

BYGONE

BY



Old Shops and Street Vendors

No. 19

SOME SHOPS IN BYGONE SILEBY

In the old days, the shops seemed to be open at all hours and, in fact, many did not lock their doors until 11 o'clock at night. This applied particularly to Friday night. After getting their wages, many of the men, who worked in the factories as boot and shoe hand-finishers, or knitters of hose and gloves, went immediately to the public houses. As their wives did not receive their housekeeping money until after "closing-time", the shops purposely remained open late that night to serve the housewives who felt compelled to spend the money on food and other essentials as quickly as possible. If the "housekeeping" was kept in the home, it was soon used on other things - especially beer - and the family could be hungry before the next pay day came around.

Children were sent on errands to the shops, and warned, "kape off the 'oss road."

One lady in the village can recall an occasion when a very little girl entered a grocer's shop in King Street, clutching a silver three penny piece, and said breathlessly,

"Two bundles of firewood, a penny,
Two candles for three farthings
An'eporth o' salt,
An'eporth o' mustard,
And a farthin' over."

The lady shopkeeper was so impressed by this infant's feat of memory, she said, "If you can say that again, I will give you a farthing." The child got her reward.

In 1972, when the older generation prefer uniformity and avoid being conspicuous in society, it is interesting to learn of villagers in the past who were "characters", eccentrics and fearless individualists. Without doubt, they made life in the village stimulating.

One such character was an old lady who kept a shop in King Street, known as the Bon Marche. She wore a tight black dress, her hair tied in a bundle on top of her head, and one frame in her spectacles filled with cotton wool or paper. The shop was an astonishing jumble of drapery and millinery. Old straw bonnets heaped one upon another, were generally believed to be the nesting place of most of the mice in the village. It is said that at the Bon Marche, "there was never a satisfied customer." People wor allus takin things back!

Cobblers:

A man named Billson came to Sileby from Leicester, about 1900, and opened a cobbler's shop at the back of his house. In the front window, he had a sign, "Boots and Shoes Repaired, Neat and Prompt". Once the villagers had seen that sign, he was always known as "Neat and Prompt".

About this time, repairs were advertised in the shops as, "Ladies, 1/6d. Gents. 2/6d. Sole and Heel."

A story is told of a young man who took a pair of boots into one shop in the summer of 1914, just before he joined the army, and went to France. When the Great War ended, he returned to the village, and one day as he passed the shop, he remembered his pair of boots. Opening the door, he called out "Ay, a mi boots ready yit?" "Not yit", replied the cobbler through a mouthful of tacks, "Al ev um dun nex wik."

Barbers:

There were several barbers in the village. Regular customers who went to the shop for a shave, had their own mug and shaving brush, which was kept in a rack on the wall with pigeon holes.

Signs on the doors stated, "Haircuts for Men, 2d. Boys, 1d." Barbers in those days were skilled in the art of sharpening and setting the large "cut-throat" type razors, for which they charged a small sum of money.

A barber who kept a shop in King Street was a most inquisitive little man. Whenever footsteps were heard on the "causey" outside the shop, he would leave the customer, cross the room and climb on a form to peep over the curtain in the window. He always knew who was about. After such interruptions, a customer would become angry and recall the barber to his labour by a gruff, "Ay, cum on, gerron wi it."

In that shop, one of the seats used by waiting customers, was part of a horse-box pew which had been discarded by the Parish Church during the restoration of 1880.

A story is told of a man who went into one shop and said to the barber, "Ay, gimme 'aircut like Prince Teddy 'ez 'iz 'air cut!" "Well", replied the barber, "it wud bay if ay cum 'ere!"

Customers who were "well-to-do" and would not care to be seen waiting with working-class men, were visited at their homes by the barber. It was a familiar thing to see the barber, wearing a bowler and in his shirt-sleeves, with his white apron tucked up at the waist, walking along the street carrying a brown leather bag, holding his equipment.

It is said that at one shop, where the barber was suffering from the "night before," he cut a customer's face a number of times while shaving him. As he was leaving, the customer asked for a drink. "Why, wot's up?", inquired the barber. "Ah ony want ter see if mi mouth ul still owd wetter!" replied the customer.

