
Village Life

Life for me in the Village began in the Year 1929 although, to be accurate, I cannot remember much for several years to come. This "Village Life", I am told, was very hard in those far off days, but would get easier for most people as the years, and the story unfolds.

The Village concerned is called Ashendon, and is situated on a hill overlooking the Vale of Aylesbury, at some 500 feet or so above sea level. The clump of elm trees at the very top of the hill were always reckoned to be at an elevation of five hundred and twenty-five feet.

Ashendon had a "Top End", a "Lower End", and consisted of a number of cottages, some of which are thatched, a School, a Church, (St Mary's), a Public House (the Red Lion), a shop, a Post Office, four farms, a blacksmiths shop, and a Village Hall ("The Hut") in the shape of a first World War Army hut. It also had a railway junction (Ashendon junction) which in actual fact was at Pollicot; this was the point where the Great Western and the London, & North Eastern, (Great Central), parted company.

The name Ashendon was always understood to come from the previous name Essendene, meaning "The Ash trees on the Hill", not that there were many ash trees in my time, and certainly there are less now, but there was a fair sprinkling of ash, oak, and elm, with elm being the predominant one.

A second small Village or Hamlet, Pollicot was close by, this had two farms, but used the shop, school, etc, and was considered to be part of "Our Village". This also had a "Lower part" Lower Pollicot, which had one farm and several cottages. There were no services installed though these would come many years later.

The boundary line covering all three parts ran roughly round the bottom of the hill, and must have covered an area of some four square miles.

The view from any of the three parts of the village could at times be quite spectacular, particularly on those cool summer days when you had no heat haze to contend with. Looking north-west you could see way over the top of Bicester, and in the opposite direction over the top of Winchendon, as far as the War Memorial on Coombe Hill, the woods at Stokenchurch, and Whiteleaf Cross further to the south. During the War you could clearly see the fires caused by the bombing of both London and Coventry. This was more emphasised on the nights when the clouds gave reflections - the Ack-Ack fire was also visible in the case of London. Waddesdon Manor, of course, was visible and the water tower at Mursley, as was the cement works at Chinnor. If a cold wind blew, as often was the case, then it was usually reckoned that "somebody had left the gate open".

There were two Railway Stations approximately a mile away at Wotton, one being main line, L.N.E.R. Great Central, which for all intents and purposes covered Marylebone to Brackley, for the few passenger trains that ran, which of course put you on to the main line going north; and a second being only a "feeder", "The Brill

Tramway", which ran from Quainton to Brill. This one closed down in November nineteen-thirty five, while the mainline became a victim of Doctor Beeching some years later - this also removed Ashendon junction from the map, the remaining Great Western section now being only single line working. The journey to either Station would be taken as part of everyday life, walking for most people being the only option. I will try to add more to this later.

We were a Village without a Manor or other large House, so without a "Squire", any "Forlock Touching" or "by Permission of" was not often called for. The nearest thing to "Gentry" would be the farmers, and in this respect we were lucky - they either joined in any celebrations or such, or on the other hand left us to get on with it; either way they would usually co-operate with the loan of equipment such as a horse and cart, and certainly the use of a field or barn.

In my very early days we had a resident Policeman but, when he retired, he was not replaced. The vicar, likewise, didn't live in the Village but had to travel several miles from Wotton Underwood, usually known as just plain Wotton (as oddly enough was the station), to be with us. His car, like all other cars in the area, would be known to us, so if you didn't want to meet him you always saw him coming and kept a low profile - he just might be rounding up recruits for some job or other.

The Year 1929 saw a small "population explosion", six children being born, of which I was the oldest, arriving in January. Even after this increase the total population of both Ashendon, and Pollicot would not be more than one hundred and fifty.