

VILLAGE LIFE (continued)

Continuing the pre 1914 reminiscences Mrs T Smith and Mrs H Atkinson both wrote prize winning essays for the Women's Institute in the 1950s which emphasize the self sufficiency and deference of those earlier times before the introduction of new forms of transport made travel easier. Mrs Smith was in her 70s and her father George Syred was a carrier in the village for over 40 years.

MRS T SMITH'S ENTRY

"I will begin by telling you about the residents of Middleton when I was a girl. We had a rector (the Rev. H. D. Blanchard) a doctor (Dr. W. Wood), a farrier (Mr Wright), four joiners (Mr Belt, Mr Warley, Mr Petch and Mr Dooks), two blacksmiths (Mr Dove and Mr Thompson), a market gardener (Mr Hotham) a schoolmaster (Mr Gush) three carriers (Mr Soanes, Mr Syred, and Mr Towse). There were seven shops for groceries and I remember well when one of the shops got some things in for Christmas presents there was great excitement. We had three shoemakers (Mr Powell, Mr Railton and Mr Norman).

There were three grinding mills, two were driven by the wind and the other by steam. That one was in the field behind Mrs Jenkinson's house. There was a pinfold at the top of Front Street where they used to put lost horses and cattle and they stayed until the owners claimed them. They had to go to the policeman for the key to get them out and had to pay for their keep.

Before we had the railway all the coals, bricks, cement etc had to be carted from Kiplingcotes, Driffild or Lockington stations. My father used to fetch a crate of crockery for Miss Wright twice a year from Kiplingcotes station.

The Rev. H. D. Blanchard was a very nice and good old gentleman. On New Year's Day all the children in the village used to go up to the Rectory and received a new penny, which was a lot in those days, and on Shrove Tuesday he used to come up to the school and give each child a ball, one of those made in sections of print or leather, and in the afternoon we went into Green Field and played "bonny ball".

We did not have whist and beetle drives in those days but the Rev. H. D. Blanchard used to give the church choir a supper at the Rectory and afterwards they went up to the day school and had a dance. The choir could ask three friends. We had some good times and kept it up until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning.

When he died the Rev. Blanchard left £100 in trust to distribute the income thereof on the Feast of St. Andrew in each year among deserving poor persons in the parish of Middleton who shall not have been in receipt of parochial relief during the previous year.

When the railway was opened and the first train ran to Market Weighton, a few people went on it. Mrs Harry Sims's grandmother, her mother and aunties went on it. My dad would not let me go. Dad used to work on the line with our horse and she was the last horse to work on that line. We have some of her gearing hung up in our stable now.

The church and two chapels used to get good congregations and when it was the anniversaries at the chapels the children were excited when they were going to have their tea-party. The teachers and children met at the chapel in the afternoon and then paraded round the village and sang their hymns. Then they had tea and after tea went into a field and played until bedtime.”

MRS H. ATKINSONS’ ENTRY

“One of the most charming villages in the East Riding of Yorkshire is Middleton-on-the-Wolds, with the lovely old church standing sentinel on the hill, like a mother brooding over her chicks, the clock face seeming to look understandingly around on all who dwell there.

The older inhabitants remember with pride and pleasure the days now past when the Hall, the home of the country squire, was the pivot around which the life of the village moved, when an outing to the seaside or a dance in the day school were events to look forward to from one year’s end to another, whilst the Club Feast, with a parade round the village headed by the Nafferton Town Band, and family gatherings in every home, was the culminating pillar of pleasure and excitement.

Times change, and our village has moved along from oil lamps, drawing water from the well and an occasional lift in the carrier’s cart to town. We now have electric light, even in the streets, a piped water supply and a good bus service.

Many of the country craftsmen are still carrying on the trade of their forefathers. The last census showed a population of 600 and in no other village of that size would one find more different trades and occupations being carried on. The doctor, the postmistress, a lady butcher, a market gardener, a lady horticulturist, two joiners and wheelwrights, two cobblers, a watch and clock repairer, two friers of fish and chips, a saddler, two dance bands, a milk dairy, a paper shop, grocery and provision shops, and the village policeman, all ply their particular trade.

The farmers, the garage, a building firm, the whiting mill, the Wold Carriers and the agricultural workshop all make their contribution to finding work for all.

