

## Recollections of Lapworth in the 1940s

Lapworth in the 1940s was a straggling village with no high street of shops. The journey will begin at the railway station. Yes we had a station for passengers to go in one direction to Birmingham and in the other to Warwick, Leamington and Stratford on Avon, There were no buses, no petrol for commuters to drive to work or school and the trains were well used by everyone.

The first port of call could be the tiny newsagents and cycle repair shop opposite the station. The ping of the shop door bell would bring motherly , unflappable Mrs Kettle from the back room or Mr Kettle , in oil soaked dungarees, from the dark inside of his shed to see if you were a puncture to be repaired or a saddle to be raised. The shop was set back from the road with a muddy forecourt where, for sixpence a day, you could leave your transport if you were travelling on the train.

The best way to the shops was by bicycle with a bag of Mrs Kettle's humbugs to help with the pedalling. Past Mrs Concannon's house where her front room served as a ladies hairdressers. Past the dairy where in a very dirty farmyard Mr.Perks would milk his cows and then set off in his van to deliver warm milk in large cans with the measures hanging around the rim. He would ladle the frothy milk into his customer's jug. Not treated in any way and having no detrimental effect on anyone.

At the next junction was the grandly named Arden Café, a tiny shop with a couple of tables where tea or ice cream could be partaken if a half way stop was needed. Turn right, over the canal and up the hill to reach two more shops. One was Potterton's, a wonderful grocers and bakers. Their bread was baked on the premises and was delivered all around the area in a dark blue horse drawn cart with Potterton's inscribed in cream on its sides. I can still feel the joy of hearing the clip clop of the huge feathered feet of Charlie Potterton's grey horse, the smell of hot bread and best of all Charlie's voice offering a ride on the step to the next house.

If you turned left at the Arden Café you would have gone up another hill, passing Hadley's Garage complete with petrol pumps on the left and Dr Farr's house containing his surgery. Arriving at Cocks the Butchers with its shining blue and white tiled, sawdusted floor. Here Mr. Cocks chopped and sawed his wonderful meat, reared on his Rowington farm. ( I went to school with his daughter and fifty years ago she came from her home in Canada to be my bridesmaid!) His shop was beside the canal where barges passed on their way from London to Birmingham. The wives disembarked to buy their meat and the husbands went over the bridge to have a quick drink at the Navigation Inn.

Seventy years ago shopping and exercise went hand in hand.

The P.O.W camp was sited opposite the entrance to the cul de sac now known as Kingswood Close. It began life for German P.O.W s. These were very surly and didn't talk much to those living near them. They left and were replaced by Italian

POWs what a difference !! I think a few hearts were lost to these handsome men with their black curly hair and dark Mediterranean eyes. They were anxious to talk especially to families, missing I think their own children. At the bottom of our garden on waste land was a pumping station and I presume some of their jobs was to paint this and generally keep it in order. A lot of their time was spent hanging over our fence and talking to my mother and I . They stayed until the war was over and then went home.

Kingswood Close was then called George Ave , after the builder, George Wall and had houses only on the left side of the unmadeup road. The right side was waste land which was not built on until much later. I can only remember the names of one family who lived in one of the original houses. It was Mr and Mrs Coop and their daughter Pauline.

Next door to the camp were two Victorian houses. In one lived the Misses Jones, both retired school teachers and their brother Frank Jones . He was Second master at King Edward's School in Birminham and a Lecturer in English at the Birmingham and Midland Institute. I still have a book of poetry edited by him and signed with the editor's love in 1943. In the other house lived a widow Mrs Podmore.

On the same side of the road as the camp was a chapel I am not sure of the denomination but the pastor in charge was a Captain Metcalfe who with his wife took the services and I attended the Sunday School there. I believe the Chapel is still in use today.

Also living in Station Lane nearer to the station was Lena Davies, her mother and father and brother Peter . She took my mother in her car (one of the few with petrol) and they went collecting salvage just one of the many war efforts undertaken in the village. Peter Davies was a prisoner of war in Germany and my father used to write him letters in code about the state of Britain. I do have some of those letters. (My mother told me many years later that Peter was Lena's son. But you didn't make such things known in those days ). They are in a picture of the Lapworth Players Drama Group which was taken in the fifties.

Other characters of Station Lane were a farmer called Mr.Savage rather grumpy as I remember with his sheep dog called Sprig. Miss Harris who on some land attached to her cottage had a flock of sheep. Miss Burden running her Dame School for some of the younger children. I attended there for a while and remember the privy up the garden complete with spiders, cut up newspaper and the scrubbed wooden seat. As I lived close by I don't think I visited this terrifying building very often. My next school was at Baddesley Clinton attached to the Convent there. This entailed a long walk up the length of Rising Lane.

At the end of Station Lane where it joined the Old Warwick Road, on a small piece of grass stood the wooden hut belonging to Mr Appleby who was a shoe repairer. His domain was full of pieces of leather, dust, nails, both repaired and waiting for attention boots and shoes. This was a time when you had your shoes repaired over and over again, new soles, new heels all much to Mr Appleby's delight.

At the other end of Station Lane where it joins Rising Lane there were two cottages. In one lived Mr Goodship who was Lapworth's only chimney sweep. He was kept busy in those days as nearly everyone had coal fires.

Further up the road was Crowther 's farm now I believe a horse breeding establishment. Jane Crowther is mentioned in one of the drama programmes. Opposite in a very Warwickshire black and white cottage, lived Pamela Peel and her mother. I think her occupation was dog grooming.

Before the canal bridge was reached, on the left hand side lived the Neal Family. I went to school with Reggie and Lily Neal, walking up Rising Lane to Baddesley Clinton.

Turning left into the other half of Rising Lane, over the railway was Mr Abbot's cottage where we would visit to buy his eggs. He was very deaf and I was sent by his wife, with an ear trumpet, down the garden to call him for his cup of tea.

Continuing up to Punch Bowl Inn (Rebuilt now after a severe fire ) Over the crossroads then to Gospel Oak. A large pig farm belonging to Mr and Mrs Wright. Mrs Wright was President of Lapworth W.I. One of the few TV owners in the district at that time. My Mother and I were invited every Sunday night to see The Tale of Two Cities. We would let ourselves in and there in complete darkness with Mrs Wright would wait with great excitement for the serial to begin.

Mrs Wright also helped with the Girl Guides and on one occasion we assembled in one of Gospel Oak's bedrooms to be taught how to correctly make a bed complete with hospital corners. A skill which has never left me!

My Grandfather, old Mr. Levitt, fell down coming out of the Boot Inn with two bottles of beer in his overcoat pockets. I don't remember who picked him up (not an easy task as he was a tall, heavily built man ) but I do remember it took my mother a long time to get over her shame when the story swept round the village. Especially as he was not a heavy drinker, just a little unsteady on his feet!

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