

BYGONE SILEBY



[by courtesy of the "Loughborough Echo"]

A SERIES OF BOOKLETS CONTAINING
HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT THE VILLAGE

No. 3 "Hard times in the Village"

H A R D T I M E S I N T H E V I L L A G E

In this booklet we take a brief look at the problem of the working class people in Sileby during the last half of the 19th Century.

Some of the younger generation may express surprise when they read of the low wages, long hours, grim working conditions and the poverty in our village when Queen Victoria was on the throne. Yet, in those times, grandparents were telling of even harder times they had during the "Hungry Forties."

When the oldest inhabitants are asked, "Why did you stand for these deplorable conditions?" the answer is painfully simple - "Cos theer wor nowt yer could do about it!"

Most of the material in these pages was supplied by men and women who lived through these hard times, and the remainder has been gathered from documents and printed matter available in the village.

R J Hunting.

C H I L D L A B O U R

The Factory and Education Acts

The Factory Act of 1833 declared that children under 9 years of age were not to be employed at all, those between 9 and 13, were not to work more than eight hours a day, and those between 13 and 18, were not to work more than twelve hours a day.

The Elementary Education Act of 1870, provided education for children between 5 and 13 years of age. Although most schools came into existence in 1872, Sileby opened a school on Barrow Road, in 1871.

Until an efficient inspection system was enforced, both the Factory and Education Acts were continually violated by parents and employers.

The cost of maintaining the new Sileby school was borne by a charge on the rates, a grant from the government and a payment by the parents of 2d. per week for each child, commonly known as "School Pence."

The Elementary Education Act came as a burden to poor, large families. The parents were deprived of the earnings of their children, and were compelled to pay school fees. A quarter of the parents were always in arrears with their School Pence, and some were unable to subscribe due to their poverty.

Sileby Child Workers - 9 Years Old

In 1875, the church began its first parish Magazine called "The Home Visitor." In the July edition, the Vicar, the Rev. Augustus Shears, made an attack on child labour, and expressed concern that where children were absent from school, the government grant for their education was being lost:

*Four children presented for education examination, and passing one or more subjects, were struck off by the Education Department BECAUSE THEY WERE KEPT AWAY FROM SCHOOL IN ORDER TO WORK FOR PROFIT, THOUGH UNDER TEN YEARS OF AGE. It may be well to warn parents and employers THAT TO EMPLOY IN WORK CHILDREN OF SUCH TENDER YEARS, IS A VIOLATION OF THE FACTORY ACT, and if persisted in, it will become necessary

to give names to the proper authorities in order that the penalties of the law may be enforced."

The problem continued. An Inspector who visited the school in April 1877, concluded his Report:

"The attendance of the children however, seems to have been unusually irregular, Factory Acts notwithstanding."

Fifteen years after the Elementary Education Act was passed, some children of school age were still being illegally employed in Sibley. The schoolmaster entered in his Log Book in November, 1886,

"Admitted four half-timers into the first class. They have been at work full time for nearly a year, but have been pressed in by the Factory Inspector."

Child Workers - On the Land

Many parents kept their children away from school during the important agricultural seasons. This seems to have been accepted by the school authorities as a necessary part of the village way of life. The school Log Book has numerous references to absenteeism :

- 1871, September. "The attendance this week has not been very good, the elder ones being away in the Harvest Fields."
1872, July. "Attendance this week not quite so good, many of the elder boys being in the Hay Field."
1872, September. "School assembled today after the Harvest Holidays, but in consequence of the unfavourable state of the weather during the past fortnight, the harvest operations had barely commenced, and there being not many children present, the Vicar thought it advisable to dismiss the children for another week."
1872, September. "Many of the elder children kept at home picking up and sorting potatoes."
1873, May. "Many of the bigger boys are away assisting their parents in gardening operations."
1875, July. "Elder children kept at home fruit picking etc."
1875, August. "The elder children away plum picking and others gleaning."
1878, July. "As the hay harvest has commenced, many of the scholars request leave to take provisions etc., to their parents in the fields."
1882, April. "Owing to gardening and herb gathering, the attendance this week has been irregular."

