges at that time were a son Henry, then 20 months but who sadly was to die after his fourth birthday, and Dorothea who was just four months old. The



**Caroline Pipe in her garden at Lower Lodge, 1921**  
Cilla King

family were then living at Hill House and were to remain there for another 16 years by which time the youngest of the five children, Rachel, was seven. When the family moved to the newly built Archway House, Caroline's job as 'nursemaid' was over but, as with so many women in her position, she stayed with them taking on other work in the house and in 1901 is described as cook.

As a nanny she would of course have 'lived in' and there were in fact two 'servants' rooms' on the first floor of Archway House but at some stage she developed a serious heart condition such that she was unable to manage the stairs.<sup>3</sup> In 1911 when she visited her brother in North Devon she was tellingly accompanied by Dorothea and it was three years after this that Herman Biddell saw fit to build the single story Lower Lodge for her. That it was built right in front of his house blighting an otherwise unobstructed view of the valley below can only be explained by the family, in the days before telephones, wanting to keep a close eye on her

and that some primitive system of communication between the two houses was set up in case of trouble. It would seem though that she had not been expected to live long for the house was built on the cheap using rat-trap bond to save on bricks and second hand timbers in the roof - possibly with demolition in mind and the opportunity to regain the full prospect of the meadows below.<sup>4</sup> Certainly by 1920 she was confined to a wheel chair and had to be pushed wherever she went. Against all

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<sup>1</sup> The date of 1914 comes from Mrs Felgate (1887-1974) who lived at The Brook from 1910. That it was built for Caroline Pipe comes from Vera Dunnett (b. 1918) whose family was living at The Brook in 1911 and that it was built on the site of the former house of the Playford Hall farm bailiff comes from Amy, Herman Biddell's second daughter.

<sup>2</sup> *Ipswich Journal*, 6 May 1876.

<sup>3</sup> Information from Phyllis Palmer (née Turner) who, when a young teenager, lived with Caroline Pipe at Lower Lodge for two years c. 1920-22.

<sup>4</sup> Rat-trap bond is a type of bond where bricks are laid on their edge in order to save money. Dairy Cottage, built by the Bristol Estate in 1882, is another example in the village where this technique was used.

expectations she lived to the grand age of 92 and stayed on in her house until she died in 1943 long after the Biddell family had moved to more modest accommodation in the village.

### **Caroline Pipe's family**

Caroline Pipe was born in Raglan, Monmouthshire, and spent her childhood in Leominster but both her parents were Suffolk born. Her father Sylvanus (1818-1871) was from Badingham and had moved to the Welsh Marches with his brother looking for work. They were both journeymen wheelwrights. Sylvanus died in Leominster in 1871. His widow, also Caroline (1821-1880), stayed on briefly living with a Bruisyard born nephew while his daughter, the younger Caroline, was most probably working away from home as a live-in nanny. Caroline's mother had been born in Otley and returned to Suffolk with her daughter some little time after her husband's death. She died in 1880 and was buried in Ipswich cemetery. It was on arriving in Suffolk from the other side of the country that the 25 year old Caroline answered the Biddells' advertisement so making a move that was to last her a lifetime.

Caroline's brother Thomas (1845-1934), six years her senior, had been born in Hacheston and had gone with the family to the Welsh Borders. On leaving school in 1861 he had become a painter and glazier but from 1880 he is recorded as being a Unitarian Minister serving a succession of chapels in the West Midlands.<sup>5</sup> After attending the Metropolitan Training College in London as a mature student, he served the Baptist movement for 30 years before retiring in 1910 to Combe Martin on the North Devon coast. The couple later returned to Birmingham where they died: his wife in 1932 at the age of 78 and he two years later in 1934 when he was 88. They had three children, a girl and two boys. The girl, a third generation Caroline, had a son who was to become an electrical maintenance engineer at the Port Talbot steelworks while a son Thomas Sylvanus (b. 1883) also became an engineer but worked overseas, notably in India and Portugal.<sup>6</sup> The younger boy, David (b. 1885), was commissioned in the Royal Marine Light Infantry, becoming a captain, and was killed in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) in October 1917. His name is inscribed on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing.<sup>7</sup>

