

Bill (William James) Atkins 1913-1993

Bill lived his entire life in Chenies. He was a quiet 'salt of the earth' man, a parish councillor and an active and valued member of Chenies community. Below, I have pulled together information about his life here in Chenies, much of it from his wife Joy's jottings.

Bill was born at 45 Chenies, at the top of the Green. His father Jim, was employed by the estate, working on the farms and woods, keeping the boundary hedges and fences in order. He also lit, each morning, the big beetle stoves to warm the school rooms up and brought enough coke in for the day. He finished his working days looking after the river and keeping the weed in it cut. Bills' mother Florence picked stones in the fields and did the washing for the Bedford Arms. In later years she cleaned the school and thought nothing of walking regularly to Chesham and back with the children in the pram or running beside her. Bill had a younger brother Raymond and a sister Vera. Sadly, Raymond in a motorbike accident age 21.

Bill went to Chenies school and on leaving he went to Germain Street school in Chesham. He had to walk to Little Chalfont for the train and then walk home at night.

As a youngster he used to go out early to the cherry orchard to scare the birds, armed with a shotgun and an old football rattle. He also earned pocket money taking rubbish up to the claypits (rubbish pit near Claypits cottages).

St Michaels church became second home to him as he had started there at his mother's breast. As a young boy he manned the bellows for the organ for years, albeit he fell asleep during the sermon one day and had not filled the bellows when the organist wanted to start! He had taken on the church boiler from his father and looked after it until night storage heaters came into being.

Bill left school at 14 and started as a gardener's boy at Chenies House. He worked up to head gardener under Mr Puddiphat and Bill then took over when he retired.

Bill was not allowed to 'join up' in WW2 because of his horticultural knowledge and he would have been useful on the farm training land girls and conscientious objectors to grow vegetables and do other farmwork.

Bill was a long-term bell ringer and became tower captain at St Michaels just after the end of the war when Bill Bastin gave it up. He also changed the light bulbs and cleaned the gutters after the Bedford estate gave up.

It was around this time that he met his future wife Joy Peppercorn who had arrived in Chenies to live and work at Manor Farm. Joy was brought up in rural Herefordshire, had been a land army girl and was already experienced with horses and farm work. She and Bill had much in common, and they spent much of their courting time within the grounds of Chenies Place. They married on 1st January 1949 and moved to 2 Bedford

Close, one of the first homes to be completed by the council on grounds provided by the Duke of Bedford.

Bill tended his new garden and vegetables and won a great many prizes entering produce in the annual Chenies Produce Show. He and Joy had two daughters, and they remained long standing and popular residents of the close for well over 3 decades.

In the 1980's Bill taught my husband and I how to bell ring, and he demonstrated to me how to trim and tie my newly grown onions to the standard required for the Produce Show entry! I remember Bill with pleasure and affection.

Sandy Homewood