HALF-TIME WORKERS - 11 YEARS OF AGE

When children reached the age of 11, they were allowed to work half-time at the factories in the village. One week they went to the factory during the morning, and the following week, they worked during the afternoon. The following examples show how they system operated:

A boy who went to work at a Glove Factory, found that it was no more than a shed in a yard at the back of a house. When working mornings, from Monday to Saturday, he began at 6 a.m., paused for breakfast at 8 a.m., then worked on until 12.30 p.m. His morning wage was 2s.5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. In the afternoons, he worked from 1.30 to 6 p.m., and was paid 1s.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a week.

A girl was sent at the age of 11 to work as a half-timer in a Footwear Factory. She worked similar hours as shown above, but was paid only 2s. a week, which alternated between 1s.9d., the first week, and 2s.3d., the second week. Her job was to "clean-up" the footwear as they came from the machinists.

FULL-TIME WORKERS - 13 YEARS OF AGE

When children reached the age of 11, they were allowed to leave school if they had a sufficient number of attendances, and could prove that they had a job to go to. A certificate was issued by the Education Department, and had to be presented to the employer.

A Girl in a Shoe Factory

A 13 year old girl who found employment in a Sileby factory was paid 4s. for a 56 hour week. During that summer, trade was so poor in the village, she found work at Syston, walking there and back each day. She returned to the Sileby factory in the winter. One day, the foreman called the girls together, and told them of a special order for quick delivery, which would mean a bonus in pay if the work was completed in a week. She said, " We worked like beavers for a week, but when pay-day came, I received only 4s." The foreman declared that the story about the bonus was only a joke. She added, " he got the bonus, and put it in his own pocket."

A Girl in a Glove Factory

A girl of 13, worked 56 hours a week, from 6 a.m. to 5.45 p.m., and was paid 3s. a week, winding for hand-knitters. In addition, she had to work in the yard "damping" skeins of yarn in a mixture of soap, oil and water. Often in the winter there would be ice on the water, and her hands soon became numb. Another duty was to pump water, and carry it into the master's house to fill a cistern belonging to a primitive flushing lavatory. In her spare time during the summer, she was sent to the master's garden to pick fruit - all for 3s. a week!

A Girl in a Stocking Factory

Another 13 year old, who obtained work at a factory in Barrow-on-Soar, walked there each morning to begin at 7 o'clock. She left the factory at 7 p.m. Her wage was 4s.6d. per week. In the evening, after she had walked home, she was expected to go to the shed in the back-yard, where her father had a knitting-frame, and wind a set (8 to 12) bobbins, ready for him to use on the frame the following day. When she had completed this nightly duty, she went into the house to assist her ailing mother with the family washing, and other household chores. Her working day began at 6 a.m., and ended at 11 p.m. "This was our life," she said, " and we accepted it without question - but they wouldn't stand for it today."

Payments by Operatives

When a girl entered a factory, she had to learn the skills of the trade, but as the employer made no provision for this, the girl was compelled to pay the other operatives to teach her the job. As the teacher would have lost wages in neglecting her own machine, this seemed to be fair compensation.

Operatives were expected to provide their own light during the winter months. Each one took an oil lamp with a reflector on the back, to illuminate their working machine, and of course, bought their own oil. In addition, they were required to pay back to the factory, 3d. a week "shop rent," and when the process became power-operated, another 3d. a week "light rent." There was also a deduction of a penny a week "hospital money."

A P U L L L A B O U R

Road Menders

Before the creation of the Parish Councils, all the affairs of the village were dealt with by the parish Vestry Meeting.

An old Minute Book records a meeting of the Vestry on 7th April, 1845, and contains this item:

"William Brewin applied to have his wages increased from 5s. per week to 1s. 2d. per day."

The Vestry increased his wage to 1s. a day. William Brewin was an old man, he married Ann Pickard at the Parish Church in November, 1801.