In our village people may also buy a pedigree poodle, have their wireless or bicycle repaired, their furniture upholstered, or get a hair-cut and order a dartboard, which brings me to the social side of village life. The W.I., the W.I. Show, British Legion, Women’s Bright Hour, Girl Guides, Youth Club, darts and billiards, cricket, football and tennis, the children’s outing, the older people’s social fund outing, dances, whist and beetle drives, etc., in the splendid Village Hall, make for a full life for the people who are friendly, very generous and industrious and proud of their own village”.

Moving on in time Percy Linford (1914-1997) a bricklayer and site foreman gave a taped interview in 1993 in which he recalled the village as he knew it between the two world wars when much of the old was still in place. Starting school at the age of three he recalls strict discipline and a fondness on the part of the headmaster for a solution to a mental arithmetic problem as a condition for release from class at the end of the day.

In those days there was no water at the school and the children from outlying areas who brought a sandwich for lunch had to obtain a drink from nearby houses. Toilets were of the dry variety with the waste being buried in gardens. No talking was allowed in class and infringements of this rule could be punished by caning depending on the severity of the offence. By this time the absenteeism which had been commonplace in the early years of

compulsory education, particularly at harvest time, was a thing of the past whilst any child who had reached the required standard and had a job to go to could leave by agreement before the statutory age of 14.

Football and cricket were played by the boys but in the absence of a playing field these activities were confined to the playground. The girls played rounders and skipped (most girls regularly carried a skipping rope).

In those days the staff consisted of the headmaster who lived in the school house and three teachers. The female caretaker went in after school.

The Reading Room which had been provided by Colonel Brooksbank was leased to the village at a peppercorn rent (about 1/6d per year). It was used by young men and provided a large room for billiards and snooker and a small room for darts and such things as sporting club meetings.

The Middleton Hall estate was still intact in his early days and employed large numbers of people. The estate itself was at that time largely parkland with much grazing for horses (hunters). Later the estate was sold, including the old laundry in South Street (now a cottage – South End) and Pant Garth Cottages which formerly housed gardeners and farm workers. The farms, later occupied by John Swallow, Ted Hutchinson and John Berriman were also sold.

Horses still provided the bulk of the power on the farms and carriers, butchers and bakers all used horses and carts. In his early days the road surfaces consisted of chalk with ironstone on top. This latter was delivered from the railway station and deposited at intervals in ton heaps to be broken into walnut size pieces by unemployed men on “Parish Relief”. This was then flattened on the road surface by a steamroller. Roads were not heavily used and Mr Linford remembered grass growing out of the surface of the Market Weighton Road. Later the adoption of tarmacadam was to change the road surfaces and by the start of the second world war horses were being replaced by motorised machinery both on the farms and the roads.

The railway played a crucial part at that time in conveying goods and passengers and in his early days Mr Linford knew men who had worked on the construction of the line in the 1880s which was itself doubled in the 1920s.

The station had a warehouse and weighbridge whilst cattle were housed nearby while awaiting transport. Cereals were sent to the flour mills and wool was also conveyed. Coal was brought from South Yorkshire and dropped off at local stations to order and then delivered round the village by cart. The station staff consisted of the station master, clerk, porter/signalman and porter plus three platelayers who worked on the line.

Horse and cart transport was reckoned to travel about three miles per hour with one horse required per ton of load.

The farm workforce generally consisted of the farmer, foreman, shepherd, beastman, pigman and young men who tilled the land with the farm foreman’s wife providing meals for the workers. The live-in workers had a bedroom and a general room to sit in at night.

The working arrangements were hierarchical with the waggoner on top above first, second, third etc horse. Each of whom usually had two horses to manage. A shepherd could handle up to 400 sheep and may have had a young lad for training.

The acreage of the farms might be large with field sizes varying from 8 – 40 acres.

All this farming activity involved large numbers of men, animals and machinery and so the village was well served by support crafts. The blacksmith repaired machinery and shod horses using shoes made on the premises. There was also a joiner and a wheelwright. Two tailors provided clothes including suits. At a time when good foot wear was essential the shoemaker was important and Mr Linford recalls that the farm workers wore very heavy boots liberally supplied with large nails and plated at toe and heel making each one weigh about 3 lbs.