Bathbricks:

A bath-brick was a block of silicious earth, which could be bought at Middleton's the Ironmongers on High Street. The brick had to be crushed to powder, and was used for cleaning the oven and table knives. The powder was applied to the blades of knives with a cork. In the days before stainless steel, the knives were sharp, but if left in a wet condition, soon became rusty. Unless they were washed immediately after cutting fruit, the juice would leave black stains on the blade. When these knives were not cleaned regularly, they developed a strong unpleasant "iron" odour. When bath-bricks were not available, knives were taken into the garden, and thrust into the soil until the stains were removed.

Boot Blacking:

To polish a pair of boots, it was necessary to buy a lump of blacking from the High Street Hardware Shop. The lump was placed in a tin lid, or an old saucer, and crushed to powder. Vinegar (bought from Drinkwater the grocer, on the "High Causey" in High Street) was then added, and mixed to make a paste. After an application of the blacking paste, the boots took on a dull appearance, but vigorous brushing eventually brought a bright and lasting shine.

Salt:

There was no distinction between cooking and table salt. It was obtainable from the baker's shop. There, it arrived in blocks, two or three feet long, and was cut by a saw into penny blocks, about an inch thick. In the kitchen, it was crushed by a rolling pin or the flat-iron, and stored in a stone jar. For use on the table, it was put in a glass salt-cellar.

Tallow Candles:

Tallow candles, known in Sileby as "Sixteens" were bought from Bailey's shop in Brook Street. When burning, the tallow ran down the side of the candle, and accumulated in the base of the candlestick. When the candle had burnt through, the candlestick was placed in the hearth, where the heat of the fire melted the tallow, which was then used to make fire-lighters.

Bacon:

The shelves at Drinkwater's Shop in High Street were filled with bacon at different prices. The poorer people in the village often had a meal of cold bacon sandwiches. This bacon cost 4½d. a pound.

Sileby Tradespeople:

1870's - Shopkeepers:

George Allen, picture framer, Church Lane
John Barradale, tailor, Church Lane
Jennings Berrington, shopkeeper, The Banks
John Augustus Church, baker, grocer and provisions dealer
Isaac Betts, shopkeeper, Cossington Lane
William Collington, tailor, The Banks
Richard Gamble, shoemaker, High Street
Simon King Goss, baker and grocer, King Street
J. Groocut, grocer, tailor and draper, King Street
Jesse Henson, barber, High Street
William Marshall, butcher, Barrow Road
Willoan Oswin, butcher, Brook Street
Abraham Porter, Jr., picture framer and general dealer, King Street
Christina Porter, shopkeeper, King Street
Joseph Porter, shopkeeper, King Street
Henry Preston, grocer, High Street

William Robinson, newsagent, King Street
 George Shuttlewood, shoemaker, High Street
 Joseph Shuttlewood, shoemaker, Church Lane
 William Raster Taylor, baker, Cossington End
 William Tibbles, chemist and botanist, King Street,
 Arthur Ward, shoemaker, The Banks
 Thomas Weston, baker, Barrow Road
 George Tinkler, butcher, High Street
 Edward Widdowson, shopkeeper, Church Lane
 William Widdowson, sadler, Cossington end
 John Wylde, grocer, High Street

1880's (new businesses)

Charles Fowler Cooke, druggist, King Street
 Mary Ann Jones, confectioner, King Street
 John Kidger, chimney sweeper, Swan Street
 John Middleton, General dealer, King Street
 B. Peabody, watchmaker, Brook Street
 Amos Widdowson, baker and grocer, King Street
 Mary Ellen Taylor, baker, Cossington end
 Samuel Barber, grocer, Brook Street
 James Hutchinson, grocer and draper, High Street
 Thomas Marlow, grocer, Barrow Road
 Sidney Oswin, grocer and beer retailer, Swan Street
 William Rastall, grocer, Brook Street
 William Swann, grocer, Swan Street