A Day Labour Book reveals the payments made to local road-menders in the middle of the 19th Century:

| | | | |
|-------|----------------------------|---------|----------|
| 1852. | Breaking Stones | 1s. 3d. | per day. |
| | Gathering Stones | 1s. 0d. | " |
| | Filling a cart with stones | 1s. 8d. | " |
| | Spreading stones on lanes | 6d. | " |
| 1853. | Levelling stones | 1s. 0d. | " |
| | Ditching | 1s. 0d. | " |
| | Breaking 1/2 tons of stone | 4s. 6d. | |
| | @ 1s. 0d. per ton | | |

The records show that no road-mender earned more than 7s. in any week.

A Limestone Worker

A Sileby father of twelve children was employed at the "Lime Works," off the Barrow Road. About 1860, he began work each day at 6 a.m., and finished at 5.30 p.m. He laboured underground, removing limestone by pick and shovel. The rock face was illuminated by "long-eights," wax candles, eight inches in length, which were fixed in a niche cut into the stone. His wage was never more than 19s. 7d. per week.

In order to fill fourteen mouths, he worked during the summer months gardening and mowing till sunset.

The limestone was loaded into trucks, which were drawn to the surface by a wire rope attached to a steam-engine.

An Engine Driver

William White, father of a large family, was employed as the steam-engine driver at the Lime Works. He lived at Underhill. His wage was too small to support the family, so he decided to emigrate. The school Log Book shows this entry:

"1906. 9th March. Two more families are leaving for Canada, White and Kirkby..... bad trade is the cause of so many people leaving the village."

Mr. George E. White, of Los Angeles, U.S.A., a grandson of William, visited Sileby a few months ago.

A Woman in a Stocking Factory

A woman who was employed at a factory in Barrow-on-Soar, worked in the "Griswald Room," with fifteen other women. The Griswald stocking making machine was secured to a bench and operated by turning a handle. The machine could have various numbers of needles, depending on the type of stockings being manufactured. Sixty-two needles were used to make children's socks, seventy-two for medium, and eighty-four for men's socks or big stockings. The hours were:

6 a.m. - 8 a.m. Early morning work.

8 a.m. - 8.30 a.m. Breakfast.

8.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. Morning work.

12.30 p.m. - 1.30 p.m. Dinner.

1.30 p.m. - 4.30 p.m. Afternoon work.

4.30 p.m. - 5.30 p.m. Tea.

5.30 p.m. - 6 p.m. After tea work.

Any work after 6 p.m. was counted as overtime.

The mealtime breaks were not always taken, many operatives returned to the machine as quickly as they could. Canteens were unheard of, and the workers took their own enamel tea cans, which were placed on the floor by their side, and someone came round and filled them with hot water.

When a woman began work at the factory, she was paid only 1s.6d. per week for the first three months, to learn the use of the Griswald machine. At three months, the wage was increased to 3s. a week. After six months, the operative was "on her own time," and was paid according to the number of pairs of stockings she produced. It was slow work, and production was low. After a week of ceaseless handle-turning, a woman could earn 12s. If anyone managed to earn £1 in a week, there was a bonus of 2s.6d.

Discipline was severe, and the women were expected to work without pause. One lady told how one of the women once sneezed so loudly, she made the others laugh. They were all fined 6d. by the foreman for laughing at work, and wasting time. A handle had to be turned a great number of times to earn six pennies.

A Man in a Footwear Factory

During a trade depression in the 1890's, a Sileby man found employment at a factory at Anstey. Each morning, he got up at 3.3 a.m. and began to walk to Anstey at 4 a.m. to be at the factory for 6.30. It was a long slow walk in the dark hours. After breakfast at 8 a.m.,

he worked until dinner time, at 12.30 p.m. For a few coppers a week, he was able to have a meal in a nearby cottage, with a hot drink. He said, " I used to by my own tackle, and they cooked it." His "tackle," was usually a black-pudding and a slice of bread. He left the factory at 6 p.m., and arrived back in Sileby about 8 p.m. Looking back on those days, he said, " It wor all wuk an bed." He worked at a last on a bench, 56 hours a week, and was paid 11d. for each dozen pairs, but had to supply his own tacks. Each pair had to be tied together with a piece of string. Wages were paid on Saturdays, at 12.30 p.m. The most he earned was 26s. in a week. At the Sileby factories, the wages were even less, after the most strenuous labour, few men earned a sovereign at that time.

