

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Memories of Seacroft as a village 1926 -1947

By Alan Noble, previous Church Warden, St James' Seacroft.

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I was born at Leyland Farm, Aberford in May 1924. My mother and father moved to Taylor's Yard, Seacroft, in 1926. My father was employed at Swarcliffe Farm by Mr Presious and the cottage in Taylor's Yard was a tied house. I can remember being taken to Seacroft National School by my elder brother Harold. The headmaster was Mr Hardy and my teacher was Miss Lancaster. I remember our nature walks were through Fox Wood and down Foundry Mill to sketch the old water wheel and the cottages alongside.

Seacroft Green was the centre of everything that happened in the village. Gala days, cricket matches Saturday and Sunday. It was a hive of activity, with coach loads of people from Leeds coming past on their way to the country.

As children, we were never allowed to go under the ropes that were around the cricket pitch. To keep the grass down in the outfield, Mr Gibbon's horse, Tommy, was used as the lawnmower!

My school friends were Raymond Thomson, Arthur Lindley and Ken Maskill, of which, I have photographs taken in the blacksmiths shop, dated 1933, with Mr Jim Gibbon the blacksmith.

I remember once being off school and going with my mother to the wash house next to Miss Hardisty's house. Squire Darcy Wilson dressed in a scarlet tunic rode by on a white horse and said to my mother "your child should not be eating an apple during the day"! My mother (who was never short of an answer) said to him, "How do you know, you're not married". Little did he know that the apple came from his own orchard and given to me by his gardener's wife, Mrs Rounding!

I spent many happy hours playing in the yard behind the blacksmith's shop. There was a selection of old cars, logs of wood, ducks, hens and a pond, but not to forget the Hansom Cab which the girls used to play in.

Audrey Ward once reminded me of the time she saw old Mr Gibbon searching amongst the sawdust for his thumb which he had just cut off with the circular saw!

Winters and Christmas was very exciting in the 1930's. I can remember the squire Darcy Wilson allowing the villagers into the grounds of Seacroft Hall to skate on the lake when it was frozen over and for the children to sledge in the snow.

We had so many shop windows to gape into, looking for tree decorations, chocolate watches, sugar mice and candles for the little holders we clipped onto the Christmas tree.

The shops, to mention a few, were Mrs Wilby's on The Green, Mrs Shoemith's off The Church and then down the steps to Mrs Johnson's living room, opposite the school yard.

Christmas was the time when a pig was killed, along with chickens and geese, as they all had to be prepared a couple of days before the great day. There were no fridges and freezers then!

I will never forget the smells of Seacroft. The smell of a horseshoe being burnt onto a hoof; the smell of leather in Mr Hardisty's saddler's shop; my mother boiling ham and chickens in the set pot and the baking of Christmas cakes and making Christmas puddings.

Oh, and I must not forget the smell of Fred Taylor's midden, behind his slaughter house!

Around Christmas time my mother would take ten or twelve children to the Theatre Royal to see the pantomime. We would all walk into Cross Gates to get the tram to Leeds. We would call at the market and get bags of oranges and sweets and then join the queue for our seats in 'the Gods'.

This was our annual treat and my mother always had trays of sausages in gravy in the oven for when we all returned. This was another of those smells!

Christmas over and with all the trimmings away, we would have plenty of dark nights to play with our new toys. I once got a set of a dozen lead soldiers, my sister a set of paints and my younger brother some building blocks and we only ever got one present each from our parents.

In the village we had our share of wonderful people. They all seemed to talk and have time for us children. Quite a few of us would go into the blacksmith's shop and watch Don Shires shoeing horses and making rims for cart wheels. Older boys would help him blow the bellows for the fire. We would also go to watch Walter Smith in the joiner's shop, making a coffin for someone that had just died and anyone giving him cheek would land in the coffin!

Old Tom Gibbon was the undertaker. He measured the deceased for the coffin, made the arrangements for the funerals and delivered the coffin to the house on his hand cart.

Our local policeman was Bobby Brown. He lived in the cottage (now a dentist) at the bottom of The Nookin.