### **Her companion help at Lower Lodge**

Around 1920-21, Phyllis Turner (1906-83) lived as a companion help with Caroline Pipe at Lower Lodge, the link between the two being Combe Martin where Caroline's brother and Phyllis' family lived, all quite possibly members of the Baptist church there. Some 40 or 50 years later in the 1960s or '70s Phyllis related her experiences at a Women's Own Meeting at the Anderson Baptist Church in Reading where she lived. Her notes are recorded in full for the detail that they contain:<sup>8</sup>

I was in my early teens and lived with an elderly lady as companion help. She was small and plump and her name was Caroline Pipe. I used to help her keep her little bungalow clean and push her out in a bath chair (she had a weak heart). It was one of those old fashioned wicker chairs with a long bar in front for the passenger to steer by. If we had any hills to climb she would get one of the village boys to help me push and reward him with a copper or two.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unitarianhistory.org.uk/ministerobit4.html> Unitarian Historical Society, obituaries of Unitarian Ministers.

<sup>6</sup> Passenger Lists leaving UK 1890-1960, 1927 Bombay, 1937 Lisbon.

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission website.

<sup>8</sup> Playford Parish Council is grateful to her daughter Cilla King who, after contacting the Clerk, handed over these recollections as well as letters that Mrs Felgate had written to her mother. The letters date from the 1960s and '70s and give precise details of both the ownership and occupation of the house during those years.

On Sundays I pushed her to church, mornings and evenings, and in the afternoon when she had her rest I used to walk over the fields to a very small and isolated church where the congregation consisted of about six people and a few children for the choir. I think the afternoon service was the only one held there [this was Culpho which she reached via footpath 3 from Brook Lane to Branson's and on past Culpho Hall].

There was no gas or electricity in Playford, cooking was done on oil stoves and when you wanted a bath you put two kettles on the stove and did your best. There was one small shop where you could buy everything from bread and butter to darning wool and paraffin. I know they sold darning wool because I used to wear black stockings with everlasting holes in the knees.

I had half-a-crown a week pocket money [12½p]. Occasionally we had a day in Ipswich about five miles away. No buses ran through the village so that meant pushing the chair a mile or two and leaving it at a cottage near the bus stop. [This could be either Culpho or Kesgrave; both alternatives were still being used by village people in the 1960s]. In the evenings we would tend the garden, read books or write letters and often we played Ludo. I used to go for bike rides.

We were quite fond of each other and, although teenagers today might think it a dull sort of life, for me it made a happy memory.

### **Caroline's later years**

In his will Herman Biddell left £50 to his coachman David Amoss but Caroline Pipe was left nothing. She was 66 when Biddell died in 1917 and, unlike Amoss at that age and much older, incapable of doing paid work. With a state pension of just five shillings (25p) a week for the over 70s she faced an uncertain future. Six years earlier, when visiting her brother in Combe Martin, the 1911 Census records her occupation not as a cook or other domestic but as 'of private means'. Could it be that she had been provided with a small annuity? With the additional possibility of a rent free house, the family might well have thought that they had done enough but interestingly, when Harriet died eight years later in 1925, Caroline was left a notional £5 being described in the will as 'my nurse' indicating that she continued to be of some small service that was still appreciated by her employers.



