

Early Youth - Village Life

Now what can I tell you about my early youth. I was born on the 31st July 1922 in Hapton at 48 Wordsworth Street. It was a terraced house; there would be about ten houses on this terraced street. The streets were not paved, they were actually just dirt roads on both sides of the front and back of the houses. We always came through the back door into a yard, which had a coal place and a toilet. Then you walked into a kitchen, which had a stone sink and a gas cooker, then into the living room which was about four yards by four yards and which had a table, a couch, a sideboard, chairs and there was a rocking chair. The fireplace was unique – an old type of fireplace which had a fire in the centre. One side was a section that heated water and on the other side there was an oven and then over the fire was a grill,

which could be put down for boiling a kettle or doing some cooking on. These were very fine and efficient places because you got quite a lot of heat from them, but they all had to be cleaned. They were black iron, which was polished and had a steel surround. Above the fireplace was a shelf, where we put black sambo. This was a moneybox, in which you put your penny and pressed the handle and the penny went into the mouth. Our front room was not furnished and I am talking now 1926-7. There were three bedrooms upstairs, no bathroom – I can remember having a bath downstairs in a large metal tub in front of the fire. My father was then working at Howard & Bulloughs and from what I can gather would leave the house at six o'clock in the morning, go on to Accrington, have his lunch in the works, have his tea, leave the works at maybe five thirty or six o'clock and go straight through to Burnley to Burnley Municipal College where he taught five nights a week, getting home at about nine forty-five. He then had to mark the homework from the various students. Of course one

worked on a Saturday morning from six o'clock until one o'clock.

Compared to my grandparent's years times had changed slightly for the better. You had one week's holiday in the summertime. Before we moved to Scotland in 1929 we all wore clogs, which were very warm, and we had to take them to the clogger if they needed to be repaired. There was a heel and metal rim for the foot part. It was a halfpenny for the heel and a penny for the sole of the clog. The clogs were leather of course, wooden base and clog irons on either side. Mother and Dad were very religious. On Sunday we would go to church in the morning and Sunday school in the afternoon and, of course, when we got older we had to go to church in the evening. We started school at the age of five. The school was run by three teachers, one running the nursery, one teaching the infants school and the headmaster teaching the older boys. The nursery class was for the five to seven year olds, then you went into the infant class (which my Auntie Maggie Shoesmith

taught), and she would be teaching standard 1, 2, and 3 (seven to ten year olds). The headmaster taught standard 4, 5 and 6. Between these two classrooms was a dividing partition which was drawn aside for assembly in the morning. School holidays in those days were a week's holiday at Christmas time, a week at Easter, four weeks in summertime and a week in September. We also had a church service on Ascension Day, the rest of the day being free and we also had a free day on Empire Day.

It was a Church of England school & the main social venue of the village. Before the church was built in Hapton in 1927, all the services were held in the school room. I can remember my father telling me that before the new church was built, when the choir came in everyone just remained seated, so they decided when the new church was being built, when the choir came walking in everyone should stand up and my father thought this was very Popish at the time and so, to show his objection to it all, he sat down when the choir came in. He was certainly quite a character!

During the winter months we always had a camphor bag. It was a small bag with a piece of camphor that was hung around our necks. I don't know what it was for, but we always wore that in the winter months and also we always had to have a spoonful of cod-liver oil and malt which wasn't very tasty. Every so often a lady came round to the school to inspect your head, because there were quite a lot of poor children and often they had lice in their hair. A lot of the boys had their hair cut and had just what was known as a donkey fringe at the front. Once a year our teeth were inspected and if you had to go to the dentist you had to walk over the moor by yourself, or with anyone else who was going, and it would be a distance of one mile. In the dentist's room a bell would ring to tell you that you were the next to go in and I can remember one boy who was the next in and when the bell rang he shot out – he wasn't having his teeth dealt with! During the summer time we used to go swimming at the swimming baths at Rose Grove, which again was a walk of about two miles. As I mentioned, the school

room was the social centre and dances were held there and where the sliding partition was, you had to dance over this ridge in the floor. Then of course we always had a Sunday School treat which the teachers used to put on for the children. This consisted of cakes, jelly, bread and sandwiches. We all sat and we really did enjoy ourselves. There were concerts put on by the Men's Society or the Mother's Union and again I can remember my father telling me that he played the banjo and my Auntie Meda played the piano. They were giving a duet and someone may have started wrong and my grandmother was there and she made them stop in front of everyone and start again. This was the social point for the church-going people.

