

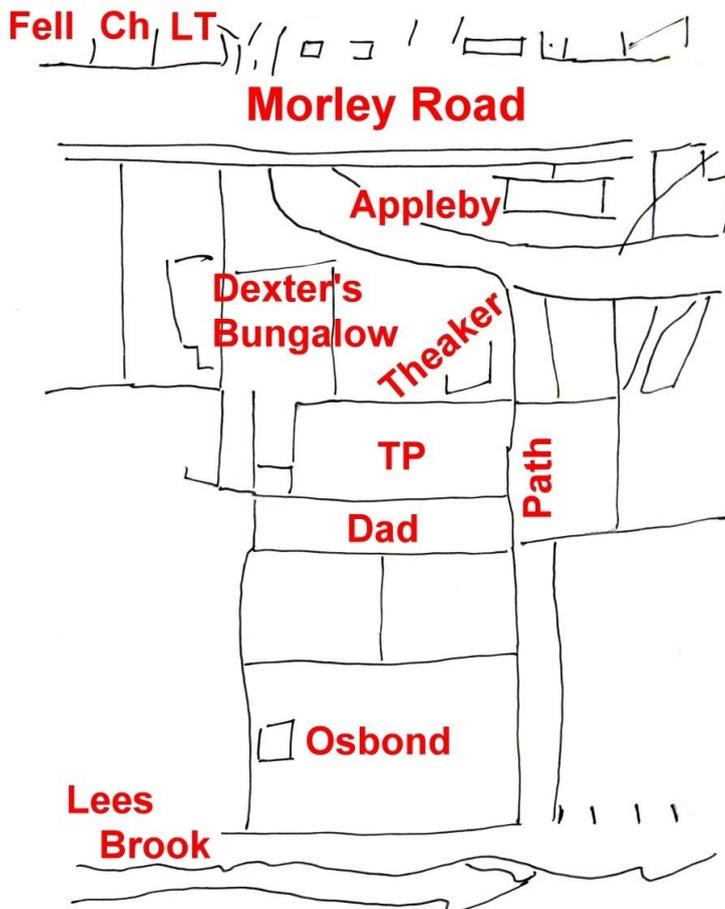
THE OAKRIDGE ALLOTMENTS

Whilst going through a file of old papers recently, I discovered a small sketch plan that my late father, Frank Cholerton, had made. It was a few seconds before I was able to recollect him drawing this little plan many years ago, when he was telling me about the allotments which once stood on the south side of Morley Road where Oakridge and Lawrence Avenue are today. It

seems that in earlier years this land formed part of a larger field of about nine acres which had once included the village cricket pitch, but at some point in time its owner deemed it surplus to requirements and part of it was divided into smaller plots, which were let to keen local gardeners like my grandfather John Robert Cholerton (1895–1974) and my uncle Harold “Lal” Smith (1903 –1982).



Two of the allotment holders: (L) John Robert Cholerton & (R) Lal Smith



Frank Cholerton's sketch plan detailing his recollections of the Oakridge Allotments.

Unfortunately Dad's original plan was too faded to reproduce, so I have copied it and also re-oriented it with north at the top to match the Ordnance Survey map featured later in the article, but otherwise it is much as he drew it. His simple pencil sketch showed this part of Morley Road as it was perhaps in the 1940s and 1950s as follows: NORTH SIDE OF ROAD: "Fell" (Jinnie Fell's cottage, 49 Morley Road); "Ch" (Cholerton's farmhouse now demolished and part built over by 51 Morley Road); "LT" (Laurence ("Lol") Talbot's bungalow, 51 Morley Road). SOUTH SIDE OF ROAD: "Appleby" (50 Morley Road); "Dexter's Bungalow" (48 Morley Road); "Theaker" (a plot owned by the Theaker family, who used to have a potted-meat stall in Derby Market Hall); "TP" (uncertain, possibly an allotment kept by Tom Poyser); "Dad" (John Robert Cholerton's allotment) and "Osbond" (maybe a reference to Mrs. Lizzie Osbond, who ran Brook Farm on Chapel Lane until her death in 1936, or, more likely, to her son and daughter-in-law James and Doris Osbond).

