
Hellifield – A village of two halves?

I was interested to read the comments in the last issue of the 'Herald' asking readers if anyone had any memories of John Hoar the Grocer, who had a Store in the Village in days gone by. It is doubtful whether any readers living today would remember the man in question as we are talking about the period covering the late 19th Century and the early part of the 20th Century. Mr Hoar himself plied his trade from a building located on Kendal Road, which by coincidence was opposite 3 Kendal Road where I lived until 1980. I remember this establishment when it was a shop run by Mr Popay – the father of the late Lloyd Popay, who ran the garage by the railway bridge down Back Lane.

In the early part of the 20th Century, John Hoar was running his Grocery, Drapers and Corn Dealership from the building on Kendal Road and although both he and Mr Popay are both long gone, the building still exists as a substantial dwelling. It passed through my mind, that as a child growing up in the village in the early 1960's, the Village itself seemed to be divided into two halves. Living on Kendal Road, we had our own shops. The school was on our side, as was the Railway Station and the Garage just past the school, which was run by the Garnett family (located where Townson Tractors stands today). Adjoining the garage were the premises of Mr McHale the Electrician (now Beck's Garden Machinery Ltd). In the 2008 Book 'The Beckjumpers' I recalled these places, and how they figured as part of our daily lives. To a small boy living across the road, Mr Popay's shop and Off-Licence was an emporium that seemed to sell everything from sweets to groceries, plus all manner of household items. Mr Popay also delivered fruit and veg around the district in his van. I particularly remember his visits to Halton West, where he made deliveries to my Uncle Arthur at Auld Hall Farm.



The Back Yard of 3 Kendal Road. L to R: Neil Redfern, Ken Leak, Dave Leak & Michael Wright. Popay's shop can be seen in the right background.

Walking towards the village from Popay's Shop you came to the bottom of Station Road. Opposite was Lambert's Shop, which again sold everything you needed, plus deliveries of your weekly shopping. This was before the days when Supermarkets had the monopoly on food shopping and car ownership was not as prolific as it is today. Brian and his wife Rose were a cheery couple and Brian was always full of jokes and good humour. My Mum ordered her groceries every week from him, and I recall the shop busy with people in and out and orders



The Lambert family outside the shop at the top of Brook Street. Farmer and milkman Ronnie Swinbank is wearing the tweed hat.

being boxed up, ready to be delivered. A regular visitor was our long term Milkman Ronnie Swinbank, who farmed at Beck House which was located behind the school. Brian from the shop regularly assisted Ronnie on the farm. Particularly at Hay Time, at which us kids also helped – or just got in the way!

Ronnie Swinbank was born at Beck House and was the Milkman in Hellifield for over 65 years. He was an industrious and active man whose motto was 'Work keeps you active'. I remember him with his crates on our

doorstep, with a Woodbine which seemed to be permanently dangling from his lips.

Across the street from Lambert's Shop was Mr Cryer's Bakery and Shop. I remember cold winter evenings after school, when we kids would knock on the back door of the bakery to ask Mr Cryer if he had any scraps. Mr Cryer would invite us in to his warm, enticing Bakery where his freshly made loaves stood ready for delivery. The smell was appetising and Mr Cryer usually found us scraps and cut-offs from his cakes and buns which we really enjoyed.

There was a small shop at the front, facing onto Brook Street, which I remember as very small but with plenty of sweets!

Walking along the main road into the village and towards the railway bridge, I remember an Antique Shop and a small Butchers Shop and then the main building you came to was the structure known as Central Mews. Now converted into houses, when I was a child this building hosted a Burlers and Menders which was outsourced from Salt's of Saltaire and provided



Joe Coates outside his business premises at Central Mews. Circa 1905. Courtesy of Sylvia Coates.

employment for between 50 and 60, mainly local, women.

After closure in the 1960's the building became Bobby Riseley's Saleroom. Bobby ran the Saleroom for many years as an outlet for furniture, goods, tools, household appliances – almost anything! Many young newlyweds picked up their first items of furniture

capitalised on the opportunities for trade created by the railway companies. It might be noted that John Hoar assisted Joe Coates in his ventures around this period.

Standing on Beck Bridge and looking down the road in the Skipton direction, it was always easy to see that the dominant railway bridge over the road



Central Mews during the transition to houses at the start of the 21st Century.

from Bobby! It was very popular and patronised by all and sundry. In the early years of this century (and it seems strange saying that!) the buildings were converted into houses.

Taking a look at the list of householders and businessman in 1900, shows that one Joseph Coates resided in the village and from premises on Gisburn Road carried out his business of 'Butter Factor – Eggs and Butter Production'. Not a man to let the grass grow under his feet, Joseph - or Joe as he was known – increased his roles to include 'Goods Carrier, Horse & Carriage Hire and Coal Merchant'. Joe created a new centre for his expansion when he built Central Mews in 1900. The building comprised stabling, a loading dock, plus interior space and a mill for grinding corn. The village was in its heyday as a railway centre and no doubt Joe would have

did split the village in two. The footpath under the bridge (No Subway in the 60's!) would bring you to the Post Office, Auction, Institute, Church etc. To us kids it was the busy part. The hustle and bustle part. The part where some of the other kids lived, that we often only came across at school.

Nowadays there are no longer any shops in our half. Townson's and Beck's Garden Machinery are the sole outlets. Hellfield has grown since I was little and still retains plenty of outlets to provide a thriving community. Despite the fact that when something new appears here and there, something will always disappear somewhere else.

Still, that's the story of most villages and small communities in the 21st Century. Time marches on.

Ken Leak - February 2022