Just re-capping, I haven't mentioned anything about wages. I think wages in 1900-1910 would be, for a working man, about 15 shillings which equivalent to today would be about 80p per week and in 1920-1930 I should say about £2 per week. In the 1930s, there was a slump and lots of people were out of work.

Miners were not working, mills were closing down and general conditions then were pretty bad.

Now what can I tell you about life in the village of Hapton in the 1930's. It wasn't a very large village, it had about one thousand people, a station where you could catch the train to Burnley or Accrington or various other places, a canal which ran through part of the village and a bus route.

The price on the train to Burnley and return, for example, was about 7½ old pennies which was equivalent to about 3p today for a distance of about ten or twelve miles and the same price to Accrington. The price from Hapton down to Padiham which was about two miles on the bus, was 1 old penny which is equivalent to 1/2p nowadays. There were a number of shops in the village. About three sweet shops, two butchers shops and Mr Cunliffe's shop which was also the post office. On the other side was the grocery business where he always sold home made cakes and bread. He used to go down to the shop at about six o'clock in the morning to bake the cakes and you

could buy anything there. There was Mr Chadwick's shop - that was a small shop selling newspapers, toys and various other things. On the other side of the shop he sold tripe and trotters and I can never once remember him, if you wanted tripe, ever washing his hands when serving it. There was Mrs Brooke's shop where she sold her homemade pies. You could get a homemade pie for 6d (i.e. 3p) with a jug full of gravy. So things ran pretty well in the village. We were always told never to go near to the canal and in fact quite a number of children were drowned. I remember my father telling me that when he was a little boy he was once playing near the canal and one of his aunts came by and straight away she gold hold of him and dipped his head in the canal and pushed it under. That taught him a lesson never to play near the canal. In fact my father was called twice to try and save two little boys who had fallen in the canal, but unfortunately they had drowned.

It was a very friendly village indeed. We all played various games, the principal games were clay

marbles where you got twenty-five clay marbles for a halfpenny. I can remember being in Mr Chadwick's shop and we emptied the clay marbles out onto his counter to inspect each one to check they were not cracked! Then you had glass allies and bombers and you played all these games in the street. Then you had top and whip with different types of tops, each top was coloured. You had little tops and large jumbos and you could make them do quite a lot. You also had hoops, some were wooden, some were iron. In fact the boys who did not have much money used an old tyre to knock along. There were always games going on in the village and no one seemed to worry about things. One main person in the village was, of course, the clogger who made clogs. As I said previously, you took your clogs to have irons put on the walls or the soles. They were a penny and he would sit there with nails in his mouth and just hammer them into the clogs. The heels of the clog were a halfpenny. He sat there all day long doing that.

In the village we played lots of games. We had a recreation ground where we played cricket and football. We had a Church of England football team. There were also two pubs in the village and, of course, we were never allowed to go near them. I can remember when we went carol singing we had to stand outside and sing to the people in the pubs.

The post came twice a day and I can remember my Auntie Maggie telling me that her sister had gone to Blackpool for a few days and sent a postcard. The postman delivered this card to my Auntie and he read it, saying "Ethel is having a good time in Blackpool and the weather is pretty good too" – there he was reading the card before he gave it to my aunt.

The milkman came round twice a day. You just left a jug on the front door step with a little gauze netting over it. The horse pulling the float knew when to stop and the milkman would get out and pour the milk into

the jug and as soon as he left the horse would start again.

Then you had the coal man. He always had beautiful horses and would carry sacks (cwt) of coal and tip them into your coal cellar. Of course if he came up a street where everyone had washing out they had to bring their washing in while the coalman went up. Then there was a person who sold fruit and fish. Fruit was at the front of the cart and fish was at the back and all the cats used to follow this person because as soon as he cut the fishheads off, he used to throw them on the ground and the cats came for them, but again he never washed his hands when he went to get the fruit. That was a chap who was called Rutter.