I had always assumed that the name "Oakridge" was given to this little housing development of some 40 or so properties off Morley Road by either the local council or the builder, but Dad assured me that the name was in use many years before the houses were constructed, as this *Derby Daily Telegraph* advertisement of 1 September 1920 shows: "FOR SALE, Freehold Garden Plot, Oakridge Estate, Chaddesden, containing 4,042 square yards (well fenced round), cultivated, now cropping; splendid bungalow site. For particulars apply H. H. Kind, Breaston." The area mentioned here amounted to over three-quarters of an acre and was a sizable portion of the original field. Interestingly, there was once a firm of nurserymen at Breaston called Kind & Chambers, so perhaps this piece of land at Oakridge had originally been bought with the idea of operating it as a commercial nursery garden.

Further proof that the name "Oakridge" pre-dates the building of the modern houses is demonstrated by the fact that number 50 Morley Road, or more accurately the old cottage which once stood in its garden, was known by this name at least as far back as March 1935 when an obituary notice in the *Derby Evening Telegraph* recorded the death of Mr. Robert Thomas Appleby of "Oakridge Cottage" at the age of 64.

The whereabouts of the ridge which first gave "Oakridge" its name is something of a puzzle. It can hardly be the tree-fringed Windmill Hill about 400 yards away to the south-east, which nowadays is predominantly crowned with ashes and small-leaved limes, not oaks. Aerial photographs of the 1940s do, however, show a thickly wooded patch of ground where numbers 70 & 72 Morley Road and number 1 Oakridge would later be built, so maybe this patch of gently rising ground was the original oak ridge.

I believe Grandad first rented a plot at Oakridge sometime around 1943 in addition to the sizeable and beautifully maintained garden he kept at his home on Wood Road. Maybe he was doing his own bit to aid the war-time "Dig for Victory" campaign. My aunt recalls her father keeping a variety of animals on his allotment, including pigeons and rabbits for their meat, ducks and chickens for a plentiful supply of both eggs and meat, and also, on at least one occasion, a pig. She remembers going up to see her father at Oakridge and that as soon as she left Morley Road to go down the path to the allotments, someone would inevitably pop out of one of the adjacent properties and ask her what she was up to and where she was going.

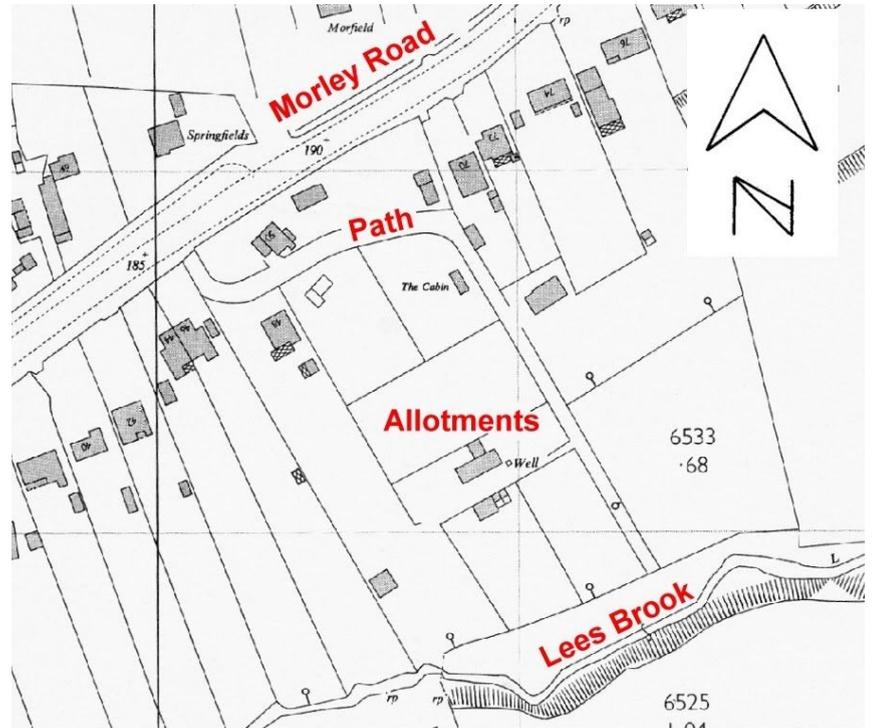
Grandad got his poultry as day-old chicks from a firm in Todmorden in Yorkshire and these would no doubt have been delivered by rail to Derby station, conveniently close to Chaddesden Sidings where he worked. The feed for the chickens was prepared by Grandad at his home on Wood Road and tipped into two metal buckets. He then bicycled very carefully and slowly up Morley Road with a bucket slung over each handlebar. To ensure the hen eggs had strong shells, he used a commercially produced mineral supplement to augment their feed. In addition to the animals and vegetables, Grandad also had the use of an area of orchard on the east side of the path running down the allotments. This had several fruit trees as well as some prolific raspberry bushes.

