

Beckingham History Group

Beckingham
in
Living Memory



List of photographs

- Page 1 The notorious bend approaching the bridge.
- Page 2 The Black Swan.
- Page 3 The windmill in 1931 and
Tony Litchfield's cottage prior to his ownership and in 1999
- Page 4 The Dovecote.
- Page 5 Beckingham Hall.
- Page 6 Stubton Hall and Church Cottage.
- Page 7 Redvers House and Chapel St. (north) cottages and Chapel.
- Page 8 Cottages along Chapel St. (south)
- Page 9 G.W.Webb's garage with the village shop.
The Post Office.
- Page 10 The Corner House Café and as Elsmar Lodge in 1999.

BECKINGHAM IN LIVING MEMORY

A stroll round the village with George Millhouse – March 27th 1999.

George is now in his sixties and has lived for some years in Claypole, but he was born at the Black Swan in Beckingham, and lived in the village until he was in his thirties. He retains vivid memories of the people and places of his youth, and members of the Beckingham History Group joined him one Saturday afternoon for a stroll round the village. We began our tour down by the Black Swan, standing on the bridge looking along the River Witham towards Barnby in the Willows.

“In those days the river was about three yards narrower and at a higher level than it is today, much nearer to the present field level, so that it easily flooded over the fields on either side after heavy rain. The bank on our left used to be all wooded from the pub here down as far as the lands of the old Hall... this used to be known as “Fairy Dell”. Where we’re standing was, of course, the main A 17 road into the village and there were lots of accidents at that bend just before the bridge.





We next turned into the land at the back of "The Barn", (present owners Peter and Maggie Brown), anxious to learn the location of the old dovecote which used to stand here; a large brick and stone structure some 20ft. square (described in "The Mediaeval Dovecotes in Notts", by J. Whitaker, circa 1927) and which, according to George's recollection, stood in the centre of Peter Brown's vegetable plot. When we checked this against an aerial photograph taken some time in the 1930s it appears to be a little way to the north on the same plot.

"The Barn", of course, really was a barn, used for the storage of hay, with large doors where the carts could be backed up. Part of it was also used for cattle and some of the old outbuildings are still there, as Peter showed us. In George's time the farm belonged to the Hopkinsons who lived in the farmhouse next door.

Another mystery which we hoped George could shed some light on was the location of the former Quaker Burial Ground, for it is generally recognised that there was such a burial ground in the village. But who knows where?

"As I recall it", said George, "it was an area about the size of a tennis court and it began where the brick wall is; that was the boundary of Beckingham Hall. At the time there was an archway in the brickwork, but it's hard to be certain now exactly where it was. Parts of the wall may have been rebuilt, and some is thickly covered with ivy, but I'm sure it was there. The plot then came across the present two gardens and

was surrounded by a metal fence. What's more, there was a building where a present garage stands, which was a kind of chapel, maybe a Chapel of Rest.

While we were in the vicinity George told us of the old village cricket pitch which was on church land, between the Rectory and the river. To reach the pitch with its little pavilion, the players had to cross the front garden of the Rectory, which "was not to the liking of the Rector's wife. She must have told her husband because the next time we went to play a match there we found 22 pigs grazing on the pitch! And we never played there again!"

Before the river was lowered the village boys used to swim there quite a lot. They would rush home from school, and hurry down the footpath by the side of the Hall to the riverbank, and swim up or down stream as far as "Parson's Bottom", where it was beautiful and sandy. "One winter, when there was a really hard freeze, must have been 1947, the river was thickly frozen over and we built a bonfire on the ice! Mind you, it took a bit of getting going!"



The old Beckingham Hall had been demolished long before George was born, but he recalled what they, as children, called "the dungeons" or "the tunnels". These had been long, brick constructed tunnels, possibly cellars, which lay under the site of the former Hall, one stretching south towards the Rectory, the other going towards the north. Though they had been partially filled in with rubble over the years, there was still enough space for adventurous boys to crawl along.

The front and rear porticos from The Hall have been saved and re-erected at the near-by Stubton Hall.



Across from the church, George remembers the two Misses George who lived at the corner house. Next came the old butcher's shop, owned, like several other properties in the village, by "Butcher" Lee. The in-filled doorway to the shop can still be seen in the brickwork. At Church Cottage lived another Mr Newstead, the joiner, who made coffins for the local funerals..... we were later to be shown the makeshift mortuary where the bodies were temporarily laid, awaiting their wooden overcoats!



Looking across to the corner of Chapel Street a cluster of some six cottages stood where the present "Ardene House" is. On the site of the neighbouring "Villa" were formerly two farm cottages, one occupied by Tommy Howitt, the builder, and the other by "Shep" Wright, the shepherd.

“Redvers House” was the village bakery, as the following old village photograph shows.