**Caroline Pipe and her companion help Phyllis Turner on Playford Heath, 1920 or '21 Cilla King**

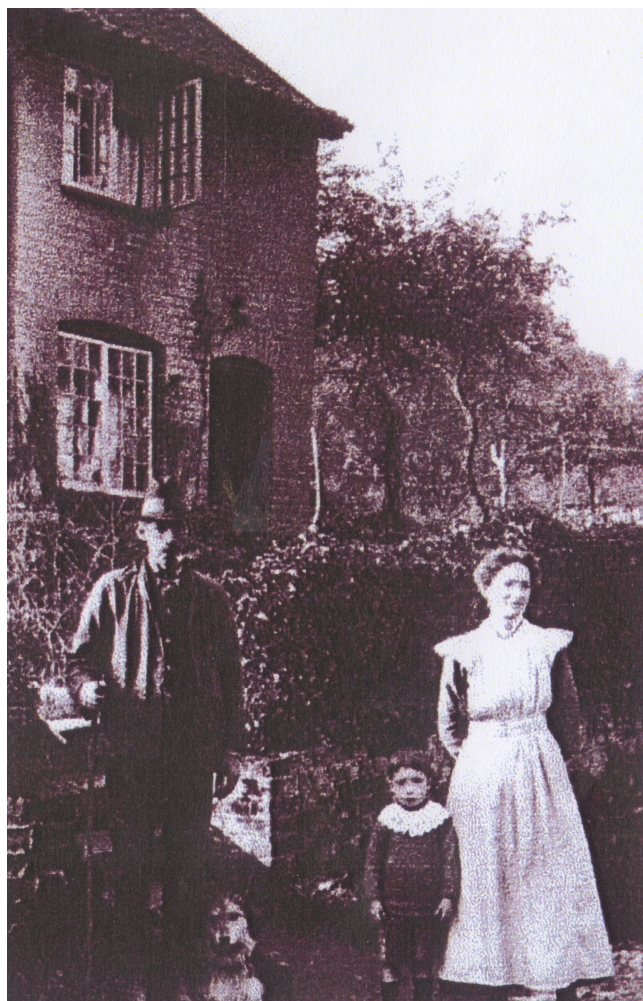
Rachel and her elder sister Amy lived on at Archway House after their parents' deaths until they ran out of money. In 1934 they put the 'small residential estate of 43 acres' up for sale but Lower Lodge was not included.<sup>9</sup> It had been sold to Caroline Pipe's brother Thomas three years before, in 1931, but whether out of benevolence or because of a shortage of funds is not known.<sup>10</sup> It is of note however that, while the property was bought in her brother's name, it really belonged to his son Thomas Sylvanus the itinerant engineer

<sup>9</sup> Sale catalogue, Archway House, 8 May 1934. Private possession.

<sup>10</sup> Abstract of Conveyance, 30 July 1931. Private possession.

‘by whom the whole of the purchase money was found’.<sup>11</sup> It was her brother’s wish that on his death the property be legally transferred to his son and when Caroline died in 1943 the house remained in the family but unoccupied for the rest of the war.<sup>12</sup>

### Lower Lodge after Caroline’s death



**Mrs Felgate outside her cottage in Warren Lane, 1918, where she lived for 63 years - from 1910 to 1973**

Wanting to retrace the steps of her youth, Phyllis Palmer (née Turner) now 59 years old, made a visit to Playford in August 1965 and met Mrs Felgate who had lived at The Brook since 1910 and who would therefore not only have witnessed the building of Lower Lodge at close quarters but been on hand during Phyllis’ two year stay in the early 1920s. Surprisingly the pair had not previously met. Sitting in her cottage they ‘chatted for over two hours’, struck up a lasting friendship and engaged in a regular correspondence until Mrs Felgate died in 1974. Her letters form an invaluable record not only of Lower Lodge in the years following Caroline’s death in 1943 but in the dating of the new housing and much else that was going on in the village at that time.

The house lay empty for three years until 1946 when Thomas Sylvester’s widow, Olive Helena (1878-1964), came to live there but the village was unsure whether she was really a widow or if she had left her husband.<sup>13</sup> No record has been found of Thomas’ death and it is likely therefore that he died overseas as he is known to have started a new assignment in Portugal in the August of 1937.<sup>14</sup> Olive came to Playford with

an older sister, Edith Marie Holthoir, who had also recently been bereaved.<sup>15</sup> Her husband had been an actor as had his father who had played Shakespearean roles on the London stage. The two sisters had had a cultured upbringing: their father was ‘a theatrical proprietor and vocalist’, their brother-in-law an ‘operatic manager’, one brother was ‘a theatre manager’ while another was to become a barrister and an executor of their wills. As young girls living at home with their parents, they had been cosseted by three resident domestic servants.<sup>16</sup> The pair were well travelled. Olive had married in Bombay in 1907 and had lived in India for many years. Her daughter, Olive Sylvia born in 1910,

<sup>11</sup> Will of Thomas Pipe, Birmingham, dated 27 April 1932. He died 10 January 1934.