The Sweaters

Boys who were bound at the age of 13 as apprentices in the boot and shoe trade, were called "Sweater." In a factory where fifty men were working, there were a dozen Sweaters. One man said, "We were called Sweaters, because they made you sweat." The operative who was teaching the lad, earned money on the apprentice's work, and kept him at it. A man with a good Sweater could earn a huge wage. The Sweater earned 4s. a week, which gradually increased to 12s. when he was 16 years old. In 1910, a good week could earn a man 30s.

The Farm Labourer

Agricultural workers were always poorly paid for his hard labour. An old lady who died some years ago, told of the hard time her father had as a farm labourer in the 1880's. His wage was usually about 14s. a week. Once, when shearing sheep 18 hours a day for a week, he came home with a golden sovereign. It was the only one he ever had during his long life. He was paid on Saturday morning, but had to wait outside the farmhouse until the farmer had completed his milk round, and collected enough money to make the wage. If the weather was bad, he was sent home, and his wage was reduced according to the time lost. On such days, the labourer went to a blacksmith's shop in the village, and earned a few coppers operating the bellows of the forge. The old lady told how the whole family were thrown into despair on wet days, because it meant that the wage would be low, and life would be harder than usual the following week.

The Framework-Knitters

The story of the Sileby Knitters between 1800 - 1900 will be dealt with in a separate booklet. The sad record of their hardships, their sufferings and the mannwr in which they were exploited, would fill a book, rather than a Bygone Sileby booklet. At a time when there were more than five hundred frames, the sound of their clattering was to be heard in every part of the village.

WAYS OF MAKING ENDS MEET

In an age when a father's wage was often too small to support his household, the family was expected to offer help in any way they could. It has been seen that the elder children were called upon to assist in the gardens, and were kept away from school for this purpose (where would the poor have been without those gardens and the food they grew?). Below are some of the ways the members of the family helped the common cause.

Glove Seaming

Many families in the village added to their income by taking in work from the Glove Factories. Glove shapes which has been made on the frames, were collected by children, and taken to their homes. The gloves were long, and almost reached the elbow when they were worn - so fashion dictated. These glove shapes, or half-gloves had to be sewn together to make a glove, and the two pieces were sewn down the sides, and round the fingers and thumb. After sewing twelve pairs of gloves, the family earned $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. Children who were so small that they sat on the arm of a chair with their feet on the seat, were expected to contribute their share before going out to play. By this long and tedious labour, a family could earn an additional shilling or two a week. They usually had to wait for payment until Saturday afternoon, when the factory owner had taken the gloves to a Leicester warehouse, and returned with the money. If he happened to miss a train, the poor seamers would wait about the station to meet the next train - or the next. "Hanging about, waiting for wages," was one of the burdens of the poor.

Gleaning

Sibley preserved the ancient custom of gleaning until the turn of the century, and harvest time brought a blessing to the poor families in the village. After the fields were cleared, families were allowed to glean the wheat which had not been gathered when making the sheaves, or had fallen when the carts were being loaded. Women were particularly quick at gleaning, but children were taken to the fields to do their share of the work. The school Log Book records:

1875. 27th August. "The elder children away plum picking & others gleaning."
1876. 1st September. "In inquiring after absentees, I find the causes to be gleaning, fruit picking, etc."
1879. 10th October. "Many scholars have been away gleaning."
1879. 26th August. "Many are away for gleaning this week."
1881. 29th August. "A great number away gleaning."

If a family collected a great quantity of wheat, it was taken to the mill in a "batch-bag" to be converted into flour. Smaller quantities were stored and used to feed poultry.

Some portion of gleaned wheat was always used to make Thrumety. The wheat heads were "ruffled" in a bag, and the husks blown away, then the grain was steeped, and boiled in milk or water until they swelled and burst. It was similar to porridge, and eaten at breakfast.

