

Services

Doctors

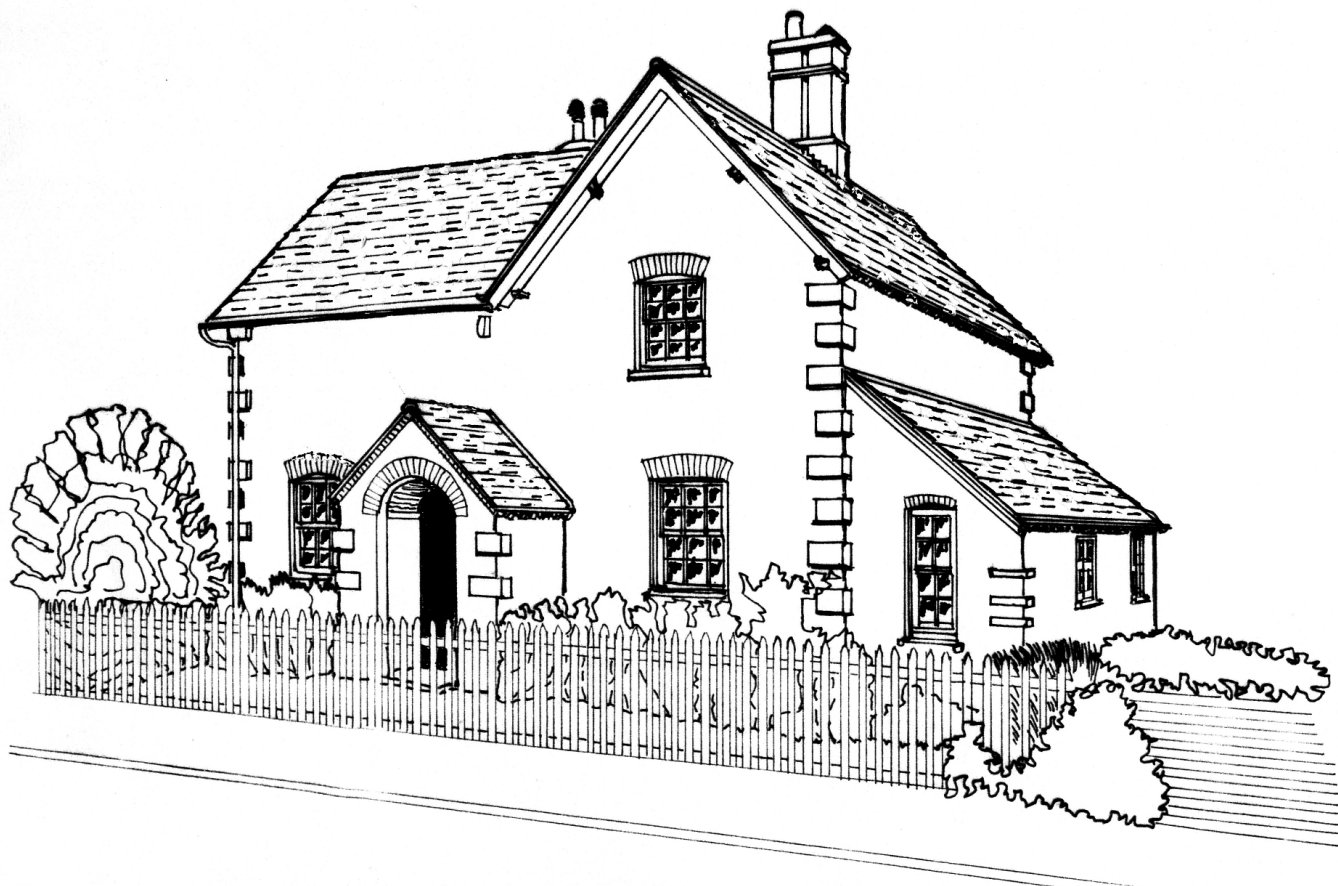
Those whose friends living elsewhere tell of long, long waits for medical attention know how Mortimer is well-served. About 1825 Dr William Wall, surgeon and apothecary, arrived and opened a surgery. His home, Briar Lea House, was recently demolished, but his brass door plate, found in an adjoining garden, hangs in the present surgery. Dr Wall was succeeded in 1848 by Dr Johnstone James Luce, who became District Medical Officer for Basingstoke and Bradfield, then by Dr Freeman Izod in 1850. A roundabout now lights up what became known as Doctor's Corner. In 1868 Dr George Henry Davis lived at Glenapp, later the home and surgery of Dr Walter Roalfe Cox and then of Dr J Anderson Hill. Dr. Hill's garden extended across to Victoria Road, and in 1952 he and his partners built the present surgery. Since then it has twice been extended.



The Mortimer District Nurse lived in an Englefield Estate house in The Street, on the corner of Pitfield Lane. The nurse went on her rounds by bicycle, in all weathers, by night and day. It was not until the Second World War that the nurses in Berkshire were provided with small cars, and a course of driving instruction was arranged for them. Almost all births were home deliveries, and the nurse had to be a qualified midwife. In the early years of this century Nurse Skey was here. Her skill was recounted by one of twin sisters, both flourishing at eighty-eight years of age. At birth one twin is said to have weighed only one-and-a-half pounds, but Nurse Skey had saved her without hospital help. The Mortimer nurses were Queen's Nurses, which meant they had received extra training. They often stayed for long periods, and were greatly loved and respected. There was Nurse Beeson, Nurse Dorothy Crook (whose wedding to Frederick Webb in 1931 was one of the events of the season in Mortimer), Nurse Sparrow and Nurse Ruth Moore. Later Health Service arrangements replaced some of the duties of the District Nurse.

