

NEWSLETTER

February 2024

Local History Cafe



Anne Silins recalls village life ...

Appleby Magna in the 1940's, as seen through the eyes of a little girl.

I have fond memories of our village cobbler. In the 1940's his work place was in a Church Street garden, it was a wooden shed. This shed was behind the home of Mrs. Spencer. Her house was a two storey house in Church Street. If you locate the Crown Inn, walk past their parking lot, and then her home was the second house going towards Bowley's Lane. That was Mrs. Spencer's home during the 1940's.

Today we would say, our village cobbler was a throwback to a simpler time. If I am correct his name was Mr. Clewes, but I cannot be certain of this, it was a long time ago. He lived in the house which was immediately beside the Crown Inn parking lot, and adjoining Mrs. Spencer's house.

Our cobbler's skin was leathery and his nails often stained from the leather, powdered dye and polish he used each day. But his hands were gentle just like his smile. The shop smelt of leather and polish, the aromas created a workman like scent of their own which we children liked and we were always made welcome. We often visited him after our 'tea' with our group of friends. Pairs of shoes were lined up on a rack,

heel side out, and this offered evidence of the feet that had filled them.



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Each fallen arch and wrecked sole was a hands-on problem to be solved by our cobbler with his careful precision and dexterity. We children understood that people needed and loved their shoes, especially their old comfy ones. A good shoe repair, done at the cost of a few pennies, could and would double the life of their shoes and work boots. Money wasn't thrown away just because something was old, it was war time,



Be my Valentine



New memories from Anne Silins

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Extracts from the school diary.
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The next History Cafe meeting will be at 10.00 am on February 20th

money was scarce. Footwear of any kind was never thrown out, they were mended to be used again. Most villagers didn't have extra pennies, so off to the cobbler they went for help.



A lady squeezed in beside us children one evening, her face intent, she leaned towards our cobbler, she poked her finger vigorously into a worn hole in her shoe, its mate lay on the ground at her feet. Our cobbler took this event in his stride with a little smile. He took hold of her shoe, with a wink of his eye to us children, he then studied the shoe. The woman's hands were work worn, with knotted knuckles, but clean as we knew she was a washer woman, she watched the cobbler intently. He could and would repair the shoe, she smiled her thanks and was on her way home.

For boys who scuffed their boots, they would have cleats hammered on to the toe and heel to extend the life of their boots. Our cobbler took only a few minutes to attach these cleats, and the boys were off. In the evening these boys walked the lanes and they slid and scuffed those cleats along the tarmac causing sparks to fly in the dull evening light. Each boy was trying to outdo the others. It was a competition to see which young man could

produce the loudest, brightest and highest sparks.

The Cobbler used leather, needles, thread, powdered dye and often rawhide. Whether it was a sole being replaced, or stitching, new buckles, eyelets or a new heel, our Cobbler had the experience and expertise to bring new life to your comfy old shoes. We children were always welcome and we sat on wooden boxes or stood beside his work bench to watch as he used his many tiny hammers, cutters, pliers, nails and tacks repairing a shoe.

Our Cobbler also made and repaired the horse's harness. This could be the making of new long reins with which the farmer controlled the horses, repairing a horse collar by adding extra padding or a new leather surround or even adding decorative brass for a horse show.

Our endless questions we continually asked never seemed to bother him, he answered us as he worked. After a while he would look at his pocket watch which hung from the edge of a shelf, and wave us off to our homes and to bed.

At this time young people learned a trade through apprenticeship or family tradition, as we youngsters stood in our Cobbler's shed, many of us boasted that we could be a cobbler. We dreamt of having such a shed and being surrounded by the smell of new leather, banging the tiny hammers, and being part of a village community.

In our village old timers told us,

The seasons rule the land,

The weather rules seasons.

Anne Silins 2023

The final part of these exclusive memories will be in our March Edition

Market day ...

Andrew Moore recalls a very specific childhood memory ...

One particular memory that stays with me was visiting Tamworth on a market day, and especially a wet and grey Midland Saturday morning and to make it extra special just before my birthday in February.



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Temporary stalls had been erected all around the ancient town hall and rain was dripping off the tarpaulins that were covering them. A string of very low wattage lightbulbs was hanging across the centre of each stall, most laden with seasonal bargains. There was a specific type of exotic produce that only appeared just around winter time. Boxes of dates included the plastic fork, clementines some which had their leaves left on and a whole variety fruit and nuts from Africa and the Americas.

The eerie warm glow of the bare bulbs also illuminated piles of cheap plastic novelties and tissue thin wrapping paper.

The very specific and very strong memory I still hold to this day is that of further down the street, the rain had collected and was gushing down the gutters and into the drains with the most satisfying splashing sound. Along these roadside streams would come some of the flotsam and rubbish from the market, including the tissue wrappers from oranges from the green grocers stall printed in bright yellows, oranges and reds with the logo "Espania".

Under the town hall clock, and in front of the statue of Sir Robert Peel stood the more stalls selling clothing and kitchen utensils. They were so close to the road that each stall would sway slightly, as cars past with a swish of wet tyre on tarmac.

