

THE EARLY YEARS

The End of an Era

The Wilson family from Woodbury Salterton have been farming there for generations.

They have always been meticulous at keeping records of the past.

Isaac Wilson in the 19th. Century kept the most informative diaries of that period.

The late George M Wilson was no exception to the rule, and some years before his death he spent the time to record his thoughts and memories of his lifetime in the village. I found that I could not fail to include these 'reflections' in this book, as they give such a true picture of life which could be mirrored over the whole Parish at this point in time. Whilst I have interspersed the record with photographs, no camera could have replaced George Wilson's intriguing facts.

The Village has changed greatly during my lifetime. In the 1920's the cottages were mainly occupied by farm workers and their families. Some were tied to the farms where the occupant worked and had to be vacated when the employment ended. Others were free from any restriction. Many of the cottages were in a bad state of repair because the owners could not afford to maintain them. Probably dating back to the 1600's they were built of cob and roofed with wheat reed thatch which had a life of about 30 years. Sanitation was primitive, usually a bucket privy at the end of the garden path. Main sewerage was still fifty years away. Lighting was by paraffin brass table lamps and candles. Electricity came in the mid 1930's.

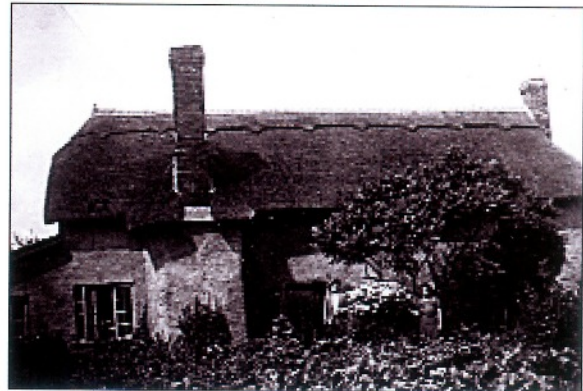
At that time the farm worker's wage was £1.10s. (one pound ten shillings) per week and overtime rate 8 - 10 old pence per hour. There were free perks such as milk, firewood, potatoes grown in the field, cider which was much valued, and sometimes a rent and rate free cottage. My late father in law, Mr H Sage of Bridge Farm



Three farm workers taking a rest. All with their bottle of cider. The one on the right is believed to be Lawrence Riggs.

engaged a farm worker telling him that he would give him his rent and rates. Some time later the man came to him and said "You are a very mean man, you promised to give me my rent and rates, but I have never received a penny". Perhaps it would be better to draw a veil over

the old boy's reaction! Although wages were low, the farm worker never complained and was invariably a cheerful chap quite content with his lot. The work was all manual requiring a lot of strength and stamina which was acquired through starting work at the age of 14. Among the old stalwarts I remember was Frank Turner, who started working for my widowed grandmother at the age of 12. Ned Auton, who once worked for my grandmother, threatened to leave unless she gave him overtime. He was bringing up 8 children on a weekly wage of 12 shillings. Jim Ware, a big powerful man who had the appetite of two men, was sadly accidentally killed on Bridge Farm whilst engaged in felling a large oak tree. Jim Buckland, who daily walked two miles to Stallcombe House, Sanctuary Lane, until his retirement. Sentinel (Saint) Marks who lost a hand through blackthorn poisoning, but continued to work with a ring or crook substituting for his lost hand, doing every job on the farm including driving a pair of horses. He had an enormous capacity for drinking cider. My friend George Carter, who was our neighbour at Cadhayes for 50 years, sadly became a cripple in his prime, but remained cheerful to the end of his life.



Cadhayes in the 1930's.

Country folk at that time still spoke the Devonshire dialect, including the children at school. A couple of farm workers' conversations would go something like this, "Mornin' Beel, bootivul mornin' baint it, how be-ee s'morning?" "Aw, not too bad 'Arry, but I wad'n tu wull tother day, 'ad a beet of the snuffles and Missus wanted

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me ver to go down the quacks ver a bottle o' jollop, but I zed hell-a-bout, I bain't gwaine tu do that ver I bain't that papern 'eaded. Twad'n nort anyways ver I wuz zoon better". "Wull Beel, I be glad to yer you be better, but do-ee luke arter yersel". With that they would pass on their way.

The horse still supplied all the power on the farm with the pony and trap providing the speedier transport to Exeter Market on Fridays and for the very occasional outing.



George Wilson's father with his pony and trap and daughter and dog.

Before the coming of the buses my father ran a pony and trap service to Topsham and Woodbury Road stations, also St. Davids and the Queen Street stations. The buses came in the mid 1920's. A firm called Croskells operated a service on the Exeter, Woodbury, Exmouth road while Dagworthy's, later the Sidmouth Touring Co., operated on the Exeter Sidmouth road. After a while, the Devon General Co. took them over.

