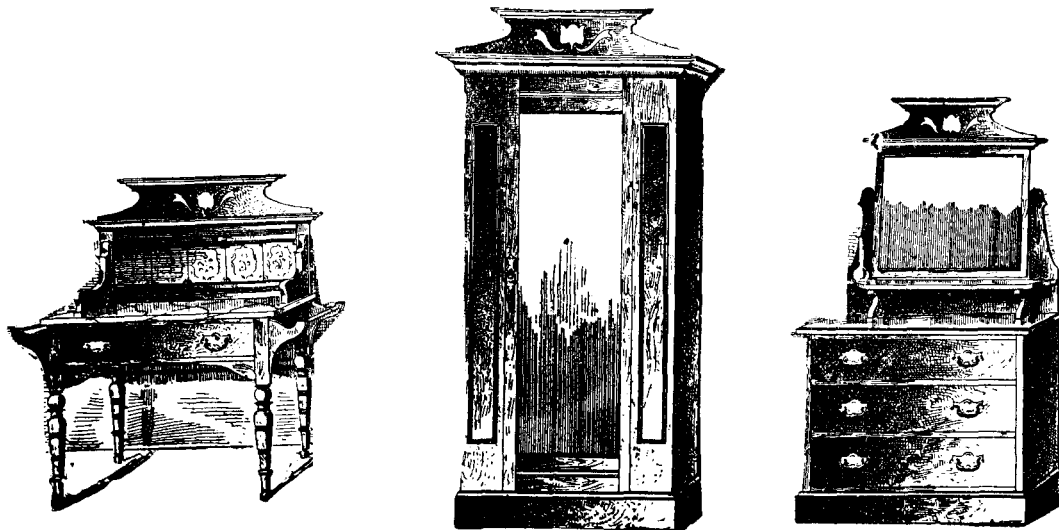


BYGONE SILEBY

HOW



LET

A SERIES OF BOOKLETS CONTAINING
HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT THE VILLAGE

No. 8.

A man who wrote to a local newspaper in 1932, declared that when he was a boy in the 1880's, "Sileby was only a poor labouring village." In this brief study of homelife several generations ago, it is essential to look into the living conditions of the average working class family, where the husband and father struggled desperately to make a living by long hours of physical labour and deplorably small wages.

RENT AND COTTAGES

The first demand on the family income was the rent. Sometimes, other things had to be sacrificed so that the regular payment could be made. It was paid weekly, on Friday night or Saturday morning, after wages had been received. Collection was made by the landlord, or his agent. The "rentman" was easily recognised, as he carried a ledger under his arm, and a steel-nibbed pen behind an ear. Ink was carried in a small bottle in the waistcoat pocket.

If a family were in arrears with their rent, it was the custom to pay off the debt by adding an extra amount to the weekly sum. After an illness, when the rent could not be paid, it would take weeks or even months to recover. Sometimes, a family in arrears would move out of the house secretly, without giving the landlord due notice, which was known as "doing a midnight flit." On those occasions when the landlord turned to the law to recover his unpaid rent, a bailiff was sent to seize furniture to be sold in settlement of the amount owing. Word would go round the village, "Ayer eerd, Owd Tommy's got the bum-beelifs in!"

The rent of a four-roomed cottage in good condition, was usually 4 shillings a week. One family who paid 4s.3d. a week, decided to move when the daughters had reached the age to leave school. They chose a newer house where the rent was 4s.9d. a week, the mother observing, "way should afford it now the gels ar wukin."

Houses with a low rent invariably had a problem - leaking roofs, dampness, or pests. At a time when wages were small, every penny had to be considered. One young couple with a small child who had financial difficulties learned that an old house in the village was vacant, and the rent was only 2s. a week. As it was far less than they were paying, they quickly moved to the cheaper cottage. The first night, before going to bed, the baby's milk bottle was placed in the oven to keep it warm for a late-night feed. When the husband came down, candle in hand to get the bottle, he found that the floor was a seething mass of cockroaches. As he dared not put his "stockinged-feet" on the floor, he made stepping-stones of a couple of chairs to reach the oven. The next day they gave notice to quit, but during the remainder of the week, as they sat huddled together by the fire with a candle on the table, the cockroaches circled round them like a silent army. It was a frightening experience the young couple never forgot. It is worth noting that there were cottages in the village where the rent was only 1s.9d., but it probably required nerves of steel to live in them!

