

NEWSLETTER

Number 74

Snow - In August ???

Part of an oral history recorded from Mrs Sally Lilley,
The Beeches, Top Street, Appleby Magna.

Some of the most vivid chapters of local history survive not in official records, but in the memories passed down through families and communities. One such account, recalled by Mrs Sally Lilley, takes us back to the quiet, close-knit world of Breedon on the Hill and the surrounding villages in the years immediately before the First World War. It was a world that moved at a pace almost unrecognisable today, where survival often meant versatility, hard work and reliance upon one's neighbours.

In those days it was common for people to combine several different occupations simply to earn a steady living. A prime example was Mr Bowley, landlord of the Moore Arms – the public house we know today as the Appleby Inn. Local tradition says that Bowley's Lane was named after one of his ancestors, and he himself was a man of many trades: alongside pulling pints and welcoming travellers, he worked as a skilled carpenter and also as the village undertaker, crafts which naturally went hand-in-hand when coffins were made to order. Like many around him, he also ran a small farm. Trade was almost entirely local; customers were nearly all villagers, and only occasionally would someone travel from further afield, arriving by pony and trap or tying up a horse at the back door. The great social highlight of the year came when the hunt met in the inn courtyard, the huntsmen's scarlet coats glowing brightly against the mellow stone and grey winter skies. This way of life altered very little for decades; real, lasting change arrived only slowly after the Second World War, as private car

ownership shifted from a rare luxury to something most families could enjoy.

It was against this background that Mr Bowley was called upon to arrange a funeral on an exceptionally bitter January day. Having crafted the coffin himself, he took charge of the procession, which began at the Queen's Head in Ashby-de-la-Zouch – an inn that still welcomes guests to this day. The final resting place was to be Breedon churchyard, some four miles distant. On a modern map that seems a short journey, but at that time roads were unmade, deeply rutted and uneven, and heavy snow and thick ice made every yard an effort.



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Worst of all was the final climb. Breedon's church stands high on a steep, wooded mound, once the site of an Iron Age hillfort and a medieval priory, approached only by a narrow, twisting lane so sharply graded that even careful modern drivers approach it with respect. For horses and heavy carriages on frozen ground it was all but impossible. In the end, mourners, bearers and officials alike climbed down and put their shoulders to the wheels, pushing together while others held the coffin firmly in place to stop it sliding backwards off the hearse. The horses were pulled, encouraged

and coaxed every inch of the way, until at last the little party reached the windswept summit – a place beautiful with wild flowers in summer, but bleak and freezing that day.

The service was held, the burial completed, and duty honoured.

It is a small story, but a telling one. It reminds us of the physical hardships once accepted as part of everyday life, and of the quiet determination to see things through properly which, as Mrs Lilley remarked, undoubtedly helped to "toughen the character" of earlier generations.

The Appleby Blacksmith

Alan Roberts investigated ...

The 1732 inventory of blacksmith Edward Cuthbert offers a vivid window into life and work in Little Appleby nearly 300 years ago. Edward, also known as Cutboard, settled in Appleby after the Restoration, joining a small group of smiths including the Mathews family, prominent local horse traders; it is possible all shared the same workshop at one time.

Edward and his wife Sarah baptised several children in the parish, though sadly three sons named after their father died in infancy or early childhood. By 1732 Edward was almost certainly a widower, his grown-up children having left home.

His inventory records a comfortable two-storey house with an attached workshop, fully equipped for shoeing horses, mending carts, ploughs and farm tools, and supplying all kinds of ironwork. It is not known if any part of the premises survives, but the exact site may yet be traced through census records.



Drawn up on 1 May 1732, this handwritten list of “goods and chattels” is far more than a dry legal document. It itemises every hammer, anvil, vice and bellows, letting us reconstruct exactly how a village smith plied his vital trade.