“Butcher” Lee lived next door at “Roseleigh Cottage”. Continuing along towards the Chapel (now the Village Hall) were several small cottages where the modern detached houses stand, one of which house yet another member of the Newstead family, Mr Newstead the painter.



On the last of the cottages before the Chapel was a large sundial on the wall, reputedly reliable enough to use when the Church clock was not functioning. At the last cottage, after the Chapel, lived Mr Dykes, the Schoolmaster. On the other side of Chapel Street there was Mrs ~~Salmon~~^{SAMSON} in Rose Cottage, with the local taxi driver, Percy Healey, next door.

In the terrace of houses still standing lived Tom Ward, the Browns, Mr Coddington.... The roadman, and, at the School Lane end, the Oldhams, who ran a laundry. Around the corner, past "Tailor's Cottage", George Underwood, the blacksmith, had his premises in what is now the car park for the "Pack Horse".



On the far side of School Lane lived George's uncle in a farm cottage, which still stands but is rather hidden by the new houses. Next came Mr Newstead's joiner's shop and an adjacent cottage, still standing but in a derelict state.



George pointed out to us the old apple tree in the garden. "As a boy, I used to pick the ripe apples for the owner and line them up on the two stone slabs in the lean-to, to stay cool and fresh. But it was also here", George assured us, "that the slabs were, at other times, used to keep the corpses cool!"

Naturally George recalled the school vividly, having been a pupil there. In his day there were some 40 pupils attending and 2 teachers.

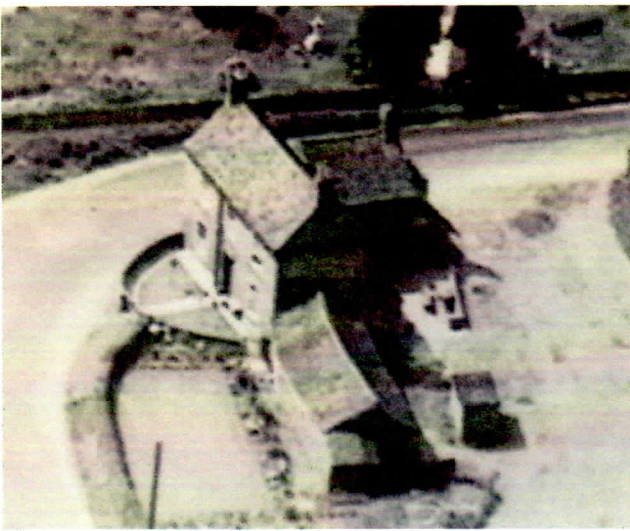


Behind Mr Webb's Garage was the dressmaker's cottage, with a wooden workshop where the garage to the present cottage stands. Next to the Garage was the village shop run by Harold Keightly which sold groceries and delicious home-made ice cream. Harold's son, Freddy, built the bungalow next door, and he married a clergyman's daughter from Hougham. Beside the "Pack Horse" pub was the plumber's shop, then came the Post Office,



The barn next door, only dismantled in 1998, was formerly used for milking, then it was later used by George himself, to house the lorries for his coal business.

We were, by now, standing on the former A17, the main road which, until the 1970s ran through the village.



The present "Elsmar Lodge" was the busy "Corner House Café" surrounded by a large car and lorry park this is now partly covered by two modern houses.

Turning towards Rectory Street, our attention was drawn to the three cottages beside the Rectory garden wall. These were occupied by the people who worked with the coach and horses to the Rectory. The old double blue door in the wall gave on to a right of way to the cottages, while the carriageway into the Rectory was paved with blue bricks. On the other side of the street, the corner house was the home of Mr Patter, the haulage contractor. Then followed more old houses, now demolished, where Mr Sleight the cobbler lived. There was a cottage where the Clarkes lived; indeed Harry Clarke, still alive and living in Coddington, was the last Clarke occupant, and it is now known as "Harry's House".

WILLOWS

Mr ~~Wilkes~~ Wilkes, the builder, built himself a handsome detached double-fronted house. A diamond shaped stone is set high up in the gable end of the house, with his initials LHW, together with the date 1938, when the house was erected.

Sadly, there was not enough time on this occasion, to walk some of the footpaths beyond the village, but perhaps we can do this some other time. It would be interesting to locate the field which George referred to as "Kingfisher Meadow", somewhere over towards the river near the triangular field, as well as the stretch of river known as "Parson's Bottom" where they used to swim.

This had been a fascinating walk, full of interesting information, and building a picture of Beckingham at a time when it was a busy and, to a considerable extent, self-supporting village with all kinds of trades and crafts taking place in its environs. We were grateful for George's time and memories, and hope to persuade him to return to tell us more about the fields and footpaths.

The illustration of Beckingham Church on the front cover is one of a collection of sketches done by Osborne Johnson, a local Doctor, towards the end of the last century.