Shopkeepers about 1910

Joseph Allen, fried fish dealer	George Bowler, confectioner
George Barradale, barber	Eli Bread, newsagent
Minnie Camp, draper	Orchard Collyer, cycle agent
William Cooke, joiner and shopkeeper	John Dakin, boot and shoe dealer
William Dorrner, butcher	Edne Fisher, shopkeeper
Edwin Freer, shopkeeper	Agnes Hall, shopkeeper
Geo. Hill & Co., grocers	Edward Keighthley, grocer
John Edward Lenton baker and shopkeeper	William Marshall, butcher
Thomas Marriott, shopkeeper	John William Marston, Coffee House
Birkin Marston, hardware dealer	James Newbold, baker
Herbert Middleton, butcher	Charles Henry Parkinson, clothier
Matilda Beatrice Paul, grocer	George Perkins, fruiterer
George Samuel Parkinson, butcher	Edwin Preston, fried fish dealer
Ernest Perry, cycle dealer	Geo. Arthur Skelton, chemist
Jane Russell, shopkeeper	William Taylor, Shopkeeper
Frisby Sleath, draper	Thomas Walker, shopkeeper
Samuel Underwood, shopkeeper	Elizabeth Wise, grocer
Arthur Ward, grocer	Geo. J. Wormleighton, barber

STREET VENDORS IN BYGONE SILEBY

Fishmongers:

One fishmonger who went round the village with a handcart, was standing near Dudley's Bridge one day, when a woman began to examine some fish in a box. She said, "Eh, ah doont like the look o' this 'ere fish." The fishmonger replied indignantly, "Ef its looks yer after, Missis, wot yo want is goldfish!"

Old Moore's Almanac:

An old man used to come to the village who sold Old Moore's Almanac for a penny. He always added to his street cry, "For any use, a good strong string bag for a penny."

Salt Seller:

A man known as "Lily-white Salto," sold salt in blocks from a handcart. Someone who remembered buying salt from the cart said that the blocks were cut "to the size of a brick."

Sausages:

Some will remember a woman who came to the village to sell sausages, in the streets from an old three-wheeled push-cart.

Once, someone said to her, "Oo, dear! The sossigiz wor that rich thi made uz all bad last wik." "Well", replied the vendor, "thi woont this wik, coz theer nearly all bread!"

A Rag-and-Bone Man:

One ragman who regularly toured the village, gave a pair of clogs for rags. They had wooden soles and leather uppers. Rabbit skins were always bought by the ragmen, and after having a rabbit dinner, the skin was usually kept in the outside coalhouse. One lady remembers that every time the coalhouse door was opened, a stiff rabbit skin was seen swinging from a nail, until the Rag-and-Bone Man came.

A Packman:

Cato Kelley was a familiar figure in bygone Sileby. He came with a donkey and a cart piled high with boxes. He supplied shoes, clothing, ribbons, pins and numerous other things.

Herrings:

A man frequently seen in the village carried a basket of herrings supported by a board, on his head. His distinctive cry was:-

"Yarmuth herrings, three a penny"

Blackpudding:

Jack Barwell, a pork butcher, kept a shop on Barrow Road, near the Horse and Trumpet Inn. People took a "round of bread" to the shop and were sold a ring of blackpudding, hot from the oven, for a penny. The bread and pudding were eaten in the street.

Old Milk:

On Saturdays, after 4.30 p.m., children were sent to Joe Dakin's farm on Barrow Road (now occupied by Mr. G. L. Lovett), to buy "old" that is, skimmed milk, for a penny a can. Old milk was also available at Harrison's Farm on Barrow Road, now occupied by Mr. W. Seal. The word "can" in this instance, meant a quart.

On Mondays, Mr. H. B. Foster, a churchwarden, who lived on Barrow Road, had a row of basins filled with old milk. Any child could drink the milk from a basin, free, after saying the Lord's Prayer. If the child could not repeat the prayer, Mr. Foster would say, "You can drink the milk, and you will say it next time, won't you?"