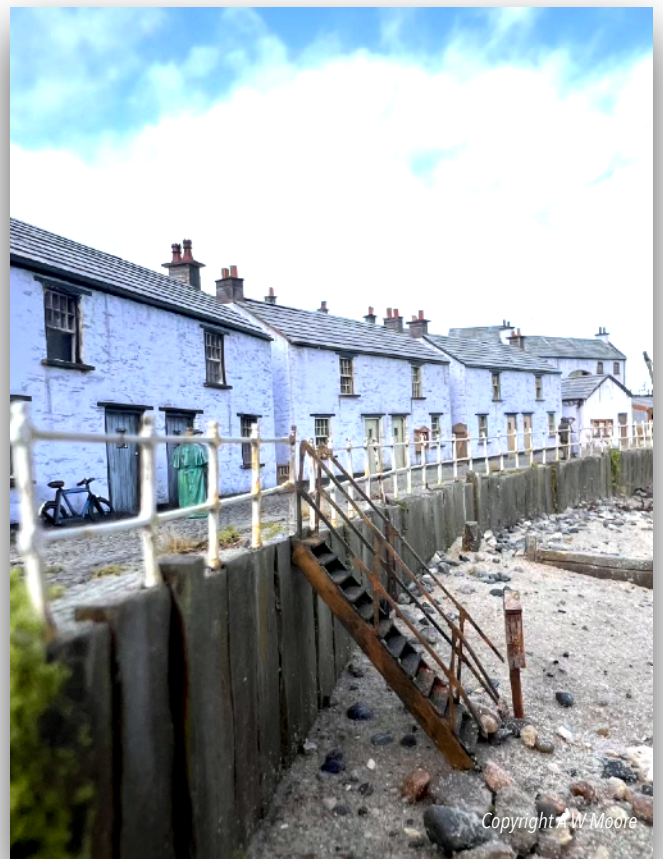
For local historians, it is a precious link to a time when the blacksmith stood at the very heart of rural community and economy.

The first summer Bank Holiday 1871

Our late-August began life in the Bank Holidays Act 1871, steered through Parliament by reformer Sir John Lubbock. It created four statutory public holidays, including the first Monday in August — soon nicknamed “St Lubbock’s Day” by grateful workers. Before this, only Sundays and four religious festivals offered any break, and many employers gave nothing at all.

Did the Victorians invent the seaside resort? Not quite — seawater cures first drew the wealthy to Brighton and Scarborough from the 1780s. But Victorian Britain perfected and democratised the idea: railways brought cheap fares, and entrepreneurs built piers, promenades, theatres and hotels from Blackpool to Bournemouth. Punch and Judy, donkey rides and fish-and-chips all became staples. The 1871 holiday gave millions a guaranteed day off, turning a luxury pastime into Britain's beloved summer tradition.

In 1965 the August bank holiday moved to its familiar late-August slot in England and Wales, but the spirit of that Victorian breakthrough remains unchanged.



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The Cemetery of Appleby

Anne Sillins recalls childhood in the village playing about in the village cemetery

At the centre of the village was the church. Appleby church was also the social centre of the village, at least for the women and children. The Pubs, of which there were four, (Queen Adelaide Inn, the Crown Inn, the Black Horse Inn and the Moore's Arms) were the social centre for most of the men. For us children playing around the church kept us out of harm's way so we were not in the path of a horse and cart, a pony and trap or the occasional car or delivery van.

We children were usually on hand when a new grave was being made ready. The grave diggers would arrive pulling a small wagon containing their spades, axes and picks. They would take off their jackets and hang them on a nearby branch. They began by cutting and rolling back the turf. Next, they began to dig, sometimes hitting a root of a tree or a rock. We would watch each swing of the axe as it caught the sunlight. We paid close attention if the sharp axe hit a rock. It was rumoured that this could have been an ancient burial ground and we listened anxiously for the sound of the metal spade meeting bone or coffin nail. We stood on the periphery with the grave digger between us and whatever might be down in the hole. Husbands and wives were buried in the same plot, and we were never sure how the digger knew when to halt so that he did not disturb the first occupant. Word would circulate among the children if a second placement was being prepared and we then moved back behind the hedge, afraid of seeing the lid of the already buried coffin.

