

Old Bugbrooke

Thinking back to my old village of birth Bugbrooke, and of the things that I was told over the years about the place by the old people, of who most have since passed away. I was born in a cottage next door to a Mr and Mrs Hanley, who moved out to be replaced by a Mr Heygate the Miller and farmer, (Mr Heygates wife was one of the Browns a big farming family).

Our house was opposite the Village Hall and Co-op Shop.

I was told that Mr Heygates house was once a shop, as you can still see where the doorway once was if you look.

It was closed when the Co-op Shop was opened up.

The Village Hall and the Co-op shop, was once Mr William Higginbottom's boot and shoe factory.

Years later he was to marry my Fathers sister Aunt Zillar (Elsie).

They used to live down Great Lane, where he also had a workshop for making and repairing boots and shoes.

Also down Great Lane was Mr Barford, s Post Office, before it was taken over by Mr Barnes and moved down to the old bakehouse opposite to the entrance to Bugbrooke Close (back of the school).

Father was born down Great lane, in one of the houses that once stood backing onto Browns Farm Yard, next to the pathway where an old stone stile once stood.

There is a photo of Father standing next to this stile in the Bugbrooke Millennium book, this pathway that leads off from Great Lane (Big Lane) is known as Shitten Ally.

The only other stone stile in Bugbrooke was along the Heyford Road, on the footpath that let up to the A5 or Watling street, (It was called the Old Roman Way by the old folk).

This stone stile is on the track or pathway, that comes from Mr Adams farm the Byre, It leads or goes all the way up to Stowe on the Watling Street A5.

From off both sides of the land following this route, the old men of the village found lots of Roman remnants coins etc, when ploughing or working these fields.

Nearly opposite to where I was born, lived old Mr Champion and his son Phillip who farmed at Home farm.

Mr Champion in later years as I grew up, would show me where the old medieval fishponds were on his land, also where there was once a small hamlet.

I can remember as a small child, a very large deep ditch on the right hand side of Smiths lane, just where the hedge starts from the large walled off pond (Once a fish pond from the past). This was in the days before the dust cart as we know it to day, as everyone would put the ashes up onto the lane surface, and all the old pots and bottles into this deep ditch.

In the field behind the old Manor, there was once a very large earth mound, almost opposite the garage at the bottom of Butts Hill, and from this mound a ridge of hearth ran across this field up to the hedge in Smiths Lane, what it was for I was never told, but over time it has since been removed, or levelled out.

The Wagon and Horses public house was still standing on the green opposite the school along with the old work shop when I was a small lad.

Also there was a row of houses that once stood where the school garden now is, also another row on the opposite side of the road to them, these were demolished at the same time as the wagon and horses 1943-4.

And another yard with a large row of houses that stood down in Gilkes Yard, were also demolished at a later date.

Two other cottages that were demolished at the same time once stood opposite to Mr Radburn Adams farm gates down Church lane, (Old Mr King lived in one of them, and a family named Quarterman, s lived in the other.)

Mr and Mrs Banards house at the top of the Blacksmith yard of Chapmans was also demolished at a later date, (Their son who joined up in the 14-18 Hussars that was stationed up Corn Hill and in the village at the time, he was to lose is life on the Normandy Landings).

When the old Wagon and Horses public house was pulled down, a set of stocks were found in the timbers that made up the roof of this building, a Mr Bubb (Valerie's) Father was one of the men demolishing it, my father used to fetch most of the wood for burning on the fires.

I was told father swapped with Mr Champion, these stocks in exchange for some sheets of corrugated tin and steel posts, to build a Air Raid Shelter for us all in the event of being Bombed by the German planes.

These stocks stood in the front of Mr Champion house for many years after, it was said that they were once the Village Stocks.

I went to school with Glenn Nightingale, and a John Curtice, (In the early days Johns father was away serving in the Army), they used to live up a old yard called Sunny Side, next to Quakers Yard, up the same yard lived a Mr Samuel Warwick, who used to show us young boys, all the old Quaker head stones that were in these gardens, there were no names on them only numbers.

Opposite to this yard was Browns Farm, and in the Rick yard were dozens of the very old Stack stools, on what they used to build the ricks up on in order to stop the vermin from eating the grain in the rick. Old Sye Nightingale, and his son Mowey, (Glens Grandfather) used to work for the Browns at the time. One of the Browns never washed himself, or his clothes, and his trousers were caked with cow muck and milk from milking, and they shone in the sunlight, and were very hard. The villagers gave him the nickname of (Tin Britches) because of his shiny trousers.