Bobby Brown would stand no nonsense and would take troublemakers down a tree lined Cross Gates Lane to the police station at Cross Gates. Many times he would give the offenders a 'clip round the ear' and they would never reach the police station. He said it saved him writing out a report!

I can remember going to watch Mr Hardisty in his saddlers shop. He had lovely white hair and a little beard and was such a nice gentleman who made such beautiful things out of leather skins. He never shouted or told you to get out.

To go get your hair cut was another experience. Arthur Broughton, quite a character, would fill you full of stories and half way through your hair cut, would break off for his tea and sandwich!

All the village news was reported to George Taylor who worked as a journalist for the Skyrack Express. Mrs Fanny Taylor, his mother, had a sweet shop in the village and

always wore Victorian clothes. She had a 'bun' hair style, as did Mrs Stringer who lived in the old cottage, now 918 York Road.

Monday morning was a busy time in Taylor's Yard. My elder brother, Harold, would have to get up early to light the fire under the 'set pot' in our wash house. I remember the water boiling all the whites, mother rubbing hard soap into the water and stirring with a stick. Then putting washing into a 'peggy tub' and using a 'peggy stick' to swish the clothes around.

During school holidays my sister Lucy and myself would have to give mother a hand to turn the mangle to squeeze the water out of the clothes. They were then hung out in the field behind the slaughter house.

Often, my mother being a farmer's daughter, would give Fred Taylor (the butcher) a hand with an unruly beast while he used the 'pole axe' to kill it. I remember, during school holidays, taking my father his 'mashings', whilst he was ploughing the field next to the Red Lion. There was a gate by the turn pike milestone and my dad would hand me his red spotted handkerchief full of mushrooms, for me to take home for my mother to cook for his tea.

Saturday was the day my elder brother took me to Cross Gates Picture House, to see Tom Mix and we would laugh at the antics of Buster Keaton.

Everyone in the village knew each other. Any children giving cheek and their mothers would be informed straight away.

Where we lived in Taylor's Yard, the big house (which later became the post office) was Mr Driff Taylor's. Our house joined his and next door to us lived Jim and Elsie Gibbon with Betty and Brian. In later years, Brian made the house into a hairdresser's shop.

Mr and Mrs Fred Taylor lived at the top of the row of cottages with Johnsons, Attack, Guest and Mrs Mitchell who lived next to the water pump. Mr Tom Gibbon lived in a house on the main road and I can remember his pear tree hanging over the fence in Autumn with the pears just *asking* to be picked!

We would walk over the fields to Roundhay Park, passing down Bailey's Lane to see the old pigeon cote on our left hand side. On the right hand side of the lane was Pigeon Cote Farm, where my brother's friend lived, as his dad worked at the farm.

A full day would be spent at Roundhay Park, sailing our boats on the little lake. We would take a bottle of water and a block of lemonade crystals to make our own lemonade and eat our sandwiches. Mother would never worry about us.

Other days we would walk down the village to the beck that ran out of Seacroft Hall. It was a smashing playground, a steep tree lined woodland running down to where Moresdale Lane is now and where the Inglewoods are today there was a rugby field.

The older boys and girls would walk on what was called the 'Duck Walk' which went from the town end to Killingbeck, trying to meet their intended!

My mother used to collect for the Nurses Association in Crossgates and I think it was about one shilling (5p) a month. This was to pay for the district nurse to come if a baby

was due or for any illness in the family as it cost 2/6d (12.5p) for a doctor's visit and people couldn't afford much then.

Every Thursday my mother would take my brother and myself along Coal Road to visit her mother and father at Bay Horse Farm in Shadwell of which my granddad was a tenant farmer under Lord Harewood.

Grandma and granddad had sixteen children! (13 girls lived and one son). They had their own pew in Shadwell Church. They were very religious with a passage of the bible read every evening. Part of granddad's tenancy was when the harvest was finished he had to cart so many loads of coal from Barnbow Pit to Harewood House - hence the name given to the Coal Road. When passing into York Road, he had a toll of 1/2d per wheel to pay at the Toll House.