Errands

Errands for neighbours always brought a reward. Children called at houses to ask, "Dow yer want any arruns fechin ?" or " Ayer gorreny arruns yer want runnin ?" One old lady explained how she preferred the reward of a slice of bread and jam - because she was often hungry, rather than "an eppny," because she was honour-bound to surrender the coin to her mother.

A Lather Boy

An Old Age Pensioner told how he was sent to work in his spare time as a Lather Boy for a local barber. He worked four nights a week, from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. On Saturdays, he was in the shop from 2 p.m. until 10 p.m., and on Sunday mornings, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. He lathered men's faces 29 hours a week for a wage of 2s.2d., -less than one penny an hour. He described how tough labourers came into the shop, "to have a shave and a wash at the same time!" Frequently arguments would break out among the customers, when resulted in a fight with chairs thrown about and equipment broken.

Killing a Pig

It is said that about 1880, every other house in Sileby had a pig in the back-yard. They were bought from local farmers, who were repaid at 6d. per week. Some houses had two pigs, because "they got on better in pairs." When they were ready for killing, one would be sold to a butcher, and the other cut up for the family and neighbours. When a pig was killed, it was the custom to send the neighbours a plate of fry, as they had regularly supplied the animal with peelings and scraps of food. There was a song about this practice:

"Blessed is the man that kills his pig,
And sends his neighbours plates of fry;
After that, a quart of ale,
And then a pork pie.

Cursed is the man that kills his pig,
And sends his neighbours none;
May he have neither grains nor swill,
To feed another one."

Children were sent round the nearby streets in search of orders, with the message, " Weer killin ar pig an mi Mam wants to know if yer want any meat?" When the time came for killing, they would send for a "Stick-pig," the local name for a pork butcher. He arrived to do his work carrying the tools of his trade, and a "scratch," on which the animal was laid. The dead pig was usually placed in an old hip-bath, and drenched in boiling water for the scraping process. Children had a half-day away from school to help in the task of pouring water to wash the "pig's belly." The prospect of good meals of pork dispelled any squeamishness. Nothing was wasted, even the pig's bladder was used to kick about as a football when inflated, or filled with lard, and suspended from a hook in the kitchen.

Vicarage Soup

During the hard times in the village about 1890, the Vicar, the Rev. Augustus Shears provided free soup from a fire heated copper in one of the outhouses. Children were sent to the Vicarage with jugs and basins to collect a ration for the family. When trade improved, a small charge was made, and children purchased a "soup-ticket" at school, which was presented at the Vicarage kitchen.

Fertiliser

In the days when horses were everywhere, the streets were littered with "oss muck," as they called it in Sileby. Children armed with brush, shovel and a home-made wheel barrow gathered this free but valuable garden manure, which they sold for $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a load. Whatever lay in any street was regarded as the property of those residing there, and the presence of an intruder from another street gathering this material, was bitterly resented. The invention of the petrol engine put an end to the supply of cheap fertiliser. One old gardener said, "Ar rheubarb wor niver the same after thi got shut o' the 'osses."

Roast Mutton

In the days when poverty and hardship were commonplace in the village, some men were driven to desperate measures. One afternoon, three hungry Sileby men gazed at a hugh flock of sheep standing in a field. The sight of all that meat caused one of them to observe, "Thi wunt miss one of them ship if way nipped it." That night, the men went to the field, and under the cover of darkness, killed a sheep, and took from the carcass as much meat as they could carry without attracting attention.

When the Constable visited the house of one of the suspects, as the man patiently answered the policeman's endless questions, he absent mindedly poked the fire. After the Constable had departed, the wife came in and angrily demanded to know why he had poked the fire out. The man opened the oven door, and said, "Ah ed tow kill the foir, cos ah wor frit ayd 'ear the mutton sizzlin!"

Coal Gatherers

The Sileby Gas and Coke Company was established in 1868, and in the years that followed, coal was regularly transported from the wharf in King Street, to the Gas Works off High Street. As the coal waggons moved up the sharp incline under the railway bridge, quantities of coal were displaced, and fell into the road. Whenever a coal waggon left the wharf, women would wait in anticipation near the bridge, ready to fill buckets, bowls and their "erden epons."