Down in Captains Close, there were once the remains of a sheep dip, or washing area that they used before shearing the sheep, this was done so as the wool would be clean after shearing, and would fetch a better price.

A section of the bottom of the brook was paved off with bricks, On the side nearest to West End used to stand two very tall pillars with grooves in, this was so that planks of wood could be slotted down into them, in order to get a head of water for washing the sheep in, on the church side downside of this dam, were two small pillars with slots in, this was to contain water along with the concoction or sheep wash, like a very large bath, it was said that the mixture of sheep wash that they used to use, was to eventually wipe out all the fish that once swam in this stream Trout etc.

I found myself along with a few more boys getting into trouble at one time, through putting some of the planks of wood that lay about from the firm named Milliards, who put the sewer into Bugbrooke in the late Forties and early Fifties.

We put some of these planks down into these slots on these pillars, and blocked the natural flow of the brook; Old Mowey Nightingale gave us a smack around the head, and a good telling off for nearly flooding out his house and West End.

Bugbrooke Church and Yard.

When I left school, I started work for Mr Harold Ward the Ladder Maker and Undertaker, (Harold's mother was Mr Heygates wife sister nee Brown.)

As well as learning to make ladders, there were times that I had to help dig graves in the Church Yard.

While doing so on the side nearest West End, we came across lots of footings from old buildings, and the remains of some brick walls just under the surface.

On this side is planted a Oak tree not far in from the pathway, this was planted over a well that we found when digging a grave, Malcolm my brother had grown this Oak Tree from an Acorn.

The late Cannon Charles Harrison would come to see some of the things that we found, one lot of old footings we found, he said they were the remains of an Old Sunday School that his forefathers had built. He said that because it was too small, his forefathers had a new school built next to the Brook what we now know as the Sunday school. When this got too crowded out, another larger School was built up on the bank opposite the Wagon and Horses Public House. He said he was told that at one time, there stood some houses in the bottom half of the park along with a farm and yard. This is in the area to where the cemetery has been extended. He said they were pulled down after the Enclosure act 1750 something.

Another man I spent a lot of time with in my youth was Old Bragg Robbins he was the village gravedigger at one time.

I can just remember during the war my eldest brother Walter (Sid) along with one of my elder sisters Myra Were in isolation hospital at Newnam with Diphtheria Myra was to lose her life with this illness.

For me being the youngest at the time was very hard, because the mothers of other children would avoid mixing with us, and avoid us like the plague, keeping away from me or anyone in our family, due to this Diphtheria.

It was Old Bragg Robbins that would take me down the churchyard, while he dug a grave to give me a break from being stuck in the house, or he would take me up the allotments.

Another man that I found interesting was Old Mr Mick Osborne, he used to live next to the Chapel, and his house was pulled down in later years to build the new Manse. When the house and gardens were excavated, the remains of one of the Quakers were found in a grave just to one side of the path that led to his house.

He used to say he had been told that there was a man buried on this spot, but at the time no one would believe him, he used to tell me about certain things that he was told and had experienced, he once told me that just after the enclosure act the Grand Union Canal was built, he said that he was told that the navvies that dug it out, and built the embankments through the top end of the village, were very tuff and hardy men.

Odd ones that were killed, or that had died through an illness or accident, were buried in Bugbrooke Church yard up next to the Iron railings opposite the Belfry Door.

He was told that the odd local men would give the job a go, but to keep up with these navies was a different proposition, as they were so strong, they ate good food and drank very heavily, for at the time they were well paid for the work they did.

He said he was told that the Navvies would use the supports and formers that they built the canal bridges with, and they would build themselves brick like Nissan huts to live and sleep in.

He said about Bugbrooke wharf, and about a large house that was built for the man in charge, I think he said it was the house that Mr Nightingale lived in, that once stood on the left as you approached the Wharf bridge coming up from Bugbrooke, Other houses were built he said, for the men that were to work at the Wharf, as well as houses for the boat people, The Walker family used to live in one of these houses, At one time as they used to have several pairs of boats that worked from the Wharf.

Not forgetting the building of the Swan public house, as at this time it was not safe to drink water, and the workmen could not afford to be taken ill through drinking it, so they drank plenty of beer, the average man drank about eight pints per day.

Three brews would be made from the same grain and hops, the first brew for the men, the second for the women and the third for the children, imagine them attending school full of high spirits, and being half cut.

He said that once the wharf was established, sales men would come down into Bugbrooke selling coal for the open fires, also men selling slates for the roofs of houses, he said the men would come and remove all of the old thatch from your roof then redo it with Slates or tiles, he said the bakers arms was done with tiles and the houses opposite with slates, So his father had the house that they lived in done.