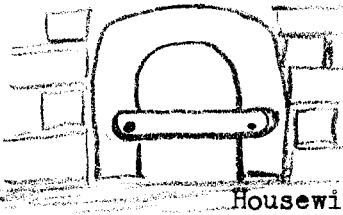


A COTTAGE A CASTLE

It was said that every Englishman's home is his castle, and this was true in Sileby. Once rent was paid, the property whether large or small, became "ar 'ouse," and was jealously guarded by the householder and his family. Whatever land there was before and behind the house was called "ar part," and that which belonged to the neighbours, "theer part." Woe betide any who dared to transgress the code of possession. Trespassing, or interfering with "ar part," began more rows and family feuds than any other matter in the course of daily life.

THE CAUSEY

The footpath outside the house was known as "the causey." This was not a slang expression, as causey is the original and correct spelling for a pathway which is raised above the level of the ground. In Sileby these were generally made of square granite setts, with granite curb-stones. Some smaller streets had egg-shaped stones set close together, known as "petrified kidneys." A footpath of this type is still to be seen in the lane from Barrow Road to the High Bridge.



Housewives washed the causey using a hard bristled causey-brush. If neighbours were not friendly, the washing down of this area could result in a noisy quarrel. If the water happened to spread over a portion of the causey which belonged to the house next door, the neighbour's wife would stand hands on hips at the top of the entry to inspect the intrusion, and state sternly, "Ay, doont yo goo wettin ar part !"

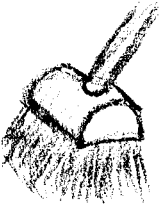
The causey did not remain clean for long. The lanes in the village were little more than dusty rutted cart-tracks in the summer, and a sea of mud in the winter. The oldest inhabitants in Sileby today can still remember when grass grew in the middle of the road to Seagrave.

By the side of every front door was a boot-scraper to remove the mud from footwear after walking about in the village. Children grew up with the question, "Ayer scraped yer boots ?"

Cantankerous old people who resented neighbour's children playing in front of the house, either quarrelled with the parents, or made threatening gestures to the little ones through the front-room window.

In times of sickness, it was a common practice to spread chaff or straw over the causey, to prevent the clatter of hob-nailed boots outside the sickroom.

Rows between a husband and his wife were regarded as private, and no one would dare to interfere - if they did, husband and wife joined forces to attack the encroacher. In cases where it was known that a husband was treating his wife badly, nothing would be said by the neighbours, but one morning the husband would find that the house had been "strawed" during the night. On the causey would be a great quantity of staw or chaff. It was a message of disapproval from those who lived nearby.



Floods

Sileby had enough water, and in a rainy season, more than enough, for then the brook would over flow and flood the meadows.

Heavy and continuous rain in July, 1875, and especially on Tuesday 20th, brought a great flood. In the church magazine for August, 1875, the Vicar, the Rev. Augustus Shears, wrote, "...the water rose 10 feet above the level of the culvert in Brook Street...the floods extended 30 yards along Cossington Lane, having a depth of 2 feet." At the Parish Church there was a special Service of Thanksgiving " for a change in the weather," on Sunday, 25th July.

Houses in Brook Street were the first to suffer during a flood. Sometimes the brook would overflow during the night, and a family would find the floors of the lower rooms under a foot of water. Men who rose early to go to work, groped their way down stairs in the dark, and found themselves up to the knees in very cold water. In the flood of 1912, a dog was drowned when water poured into a living-room during the night.

Wells

A former well-digger said that water could be found almost anywhere under Sileby, from one foot to fifteen feet below the surface. There used to be wells all over the village, and if they were not guarded properly, were a danger to life. The church magazine for December, 1876, records an example : " On Thursday, November 2nd, Emma Riddles was walking near a well behind her father's house in High Street, when she turned back, apparently to look for a playmate. She tripped up in some way and fell down the well, 38 feet deep, with 9 feet of water in it." The child was rescued by a man using a ladder. When she was brought up, she seemed " almost dead, but with attention revived." The well was later sealed, and a pump used in its place.

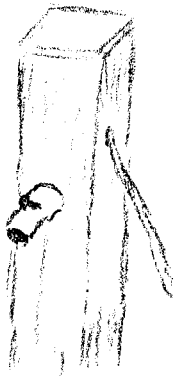
In most parts of the village, a group of houses would use the same well. In times of drought, when the demand for water exceeded the capacity of the well, householders had to beg or buy water from other places in the village. There was a good deep well at the rear of the Primitive Methodist Chapel in King Street. In times of shortage, water was sold there at a farthing a bucket. A long pole like a shepherd's crook was used to fill the bucket. The income from the sale of water was given to the Chapel funds.

