Hob Barn Cottages, Canley.

Much of what follows is from recollection: memories from more than half a century ago. I know that a lot of my long-term memory is still OK, but don't ask what I had for lunch yesterday. My grandfather lived in the other cottage from the mid-1950s until his death in 1961.

I haven't supplemented the address with Coventry as for much of their time the cottages were far outside the city boundary. They were in Stoneleigh’s Westwood parish. The hamlet of Canley, until 1926, was part of the Leigh estates. Canley formed part of the land bought by Coventry Corporation. Now much of that acreage is covered by housing.

Location
I'm not going to suggest how to get to the site of Hob Barn Cottages as access and road layouts have changed considerably since I was last in the area. What I suggest is that you type 'Stare Green, Coventry' into Google Earth's search facility. If you then go to street view and go about 10 metres into the car park just beyond Stare Green's western end and you will be standing in the 'sitting room' of the Clayton's cottage.

Before the more recent developments Sir Henry Parkes Road ran parallel to the row of houses on its western flank and Shultern Lane formed a 'T' junction where Sir Henry Parkes Road changed its name to Kirby Corner Road. Shultern Lane had hedgerows either side and just as it curved to the right there was a bungalow on the left – possibly where the 'First Steps Kindergarten' is shown on Google Earth – and where traffic is now stopped from proceeding further. (The Cannon Park Shopping Centre was built in 1977, several years after the Cannon Park housing estate. The latter was a late 1960s development.) Previously Shultern Lane proceeded between more hedgerows before it turned sharply to the left. If you look SSW from the apex of the corner then about 30 feet away would be the frontage of the Clayton's cottage, slightly below the Shultern Lane level.

History
In searching for any history of the cottages I turned to the earlier Ordnance Survey maps. The earliest edition I could find was one that omitted the rail line through Coventry and therefore before the 1840s. The cottages were still there.

I also remembered that the cottages had a distinctive window style to the west-facing, ground floor sitting room. (The picture shows similar style windows in Kenilworth.) I found information which suggested this particular style was popular in the 18th century. Without doing a lot more
time-consuming research I'm afraid that is as close to a date I can get.

I guess for much of their life they had been tied cottages, leased by the farmer along with the farmland, and to house his farmworkers. From their location, I take it they were originally used by Ivy Farm or Canley Hall, but when Ivy farm finished (probably around the early 1930s when the Coventry bypass was built) they were transferred to Tocil Farm. Both Tocil and Cryfield Grange Farms have now been swallowed up by Warwick University.

**Cottage exterior**
The land-form around the cottage looked as if the plot where the cottages stand wasn't suitable for ploughing, so they scooped out sufficient flat space to build. Better than leaving the land idle. A track to the immediate west of them gave access to the arable fields. From just inside the field gate was a footpath to Tocil Farm and Gibbet Hill Road.

The two-storey dwellings were constructed from red brick. There would have been no thought of the benefits of cavity walls until the 20th century so the walls would have been just 10-inches (one brick's length plus interior render) and probably in Flemish bond. They are two-up/two down with an extension for the scullery and wc. (Whether the extension was added after the original build I am not sure.) Because of their interior layout, there would have been no windows on the entrance elevations.

Across the frontage of my grandfather's house he had a vegetable garden and in the SW corner a pig-sty where grandfather kept a couple of pigs. The garden was good for rhubarb, mint, and a few spring onions but slugs feasted on any lettuces he planted.

**Cottage interior**
This is a description of the interior of my grandfather's cottage (his wife had died in 1945). The Clayton's cottage would be the same layout but as one came into it from the opposite direction then left and right are reversed.

There was one massive difference between these cottages and the modern house – neither gas nor electric had reached them. Lighting was by paraffin lamp similar to the one shown, but with him living on his own his was more functional and less ornate. Going out to the toilet a hurricane lamp was used. Moving around inside the house after dark one used a candle.

The cooking range was often the only heat source in the house. It took some amount of skill to roast a joint in them with the heat coming from only one side – and, as my brother used to remind me, my grandfather never managed to acquire that skill. He was a regular visitor to our house on the BISF estate off Charter Avenue for his Sunday lunch.

As one entered my grandfather’s cottage the range was in the centre of the opposite wall. To the left was what one might call the parlour (not an everyday room, but used only on special occasions). To the right led to the scullery. On the immediate right, and opposite the range, was the staircase to the two bedrooms.

The staircase had, at some time, been enclosed with tongue and groove panelling to prevent the heat escaping up the stairs. It was a dog leg staircase with the ninety-degree turn at the bottom. It rose along the south-facing wall and I imagine terminated over the ground floor entry. Under the stairs my grandfather kept his immediate fuel needs. I know nothing of the upstairs rooms. As a 15 year old you wouldn’t dream of going into your grandfather’s other rooms without an invitation – and none was forthcoming.
The scullery was around half the width of the main room. I have yet to make up my mind whether it was a later addition or built at same time as rest of house. Before mains water was run in I assume there was a hand-pump for water between the two cottages, or at least a well. It would mean food preparation (plucking, skinning, trimming, and washing etc.) could be done in the scullery instead of what was, literally, the living room.

Whether my grandfather made good friends with his neighbours, the Claytons, I don't know. I seem to doubt it. He was an old man living on his own and the Claytons were a family group. He also had friends, and family (two brothers and a sister) who lived in Gibbet Hill Road – not very far away on his Rudge bicycle. He had himself lived in Gibbet Hill Road for more than 40 years prior to the move to Shultern Lane.

Well, I think that's about it. Can't think of anything else that needs telling.