
Jobs for the boys! Memories of Hellifield Auction Mart

The Auction Mart was such a dominant presence in the village during the years I was growing up in Hellifield, that it seemed inconceivable there would come a time when the Auction Mart was no longer there. The loading and unloading docks opposite the Institute were the scene of much activity on sale days. Murfin's Fish and Chip Shop and Cafe was always busy, and Preston's Barbers near the Church also had an increase in trade, with farmers popping in for a short back and sides.

Preston's Newsagents and Martins Bank next door were popular haunts for the farmers, as was Mr Rolfe's Greengrocers and Store which was opposite the Vicarage. The origins of the Auction Mart date back to 1886, when several local farmers discussed the idea of forming a Cattle Auction Mart in the Village. Land was purchased for the project and the subsequent Auction Mart Company went on to be a fixture and a part of Hellifield life for a further 100 years or more. The Auction Mart was closed and the buildings dismantled in the 1990's. The whole area is now part of the 'new' housing estate which in itself has become part and parcel of the village. The heritage of the Auction Mart and its agricultural links are remembered through place names such as Wheelwrights Court and Drovers Walk.



A similar view of the Main Road Front Docks under demolition. 1990's



Cattle Wagons on the Auction Mart Front Docks. 1980's

In the 1970's the Auction Mart was still a busy place with activity and sales taking place on various days of the week. Mr Laurie Kay and Mr Malcolm Skidmore were the Auctioneers on most days, and the sales were broken down into Milk Cows, Sheep, and Beef. Sale days were generally Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays – with Thursday being a busy day, when a combination sale of Milk Cows, Beef, and Sheep was held. There were also special sales taking place at Easter and Christmas. Every alternate Friday, the main ring was cleared and an evening furniture sale took place, which drew many people and was a popular event. With all that activity taking place, the Auction Mart needed staff to organise stock coming in and out, herd the cattle and sheep to and from the fields, assemble the sheep pens, load and unload wagons and trailers, and keep up with the ongoing 'Mucking Out'

that took place in the shipons, sheds, and associated buildings. There was also the unloading of hay and straw to deal with, plus seasonal jobs like thistle-mowing, creosoting the many pens, and moving cattle around within the Mart itself.

Many local lads including myself had part time jobs at the Auction. For teenagers like me it was a job that encompassed duties that by today's stringent Health and Safety rules, simply wouldn't be allowed to happen! I can well remember myself, David Preston, Robin Bartlett, and Alan Starkie mowing thistles down the Beck Fields with vicious long handled scythes. We were unsupervised and left to get on with it. Norman Lawson was our foreman. I seem to remember being paid 40 pence an hour. Such wealth! We also brought cattle through the village from the fields. Along the Back Lane or down Haw Lane, we drove the cows through the village and into the Auction Mart where we chained

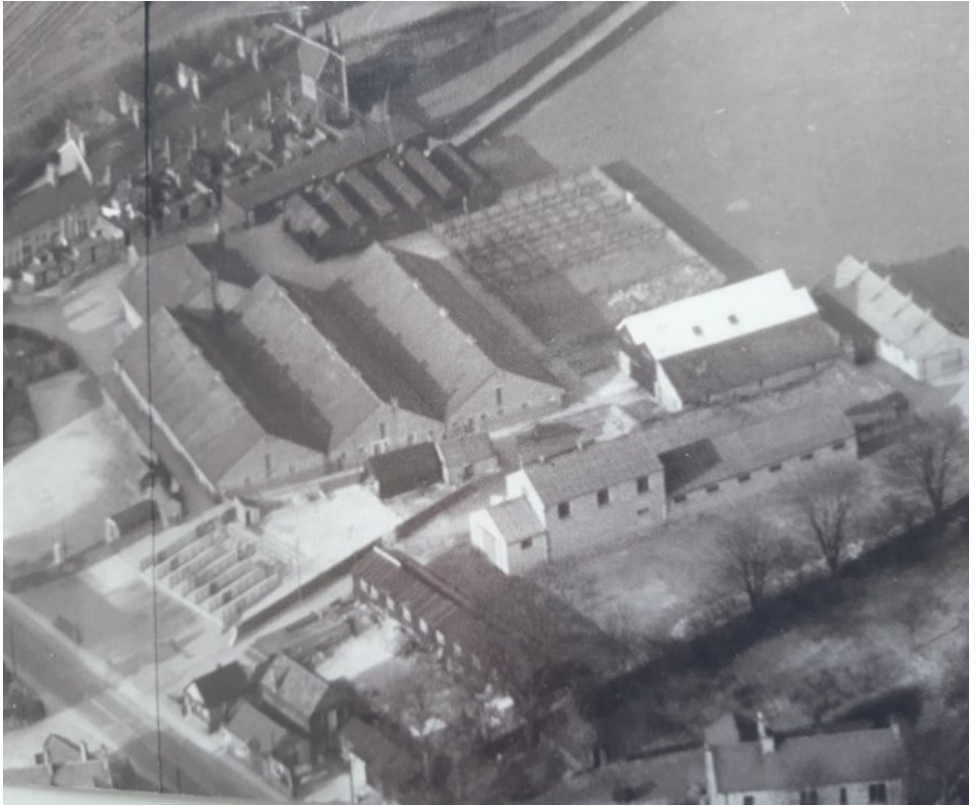
them up in stalls.

The cattle left a residue en-route, which was no doubt good for the roses! People did actually come out with shovels along Gisburn Road and Haw Grove, to supplement their garden manure. Chaining cows up was hazardous in itself, as we were often kicked, or squashed between two cows in our efforts to get them in place. Try getting cows into one stall and putting a chain around their necks when they just don't want to play ball. It wasn't easy!

On sale days we were busy erecting and labelling sheep pens. We penned the sheep up and following the sale we disassembled the pens and cleaned the area out. Whilst this had been going on, cows had been arriving, and were graded and labelled. We assisted with penning them up, getting them ready to be weighed, and moving them into the sale ring. The Auction Café was busy and we were glad of a brew.



Wintry scene on the Auction Mart front in the early 1980's. The buildings on the right are the Cobblers Shop and the Joiners.



Aerial view of the Auction Mart. Taken in the 1950's.

Dinner was taken there, or sometimes I'd go home for lunch. This wasn't entirely favourable with my Mother, as I was generally covered in cow muck and stunk of sheep! Then it was back to carry on with the work. The sale days were long and we were often there till about 9 p.m.

During the mid 1970's the sheep pens at the rear of the ring were extended and new wooden loading pens were built. They covered a wide area and I remember me and David Preston being tasked with creosoting them all. That was a steady job, and a rather tedious one to say the least. Much of the job obviously involved 'Mucking Out'. Strangely enough, none of us minded

this and there was a sense of satisfaction when the shippers or sale rings were cleaned up and a fresh covering of sawdust was put down. Ah yes.. I can still smell it all now.

So there you have it. Some memories of the Auction Mart in the days when five or six young lads spent busy days surrounded by sheep and cows. Covered in muck and having a laugh in between our labours. It seems a long time ago but it is still all very vivid. All part of the past – and a slice of Hellifield in days gone by.

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