<sup>12</sup> Ex inf. Colin Ablitt who was evacuated to Playford as a boy of nine from Wroxham Road in Ipswich 1940-45. He lived with his grandparents at Dairy Cottage.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Mrs Felgate to Phyllis Palmer, 20 April 1964.

<sup>14</sup> Passenger lists leaving UK, 1890-1960.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Holthoir had died in 1943, the same year as Caroline Pipe, while the couple were living in Wells, Somerset.

<sup>16</sup> Census 1891 Finchley; 1901 Yardley, Worcs. Will, Olive Helena Pipe died 23 March 1964: her brother James William Cecil Turner, barrister-at-law, was an executor.



is recorded as having gone out to join them in 1928 which, at the age of 18, suggests that she had been educated in this country. Edith had sailed unaccompanied to New York on the Queen Mary in 1937 but it is not known whether this was for work or for pleasure. Olive was a tiny woman 'only ever wearing girls' clothing'. She died aged 80 at Wear Home, Winesham (still in business as Winesham Nursing Home) in 1964 having lived in Playford for the best part of 20 years. Her sister had died in a Felixstowe nursing home much earlier - in 1950 - within four years of her coming to Suffolk. On her death she left £20,000 [equivalent to £650,000 in 2017 money] only £7,000 of which could have come from her husband. She had money of her own. Together with Olive's £5,000 [£100,000] it has to be wondered why two such cultivated and well-to-do old ladies should have chosen to live out their lives in such humble and spartan accommodation.

After Olive's death it was thought that her daughter would clear the house ready for sale but things were left as they were. The exterior woodwork was painted blue but that is all that was done and the place began to look very shabby with the gate 'all broken down'. In December 1966, nearly three years after her mother's death, the property still remained empty although 'some of Pipe's relations come for weekends. The curtains are still up at the windows and the furniture still there'.<sup>17</sup> Finally in



**Frank Mann bought Lower Lodge from the Pipe family in 1969. He lived there for 28 years until his death in 1997**

April 1969 Mrs Felgate was able to write that 'Miss Pipe's bungalow was sold for £2-300 and a bachelor man bought it. The hedge is all cut down level to the ground as he has got a car. He used to live in Church Cottage and when Mrs Pocock [Anna Airy's married name] was alive he used to do odd jobs for her'. That bachelor man was Frank Mann (1922-97) whose wider family had lived in the village since at least the early 1800s and who had moved out of Church Corner Cottage following Anna Airy's death in 1964 when her cousin Col. Airy put the property up for sale. But the price of Lower Lodge has to be wrong, the most likely error being that Mrs Felgate had left off a nought.<sup>18</sup> Frank Mann moved in sometime before October 1969 and lived on there as a bachelor in very austere conditions until he died in December 1997. By this time property prices had soared and the house was now valued at £70,000.<sup>19</sup> Starting as a gardener boy in Great Bealings, he had worked as a tractor driver on Lux Farm during the war after which he took employment with the District Council cutting playing field grass later working in the maintenance shop. After a few personal bequests he left the remainder of his £140,000 estate to charity. Soon after gaining possession, the new owners added an extension to the house in matching brick.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Mrs Felgate to Phyllis Palmer, 20 December 1966.

<sup>18</sup> By way of comparison, in 1961 it was proposed to build new bungalows in Spring Meadow for £3-4,000. House price inflation would have lifted those figures to £5-6,700 by 1969.

<sup>19</sup> Register of Electors, qualifying date 10 October 1969. Frank William Mann, probate 27 February 1998.

