

92 years a villager - the story of Arthur Howard

On the 19th January, 1911, Arthur Howard was born at the ‘Arch’, adjacent to the medieval church at Bottisham. His story covers life in Bottisham over the next nine decades. In that time many major changes have been made to the village services and buildings. Oil lamps have been replaced by gas which, in turn, has been replaced by electricity. Water, raised from wells by a bucket on a long pole, has been replaced by piped water. The best water came from the bore-hole dug down to the greensands, by the Council, on the ‘Hill’ nearby Bedford’s shop (later the ‘Stocks’ restaurant). The quality of the water varied according to the position of the well in the village. For example, water from the well in the Pighthle was very hard. A sewerage system, installed when the American airforce arrived in World War II, has replaced outhouse privies. Privies later built on the side of the houses replaced the need to pull the ‘box’ on wheels from the bottom of the garden for ‘disposal’ in a hole dug in the garden! Some carried their buckets to the allotments on the site where the Royal British Legion now stands. Entry to this site was through Church Farm, once the key had been obtained from Charlie Parker. Such was life until the early 30’s. Arthur has seen brick buildings erected in place of Tudor cottages; mud tracks with no footpaths, and deep ditches either side, replaced by metalled roads. Small boys enjoyed pressing their boots into the road surface of Town Street (now High Street) and water oozed out from the springs below the surface. Some 12 beer-houses have been reduced in number, currently, to one inn; and modern street lighting has replaced the occasional oil or gas lamp. Education has changed beyond the conception of the modern child, and the village population has more than doubled since Arthur’s childhood. His story also includes the impact of modern social services, transport changes and the evolution of sophisticated modern communication.

First day at school was traumatic Arthur and his friend refused to hang their school caps in the lobby and insisted on taking them into the class. Miss Peachy the assistant teacher, and Mr Morgan, the Headmaster, brooked no dissent, the caps were confiscated and Arthur and his friend fled for home - an event for a three-year old never to be forgotten! Education was conducted with all classes in one large room of the National Church School, built in 1839. Arthur remembers, at four years of age, seeing the school house of the Sunday school teacher, 'Daddy' Hollings, being demolished in 1914 to make way for the enlargement of the playground - the demolition provided a pram full of much welcomed firewood. At school, letters were learnt by using a wooden meat skewer to scratch letters in the surface of sand in a small tray. Progress was made from sand trays to the use of slates with a slate pencil.

Memories of the First World War remain real. The sound of a Zeppelin, droning over Bottisham on its way to bomb London, coincided with his mother being fined five shillings for showing a chink of light from a window during the blackout (a sum equivalent to £9 in 2002!). There would usually have been no fine, but, on that particular night the local policeman was accompanied by his Superintendent! Arthur has no memory of wartime food rationing which probably reflects the sacrifice by his mother for the growing boy. The army billeted horses and carts in the barn of the King's Head and, once the hay had been baled on the farms, it was confiscated by army patrols, who visited all farms with horse drawn vehicles. The soldiers were billeted in the various village pubs. Relief to school life came when gangs of children were taken by Dr Grace to select sweets at Woollard's Store (now 103 High Street). Visits to the Cambridge Fair, by taxi, were also organised by Dr Grace which were most welcome: life in the 20's was hard. "When we came out of school we went up to the Swan, especially the last day of the Newmarket races. When the races were on they did not take the horses home at night but stayed in Newmarket for two or

three days. Race goers stopped at the Swan for a drink”. The boys shouted “Can we hold your horse, Sir?”. Arthur got a bucket of water to give the horses a drink, and got a few coppers for his trouble. The boys were also able to collect a few halfpennies and pennies, at the time of the Reach Fair, when the Mayor of Cambridge came back through the village and threw out the coppers to the villagers.

Schooling finished for Arthur at the age of fourteen and he has stayed working in the village for nine decades. His working life began at the Swan Inn, situated at the eastern end of the present High Street (now a business premise). The ‘Bottisham Haulage Company’, based at the rear of the Swan, operated three steam wagons. which were owned by a farmer from Swaffham Bulbeck (Philip Singleton). Granite was carted from the Lode railway station to repair roads for several miles around. Sometimes grain was carted to London and cattle feed filled the wagons on the return journey. A journey to London necessitated carrying bags of coal, and at least three stops for water, on the way. London was reached in under four hours, but often through driving too fast which broke the chains of the steam wagon. The first steam wagon acquired was driven by Archie Harvey (there were several Harveys living in Lode). Working hours at the Swan were occasionally relieved by the visit of a ‘concert party. Arthur has happy memories of the singer in the cast (Daisy Marsh), whose professional(!), name was Daisy May, singing about her rabbit as white as snow that “couldn’t buck up because it was a doe”. When Arthur went to work at the garage he was asked, “Yew got a license to drive yet boy?” He was given five shillings to buy a licence - a year before the legal age of 17 - and started to drive lorries, Model-T Fords, Chevrolets, and do repairs on the few cars in the area. Dr Wood, physician and surgeon, had a two-cylinder De Dion-Bouton which had the disconcerting habit of backfiring at regular intervals. Dr Wood was killed by his one-cylinder Rover when he used the starting-handle with the car in gear. There was a

Studebaker owned by Mr Towler at Tunbridge Farm, Mr Paul had a Victor and Mr Tebbit's car at Bendish was burnt out, never to be replaced!

Seventy years ago social life was centred around the Beer Houses, the Reading Room, and behind it, the Parish Room. Once a year, near Easter, a Parish tea and singsong is remembered with pleasure. The Anchor, Golden Ball and the Swan pubs, ran slate-clubs and any excess at the end of the year was shared out. Some villagers were notorious for always "being on the Club and sick list". Before the second World War, Mr Jenyns had an area in Bottisham Park fenced for a cricket pitch where the final for the Jenyns Cup was always played. The cup final was a "rare day". A large marquee, which belonged to the Bottisham Flower Show, was used by the cricketers and one for sweets and cups of tea. Tents were in charge of King Cole who had a coal business. There was no charge for villagers to use the Park. Football was played in Bendish Close before the Grandfather of the present Mr Roger Jenyns gave land for a recreation ground - now Jenyns Close. In the early year of the First World War there were goal posts near the present Beauleigh House in a twelve-acre field. Arthur was working at Six Mile Bottom, when the Second World War started. Arthur had the job of carting bricks from Burwell brick-works around East Anglia and the coast to supply aerodromes and gun emplacements. In 1942 he was called-up. Placed on an embarkation draft he got home leave then told to go home! He was recalled in 1945 to R.E.M.E. then to the Service Corps, and found himself in Gibraltar, then known as a 'home posting' Day and night lorries carted rocks from inside the mountain to extend the runway. He also went to North Africa and was demobbed in 1946 at the age of 35.

So many memories of village small developments are still real to Arthur, who in 2002 is the oldest inhabitant of Bottisham. The limes alongside the cemetery were planted by his father some one hundred

years ago. Arthur remembers the two Miss Kings telling him how they had planted a sixpence under the third tree in the row - an event generating some excitement. Sally King was referred to as a 'real old war-horse' and when sister Elizabeth sat in a water tank, but failed to drown herself, she ended up in the hospital at Fulbourn. The land behind Bendish was swarming with rabbits and the field was known as 'rabbit hedge'. Time changed the whole area. The agricultural land was grassed down, with the loss of hedge-lined footpaths to Wilbraham and Fulbourn, and the area became the airfield for many hundreds of American airmen during World War II. Telling his stories raises heart-warming chuckles!