My aunt remembered that the pig her father kept at Oakridge was eventually assessed (this might perhaps have been by the County War Agricultural Committee) but was reckoned to be rather too fat, which annoyed Grandad somewhat since it reduced the animal's value! By the by, this was not my Grandad's first attempt at pig-keeping, for back in the 1930s he won a pig in the skittle competition of the Chaddesden Hospital Fund Association's annual carnival. On that occasion he had nowhere to keep the animal, so he asked Tom Poyser of Tiny Hall Farm (later to become the Jubilee Club) if he could keep the pig in his cowshed until he was able to sell it on.

My own abiding memory of the allotments at Oakridge dates back to the late 1950s when I was just a small child. One very hot summer's afternoon my parents and I walked up Morley Road, then along the path between numbers 46 and 50, through a gate and down into the allotments where my grandfather was hard at work. Mum and Dad had gone with the intention of helping Grandad, but I wanted to try out my new fishing-net and catch some tiddlers in Lees Brook, which flowed along the southern boundary of the allotments. Dad checked with Grandad that the depth of water in the brook

would not be a problem for me and was assured it was only a few inches deep at most. For a while all went well as I paddled happily in the brook, carefully putting any tiddlers that I caught in the jam-jar I had brought with me. Things changed abruptly when I decided to move a few yards to try my luck elsewhere in the brook and fell into a deep hole in the stream bed. Fortunately my parents had been keeping a close eye on me and I was pulled out coughing, spluttering and soaking wet. Grandad explained that the hole I stumbled into had been caused by countless allotment holders dipping their metal buckets into the brook at this particular point to draw water for their plants. Fortunately I came to no harm, but I have always had a healthy respect for water ever since! Incidentally, the proximity of Lees Brook to the allotments was greatly appreciated by my Grandad since he used to fence part of the brook off with netting so that his ducks could enjoy a swim.

A look at the Ordnance Survey map of 1963 shows several buildings on the site. Some of these were no doubt connected with the allotments, for example, my Grandad had a pigeon loft, fowl-run and rabbit hutches there, but one at least of the buildings had a name, "The Cabin", and this seems to have been owned by the Theaker family, who used it a summer-house to retreat from the hurly-burly of everyday life. The map also marks a largish building at the bottom of the gardens of nos. 70 and 72 Morley Road, this was apparently the shell of a double garage built of Stanley Building Blocks and housed an old caravan.



Oakridge Allotments, Morley Road, Chaddesden. From the Ordnance Survey map of 1963.

Various other people had allotments at Oakridge over the years. They included Mr. George Black, who lived a short distance further up Morley Road, the Noon family, who succeeded the Applebys at number 50 and kept chickens and sold eggs, and Mr. "Dickie" Day, the village cobbler. A keen ornithologist, Mr. Black especially appreciated the relative solitude of the allotments and the surrounding gardens and used to say that he had identified some 50 birds locally, including the nightjar, a comparatively rare nocturnal bird which is seldom seen during the daytime.

I seem to remember Dad telling me that in the early 1960s the various allotment holders at Oakridge were given the opportunity to purchase the plots they were renting. Apparently they made enquiries about the likelihood of getting planning permission to build on the site and were assured there would be no chance of this in the foreseeable future, so thinking there would be no profit in purchasing their allotments they declined the offer. Times changed, however, and just a few years later, in February 1965 Grandad, Uncle Lal and the others had to quit their allotments because the land was wanted for a new housing site, and by late September that year the first of the new bungalows at Oakridge was completed and up for sale.

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Acknowledgements: Thanks to those who provided additional memories of the allotments at Oakridge, especially my aunt and uncle, Joyce and Cliff Stone, and Annette Brownhill and Mrs. M. Brownhill. Also to Sandra Rainsford for producing copies of the 1954 and 1960 electoral rolls of Morley Road which enabled me to cross-check the accuracy of the names on my father's sketch plan.