

## **BOYHOOD MEMORIES OF THE LATE 1920's -By Dennis Clarke**

I was born in 1925 and grew up in a house near the top of Fleckney Road, opposite the then cricket ground. My father was a railwayman who worked at Gumley signalbox, long since gone, a short distance along the road to West Langton. There were many railway workers in the village – this was the age of steam- there were many trains passing through such as the Thames Clyde Express and the Master Cutler, as well as excellent services to Leicester and the South. There were day trips by train, usually on a Sunday, to places such as Blackpool or Llandudno, the fare being seven shillings (35p). Alongside the railway, the main means of transport was the bicycle and to go to work people cycled the 6 miles to Market Harborough or the 9 miles to Leicester, morning and evening.

Apart from the railway, life in Kibworth centred around the two hosiery factories, one in Fleckney Road and the other in Smeeton Lane. There were very few cars and it was quite normal for small children to play in the road, such games as Whip and Top and Hop Scotch. The milkman came twice a day with his bucket and measure, the coal man weekly with his horse and cart and there were three travelling shops – Messrs Tarrant and Garner from nearby Fleckney and Monks from Market Harborough who sold paraffin oil ( for lamps ) and other items of hardware. Small boys, such as myself, were given a Saturday penny to spend – usually on a Bakewell Tart or something similar. Occasionally, a street singer would visit the village, singing songs in the hope of receiving a few coppers. A little further along Fleckney road there was a small nursery and on a Tuesday morning, Mr. James Bolton, the nurseryman would load his horse and cart and take his produce to sell in the Market Harborough market.

The rented semi detached house in which we lived had no electricity and no mains water. There was a pump in the back yard but the well had become polluted and the water was thus only used for flushing the outside toilet. Drinking water had to be fetched in a pail from the house next door. The living room had a red quarry tiled floor, colour-washed walls and a homemade pegged rug in front of a coal fired black leaded range. This was the only room in the house to have gas lighting – one took a candle to light the way to bed and there was, of course, the usual facility under each bed, which sometimes froze over on a very cold night. There were small fireplaces in the bedrooms but these were only used if someone was ill. The ‘Front Room’ downstairs was only used on very special occasions, often only at Christmas.

There was a brick enclosed copper in the corner of the kitchen and Monday morning washdays started with the lighting of the fire under the copper to provide the necessary hot water. After the clothes were washed by hand in the kitchen sink, they were put through the hand turned mangle before being hung out in the garden to dry. Irons were heated on the gas stove or living room range. Friday night bath nights involved the same procedure for heating water before bringing in the tin bath which hung on a nail in the back yard. There was certainly not enough hot water to enable it to be changed between bathers!

These were the early days of ‘ wireless ‘ and the first one we had was contained in a wooden box into which one had to delve and change the coils if one wished to have a different station. Power was supplied by a dry high tension battery and a wet accumulator which had to be taken down the village to be recharged every couple of weeks or so. In common with many houses there was a wireless aerial suspended on a high pole in the back garden. Also in the garden was the hen house where my mother kept about a dozen hens. She would buy some 15 day old chicks from the local hatchery, rear them and sell the eggs at a shilling (10p) a

dozen. My father had a large allotment, further up the Fleckney Road, where he would grow enough produce to keep the family in vegetables all the year round.

At the tender age of four, it was time for me to start school at the Council School at the centre of the village. The headmistress was a Miss Bailey. My mother took me on the first day but it is interesting to note that it was quite normal for a child of four to walk the half mile or so by themselves. These were the days when it was not necessary to lock the door when going out and there were no concerns about small children going out to play. It was also the era of school milk, at playtime we were given a bottle containing one third of a pint in the interests of bodybuilding and good health.

Early memories include being taken to Leicester to see the Pageant and to Market Harborough to see the first talking picture – Al Johnson in *The Singing Fool*. I also recall seeing the airships R100 and R101 before the latter's ill-fated last journey and crash on the other side of the channel.

The villagers were well catered for as regards shopping. In addition to the Co-op – still in the same location as today – there were two butchers, two bakeries, a shoe repair shop and numerous sweet shops as well as three drapers, a post office and newsagent. There were four builders and four doctors, the latter operating from large houses which also contained the surgeries. All services had to be paid for and most people could only afford to have the doctor if they were really ill. Minor problems and maternity were taken care of by the two District Nurses. Residents paid a small weekly sum into the Nursing Association to cover this service.

In due course, I progressed to the C.of E. School opposite the Village Hall. This was a Victorian building which still has its original diamond shaped small windows. The headmaster's name was Charles Mansell who had been a Captain in the first World War. There was, of course, no such thing as central heating, warmth being provided by a 'slow but sure' stove in the corner of the classroom. There was an assembly each morning and Mr. Mansell led the prayers and played the piano for the morning hymn. The boys and girls had separate yards in which to go at playtime and on Church occasions such as Ascension Day we would form a crocodile and walk up the hill to the service at St. Wilfrids, the parish church. There was also Sunday School at 10a.m. and 2.30p.m. Again, we would have lessons and then progress to the church where we would sit at the back and leave just before the sermon.

At the age of ten, I was lucky enough to gain a place at the local grammar school and I count myself most fortunate in having been born and lived in the village for some 18 years before leaving for war service. I recall with affection the teachers and many of the people who lived in Kibworth Beauchamp at that time and who, together with my parents, obviously influenced my life in those formative years.

Dennis Clarke.