New Milk:

Milkmen made their daily rounds with a float drawn by a pony. The float contained a large milk churn, an oval can with a carrying handle and a cylindrical ladle with a long handle. As the pony knew the round from memory, there was no need for instructions. When the float stopped at a house, the milkman carried the can to the backdoor, calling "milko". When the housewife came to the door with a jug, he used the ladle to pour in half-a-pint and was paid one half-penny. As he stepped on to the float, the pony would set off to the next house on the round.

Eggs:

Milkmen and grocers sold eggs, usually described as "farm fresh". There was a popular belief that brown eggs were better than white, and following the laws of supply and demand, brown eggs were always dearer. One Sibley man can remember seeing white eggs being converted into brown by the simple process of standing them in cold tea:

Lard:

The expression "a bladder o' lard" came from the custom of pork butchers pouring lard into the bladder of a pig. Every shop of this kind had a number of bladders of lard suspended from hooks. After the contents had been used in the kitchen, the bladders were given to children, who played with them by blowing them up like a football, and kicking them about in the street, or tying them to sticks, in imitation of a balloon.

Lucky Bags:

A small shop in King Street sold lucky bags, which were made up by the shopkeeper, and were sold at two bags for a half-penny. Each bag contained monkey-nuts, tiger-nuts, small sweets and a dark brown locust bean.

Watercress:

A man named Jack Riddle, sold watercress from a barrow in the streets. Whenever anyone asked him, "How much?", he always replied, "Tow pennuth fer tuppunce."

Fish:

Another who sold fish from a basket in the streets, was "Bloater Joe" Bailey, who lived in "Brisket Squsre" off King Street. The fish were sold at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and 1d. a piece.

The Pot Stall;

At the bottom of High Street, near the corner leading to Brook Street, was a public house, "The General Sir John Moore." In front of this house on the "hard padded earth", a stall was erected at weekends, to sell crockery. At night, it was illuminated by naphtha lamps. At this stall, a tea service could be bought for 3/6d.

Trotters:

On the same site as the Pot Stall, also using naphtha lamps was a stall selling pig's trotters and hot peas.

The Grinders:

"Scissors to grind," was a well known street-cry in old Sileby. The grinder arrived in the village with a home-made complicated contraption, made mobile by a large single wheel, and a pair of handles to push it along the streets. When this device was at rest, the man operated a wooden foot-pedal which rotated a circular grinding stone. Above the stone was a tin can with a spout and tap, which allowed water to drip as the stone was being used to sharpen scissors and knives. In an age when most women made their own clothes and household linen, scissors were in regular use, and became blunt. Before the arrival of the modern style of cutlery, it was necessary to have table and carving knives sharpened. As most families had to manage with the cheaper meat sold at the butcher's shop, and false-teeth were a luxury of the rich, a sharp knife was essential.

The men who shouted "scissors to grind," found good business in the village, and were part of the way of life in bygone Sileby.

Props:

Men were heard in the streets crying, "Line props", and carrying several on their shoulders. A number of clothes lines usually hung from a leather belt round the waist.

MENDERS:

Chairs:

"Chairs to mend", was another cry heard in the streets. People employed these men to repair cane chairs, or those with cane seats. The men carried cane of various kinds in a loop thrown over the shoulder

Pots:

Men called at houses crying, "pots to mend", carrying a portable stool and a tiny work-bench. In the yard or garden of the tradespeople and more prosperous villagers, the pot mender would be given expensive crockery, ornaments and bases to repair. A broken plate or soup bowl would be clamped to the bench, and small holes drilled into the broken pieces, which were then joined by small metal staples cemented into the holes. This kind of repair was so successful, that some of the crockery can still be seen to-day, usually decorating walls as plaques.

Pans:

The name for the man who repaired pans and kettles was a tinker. Many of them were gipsies, and regarded with suspicion by the villagers. A troublesome boy would be called "a little tinker". In an age when pans and kettles were expensive for the poorer people, it was found worthwhile having them repaired, though in many cases the patches on the metal did not endure.

