

## Our Changing World by Stan Clark

It is one thing to listen to lectures or read historical records, but it is another to hear the stories and experiences that were handed down through the ages. They give you a different picture! For a way of life that had been carrying on for hundreds of years had to alter, and sometimes it happened in only a few days.

I have listened to talks about the Enclosure Act of the 1700s and also to tales handed down through generations of my family. The effects of the Enclosure Act caused heartache and anxiety right up to 1804 and affected many generations who could not read or write and were easily taken advantage of. I have talked to many elderly people, especially the late George Freestone from Blisworth, about the changes we have seen in our lives, and about how things have always changed.

People were thrown off the land and out of their normal working practices. They filled the Poor Houses the length and breadth of England, and the movement of people from different parts of the country who were seeking alternative work, was phenomenal. It is said that thousands were carried up the canal through Bugbrooke on boats, to be re-employed in the factories in the northern part of the country.

The Enclosure Act changed people's ways of earning a living. Rather than living off the land, it meant new work was available that was perhaps more reliable. The new field system meant there was work pegging out the new layouts and hedges needed to be set for boundaries. Then canal construction created many jobs which made them forget the effects of the Enclosure Act. The brick yard up Kiln Yard could not keep up with the demand for bricks so a new set of kilns were built down by the Wheel Pits. Then, the canal was barely up and running when work on the railway began, following the same route of the canal. Materials that were needed to construct the railway were carried on the canal, but because cheaper bricks could be brought in by boats, the brick works closed down in the village. According to old Mr Michael Osborne, the range of goods that the boats brought to Bugbrooke had never been seen before and it seemed unbelievable. Better and cheaper soap was brought in by canal, and caused the soap factory at the bottom of Camp Hill to close. At the same time as the railway was being constructed, the Watling Street (A5) was being upgraded, and most of the materials were again brought by canal.

The Napoleonic period of uncertainty around this time, brought other effects. I was told that at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, while Weedon Barracks was being built, the fear of invasion was high on people's minds. Not only was the barracks being built, but every hill within a twenty mile radius was fortified. They set trees in a circle on the top of the hills so as to give cover, and these trees still stand and grow to this day. The canal was running at full capacity and every man from the surrounding villages were mobilised into local militia.

When the railway was completed, it began to take work from the canal, and just after the Second World War, the canal was closed completely for traffic. This was a great blow for the Walker family from the Wharf. Mr Walker had several pairs of boats that mainly carried coal. Without the traffic, the canal water became so clear you could see the bottom of it, but soon it came to be full of water

weeds that grew very rapidly. The canal was not to be used again for quite some time, until the pleasure boats started to use it for recreation.

The railway brought other changes. It made all the old drovers redundant, as livestock was carried by rail instead. At one time according to Mr Fred Lovell, Camp Hill had a blacksmith shop alongside the wheelwrights and wagon maker's yard that was run by the Bull family (Tibbs). There was also a shop and public house that took in drovers. All around Bugbrooke and the lanes adjacent to Banbury Lane there were many double hedges that were used as cattle pounds for the drovers to put the livestock overnight. The railway swept all of this away.

Mr Jack Pearson's family were blacksmiths, wheelwrights, wagon makers and undertakers at the bottom of Butts Hill, opposite the Manor House, but between the first and second world wars, they stopped trading as the demand for their type of work just faded away. Similarly, Mr William Higginbottom's large shoe and boot manufacturing business where the Village Hall and where the Co-op used to be, failed after the First World War. This was due to the demand for labour in the factories in Northampton where pay was better. Travel by bus enabled people to go back and forth to Northampton and also to Weedon where there was a very large Army Stores. Daventry expanded at a tremendous rate and the demand for labour was satisfied by the easier transport link. Unfortunately, after the Second World War the bus service declined because there were many strikes which made it unreliable. Instead the workers purchased motorcycles or motor cars to make sure they could get to work.

When I left school and started work at Wards, the local ladder maker and undertaker, it was extremely busy, but the demand for wooden ladders plummeted when aluminium ladders came out, and now there are houses standing where the busy workshop once stood.

Farming methods were constantly changing. I saw horses replaced by tractors. Mr Mont's and Bill Grant's threshing machine was made redundant over night when the combine harvester came. The new machinery made many farm workers redundant. New methods of cultivating the land were being used and ridge and furrow, which had helped with drainage, was no longer necessary with the coming of tractors. Mr Gilkes from Little Lift farm pointed out to me that in the Saxon ridge and furrow system, the length of the ridges ran straight as an arrow from the hedge that runs along the top of the ridge to Scurf farm to where the stream once ran. They had used oxen, but when steam powered ploughs started to be used, they pulled large moles through the earth before ploughing to improve drainage and then they used large plough that made the ground lovely and flat, quite unlike in the ridge and furrow system.

At one time there were 16 different farmers in the village and now there are only four. The others stopped farming and their land was split up and is now farmed by the remaining four or has been built on. There were once 6 public houses and now there are 2. There were 2 butcher's shops in the village and now there is none. There were jobbing builders and haulage contractors. The biggest business was and still is, Mr Heygate's Mill. There were other small businesses run from people's homes, but as time passes, everything alters.

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Notes

Bugbrooke Enclosure Act 1779

Bugbrooke Canal Construction 1793 -1796

Railway Construction Completion 1832

Weedon Barracks started 1803

For information on drovers, see Articles of Historic Interest on the LINK website.