Mr Gilkes resurfaced all the roads in Bugbrooke under contract, and all the stones for this were bought by barge on the canal and unloaded by hand.

He said the wharf got very busy and could not cope with all the work; this was due to all the trade that it attracted from one end of the country to the other, so another wharf was built along with a public house what we know as Elliot's, just off the Heyford Road, at this wharf were some limekilns; he said that they worked flat out to keep up with the demand for the lime that was used mostly in the building trade, as well as for agriculture.

The canal was used like the Motorways of today, the armies of the day moved all its troops guns ammunitions backwards and forward, from the new Army depo at Weedon, or from one end of the country to the other, he said he was told that just after the enclosure act, the canal was used to transport many families and folk up to the Northern towns to work in the factories.

He did say that he was told something about the Walker family, during the period of putting of a militia together, that they were to give two boats to be used if needed.

Also the canal moved and carried all the materials that were needed to build the railway that ran alongside of the canal, he said that the men that were building the railway would go along into the Swan Public House, then after a few drinks they would get squabbling and fighting with the canal people, as they were worried that the railway would putt them out of work when it was completed.

During the Second World War, we moved home up to the council houses up camp hill, no 6 now 41, it was to be a new set of people and friends to get to know, I got to know John Gilkes, as Mother would get him to take me to school when I was reluctant to do so, In those early days of living up Camp Hill.

A Mr Bull who was a Wheelwright ladder maker and Undertaker had a very large workshop up Camp Hill; this was opposite side of the road to the home of the Clayton family.

Mr and Mrs Clayton had two Boys Lynn and Rodger, the house they lived in so I was told, was once a Public house, it also had a very big cellar to it, this was to be a problem for the builders that built the new houses that now stand on this site as they did not know at all that they were there, one of the men in charge of this site said to me, that he wished that he had met me before they started to build or put the footings in.

Attached to this house was three story cottage, where a Mr and Mrs Gardener lived at the time we moved up Camp hill 1945, it did not have any Gas, or Electricity, or water laid on, they had a well in the garden for drinking water, and a bucket toilet was way across the garden backing onto Mr Harry Lovell's fields.

They used to have candles and an oil lamp for light, and always cooked on the grate. (Digressing Mr gardener as well as the Saunders brothers from Camp Hill, served alongside of Lt Campion the farmer, when they were out in the Middle East building the railways from Egypt up to Iraq and Iran when fighting the Turks).

Other house's in this block were out the back, a Mr and Mrs George lived in one, they had a son who was badly injured or suffered from some illness that he had, through serving in the Second World War, before he died us young lads would take him fishing in his wheel chair, to his favourite fishing spot, this was nearby to the old boat shed that once stood on the side of the canal near to Jimmy Rainbows level crossing.

Opposite side to Clayton's in the same yard, lived Mr and Mrs Joe Wooding and family, this house had a mud or Cobb Wall that ran from front to back of it, on the side nearest Camp Hill, I well remember Tony their son leaving Bugbrooke School in 1947, as I missed him when he did, for alongside of John Gilkes, he would take me to school when we first moved up the Hill, I was jealous when he left school, and I had to persevere being at school for another seven years, I did not like school very much, as I seemed to be always having the cane or being bullied.

Tony sister Edna was in the field near to us when a German Plane that came over Bugbrooke, shot at us in Mr Campions fields Harvest time 1944.

The other houses going down the road from this yard, was a Miss Davies she lived on her own, I think she was a retired schoolmistress, then there was the Saunders brothers in the next two houses, in the end house at the top of camp hill lived George England, he was disabled from a accident while in the army doing his basic training.

One event that I remember well, was when the war was over all the people that lived up Camp Hill had a very big party, I well remember everyone sitting at very long tables, opposite Pap Curtis's gate to his bungalow, and parallel to Mr painter Lovels allotment (part of the once cattle pounds), it was on the large expanse of grass next to the council houses.

I well remember my youngest brother Malcolm not being to keen to eat the Jellies and custards that were made in the baths, that we used to have to get washed and bathed in during bath nights.

Even though it sure was a treat for us young ones at the time.

Pap Curtice worked the signal box and the level crossing at Banbury lane Crossing.

Another event that sticks in my mind, was when Frank Curtice came home from being a prisoner in the war, as they had loads of bunting and flags like VE and VJ days With a large banner saying welcome home Frank.