Crow Starvers

Farmers paid children a few coppers a week to keep crows and other bird from the crops. They were provided with wooden clappers to strike together, or a large rattle. The children used to sing, "Away, birds, away. Take a little, leave a little, and come another day."

Cowslip Gathering

In spring, when work was scarce, many Sileby people went out of the village to gather cowslips. The schoolmaster wrote in the Log Book on 12th May, 1879, "Many children were kept away this week in order to go cowslip gathering." There were various sources of supply. Those who went on foot, went "Six Hills way," carrying their bags. Others organised parties of women and children who travelled by brake, to Hickling, Colston Bassett and "up the Vale of Belvoir."

An old Sileby man described how his father employed children in his house to take the flowers from the stalks. Cloth and paper were spread on the floor round the table, and the unwanted parts were thrown down. The children were paid one fathing for a basinful - after an adult fist had pressed down the flowers a couple of times. It required a great deal of nimble work to earn a penny.

Older people who looked back on those times, said, "Cowslips wor a big thing in them days," "It wor quite a business in the early summer," and "They wor a good thing for the measles."

The picked cowslips were usually taken to Leicester, where they were sold for wine-making.

Firewood

Elderly people in the village during the late Victorian period, found it difficult to afford coal, although it could be obtained for 6d. a bag, and even "tow pennuth" could be bought from a coal dealer, if they took a wheelbarrow. Many people went down to the Mill to collect wood which had drifted down the river, and could be seen carrying branches or pieces of timber, on a shoulder protected by a sack.

A blazing fire was one of the few pleasures of the poor cottager. An old Sileby expression used by visitors, was "Yowve got a good foir runnin theer" - with the customary reply, "Ar, but yow wait till it gets gooin, itul bay a roxer."

Sticking

Children were sent "sticking," - picking up small branches which had fallen from trees in the lanes and fields. It was a useful addition to the household fuel.

There was a curious saying in Sileby :

"If you go sticking on a Sunday, the man in the moon will chop your arm off." The origin and meaning of this saying is not known.

The Sparrower

Sileby must have been "snived wi sparrers," as they said, during the 19th Century. The earliest record of a man paid to kill these birds, is in the Vestry Book of 1845, when he was paid £2.10.0 a year. In 1855 this entry was made, "Sydney Oswin was proposed to take the Sparrows from this date to the 25th March next, for the sum of one pound, and to give one halfpenny for old ones and one Farthing for young ones, and the said Sydney Oswin to take the heads of such sparrows to Mr. Edward Smith every week and to receive the amount."

Mangle Houses

There were several places in Sileby where mangles were available for use at a charge of $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. Poor people who could not afford a mangle, had to wring out their washing by hand, a difficult task when sheets and blankets were involved. Those who could afford to pay three half-pence, or made a little money by taking in washing, took the wet clothes in a basket to the nearest mangle-house. Perhaps the largest mangle, with 6ft. rollers, was in the back of a thatched cottage on the corner of Barrow Road and King Street, where the Club now stands. Smaller mangles, with wooden rollers a yard wide, were to be found in two other thatched cottages, one in Brook Street, and the other at the Banks. Pressure was applied to the rollers by placing large blocks of granite on a tray above them. It needed a strong arm to lift enough stones to the tray to obtain a good squeeze.

Pawnbrokers

There was no licenced pawnbroker in Sileby, so the sign of the three golden balls was never seen in the village. The families who needed the service of a pawnbroker had to go to Leicester. On Monday mornings, a group of women could be seen at the railway station waiting for a train, holding their pathetic bundles, generally wrapped in a counterpane. Some bundles never seemed to be opened, week after week, the same contents were taken to Leicester on Monday, and on Saturday, redeemed and brought back to Sileby. That mysterious bundle supplied the narrow margin of a shilling or two, which carried them over to the next pay-day.

The Pawnbrokers' Act of 1872, laid down that a pawnbroker may not charge more than $\frac{1}{2}$ d. on every 2s. loan per calendar month. A pledge for a loan of 10s. or under, became the pawnbroker's absolute property if not redeemed within a year and seven days.