Pumps

Many houses in Sileby obtained their water from pumps. Several houses had to share a common pump, which was usually in a yard. One lady recalls that the pump used by her family was located in the middle of a dark entry, some 30 yards from their house. Pump spouts were designed so that a bucket could hang from them when being filled.

Soft Water

Some people collected soft water in large wooden barrels which stood in the yard, or even on the causey in front of the house. Someone remembers one outside a cottage in Mountsorrel Lane, in which a cow got its head stuck !



In the House

The ordinary four-roomed cottage had no kitchen, sink or drain. After meals, pots and pans were washed in a bowl placed on the living-room table, and allowed to drain on an old tray. The washing-up-water was then carried to a drain in the yard, or taken up the entry in a bucket, and poured into the street gutter. During summer months, a grease-trap made with straw, was employed to conserve water for use on the garden.

Personal Use

As water had to be drawn or pumped, then carried, it was never wasted. The whole family would wash themselves in the same bowl of water on the living-room table. A question heard every day in the home was, "duz anybody else want a wesh in this wetter afore ah chuck it out?"

On those occasions when a saucepan had been dipped into the soft-water barrel for this purpose, it is said that there would be "an inch o' wetter, and a foot o' lather in the bowl."

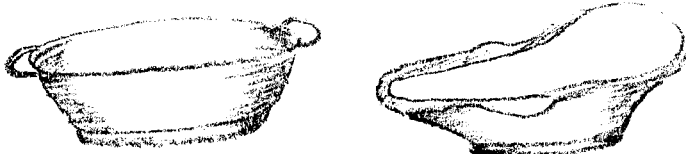
Baths

The complete submersion of the adult body in water - apart from a swim in the river, or the "Commonisher" - was a rare thing. One villager recalls, "my father never said, "al ev a bath." He used to say, "am jus gooin t'ev a swill," or "a good wesh."

Most adults did not bathe the body "all in one go." The various parts of the anatomy would receive an application of soap and water "every now and then."

One man tells how his grandfather suffered the indignity of having a bath somewhere, either at a hospital or an institution, and later, the old man reflecting on the experience, declared "it dint seem to do mi much 'arm."

Most houses had an oval galvanized iron bath for the children. It was



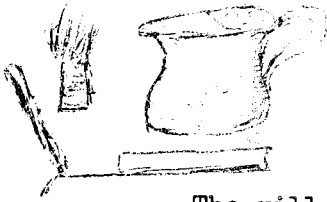
usually suspended from a nail outside the back door, or kept in a hut, "at the top o' the gardin pad." It was brought into the living-room and placed in front of the fire. Children sat in it with their knees touching their ears. Someone remembers that his mother used to bath him in the wooden dolly-tub.

Visitors

Few working class families ever had visitors who came to stay, except when there was a wedding or a funeral. When they did arrive, they were given the better bedroom, and were expected to wash themselves in the bedroom, using a wash-basin and jug. In some houses these utensils stood on a marble-topped wash-stand, known locally as a "wash-hand-stand." Poorer families

borrowed a jug and basin from a neighbour. In a soap-dish was a piece an inch thick, cut with a knife from a 3d. bar of "best soap." A boy was once sent to a grocer's shop in the village, and said to the shopkeeper, "mi Mam sez, con shay ev the money back on this bar o' soap, cuz ar viziters dint cum?"

A male visitor would be provided with a shaving mug filled with hot water, and a small piece of the same "best soap," in the receptacle at the top of the mug. He would also be lent a strop to sharpen his hollow-ground razor, known as a "cut-throat."



THE GARDEN

The villagers were keen gardeners, not only from a love of the soil which some of their ancestors had farmed for centuries, but from the real necessity of providing food for the family. Gardening was taken seriously, and the plot behind the house was used for growing potatoes and vegetables, though a portion of the land was reserved for the luxury of growing a few flowers. When potatoes were due for lifting, the whole family joined in, as the Schoolmaster's Log Book shows. Children did other gardening too :

1872. 29th September. "Commenced School after Holiday. Attendance not quite so good. Many of the older children being kept at home picking up and sorting potatoes."

