

"North Marston was the village of my childhood and formed a vivid patch on my memory. My father was Vicar from 1929 to 1938, virtually the whole of the final years of peace, and looking back I realise just how happy a village it was despite low wages and a depressed agriculture.

To a large extent it was still a horse-dominated community and Henry White's forge was to me and my brother and sister as well as to many other children a source of wonder. Henry himself was a character, a born humorist and no mean craftsman, I believe that some of his handiwork can be seen in the imposing entrance gates to Waddesdon Manor. Many a carthorse I have watched him shoe and the throaty sound of the bellows rekindling the dying embers of his forge is a sound I vividly recall.

Besides Henry White there were several other businesses in the village; Holden's the Tailors, where hunting pinks and other garments familiar to both the Bicester and Whaddon Chase were on display in the windows. Mathew Holden was one of the churchwardens and Henry Cheshire, a baker of renown, was the other.

The two Miss Bakers and their mother ran a shop nearby which sold everything from chickfood to liquorish whilst Franklin's was a general grocery and butcher's shop. Mr. Franklin owned the slaughterhouse from which the distressing squeals of pigs would sometimes rend the air on a quiet afternoon. The only other shop at that time was along the Quanton road and was a tiny sweet shop run by Mrs. Cox and her daughter who also between them did some dressmaking and gave piano lessons.

Other businesses in the village were Ted Anstiss the barber, Carter's the shoemaker on Portway and the Post Office presided over by Alfred Cheshire, brother of Henry, and his wife.

There were three public houses still functioning, the Bell Inn in the middle of the village, the Wheatsheaf near the Memorial Hall and the Sportsman's Arms on the Quainton Road. A former Inn which had been called the Arm'd Yeoman had been turned into a dwelling house and was lived in by Henry Anstiss and his wife and was an attractive thatched house.

The carrier was a man called Joe Gregory who lived near the slaughterhouse and had a four-wheeled wagon. I remember him well collecting the trunks to take to Winslow station when my brother and sister went back to school.

There were other tradesmen who began visiting the village in the 30s whom I remember. Mr. Young the greengrocer from Oving, Mr. Parrott the butcher from Whitchurch and Mr. Culley the coalman from Quainton. All these men had appropriate horse drawn vehicles.

Later came a fishmonger, Mr. Brown, a Steam Laundry and a man who sold cakes from Aylesbury whose name, I think, was Kemp. But these all had motorised transport and must have started coming to the village in the latter part of the decade.

In 1929 a bus service was started run by a Mr. Young and his daughter but they were bought out by Simons Yellow buses from Whitchurch in due course and later the Yellow buses gave way to the Red Rover company. I remember being terrified when the first double decker arrived and refusing for a long time to "go upstairs" as I had heard someone say that it was top heavy!

Hay making in those days still meant making hay, tossing and turning it before making it into ricks. Later these would be thatched and the hay cut with vicious hay knives into trusses on cold winter mornings for the cattle. There were few haycutters and most of the fields were still mown by scythe and the hay loaded on carts and ricked by pitchfork. The few hay elevators that there were were driven by a horse that would walk in endless circles to provide the power to drive the mechanism.

because public transport was still in its infancy there were many people who had never left the village and there was a strong community feeling. Most of this spirit was centred around either the parish church...St. Mary's.... or the two Chapels and their respective organisations.

When my -father was offered the living the old vicarage was in a desperate state and was found to be in an advanced condition of dry rot as well as in a poor structural state and it was decided that it should be pulled down and replaced by a new house.

The old vicarage had stood very close to Glebe Farm and it was decided to re-site the new one in another part of the grounds. While this was being built we lived in Vine Cottage, next to the church and almost opposite the vicarage. Due to some trouble with the builders there was a delay over finishing the building, and one end of the house was roofless for the best part of a year and eventually this part, by the front door, was built with some of the attractive stone of the old house.

Far off days, before main water or drainage, before very many houses had electricity and there were few motor cars, now it may sound somewhat primitive but I wonder if in the intervening years the characters and the character of the North Marston of 46 years ago has changed and if there remains something of the old spirit still?"