



STEEPLE ASTON VILLAGE ARCHIVE TRUST

A WALK AROUND STEEPLE ASTON 100 YEARS AGO.

This was the last entry in a cub's book, written when he was aged about 10 years in the mid 1970s. His Mother has treasured this book all these years and has kindly allowed us to reproduce it as an article for Steeple Aston Life. It is interesting in that it refers not only to life in the early part of the twentieth century, but also to how things were three quarters of the way through it! I have followed the child's writing as closely as possible.

Steeple Aston 60 years ago

My Granny came to stay with us at Easter and she told me what Steeple Aston was like about 60 years ago when she was living at Barton Lodge on an Estate then owned by Lord Dillon. Starting at Heyford Station where she used to meet people and collect their luggage with a pony and trap, over the Bridge and up the Beeches which has never changed until now with all the lovely trees being cut down.

The first place was a black smith's shop, opposite where the war memorial stands now. Then came Mr Ray the bun man's house (*Springvale*), he was often seen with a wicker basket on his arm carrying buns and black bulls eye in a tin, 5 a penny (old money). Next the butcher's shop (*Ralph and Joan Fonge*) then the co-op. This was a big store then with a grocery department at the bottom and a drapery store upstairs where the servant girls from the big houses round bought their caps and aprons and uniforms. From the White Lion down to the Black Smith's shop, on the wide grass verge, the annual feast was held with Swing Boats and other stalls. Waltons the Butchers is still in the same family. The meat was then delivered in a horse drawn van and Mr Walton usually had 2 or 3 Greyhounds running along by the side. The motor car was just beginning to come and on the opposite side of the road Mr Fred Price was starting a small workshop in a shed and after some years Built Hopcofts Holt Garage. Further along Mr Kinch's farm, still the same. Then the post office. Mr Dew was the post master. No mail van then, delivery was by Bicycle. Over the wall there was a field where football and many other games were played. (*Bradshaw Close*). On the corner was the Red Lion. Brewers drays delivered beer by a Shire horse driven cart, the Beer then in wooden Barrels. Over the wall in Water Lane used to be a walled in Garden.

At the end of the lane we come face to face with the Big House always called Bradshaws. The Gardens were all kept lovely and were open every year for the flower show which ended with dancing on the lawn and fairy lights in the trees. Nothing much has changed along North Side. The Technical School was used by all the villages round for cooking, wood work etc. On the corner opposite the Church was another Blacksmiths. Then down Doctors Hill. The surgery was held in the big house at the top of the Hill. Here also the medicine was mixed up. At the top of the hill was the Harris's Stores. The outside of this building has not altered. In the fields the work was done by Steam Engines and Horses. Cars were only owned by the wealthy people.



We would be interested to hear from anyone who thinks they know anything of the blacksmith's shop which is referred to twice, opposite the war memorial. There's certainly no sign of it now, so could it have been a position favoured by a travelling blacksmith? The wide grass verge along Lawrence Field's field is an ideal location for fun and games, as the bellringers can testify to when in the '80s they had all manner of fair ground rides there one weekend as part of their intensive fund raising effort, little realising that it had been done before! The Feast Day obviously refers to St Peter's Feast day which today we celebrate with the church fete at the end of June. There was a procession around the village as the photograph above shows. Connie Franks is the nurse second in line, then comes Edie Stone, Winnie Palmer, Maud Ray, Ivy Shott, Freda Young, and on the right is Joan Steel's brother Lloyd Price, holding a bow and arrow, no doubt having lots of fun being Robin Hood for the day. So was it always celebrated by children in fancy dress or was this a one off? Can you identify anyone else in this 1923 photograph? I imagine that Mr Ray the baker, living right opposite the grass verge, did exceedingly well with sales on Steeple Aston's Feast Day!

Diana Gardner
SAVA