1873. 8th May. "Many of the bigger boys are away assisting their parents in gardening operations."

1875. 25th March. "Attendance this week not quite so good, many of the elder boys being away assisting their parents in the gardens."

A number of lectures in the National School were given on the subject of gardening in the 1890's.

Garden boundaries were zealously guarded. Damage to pailings dividing the plots, or dogs "scratin" among seedlings and especially children running across a garden after a ball, could start a bitter quarrel between neighbours, with someone shouting, "Yo kape ter yer own part, and mek yor kids kape off arn !"

Without a garden, some of the poor large families would been in a most desperate plight.

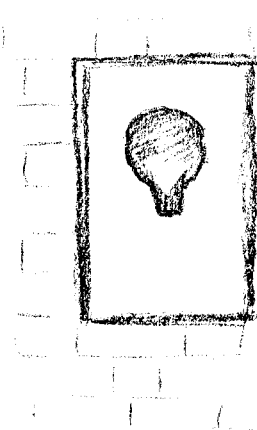
THE BACK-YARD

The area at the rear of the house was known as the "back-yard," and was usually shared by several houses. Larger and more modern properties had their own back-yard. The surface was granite setts, or in some places, smooth blue bricks. As the yard was washed frequently, there was a good deal of "Mop and trowlin."

Mops and Trolling

Mops were made of several layers of old cloth fastened to the bottom of a stout stick, or a stave, by a large-headed nail. Mr. Marlow the blacksmith made and sold special "mop-nails."

To avoid the labour of wringing water from the head of the mop, it was the custom to troll it, that is, spinning the handle along the left forearm, by twisting the end with the right hand. The main problem with "trollin," was the spray thrown out by the spinning mop-head, and as a result of this, "yowd get sumbody's mopped-up tea leaves all uver yer cowlus latch."



In larger yards at that time, for example, at the Fountain Inn, there was a "troll-hole" in a wall. This was a metal plate covering a cavity in the wall, through which the mop-head could be thrust then trolled. The water thrown off, ran down inside the cavity to an outlet pipe.

In a yard in Brook Street, almost opposite Dudley's bridge, there is a rare "bull's-eye" type of troll-hole built into a wall at the time it was erected.

When the women were washing a yard, they wore a type of clog with a wooden sole, known as "patins." These were pattens, which had an iron ring attached to the sole, to raise them from the wet. They were cheap to buy, but uncomfortable to wear.

Closets

In a yard where there were six cottages, there were usually two closets. The majority of closets at this time contained a pan, which was replaced each week, though some houses on the farms had the old "deep hole in the earth" kind. Those who were employed in the necessary by unpleasant labour of removing pans from the closets, worked at night, carrying lanterns - hence they were known as "Midnight Mechanics" and "Night-Soilers."

As children were in bed when these operations took place, it seemed rather mysterious - the sound of a horse and cart at night, the clatter of empty pans, the sound of men's voices in the silent street, and the glow of their lantern on the bedroom ceiling. Children were told by their parents, "Cum on, its time yo wor in bed, the nine o'clock oss is cummin!"

Once, when the operatives were short handed, a man who lived in Mountsorrel Lane was asked to go "pannin" one night. He said the work went well, until in one street, his partner "tipped the pan ter much 'is way," as they lifted it up on to the cart. It was work for men with good muscles and strong stomachs.

A story is still told of the "Midnight Mechanics" in the village of Woodhouse. There was an accident one night, when the cart -wheels mounted the grass verge, leaving the cart at such an angle that all the pans slid off, and rolled down the hill distributing the contents far and wide. After that, it was always known as "Treacle Hill."

7

The Coal-house

Every dwelling had its own "cowl-us" in the back yard, secured with a padlock. There were many grade and prices of household coal. In 1890, the advertised Leicester prices per ton, were:

Langton Picked Soft	17s. 3d.	Langton Picked Hard	16s. 9d.
Main Brights	16s. 3d.	Best Silkstone	16s. 3d.
Langton Soft	16s. 3d.	Langton Hard	16s. 3d.
Deep Hard	15s. 9d.	Cobbles	14s. 3d.


There was one shilling per ton discount for cash on delivery.