Farming was hard and my dad gave up farming and bought two shire horses with flat carts, to hire. He had contracts with the Council to repair the roads. A Council man would go with my dad, with a pile of tarmac and a couple of shovels and bumpers to flatten the holes on the back of the cart.

I can just remember Squire Darcy Wilson dying. The older children went to church and watched his coffin being placed in the vault in the crypt. After his death, everything changed in the village and I remember the building of the village hall in his memory.

I was told that Darcy Wilson never charged more than 1/6d a week rent for his cottages, but he would never allow baths to be fitted. He is reputed to have said "I haven't fixed one in my hall, so why should you"? When the old hall was auctioned and all the furniture arranged for sale, it was noticed that there were quite a number of 'sit-up' baths of all different sizes!

I remember every Whitsuntide, my dad would dress up his two shire horses, Peggy and Prince and put forms for seats on the back of the flat carts, and take the children of the village Sunday school to Aberford, usually to Layfield Farm where I was born. What an honour it was to sit beside my dad! Dad would stable the two horses at Dixon's Farm which stood at what is now the entrance to the Hansby's.

As you can imagine, Seacroft had many farms. Stocks Farm, Park Farm, Laburnum Farm on The Green, Park Farm where the Lion and Lamb Pub is (was) and also, Hawthorn, White Laithe and Providence, which I think was 'Carter's' at the point where the Ring Road and Coal Road now meet.

As the estates of Cross Gates, The Oval and Hawkhill started to be built, everybody seemed to want to be milkmen, Dennis Osborne, Mr Lumb and Jim Gibbon, who was my first boss when I left school. I worked seven days a week for 7/6d. We had two daily deliveries, except Sundays and I enjoyed every minute that I worked. Jim Gibbon bought his milk from Mr Leake at Grimes Dyke Farm where Sidney Webb worked. They were all such lovely people as was everyone that I knew in Seacroft.

I had always wanted to be a farmer, but my mother and father discouraged me. Getting soaking wet and tied houses was not all it seemed!

We always had plenty of entertainment during the summer. There were shows, cricket matches, feasts and the Roundhay Tattoo which was held every two years. The cricket

matches were always well supported, both at home and away, as dozens of supporters would travel to Garforth, Micklefield and Kippax to cheer our teams.

Cross Gates Feast was held in the field where the old Regal Cinema was built (*now a bingo hall*). Chris Johnson, the owner, was a big man who sat on a chair at the entrance. Dad always supplied him with a giant dahlia twice a week for his button-hole and received 2/6d for his efforts. The feast was powered by a gleaming steam engine called the 'Yorkshire Man'. It was made by Folwer's of Leeds and had a plaque with the words '**Who'd have thought it**' on the side.

Dad and Fred Taylor went to the Scholes Show one Saturday afternoon in a pony and trap. Later that day the pony arrived home with dad and Fred 'asleep' in the trap. My mother, horrified at seeing dad, put his head under the pump in the corner of the yard. I never did see my dad with a drink after that!

In 1935 we moved to Cross Gates, but my sister Lucy, and brothers Harold and Dennis were always back in Seacroft to dance at the village hall. Mrs Kitchen taught me to dance. She was the wife of the local joiner and the life and soul of the village.

Seacroft has always been a lovely village to live in. I have never been ashamed to admit I have lived here. I remember going into Leeds, passing down York Road and seeing children with no shoes on and rows and rows of houses so close together.

When Darcy Wilson's nephew sold all the land to the Council to build Seacroft Estate and provide new houses for all the people that lived in those streets, I thought how wonderful for those children to be able to share our open fields and breathe our beautiful fresh air.

When I used to bring my dad his tea, whilst he was ploughing the field next to the Red Lion at Whinmoor, I would say to him "why is it always windy up here" and his reply was that was why they called it Whinmoor as it was always known as 'Windy Moor'.

Well that's all folks. I've enjoyed every memory that has been written here. I hope you have too.

Alan Noble.