In the two blocks of council houses up Camp Hill No I, lived a Mr and Mrs York.

At no 2, lived a Mrs Bates her husband was once the village Policeman.

At no 3, lived Mr and Mrs Rook and their daughter Mary who was to marry Frank Curtis, Mr Rook was badly injured in the First World War and had to wear leg irons due to his injuries, at no 4, lived Mr and Mrs Wall with daughter Beryl, and son Arthur; Mr Wall was a Regimental Sergeant Major in the First World War, at no 5, lived a Mr and Mrs Jeffery with their son (Arthur), I remember Mrs Jeffrey's brother a Mr Nord, who once played football for Sunderland came to stay for a while until they got a house in Bugbrooke, He used to teach us boys how to play football.

At a later date they moved out up to Chipsey Ave Butts Hill, and Mr and Mrs Jack Higgingbottom and family were to move in.

We all lived at no 6, Mother, Dad, Sid Gwen, myself, Malcolm, Audrey, Mother gave birth to Stella at no 6, during a terrible blizzard, 1947 (Deep snow at the time), Dad and Sid had to erect a tarpaulin up on poles over mother and Stella, it resembled a four-poster bed, this was because of the snow melting up in the attic, Dad and Sid and Joe Able our cousin who was home on leave from the army, even myself went up the attic, to help shovel the snow into buckets, this was passed down through the very small hatchway and tipped into bathes to be carried and tipped outside.

When all the snow was cleared Dad painted all the joints between the slates with Cow muck and Flour, this was to stop the snow from drifting back under the slates with the strong winds.

At No 7, lived Mr and Mrs Child's, they took in Home Girls, as they grew up and left they used to give a home to others.

At No 8, Lived Mr and Mrs Howard, Arthur, and Aubrey, Mr Howard's nick name was (Shocky), he kept lots of racing pidgins on the spare ground opposite to where we lived, he was forever telling us off for making a noise, if and when he had his pidgins out, or waiting for one to come in from a race.

At a later date Fred, and Frank Curtis, were to build themselves a bungalow each, on this piece of land.

There was no more houses on the side that we lived on up the Gayton Road, only on the right, the first was one belonged to Mrs Robinson, whose son kept the shop down near Elm Tree bank.

The next house was Polly Wooding's, Tony, s Grandmother, who I mentioned earlier. Along with her Daughter, who was married to a Mr Barford at the time?

Mrs Wooding took in Dr Banardo, s Home Boys, at the time we moved up Camp Hill living with her, was David Green, Richard, and Norman Macconachie, another of her homeboys Tom Davies, who was serving in the Royal Navy.

The next house was Mr and Mrs Oliver Bubb, and their daughter Valerie

The next two were semidetached the first one was, Mr and Mrs Massey, with sons Peter, Bernard, Allan, and daughter Jennifer, and on the end, lived Mr and Mrs Adam's, (Mrs Massey's mother and father.

Mr Massey was a Signal Box man at No 1 Box Northampton Castle Station, in is spare time he repaired Clocks and Watches.

Going back down toward Camp Hill from Miss Robinson's house, it was quite a distance to Gran and Pap Curtices bungalow, Then another bungalow that Gwadkin or some such name had built, it had a glass roof in one part of it, so he could lay and look at the sky at night, He was supposed to tell fortunes and such likes, I remember him being a very tall strange looking man.

I was told that at one time when he lived up Bugbrooke Wharf, he had lots of loudspeakers, and played music, and spoke over them, He was stopped from doing this in the war years.

The next area was Mr Bull the Wheelwright Ladder Maker come Undertakers Yard, I remember the wagons, and ladders, that he made or repaired, along with some of the funerals that he did, (I never dreamed at that time in my life, That it would be the very same trade that I would learn to do and take up at Mr Harold Wards, after leaving school).

In this same yard lived Mr and Mrs Tibbs, and their son Rex, who in later years used all this ground for market gardening, along with some very large green houses.

The next house down lived Mr and Mrs Gilkes, and their son John, who my mother would ask at times to carry or take me to school when in a reluctant mood?

A Mr Fred Lovell would tell me about how Camp Hill used to be, before the Railways and canal were built, as he said it was quite a very busy part of the village at one time, of what I have written about in some of my other notes.

While we lived up Camp Hill in the early days it was quite common to see Oliver and Ernest Brown taking their milking heard back and forward from Grougton Fields, to their yard near to Elm Tree Bank.

As well as getting used to the sounds of the boats on the canal and the different noises from the railway.

Happy Days, part from schooling, and Sunday, school.

Stanley Joseph Clark.