When someone died, they were laid out in the parlour of their home. Women dressed in black while the men wore black arm bands. There was usually an interval of three days from the time of death to the time of

burial. This was sufficient for the village carpenter to build a coffin at his workshop which was a wooden building at the end of Stoney Lane. The wheeled-bier was brought out and on the day of the service it was taken to the home of the deceased. The coffin was placed upon the bier and relatives and friends accompanied the body, usually on foot with the men pulling the bier while the women followed. Both men and women wore a circle of black ribbon or cloth on their upper arm as a sign of a lost one. Along the route all curtains would be drawn and if the procession passed us children we knew to bow our heads and close our eyes out of respect.

I can only remember the names of two women who kept the church clean and the church linens fresh. They were Mrs. Dora Gothard and Mrs. Gladys Gothard, sisters in law, and they also cut fresh flowers to decorate the altar and the pulpit for the Sunday services. This was a labour of love. The Sunday before I left to travel to Canada these two sisters gave me a hymn book, I still have it and I treasure it still.

The funeral service took place in Church, after the service which was attended by nearly all villagers, the coffin would be carried across Church Street to the cemetery and lowered on ropes into the prepared earth. Our village vicar would say another prayer, family sometimes dropped flowers into the grave, a handful of soil and then they left for a funeral 'tea'. All who had attended the funeral would attend this 'tea'. The grave was filled in right away by men who had dug the grave, they had been standing nearby, leaning on their shovels, while smoking a 'fag' - a cigarette. Most often a glass of beer followed their work.

The cemetery belonged to us children once again, and play would begin again.



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Crimson Fields

Last month we Looked at the Black Horse but there were other Inns in Appleby Magna as Joan Noble recalls ...

For centuries, the village inn stood at the heart of community life – but in times gone by, running a pub was rarely enough on its own to make a living. In Appleby Magna and Appleby Parva, as across rural England, landlords were typically men of many trades, and their premises witnessed everything from daily gossip to momentous historical events.

Four hostelries in particular have left their mark on local memory.

The Black Horse, dating from the very start of the seventeenth century, is a fine surviving example of timber-framed construction. Its distinctive black oak beams are infilled with brick – something of a rarity at the time, when wattle and daub was the standard method, though a handsome row of similar cottages can still be seen at Market Bosworth. For over three hundred years the roof was thatched, until a serious fire in the 1930s threatened to destroy the building completely. It was saved, but re-roofed in tiles; today, only one thatched house remains in the village, in Top Street, dated 1639. Older residents recall that there was once a bear pit attached to the inn, thought to have stood on the site of the present car park. Outside, a changing procession of pony traps and, later, motor cars waited for their owners – though never in the numbers seen at country pubs today. Unlike modern inns, which draw custom from miles around especially on bank holidays, trade was almost entirely drawn from the village and neighbouring farms. Consequently, almost every publican needed a second, or even third, occupation.

A perfect illustration is The Moore Arms, previously known as the Appleby Inn, which began life as a farmhouse. Around the time of the First World War it was run by the Bowley family, whose name lives on in Bowley's Lane. Mr Bowley combined the licence with farming, carpentry and undertaking – the same man who features in the well-remembered story of the winter funeral procession to Breedon on the Hill. He and his great friend Henry Hatton, the shoemaker from next door at Rose Cottage, also served as special constables; it is said that on Sunday mornings they

would patrol the lanes together, armed with pistols, to move on anyone considered undesirable. The inn yard was a regular meeting place for the hunt, and one former villager remembered being allowed, as a small child, to ride the tethered horses escorted by huntsmen in their scarlet coats – the envy of every other youngster in Appleby Parva.

At the junction of Bowley's Lane and Church Street



stood The Adelaide, which traded until the 1960s when it was demolished to make way for new housing, the first of which still bears the name. It is thought to have been built in the early 1800s, named after Queen Adelaide, who was a frequent visitor to this part of Leicestershire. It was here, in August 1914, that author Aubrey Moore and local man Ron Hatton were enjoying a pint when a soldier burst in with the news that their Territorial unit had been mobilised. For them, the Great War began right there in the bar.

Of The Crown, less is recorded on paper. The main range facing the road appears to be early nineteenth-century, but the older section at the rear, bordering the footpath towards Moat House, is believed to be of much earlier origin – a reminder that behind every pub frontage there is often a far longer story waiting to be uncovered.