Wandering Rogues:

Although most of the street vendors and "door knockers" were honest folk, and known by name or sight in the village, from time to time, some who were plausible rogues wandered the streets with the intention of cheating the villagers. The police and others identified these persons in the following manner:-

Griddlers or Chanters:

These were people who sold badly printed ballads on poor paper, about their supposed misfortunes in life. While they sang the doleful song, an assistant, known as a "mumper" approached people with a cap to beg coppers.

Dress Fencers:

Were women with persuasivetongues, who sold cheap lace, treated in such a way it appeared to be expensive - until washday.

China Fakers:

Men who pretended to be craftsmen able to repair broken china and glass ornaments. The articles were just crudely stuck together with cheap glue, and a high price demanded for the repair. Having a row was part of their stock in trade, and villagers often paid up, just to get rid of them.

Forney Squarers:

Well dressed men, who carried "gold" rings in expensive velvet lined jewelery cases. The rings were highly polished rouged brass. Their victims were usually servant girls.

Paste Lurkers:

People who went from door to door selling pots of useless paste, which they claimed was a new and wonderful composition for cleaning brass.

Timber Merchants:

Men and women came to the village with a handcart loaded with firewood. They sent children dressed in rags from house to house, offering the wood for sale. The appearance of the children roused the sympathy of housewives, who would not usually buy wood at the door.

Greengrocers:

One man who came to the village about 1900, had a distinctive cry, "Apples, Taters, Pears - and I am beloaded".

Another shouted, "Apples, good apples, 'eppny a lot."

Fish and Tomatoes:

Tommy Smith of Leicester, was an old man with only one eye, who came to Sileby each Friday with a horse and cart. He sold kippers at 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d a pair, oranges 5 for 1/- and 12 lbs. of Italian Plum Tomatoes in a wooden box for 1/-.

Old Tommy had a remarkable dog, which always stood under the cart. A woman could take fish from the cart and hand it to the old man, but the dog would attack any man who put his hand on the cart. It had somehow been trained to distinguish men from women.

The Bun Man:

A man named "Muggy" Measures, who lived in Leicester, used to walk to Sileby, where he was known as "the Bun Man". As he wandered through the streets, he called to any child he saw, "Go and tell your mother the Bun man's here - they're four a penny, my dear." They were small buns, made of a sponge mixture and baked to a crisp surface.

Tripe Sellers:

A man called Newcomb came to the village on Saturday nights, arriving here via Mountsorrel. He was to be seen in High Street at 7.30 p.m. When he cried, "Tripe o' Cowale" people would walk to his donkey and cart, which had a large square zink tank, kept hot by a coal fire. As he went along the street, he rang a bell, and the tank, which had a leak, left a trail of tripe gravy on the cobble stones.

One Saturday night, a lady who lived in High Street, sent her new housekeeper for some tripe. This person had never bought tripe before, and took a plate to the cart. Newcomb said "you'll want something to put the liquor in". The housekeeper returned a moment or two later with a collander!

Another in this business was called "Tripo" Edwards, a local man, who was a member of Cossington Church choir. His vehicle was a tricycle, which carried a tank with a fire underneath.

One day, "Tripo" left his tricycle outside a shop at the church-end of King Street. A lad (who was blamed for a lot of things he did not do), mounted the machine for a short ride, and wassoon on High Street, and rolling down the hill at high speed, shouting, "I can't stop!" The trike, tripe and lad, ended in a heap in Sileby brook at Dudley's Bridge.

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BYGONE SILEBY

Our readers may notice that the last booklet was No. 15, and this is No. 19. This is due to some problems with duplicating and production. Numbers 16, 17 and 18 will follow this edition.

The large photographs used on these covers were printed by Mr.S.Wholton.

Only one edition of the Almanac was issued, in February. Although all the material was prepared for 12 monthly Almanacs, the idea was abandoned. The "Nippy Hug" episode put an end to that. For some curious reason, the national press, B.B.C. Radio and T.V. ,and I.T.V. all picked up the story from an agency and made a new item of it. It was an uncomfortable experience, and we could not bear the prospect of that occurring each month ! Strangely, the "Nippy Hug" story (which was told in only three lines in the Almanac) is still being published in various parts of the world. The latest reports I have are from newspapers in central Africa and Borneo !

R.J.H.