Other trades included builder, painter, ropemaker. In addition there were gamekeepers and women laundry workers. The whiting mill was situated at the top of Station Road near the parish boundary where about thirty full time workers were employed. Ground chalk was produced, some made into paste and the product was then conveyed by rail to paint and putty manufacturers.

Whilst the ground at the top of the village was chalk, down at the bottom there were at least seven sandpits the produce of which was used in the building trade and foundry work. Similarly there was a claypit whose yield was used for the lining of ponds.

Mr Linford recalled two butchers in the village with their own slaughterhouses in which killing took place on one day per week, the rules governing such activities being less restrictive than at present.

Stray cattle were housed in a field near the present Greenfield Road in a circular brick construction about four feet high.

Many houses have been demolished or have changed use. The present village hall was built on a market garden. The old Post Office (still standing) is on the south side of Front Street. Mrs Noble, a lifelong resident of the village, was postmistress for many years and retired when she was about 80 having received the MBE for her services.

There was a Primitive Methodist chapel where the present industrial estate is situated and Dr Wood's house was nearby.

Before the piped water supply there were four pumps in the village. One was near the present shop premises, and the others at Church Hill, the Rose and Crown and near Mr Linford's home, the old Methodist Chapel in Station Road.

In the 1920s the wage for an agricultural labourer was 32/6 per week (£1.62). A head lad could expect £18 per annum plus food and the youngest lad £8. At that time a pair of boots would have been about 15 shillings (75 pence).

Mr Linford recalled that the men bought most of their clothes in the village whilst the women might make some purchases further afield. The men who were paid annually would probably settle their debts on pay day.

Moving on from Mr Linford's memories village life had one distinct advantage over town life throughout the 1940s and early 1950s in the period when food austerity was at its height and it became an advantage for town and city dwellers to have relatives or friends in the country who had access to such luxuries as eggs, poultry and meat to supplement the otherwise meagre rations.

Nationally the early 1950s saw a brief attempt to restore some of the social stability of the 1930s after the upheavals of the war and its immediate aftermath. The television service which had hitherto made slow progress came of age with the coronation in 1953 and in the years following the “box” in the corner of the room provided home entertainment. This together with the growth of personal transport and ever burgeoning youth culture helped to erode the attractions of village based entertainment.

In the years following the Second World War agriculture prospered but with increased mechanisation the number employed on the land went into a sharp decline. The village which had been a largely self contained entity reflected this change so by the 1970s although much of the old remained the new housing development which took place helped to revitalize the community although perhaps not always in the way intended. New housing brought in an element of suburbanisation in that the newcomers were often employed away from the village and whereas some embraced village life others did not and this partly created a dormitory situation further eroding the sense of community.

This change is reflected in an interview which Mrs Grace Sims (a mine of information on the village) gave in April 1992 to The Post. The article starts:

“Mrs Sims, now 84, has spent her whole life in the village, seeing it alter gradually from a quiet rural settlement, through to the present day, with its numerous new housing developments and roaring traffic”.

“It is so much different here now. Most of the farms in the village have gone, as have nearly all the shops – we only have a couple left now,” she explained.

Mrs Sims had managed a shop on main street, which had been owned by her family for many years.

“They used to call Middleton the contented village but not any more – so many people have moved in from outside areas, but it used to be a lovely place”.

When cheaper and more regular travel to the surrounding towns of Beverley and Driffield became available the stores lost custom eventually fading away into the memories of the older inhabitants of Middleton. Mrs Sims remembers the excitement of travelling on the “Pride of the Wolds” a once a week bus service to Driffield, which no doubt opened up whole new horizons to the once isolated village folk.

If the J. R. Mortimer of his boyhood days of the 1840s could return he would be astounded by the changes in village life, not so much by the physical appearance although that itself would be a cause of wonder but by the much more expansive life of its inhabitants.

In particular their general affluence, the ease of local and foreign travel would appear remarkable. All this combined with instant communication, the wonders of the internet and an ever growing array of technological gadgets would cause him to drastically revise his distinction between town and village life. As would the easier production and distribution of food.

All these changes which are marvellous in their way have not of course added to social cohesion.