One of my earliest memories was the fire which completely gutted Parkhayes farmhouse, somewhere around 1919. My father took me to the scene and I remember Woodbury Fire Engine pumping water from the ponds nearby. The pump was manually operated and Perce Sharland told me he helped, but because he was a boy, received no payment. He said, "I cried". I remember the farmer, Jesse Pyle, leaning over the garden wall, bowler hat on the back of his head and crying.

I remember Woodbury Fire Brigade making one of their practice runs through our village. The first we knew was a bell ringing in the distance and getting nearer and my mother would shriek, "Come in out of the way, the fire engine is coming". Then around the bend came the engine with a pair of horses at the gallop, manes streaming. The driver leaning forward, reins firmly grasped in control, the men wearing brass helmets

clinging on either side of the engine like warriors of old pursuing a vanquished enemy. A most impressive and unforgettable sight.

Another memory takes me back to what must have been the summer of 1918. My father had sent my two sisters and me to fetch the cows and we had just reached the gate when a dark cigar shaped object appeared in the sky over Heathfield House. My sisters, who were older than me, panicked shouting, "Germans" and ran leaving me at the gate bawling my head off. Obviously they had heard about German Zeppelins. Many years later I mentioned this to my aunt, who lived at Ford Farm Woodbury and she said, "Yes I remember that well because the mooring ropes dragged over our farm buildings". I can only imagine it was a barrage balloon which had broken free from its moorings.



Salterton School 1927.

Back row: Joan Meadowcroft, Ron Pyle, Leslie Mitchell, Bill Boyland, Doris Searle, Phylis Searle.

Middle row: Girl from Sanctuary Lane, Leonard Mitchell, Ern Pyle, George Wilson, Em Sprague, Roy Sellick, Archie Smith, ?.

Front row: Marion Tavender, Dora Sprague, Mildred Mitchell, Isabell Mitchell, George Smith, Peggy Turner.

I went to school at the age of three, when Mr Turner was approaching the end of his long teaching career and when Mrs Aird would take over. Mr Turner loved music and he would order the bigger boys to take the piano into the playground where the children would sing "Home sweet Home, Keep the Home Fires Burning" and other patriotic songs. Contrary to the present trend, he was a great disciplinarian. I have been told that he would stalk the playground with a pointer behind his back looking for misdemeanours.

There was little entertainment, the piano provided music for a family sing song, it certainly did in our home, for both my sisters could play and people outside my family would call in and give some renderings of old time songs such as "Little Grey Home in the West" and "Charmaine". Wireless began to appear around 1926 -

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27 and I can remember my mother taking me to Mr and Mrs Chick's at the Post Office, to hear the Church service from St. Martin in the Fields conducted by the Rev. Dick Sheppard. There were two sets of earphones which we shared in turn. In the winter we would sometimes see magic lantern shows in the Parish Room, which were much enjoyed.



The old Post Office and shop, kept by Mr and Mrs R Chick in the 20's and 30's.



Outside the pub in Woodbury Salterton, when it was run by Walter H Ware c.1912. The small girl is Katie Ware, who was later Jeff Dagworthy's mother.

Old time dances were frequently held in the Parish Room, the music provided by piano. There was a tennis

club and football club, the playing field at Crosshills being kindly loaned by farmer Robert Pyne of Greendale. He was a great sportsman and sometimes held clay pigeon shoots in the same field. There was also a men's club in the Parish Room.

Our village pub was a beer, cider and tobacco house owned by farmer Harry Ware, who also ran a farm. The customers would average four pints per night with about nine or ten at weekends. Few cars ever parked outside in those days.

As children, outings were infrequent. We would be taken once to Exmouth in the summer to play on the sand, ride on the merry-go-round or watch Punch and Judy. On one of the earliest visits I can remember seeing the Lifeboat, still powered by oars, going out on a practice run.

About once a year my mother would take us to visit her father and aunt at Bramford Speke. In the summer, the village children had a great treat provided by the Hon. Mrs Peters at Greendale House. Started by her mother, Lady Dunboyne, it was a memorable day. All would gather at the school and the younger ones would be conveyed in a horse waggon sitting on straw, with the older ones walking behind and holding flags on bamboo poles.



Greendale House.

The lady would be ready to greet us at the gate and everyone had fun on the lawn. Topsham Town Band entertained with rousing music. At the end of the afternoon we all sat down to a sumptuous tea and finally the Hon. Mrs Peters would appear with a large jar containing sweets, which she would distribute to the children. At the end we all gave her three hearty cheers and returned by horse and waggon, singing joyously all the way.