Every so often, outside the school would come what was known as a rag and bone merchant and you took newspapers and things to him and he would either give you a goldfish in a jam jar or maybe donkey stones. One would use either a yellow donkey stone

or a white donkey stone just to make the window sill or doorstep tidy.

It was a friendly village and no one bothered to lock their door at night. No one would ever come into your house at night time.

May Day was a great day in the village. The coalman's horses, the milkman's horses and all the trade horses used to be decorated and their brasses polished and they really did look marvellous. The girls used to have Maypole dancing where they would set up a little maypole. One would sit holding it and the others would dance round singing "All around the maypole we go, ippitippitary singing as we go" – that was one of the songs. The boys used to dress up as a performing bear. One boy had a sack over his head and the corners of the sack were tied to look like ears and he had two holes to see where he was going. The rope was attached to him and the other boy held the end of the rope and would act like a performing bear, collecting money from people who passed by. May Day was a great day in the village.

Another great time was Whitsuntide. On the Friday before Whit Saturday or Whit Sunday we always went to Burnley and got our new suits. We then went round to our various aunts and uncles to show off our new suits and they would put a threepenny bit or a sixpence (i.e. 3p) in the top pocket. As soon as we got out of the house we would look in our top pocket to see how much they had given us!

Whit Monday was a great day, it started very early in the morning. The Sunday School teachers went into the woods to pick flowers and ferns and anything that was bright and cheerful to decorate the ropes the little children would hold on to. What actually happened was when the Methodists were ready, we all met down at the school and at about 9 o'clock the band would come from the station and march down the road. If it passed us at the C of E school and went on to the Methodist school it meant that they would be leading the procession. They would come walking out with the band at the front. The banners which were

very big, had two large poles held by two men, with a large banner in between and two men on either side holding the large tie ropes. In the centre were the girls holding the ribbons. It was quite a heavy job and you always had one man standing by you if you were holding the pole, ready to take over. When they came past us we would join leading with the banner. My father who was a vicar's warden then would walk with the vicar and the other churchwarden and you would have all the children in a long row all walking with baskets of flowers, and the Sunday school teachers guiding them. Then came the Mother's Union and the Girls Friendly Society and then the men, all walked round the village and stopped and sang a hymn at various places. We always stopped at the Methodist Church which was on Manchester Road to sing a hymn and then we used to come over the railway bridge. If there was a wind blowing the banner would take some holding! In fact once the pole broke and we had to step to one side. We then went up the road to the church, sang a hymn at the church, and then walked right up to Hapton Inn to sing another hymn,

and then came back home. We had lunch and then it was field day in the afternoon.

We had races and games, buns and coffee and if you won the race you got 6d (i.e. 3p). It really was a wonderful day, everyone enjoyed themselves.

Then of course Tuesday was the choir picnic when my Uncle Alf, who was choirmaster, used to take sixteen choirboys to Southport. This was another great day. When we got to Southport we always had a cricket match, one side of the choir versus the other. We went for lunch and Uncle Alf always made us sing "grace". I don't know what the rest of the other people in the restaurant thought about it! Afternoon was free and we enjoyed ourselves on the fair, came back and had tea and usually just walked around until it was time for the train to take us back. It really was a marvellous day out. How a man could cope with sixteen boys on the choir trip was quite remarkable. We were all in the choir, brothers Fred and Roland, my cousins Arthur and George and Fred Shoesmith. The only reason we were in the choir was because

my father was the vicar's warden and my Uncle Alf Shoesmith was the choirmaster. I don't know whether we could sign or not, I think we just made a lot of noise, but we did enjoy ourselves as choirboys. I don't think we listened to one sermon! We basically just spent our time in the choir stalls when the sermon was on, just looking around. When the collection bag came round you put a penny in and if you didn't have a penny, put your hand in, rattled it and passed it on! I can remember at one choir practice, which were always held on a Wednesday, we were crawling underneath the pews and if a head appeared we would throw one of the kneelers at it. There was one day we were crawling underneath the pews and the vicar came in. There was deathly silence and he said "well I know you're all there, you'd better come up", and gradually our heads popped up. He told us that from then on when we came to church we would kneel and keep kneeling until the choirmaster came. So that meant in future none of us came early – we weren't going to spend our time kneeling!