Even now I can get taken back to those days in the early 1960's when ever I am walking and hear water trickling into a drain or man hole cover.

From the diary ...

An extract from the school diary 1929 ...

Attendance better this week 90.4%

It has been decided by the school to crop the whole of the schoolhouse garden with potatoes this year in order to keep it in decent order. Potatoes the boys have found are good for ground clearing, especially of weeds.

Three teams have been chosen with approximately, a third of the garden each to work and the headmaster has promised to provide the necessary seed on condition that he is reimbursed his outlay when the crop is sold. It has also been decided that at the end of the season, each boy should be given $\frac{1}{2}$ stone of potatoes and that a double portion shall be given to the members of the best team. Any balance accruing shall be used for sports purposes.



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The boys have spent a good deal of their spare time during the last fortnight harvesting the schoolhouse garden potato crop.

And after the harvest ..

For many reasons it was impracticable to continue the garden work with three teams. After about three weeks, therefore, the school worked as a whole and works so well that they each received a stone of potatoes on Friday last instead of the $\frac{1}{2}$ stone or stone as promised.

Solving the Longitude Problem ...

Jane Harris takes time to solve the longitude problem ...

In thick fog Sir Cloudisley Shovell's fleet of twenty one ships returned from Gibraltar after fighting the French in 1707. Four of the ships were blown onto the Western rocks off the Scilly Isles with the loss of almost two thousand troops. But if they had known their longitude position they could have avoided their fate. The dramatic loss of Sir Cloudisley Shovell's ships and huge

misjudged how far they had travelled in an Easterly or Westerly direction.

Many thought the answer lay in the stars and many famous scientists, including Newton, thought an astronomical method would produce an answer. But a self taught clockmaker had other ideas. This was John Harrison who had already made a number of innovative clocks and, on hearing of the prize on offer, turned his hand to making a sea worthy timepiece.

Lines of longitude and latitude were described as far back as Ptolemy in AD150. Sailors could work out the latitude by observing the position of the moon and stars. Christopher Columbus followed a line of latitude to reach the new world but had no idea how far he had travelled.

Lines of longitude 15 degrees apart at the equator are one thousand miles apart, reducing to nought at the poles. At any given line of latitude the distance between the lines of longitude relate to the time the Earth has moved on its axis. Relating the time on a ship to the time at the Greenwich meridian would give the position. However this would need an accurate sea going clock. Eighteenth century clocks had to be kept stable, and at a steady temperature. None could work at sea.

John Harrison spent four years constructing clocks that could still work despite being tossed about and subject to extremes of temperature. In 1737, after successful sea trials, he presented his clock to the Board of Longitude. After a journey to Jamaica and back Harrison's timepiece, accompanied by his son William, was only out by two minutes. The Board were reluctant to accept the results making more demands of John Harrison despite his success.

loss of life galvanised the government of the day to try and solve the problem of finding longitude positions. The government passed the Longitude Act in 1714 offering a prize of £20,000 to anyone who could find a way of determining longitude at sea. As it was difficult to navigate the high seas accurately, many lives were also lost to scurvy or malnutrition as journeys took longer than anticipated as navigators

Did Harrison receive the prize and accolade for his work? No. He did receive some money to allow him to continue with the work on his clocks but the Board prevaricated, still waiting for an astronomical solution. However Captain Cook successfully used one of Harrison's clocks on his voyages around the world. John Harrison's accurate sea chronometers did solve the longitude problem saving thousands of sailors from death by drowning, malnutrition or scurvy.



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Snowy memories ...

Duncan Saunders recalls the big freeze of 1947



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The article on the freeze of 1963 in your December edition plus a very good programme on TV about the 1947 snow brought back memories for me.

I was nine years old and living at Snarestone and as a village we were totally cut off. My father worked at Red Bank Brick and managed to walk to work on most days. He owned a Canadian flat bottomed sledge and villagers would take it in turn to pull it to Measham to collect essential supplies such as bread, milk and groceries. Being at school in Ashby the winter holiday was extended by at least two weeks but we were not allowed to have fun with the sledge in case it was damaged.

After two weeks a council official came to the village to organise any able bodied person to help clear a single track to Appleby. It was decided that I could use a dust pan and so the work began. Similarly Appleby was organised and work began. I cannot remember how long it took but the drifts were higher than me. A single track was cleared and there must have been some laybys cleared but I cannot remember but once the Midland Red bus could get through it was back to school for us.

At home there was always an open fire in the kitchen and warm toast and dripping was always very welcome.

And finally ...

New local heritage boards installed ...

The installation of heritage boards in Appleby Magna is a significant step towards celebrating the rich history and culture of the community. These boards serve as informative and educational tools, providing locals and visitors with valuable insights into the village's past. Each board is designed to showcase important historical landmarks, and stories that have shaped the village over the years. The two boards, one by the recreation ground and the other near the Crown pub, allow residents and tourists can easily navigate and explore the area while learning about its heritage.

The installation of heritage boards not only enhances the village's charm but also fosters a sense of pride and appreciation for its cultural heritage.

You can access the SJMF Collection via its website and The Earth Museum Website has further stories and links relating to items from the museum.



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