In Sileby, dealers sold a cheaper Derbyshire coal at 11s. 6d. per ton, which was brought to the village by rail. Israel Lovett, a principal coal dealer in Sileby, owned three coal waggons, which were shunted into the local sidings for unloading. The coal was delivered by horse and cart, at 8d. per hundredweight bag. Mr. Lovett had two or three shallow coal-barrows for the use of customers who collected their own supplies. Some can still remember him calling to the customers as they left, reminding them to return the barrow.

Poorer villagers who could not afford to buy much coal, were to be seen wandering along the railway lines and the banks, picking up pieces which had fallen from passing trains.

In 1910, coke sold in the village at 1s. a bag, or 11s. a ton.

The Wash-house



Some yards had two wash-houses shared by six families. Each house had its own day for washing, and the rules governing the use of those houses had to be strictly observed, or there was strife among the housewives. A woman with a large family would have a struggle to complete her washing on her allotted day, nevertheless, she had to be out of the wash-house when that day ended. Someone can remember a tug o' war between two women with a bath full of soapy water when one had not finished her washing, and the other was ready to begin, and was "gittin all wuked up about it." Both women ended the contest wet through.

A brick coal-fired boiler was used to heat the water, and large wooden dolly-tubs employed to wash the clothes, with the assistance of a three-legged dolly-peg. Clothes were then scrubbed in an oval bath standing on an old wooden chair from which the back had been removed. Pink carbolic soap was favoured on washday. Some women even added sheep-dip to ensure that the clothes were washed properly.

Mangling

Women who were poor had to wring out their washing by hand. It was very hard work when there were thick woollen garments, and sheets. Those better off possessed their own mangle, built massively of iron, with heavy wooden rollers, bought from a shop in High Street. One poor Sileby woman undertook dress-making at home, carefully saving the coppers she earned, until she had the £2 necessary to buy a mangle.



COSSINGTON ROAD, SURREY

8

There were a number of houses in the village which hired mangles. Women who could afford the $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. fee, took their washing to the mangle in baskets. These hireable mangles were in houses on Barrow Road, Brook Street and the Banks. There were also one or two women who owned a mangle, who were willing to mangle clothes delivered to them. Sometimes in a front-room window was a piece of paper with the words "Mangling done," scrawled in pencil.

The Day School records show that children were frequently absent on a wash day, helping with the washing and mangling. The reports of the "School Board Man" show that the absentees were always from large families.

Ironing

Ironing was done on the living-room table. The old flatiron had to be heated by the fire. A metal device for this purpose was attached to the fire-bars, to enable the iron to stand on its base with the flat surface to the coals. As an iron soon became cool, the ideal arrangement was to have two, one being used, and the other being heated. As it was not possible to control the heat, the flatiron had to be tested before it was used, by trying it on a piece of newspaper, or more commonly, by spitting on it.

Airing Clothes

After ironing, clothes were aired by the fire on a clothes-horse, or in Sibley a "close-oss." It was perhaps more usual in this village to place the clothes along the fire-guard. Inside the fireplace, just under the mantel-piece, there was a rack made from iron rods on which clothing could be placed.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

The Living-room

The back room of a "two up and two down" cottage was the living-room, but was always called "the house." Here the family lived, cooked, ate their meals and washed themselves.

There was no unnecessary furniture in the room, because a large family occupied much of the space. Someone has described "the house" in their home: "In the centre was a scrubbed-top table, which on special occasions was covered with a green cloth. There were several wooden chairs; father had one with a high back, and curved arms, and mother's chair had the legs cut short to assist her when nursing the babies, and was called "the low chair." We also had a small side-table." This seems to have been a typical living-room, as one woman observed, "theer wornt room fer owt else when way wor all in it." On one was was a frame with a verse printed in silver letters on black paper:

" A Sabbath well spent, brings a week of content
And peace with the gains of the morrow.
But a Sabbath prfaned, what else may be gained,
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow."