Another time it was on a dark Sunday night and we were with cousin Fred, and Roland was on my shoulder, and we were dressed in white surpluses. We had a torch so when people came and saw this ghostly-looking figure jumping up and down we thought that was funny. It got to nearly 6.20 p.m. so we had to go back to the vestry and there was the vicar waiting for us. We were sent home that night!! We did enjoy being in the choir. There were about sixteen choirboys, ten choir men and maybe about ten choir ladies, so it was quite a good choir.

The next holiday we had was usually the summer holiday and that was just for one week. All the mills stopped, in fact everything stopped in Burnley. In the village all work stopped and you could see people on the Saturday morning with their suitcases all waiting for the train to Blackpool.

The next event in the village was November 5th. Everyone had bonfires all over the place. We used to do down to my Aunt and Uncle who had a hen pen

and there was an area there that had a super bonfire and all the aunts and uncles would come. There would be baked potatoes cooked on the bonfire, treacle toffee and all types of fireworks – ‘jumping jacks’ (they cost 1d equivalent to 1/2p now), ‘bombers’, ‘squibs’, ‘pinwheels’ and ‘rockets’. It was a marvellous evening with everyone round the bonfire. Throughout the village you could see people having bonfires, fireworks going off and everyone having a great time. I cannot remember a time when anyone was hurt.

Then of course came Christmas, now this was something special. The shops in the village kept open until 9pm on Christmas Eve. People worked until 5.30pm. As choirboys we always had to go round singing carols at various houses where we collected money. I don’t think we got much from it and I don’t know what happened to the money. I suppose it went to the church, I can’t remember.

Then came New Year's Eve. There was always something going on in the schoolroom. The Young Mens' Society or the Mothers' Union would put on a concert & there would be a bit of a dance. At 11.30pm we used to leave the school & walk up the road to the church to the midnight service.

One thing I did forget was Shrove Tuesday. It was always a very popular time when everyone had pancakes and the apprentices in those days would get their faces blackened by the workmen and then they got the afternoon off. In the village at the time there were actually two weaving mills, one chemical works and Simpson's electricity works. But around 1933 there was a slump and quite a lot of people were out of work and I can remember miners sitting on the corner where the Co-op shop was, playing mouth organs. It was a terrible time, people were looking for work all over the place. Another thing about miners, they didn't seem to have many pithead baths and often they would travel on buses and trains absolutely black. They used to have a bath at home. Also in the

1930's there was a lot of unemployment and quite a lot of Irishmen used to come across to work in the fields in the summer. They would cut the hay and then slept in the barns. I can remember once my brother Roland going to help the farmer to stack the hay into haystacks and at the end of the week he gave them two shillings (equivalent to 10p). He was with another lad and they were very annoyed so as they left the farm they knocked over all the haystacks!

Again reminiscing back to 1935 when George V died we were sent up to ring the church bells seventy-five times, for the number of years he lived, but unfortunately the bell had a rope and when you pulled this rope unless you caught it again, it rang twice. By the time we finished pulling the rope King George would have been one hundred and fifty when he died!

Again I remember the canals were used frequently and the canal barges with horses pulling them. Families often lived on board the barges. They were full of coal but they had small living quarters. I don't

know where the children went to school. They would take the coal to various mills by the side of the Leeds Liverpool Canal. It was dug in 1850 by the Irish “Navvies” whose name was derived from the word “navigation”.

Just a bit more news about living conditions – up to 1930 every house was lit by gas and I think our house had electricity by about 1932/33. We had a front room which was used for weddings and funerals etc. but it was also used on Sunday. This was a treat. Every house had coal fires which had to be lit and kept going. They were messy and the ashes had to be taken away every morning. The majority of houses had something called a clothes rack, which was four long pieces of wood held together by a rope hung from the ceiling. On washing day if it was bad weather all the clothes were put on this rack which was near the fire and pulled up to the ceiling. One game that we used to play was snatch apple. That was a piece of string holding an apple and attached to the rack on the ceiling. The apple swung and with

your hands tied behind your back you would take a snatch at it. It caught your nose quite often and it is a wonder that we did not lose a few teeth!