In the 1920's the village road was a peaceful haven for children to play in. The occasional horse and cart or pony and trap would trundle by, but I can remember just four cars which were locally owned. There was Mr

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Stubbs of Coombe Park driving his T Model Ford which, in perfect condition, ended its days dumped under a hedge. The Hon. Mrs Peters of Greendale passing in her Armstrong Siddeley. Mr H Hollett of "The Firs" in his large open Wolseley with huge brass acytelane lamps and Dr Darbyshire driving a very noisy open Singer. Occasionally Dr Gaitskill of Lymptone would be seen in a three wheel Morgan or a BSA motor cycle. He had one family as patients.



One car not mentioned was farmer Robert Pyne's. This was his Austin 12 Tourer pictured on Woodbury Common with Win Wilson on board in August 1926. It seems the Common has always been a popular place for boys and girls and cars!

Mentioning Dr Darbyshire reminds me that almost everyone had to pay for his services. In the case of the exceptionally poor, he would waive his charges. People were really ill if he was called upon, for a bill of six guineas was rather daunting. There were no "lead swingers" prior to the introduction of the National Health Service.

Poultry belonging to farmer Harry Ware and Jack Phillips roamed the road all day around the pub area,

much of which was grass covered, pecking in complete peace. The children played hopscotch, whipped tops and truckled hoops. In fact the road was their playing field.



Farmer Henry Sage at Bridge Farm.

As a child, and for nearly fifty years, I saw Mr H Sage driving his pony and trap around the farm. Tom Jennings, a rather dwarf like figure, drove a pony and trap plying his business as a pig and calf dealer. He was illiterate yet successfully made his way through life. If he had made a good deal he would loudly sing some song of his own composition. If the deal had gone against him, he would pass furiously biting his nails. Art Perry and his sister Vera delivered bread and buns and we as boys would run behind shouting "Give us a bun baker". I remember that once, two or three buns were thrown out over the back of the trap.



The Exmouth Industrial Co-operative Society making a delivery to the Pub in 1933. The lady on the right is Annie Ware.

Baker Wheaton also did his round. He was renowned for his dough cake. Baker Hall delivered, riding a tradesman's bicycle. Eli Bamsey drove his specially adapted wagonette, which was a shop on wheels. He sold cotton, wool, pins, needles, boot blacking, polish, laces and kitchen utensils. In fact almost everything to run a home.

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He sold paraffin, bought rags and rabbit skins. Most of the articles he sold were priced in pennies and the farthing had a strong purchasing value. He would reckon the housewives purchases like an auctioneer conducting a sale "Three, three half, four three, five half, six pence Madam please". Intentionally or not, it was a little bewildering to the purchaser.

Sam Miller, who had an identical wagonette, came on Saturdays selling similar articles. His horse brasses were always polished to perfection. He would come up our garden path shouting, "Thank you please"! On Fridays an elderly man walking from Exeter would come ringing a brass bell delivering the weekly "Western Times".

Dick Harris delivered the daily newspapers by pony and trap. In the summer he would often return in the afternoon selling mackerel crying, "Hook and line mackl, hook and line mackl o - n - l - y a few left"! As a lad he once worked for my grandfather, but was sacked for tarring the water pump handle. He much enjoyed telling me the story.

Road making was a crude operation compared with modern techniques. Tom Pidsley, driving a magnificent former circus engine named "Semper Fidelis" and using a large truck, hauled stone from Blackhill Quarry and unloaded at various laybys in the village area. The local roadman wearing wire mesh glasses, cracked every stone with different size hammers. A stretch of road about 50 - 70 yards long would be selected for repair and the cracked stone was spread evenly using a horse and cart, followed by a layer of sand. Water was sprayed over the surface by a specially built water cart. The steam roller, driven by Harry Sellick, would then thoroughly roll the entire area. Needless to say, the country

lanes carried many large potholes. Bill Channon, a local man, was a popular figure among many village boys. He drove a traction engine and threshing machine, visiting the farms in an area which covered many villages. He was still working at 70, spanning a career of 50 years. Fred Curtis, riding a bicycle, delivered the morning mail, and I still remember the aroma of his "Digger Shag" tobacco which hung in the air long after he had passed. Sid Nott walking the afternoon round returned to Woodbury via Sanctuary Lane and Woodbury Common, a distance approximately five miles long.

All the activities which I have described have long passed into history. The horse and nearly all the farm workers have been replaced by the tractor and modern machinery. The cottages are now occupied by commuters to Exeter and the retired. Affluence has transformed the cottages, some of which were rather primitive, into beautiful homes, which their former occupants would never recognise. About four of the original families remain here.

In recent years the village has grown, with new housing, and is still continuing much increasing the population, which has benefitted the school and hopefully the Post Office and Stores.

There is no doubt the newcomers have brought the village alive, which must be beneficial to the community. From a personal point of view I miss the old timers of a long past era. Those farm workers who were the salt of the earth. A type never to be seen again."

George M Wilson.



The late George Wilson's father with Charlie Chick in 1935.



Holy Trinity Church with Spire.