9

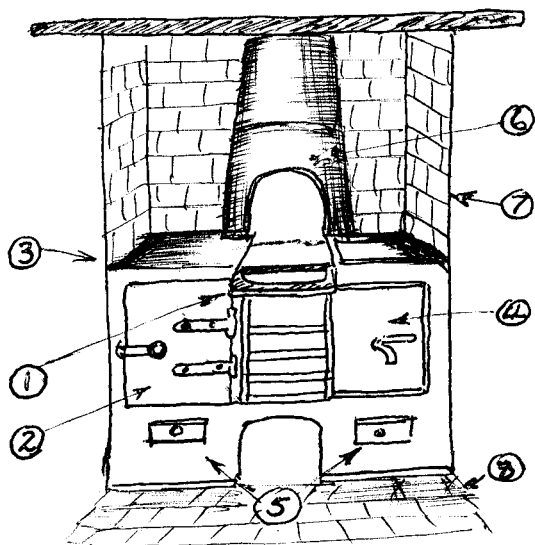
These were hard times for the poor. On Friday night, mother in her "clane epon" worked out her weekly budget. A candle stood on the bare table, its light shining upon the total financial resources of her family - a few silver and copper coins which could be held in one hand. These were spread out, counted and counted again. One person remembers her poor mother sitting at the table writing down the groceries needed for the week following, and after working out the cost, crossing off a single box of matches she had put on her list.

Someone else remembers a neighbour knocking on the backdoor, and asking, "Mrs. - , could yer lend mi two shillin?" and her mother replying sadly, "mi gel, arv got none miself...."

The Fireplace

Victorian home life seemed to be centred on the black iron fireplace, in which a fire burned summer and winter. It warmed "the house," cooked the food, heated water and aired the clothes.

When cooking, saucepans were placed on the grate (1) and tins or earthenware utensils in the oven (2). Food was placed on the hob (3) to keep warm. When cooking in the oven, the poker was used to move the coals to the left side, so that maximum heat might be obtained. This was effective for stewing and roasting, but as there was not an even distribution of heat, it was difficult to cook pastries in quantity. In Sileby they used to say that mince pies which were furthest away from the fire came out of the oven "white-faced." Rice puddings would boil over, and salt was then sprinkled on the bottom of the oven to clean it.



On the right side of the fire was the boiler (4), which was filled with water from a bucket, or a large jug, after raising the lid. The hot water was drawn off by a polished brass tap. Few houses used the boiler for this purpose, because the interior became rusty, and red-brown water which came out of the tap was not fit for household use. The boiler was generally used for drying sticks to light the fire, but when the fire was burning well, the boiler became so hot, the sticks began to smoulder, and filled the house with smoke and fumes.

Under both the oven and the boiler were spaces for hot ashes to increase the heat, and when the fireplace was being cleaned, the cold ashes were raked out by removing the two plates (5). To control the smoke, there was a metal dust-preventer (6) between the grate and the chimney, which could be adjusted backwards and forwards.

10

Black-lead

The ironwork of the fireplace was polished with pumbago, a form of graphite, commonly known as black-lead. A nob of black-lead could be bought for $\frac{1}{2}$ d. from a grocer or ironmonger. It was crushed, then mixed with water or some other fluid, until a thin black paste was obtained. This was then applied to the fireplace with a brush.

It dried almost immediately, leaving the surface dull, but when polished vigourously with a special curved



brush, the ironwork shone like a black mirrow. Friday was "black-leadin'day." Many houses had a steel fender which was rubbed regularly every week with emery-paper to give it a gleaming finish.

Pitch

The bricks at the back of the fireplace (7) were painted with pitch obtained from the Sileby Gas House. Most people gave the bricks a polished appearance by the use of black-lead.

Red Roddle

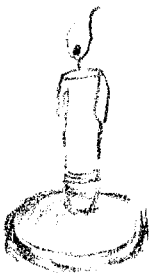
The bricks of the hearth (8) were scrubbed, then painted with red roddle. The idea probably originated at the brickyard, as this substance was used there for staining bricks during their manufacture. It was also employed for marking sheep. Roddle could be purchased from an ironmonger by the piece, and looked like a lump of rough red chalk. After crushing, it was mixed in a bucket by hand, until, up to the elbow, "yo wor all uver roddle." The hearth was painted with the red fluid, which dried giving a clean but dull powdery surface to the bricks. Red roddle was used also to paint door steps and window sills.

Gall

The red brick floor of "the house" was washed with water into which gall, bought from the butcher, had been added. They said that "Gall fetched the floors up beautiful." After washing, red roddle powder was scattered over the floor and polished in with a mop. The red floor with a newly black-leaded fireplace was a fine sight.

Lighting

Before 1900, most of the smaller houses in the village were not supplied with gas. The "house" was illuminated at night by a candle, or an oil lamp. Although candles were cheap at 3d. per dozen, some of the poor villagers made their own from sting and mutton fat. "Muttin canduls" were not very satisfactory, as they spluttered, and burnt quickly and unevenly. Many houses had two lamps. The best one had a polished reflector. In Sileby, it was the practice to drop a moth ball into the oil to make the lamp burn brighter.