Something else that was interesting with regard to food, was that no one ever talked about dieting. It was always said that you should have a very good breakfast. You had porridge, with fresh milk and sugar, boiled eggs and toast. Definitely on a Sunday it was fried egg and bacon, with maybe fried black puddings and coffee. We always had to have a good breakfast.

Lunch was always something hot and on Sundays we had high tea, which was mainly tinned salmon, salad, and cakes and jelly. Sunday lunch was always a joint and on Monday that was made into a hotpot with a pie crust, followed by a homemade rice pudding with a nice skin on the top. People bought a few cakes but nothing special – you could buy meat pies from a shop if you were in a hurry and these, of course, were always homemade. No one ever talked about dieting,

but nowadays everyone is concerned about their diets and getting the right vitamins. No one ever thought about vitamins then either. We had plenty of fruit and full cream milk. Certainly different conditions than they are today.

In the 1930's no one had a television set, in fact we didn't get a radio, or wireless as it was called, until about 1933. The main entertainment was going to the cinema. In Burnley there were at least six or seven cinemas. There would be a show in the afternoon from 2.30 p.m. and there were always two shows in the evening at 6.30 p.m. and 8.15 p.m. The price at the front was 1s 3d, the back was 1s 9d and upstairs at the front was 2s 3d and the back was 2s 9d. That was equivalent to about 10p or 11p as it is today and that was for two hour's entertainment. There was a newsreel show, a short film and in the interval ladies came out selling ice creams. Everyone used to smoke in those days and you could see all the smoke rising. The manager always stood outside dressed in evening jacket. There were big queues waiting to go

in and that was the main type of entertainment. There were also variety shows held in the Burnley Variety Hall. These places were always full and it was the same price as going to see a film.

MORE REFLECTIONS ON VILLAGE LIFE

PASTIMES AND GAMES IN THE 1930s

In those days children had to make their own amusements and various games were played.

1) Marbles

There were various types of games played with marbles. One was with clay marbles which cost 1/2p for twenty-five brightly coloured marbles. One game was to make a hole in the soil with your clog and then each player threw ten marbles towards the hole. The player that got the most marbles into the hole started the game. The idea was to get all the marbles into the hole by flicking them with your fingers and the one who got the most marbles into the hole won the game.

2) Glass Marbles

A circle was drawn of about 12 inches diameter and a number of glass marbles were placed in the centre. The idea was to flick your own marble into the centre and knock out as many marbles as you could, which you then took up. Then your opponent did the same. The game went on until all the marbles were removed from the circle.

3) Bombers

These were large white marbles approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ inches diameter. The principle of the game was

that your opponent threw his bomber along the street and you then had to try and hit it. If you missed it then it was your turn to throw your bomber. This game went on until one player managed to hit the other player's bomber.

4) Hopscotch

This game involved drawing squares on the pavement with a piece of chalk. The squares were numbered and the first player threw a marker (usually a small stone) onto the first square. They then hopped over the square up to the top square and down again. On the way back the marker had to be picked up and the next player then had their turn. The first player then moved onto the next number and so on.

5) Buck and Stick

The 'buck' consisted of a piece of wedged shaped wood about 2 inches long. The idea was to hit the narrow edge of the buck with a stick so that it rose up and you hit the buck. The one who won the game was the player who hit the buck the farthest. If a buck

went through a window, both players ran away as fast as they could!

6) Hoops

These consisted of either a wooden hoop of about 2 ½ ft. diameter or a metal hoop. If you did not have one of these you used an old tyre.

7) Sledging

In winter time when the snow was about we used to go sledging. Not many children had a sledge so at times we used other types of articles such as a shovel. You would sit on the shovel and hold its wooden handle. Other children would use a sheet of metal.

8) Top and Whip

There were various types of tops – small medium and jumbo sized tops. The point at the top of this toy was always brightly coloured and you used a string to make it spin around.

In the Summer time we spent all our time playing in the woods, making dens and swinging from trees.

Finally, the favourite pastime was knocking on doors and running away. The only difficulty with this game was you had not get to get caught.

HAPPY DAYS!