Mending Clothes

In the second issue of the new Parish Magazine, in February, 1875, it was announced that at the Mothers' Meeting, held in the National School on Tuesday evenings, arrangements were being made to help the mothers:

"Materials are supplied according to the wants of menders, for which they pay by instalments. Mothers are invited to bring children's clothing for mending, which they will be helped with patches and other materials gratis."

At a drapery shop in the High Street, resided old Mrs. Wise, who always wore an old fashioned lace cap, and her daughter, known by everyone as "Miss Lizzy." Whenever children were sent to the shop to buy mending wool, Mrs. Wise always spared the time to give them a short lesson on the art of mending. She would say, "keep the mend nice and flat. If you do it lumpy, you'll soon have another hole." She was an expert at mending.

The Clothing Club

The weekly income of many of the families in Sileby was so low that it was as much as they could do to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. In such circumstances, it was impossible to have money available to buy clothing when the necessity arose. By 1877, the Parish Church had formed a Clothing Club, with one hundred and fifty families paying a few coppers weekly. In January each year, the subscription Cards were issued by the Vicar in the Vestry. Just before Christmas, the cards showing the deposits and total, were returned to the families, who were then able to purchase clothing from shops in the village where a percentage was allowed off the price of goods obtained by the Card. More than twenty years later, in 1899, the Club was still flourishing, with the same number of subscribers. By that time, the smallest weekly deposit was 3d., and interest was added to the total at the end of the year. The Clothing Club was a great blessing to the poor in the village.

Cheap Food

Meat became a luxury in poor houses. One method of buying cheap meat was to wait at the Leicester market late on Saturday night until the butcher's stalls were ready to close, and to purchase unsold meat, which would not keep over the weekend. This meat was sold "four pounds a bob and a nob," and rolled up in a newspaper. The purchaser then had the problem of getting home - it was a long walk all the way to Sileby.

In the village, women went to the butcher to ask for "Thray pennuth o' liver, a pennuth o' fat and some bones." This was often the meat ration for a family for a week. The bones were boiled until they were bleached. To add to this diet, a ring of black-pudding, a sausage made of pig's blood, suet and cereal, could be bought for a penny, from a cottage near the Horse and Trumpet Inn.

The cheapest filling meal was called "Suety Isaac," a plain suet pudding made with flour and a pennyworth of suet. It was made more attractive by stuffing the centre with boiled onions.

The Poor

Someone once said, "Poverty is no disgrace, -but that is all that can be said for it." There was plenty of poverty in the village during these Hart Times. The plight of some families is shown in the pages of the school Log Book, in references to the School Pence, the payment of 2d. per child for education. The schoolmaster wrote:
1879. April "I have difficulty in getting the Pence. The excuse for non-payment is bad trade."
1879. November. "Several parents came this week to say they could not pay the School Pence owing to depression in trade."
"Araars in 1879, £5.2.6. Twenty-seven children left the school owing £2.15.5."

There was a saying, "The poor help the poor," and this was true in Sileby. People would help in time of trouble and illness with a handful of potatoes, an egg, or a cup of flour,

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Future Editions of "BYGONE SILEBY"

Number 4 to be issued in November, has a blue cover, and is
entitled "TALES OF OLD SILEBY CRICKET". It is not written for
experts or sports enthusiasts - it has a collection of
interesting and amusing tales of the game since it began locally
in the 1700's. Even those who have never seen a cricket match
would understand this booklet.

Number 5, to be issued in December, will be a SPECIAL CHRISTMAS
NUMBER. It will have stories about Christmas in Bygone Sileby.
There will be some of the old party games, and "Fireside Tales"
they used to tell. As it was the season for "Ghost Stories",
there will be one or two of these. Christmas, as a Religious
and Family Festival will, we trust, make interesting reading.

Although the early editions of "Bygone Sileby" have dealt with
the Victorian period, it must be remembered that the history of
Sileby goes back a THOUSAND YEARS. Some of the booklets will
cover that period.

Enquiries for advertisements on this page should be made to the
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