Spring Cleaning

Believing that "cleanliness was next to godliness," one of the annual household rituals was "Spring claynin an dooin." Women set to work with a will, and soon "wornt arf gooin the rig," with all the furniture moved out into the back yard to be cleaned and polished. The whole cottage was scrubbed from top to bottom, nothing was missed. Standing on the table or a chair, mother would exclaim, "it's time this 'ere top shelf wor done, it's as black as yer 'at!"

For rough work, women wore home-made aprons of a jute or hemp material, called hessian, but known in Sileby as "herden," as it had been since the 16th Century. Women said, "al get mi a bit uv 'erdenin from Wise's to mek a coarse epon." A sack bag was called "an erden bag" in this village.

If during this period of domestic chaos a visitor was seen approaching, mother would cry out, "jus look who's cummin- an wiv got the 'ouse lookin like Lunnon!" (London).

When some member of the family expressed criticism about the cleanliness of some corner, there was a standard reply in Sileby - "a blind man on a gallopin oss woont see that !" In other words, "do not be fussy over unimportant details."

The Front Room

This part of the dwelling was used only occasionally. Villagers always liked to have something in reserve, and distinguished between "working things," and "best things." This applied to "working clothes," and "best clothes;" "working boots," and "best boots;" "ordinary pots," and "the best pots;" "the house," and "the front room."

The room was set aside for festive occasions, especially Christmas, Easter, the Wakes, weddings and baptisms. Relatives gathered sorrowfully round the coffin in that room when there was a death in the family. When visitors came, they were entertained in the front room. The only exception to this rule was on a wet washday, when the "house" was festooned with damp clothing, and the family had to take refuge in the better room.

A typical front room had a small black iron fireplace, with a cupboard on one side, and a shelf on the other. In the middle of the room was a deal table covered with a table-cloth, and the best oil-lamp standing on it. One lady, describing the home of her childhood, said, "Mi Dad's grandfather clock and best woodin cheer wor in theer, which 'im an' Uncle Sam carried from Segruf or sumweer. As thi got to Sileby, somebody shouted out, "ay, eent yo gorra watch?""

The room might contain an old couch donated by some other villager, "yo con ev it fer nowt, ef yer'll cum an gerrit." Poorer people were proud to possess a couch covered with woven black horse-hair, even if the stuffing was bursting out in places. A well worn couch could be uncomfortable, because the stiff projecting horse-hairs pricked the skin through thin clothing.

The bare floor-boards were covered here and there with home-made pegged rugs.



Bedrooms

The upper rooms were even more sparsely furnished, containing a bed and a chest of drawers.

The bedstead, painted yellow, with a wood-grain, and "a knob on each corner," was bought from a second-hand shop, or inherited from some poor deceased relative. Many people slept on a straw palliasse, "as hard as a board," and often the residing place of troublesome parasites which had prodigious leaping powers. An aged villager said, "When thi burnt thi owd straw bed, yo ed to stand clear, or yowd bi covered wi flays." Another recalled, "way uster tek ar dug ter bed wi us ter kip us warm. Ay wor full o' flays, but as way ed as many as ay ed, it dint marra."

There was no wardrobe. Clothes hung from nails at the back of the door. Best hats were kept in a tin box under the bed.

One family, "weer the gels wor wukin" and a little money was available, tried to persuade their father to have some "lino" on his bedroom floor, but he preferred the bare boards, stating that "lino" was "cows t'the fate."

Furniture Prices

New bedroom furniture in 1890, as illustrated on the cover of this issue, cost £6.5.0. Beds were sold separately. A full sized bedstead cost 10s.6d., and a wool bed to fit, was also 10s.6d. A new straw palliasse was priced at 9s.6d. in Leicester. A kitchen table cost 7s.6d., cane chairs 2s.6d. each, and Windsor chairs, 2s.9d. When these prices are compared with a weekly wage of 15s., it is seen that furniture was dear from the view of the labouring man, and he had to put his home together the best way he could. Some people never had a piece of new furniture as long as they lived.

Visitors

In those days, a journey away from home was exceptional, and visitors from "out of town" came only "once in a blue moon." Some people made but one journey from another town or village in their life time, and then only to be present at some important family event.