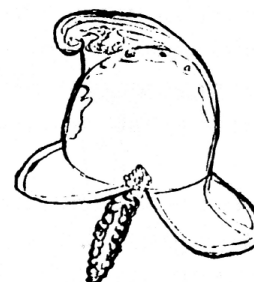
Police

Mortimer had a police force by 1872. Next to St. Mary's School the first police house had a small cell. There were two constables and a sergeant on duty. In 1899 a constable's house was built in St. John's Road to serve Mortimer Common, and in 1960 a new police station flanked by two houses appeared in Victoria Road just in time to see the end of our own village policemen after over a century, to be replaced by car patrols from Pangbourne. Many villagers will remember Police Constable Axton, who looked after the village from 1934 to 1951 and lived in King Street.



Fire-fighting

In 1895 Richard Benyon gave a horse-drawn fire cart to the village and a brigade of volunteers was formed. Enthusiasm waned however and by 1914 it had ceased to exist. After the war a new start was made and the Mortimer and Sonning Fire Brigade came into existence, with two men always on duty at the fire station in The Street (now the Post Office sorting office). When the fire siren sounded the rest of the brigade downed tools and rushed to the fire station. They had to deal with many fires in the extensive woodlands that surrounded Mortimer before the era of gravel digging.



Came the Second World War and traditional firemen's helmets were exchanged for tin hats. A 'Green Goddess' army fire tender and a car with added roof ladder and trailer pump joined the two Dennis fire engines. The brigade became part of the National Fire Service and the part-timers Auxiliary Firemen. During the blitz they attended fires at Southampton, Portsmouth and Bristol, but all survived enemy bombs. They also dealt with a fire at Burghfield Mill where they were strafed by a German aircraft.

In 1974 they were renamed the Royal Berkshire Fire Brigade and the following year were moved to the new fire station in West End Road. Over the years the brigade has raised a

great deal of money for charity.

Telephones

The first telephones were on the Burghfield exchange as Mortimer did not have its own until 1936 when one was built at the corner of King Street and Victoria Road. It was a manual exchange staffed night and day by operators who lived in the flat above. The fire siren was mounted on the roof. In those days a caller might be advised by the operator to "*Try again this afternoon; I saw them catch the bus for Reading*". Automation meant a move to the present exchange behind the Horse and Groom. The old one became a private dwelling, and now houses a dentists' surgery.

Electricity

The coming of electricity to Mortimer in 1936 must have been a taste of Heaven for many. Electric irons, cookers and kettles were probably the first acquisitions in many households, and one could for a while buy these modern wonders in Mortimer's own electricity showroom which was situated in one of the shops since replaced by the newsagent's.

The Wessex Electricity Company installed three lights and one 15-amp 3-pin plug free for each new customer; many thought this sufficient and rigged up complicated webs of wires, often running their appliances off the five-amp lighting circuit via bayonet extensions in the bulb sockets. When everyone had a mains wireless, Mr Hillary's accumulator service with his trailer full of flat and recharged batteries was seen no longer.

Water

At the beginning of this century every house in Mortimer had a well (or shared one) and raised water for domestic use with a pump or windlass and bucket. To provide water for cattle some farms had cisterns filled by windpumps like the one at Great Park Farm that fell victim to the gales. There is still an old cistern in a field between The Street and Wheats Farm.

In 1912 the Mortimer Waterworks built the attractive pumping station near Tun Bridge and the red brick water tower opposite the Fairground, where the engineer-in-charge, Mr George (Jammy) Jarvis, pumped water up the hill with a paraffin engine. By 1918 the water pipes were laid. Householders paid for connection, Jammy cycling to the sites and using his own pick and shovel.

Mortimer Waterworks was sold to the Mid-Wessex Water Company for £25,000, and some of the money was used to clear and drain the Fairground. During the Second World War the tower garaged an auxiliary fire pump and the Local Defence Volunteers watched for parachutes from the top. It was taken down in 1965.



Sewerage

Outdoor privies with earth closets or smelly cesspools were once the lot of country dwellers. By the 1920s, however, most houses had indoor toilets draining into septic tanks that did not need pumping out or emptying. Many householders decided to keep them instead of paying for connection to the sewer. Main drainage in Mortimer brought its own problems. One would expect a village with a valley to one side of it to be an easy site, but apparently the very steepness of the hill caused trouble. The pipes ran at great depths in some places while at the end of The Avenue they snaked above ground and a booster pump was required. One of Mortimer's many springs found its way into the trench and ran happily downhill beside the pipe, excavating a cavern as it went. A large hole opened up near the Horse and Groom and another was reputed to have ensnared a bus. The provision of one connecting 'eye' to every two houses, in Victoria Road anyway, has thwarted at least one late joiner, but since the 1960s there has been little call for the services of cesspool-emptier 'Lavender Jim'. Much of Mortimer West End, however, still has no mains drainage.