When working class visitors arrived for the day, it was the custom to bring their own food with them, so their presence would not put a strain on the supplies of the host - they were usually as poor as each other. It was by no means unknown for visitors to bring their own cups, knives, forks and spoons, because the family at home had only enough of these items to meet their own daily use. If these articles were not brought, and the hosts did not have reserves, then the children were sent out to borrow from neighbours, or they had meals in two sittings, when the cutlery became available.

Those better off, had crockery put away in the front room for such an event, and "alus ed their nice pots out when cumpny cum." Glass milk jugs, sugar-bowls and salt-cellars were highly regarded.

Visitors and strangers were so uncommon in everyday village life, that there was much interest in omens about their arrival. If soot adhering to one of the fire-bars began a flapping motion, someone would say, "Look yer, their's a stranger on the bar," and the family would set to wondering who might be coming.

Other signs that a stranger would come to the house:

A cock crowing during the day.

The cat washing itself in the evening.

A bee in the house.

To drop a knife on the ground, indicated a male visitor.

To drop a spoon on the ground, meant that the stranger would be a child.

A bright spark on a candle wick.

The Good Old Days ?

Despite the hardships and privations, older people in the village look back on these times with some affection. It was a time when the family was a close knit unit. Unless one of the denominations in the village was providing some entertainment, there was no where to go - except to one of the ten public houses. Many families worked together at night, seaming gloves and stockings, or sat gossiping round the fire; there were few secrets in the village.

Perhaps memory erases the heartaches and anxieties of bygone years, and retains only the happy and homely things that took place. Memories of the past are easy to play with, because they can no longer bite us. Many believe that families were happier then, even without the attractions of television, radio, record players, glossy magazines, cinemas and annual holidays by the seaside or abroad. If some of the old framework-knitters and farm labourers who passed from this life in the 1890's could return to spend a day in the Sibley of 1970, they would imagine they were on another planet!

The Cost Of Living in 1890

Butter	1s.4d. per lb.	Beef	6d.- 9d. per lb.	Eggs	10 for 1s.
Mutton	6d-10d. "	Pork	6 ¹ / ₂ d. "	Hares	5s. each.
Rabbits	2s.-2s.10d. a couple.	Fowls and Ducks	5s.6d. a couple.		
Pheasants	6s. a brace.	Geese	8d.-9d. per lb.	Turkeys	9d.- 1s. per lb.
Pigeons	6d.-7d. each.	Potatoes	45s. - 52s.6d. per ton.	Hay	40s.-70s. ton.
1 doz. boxes of matches	1 ¹ / ₂ d.	6 pairs of mohair bootlaces	1 ¹ / ₂ d.		
Diamond Pale Soap	3d. per lb.	Sugar	2lbs for 3 ¹ / ₂ d.		
Best beer	2 ¹ / ₂ d a pint.	Pure Malt Pot Still Scotch Whisky,	45s. per dozen bottles.		
Whisky,	21s.6d. per gallon.	Brandy,	28s. per gallon.	Port Wine,	2s.6d. pint.
Sherry,	2s.6d. per pint.	Stout	20s. per barrel.		

The above are Leicester prices. In the village some items of food from the farms were much cheaper. Eggs could be bought for as little as 24 for 1s.

Later booklets in this series will deal with the homelife of the stockingers who lived with a frame in the front room, and that of the middle class villagers who employed local girls as servants.

ADVERTISEMENTS

HIGHGATE TAXIS

YOUR LOCAL TAXI SERVICE - ANY DISTANCE
ANY WHERE
ANY TIME

WE OFFER A 24 HOUR SERVICE.

How can you get a TAXI ? - RING SILEBY 2015
or, you can book your TAXI at the "Modern Maid" Baby Wear and Wool Shop,
at 28 King Street. Telephone Sileby 2962.

Please remember the name -- "HIGHGATE TAXIS."

Proprietor: Mr. H.J. Taylor.

* * * * *

GOOD QUALITY PAINTING
AND DECORATING

For High-Glass interior or exterior work

BY

JOHN SKORIK

Telephone: SILEBY 2057

Free Estimates
Reasonable Prices

* * * * *

BYGONE SILEBY

The next booklet, Number 9, is about Sileby in "Norman Times," and continues the story of how the village developed after the Doomsday Book was written. The cover has on it a photograph of High Street in 1910. Number 10 is on the subject of "The Wakes," and should revive some memories of the past.