

A Busy Village is Much Changed

Keith Bunnett who grew up in Farnhill wrote the following article. It was published in the Craven Herald a few years ago. It is an atmospheric recollection of his childhood in the village. Indulge in his descriptive journey, feel the vibrant life and characters that existed in our community. He raises a poignant observation at the end of the article about the village as it is today. Our thanks go to Marcel Bunnett for forwarding this piece to us.



During my recent annual return to the Craven district, which included several walks through Farnhill, I was surprised to see no one else walking - plenty of cars - but no sign of activity, a ghost town. How different to the village I was born into in 1927.

My early memories of village life were the gathering of local men on the bridge in the Thirties for the weekly walk down the canal bank to sign on the dole at Silsden labour exchange. No one had cars then - or giro's. But we did have shops.

Coming down the village we had the butchers, then Willie Barber's shop, which I hated because if I didn't sit still he would threaten me with Saturday morning school. Then came a shoe and clogs retail and repair shop, followed by Mosleys Emporium.

Down from here came Lizzie Jacksons-cakes bread and take your own plate for the best meat and potato pie and peas in Yorkshire.

Opposite was a joiner's shop, which during the war became Farnhill Aircraft Components. The noise of the drilling could be heard down the Main Street and the smell of the paint spray was at times a bit too much. However, when we saw the aeroplanes completed, Farnhill was doing its bit for the war effort.

A more pleasant smell came from the next business, 'Jammy' Howarth's premises. His jam making days, though it always smelt like strawberry, were a delight and a bonus for me because if I collected a dozen jars he would give me sixpence, half a penny each. This was my entree to Cross Hills picture house that night.

The fact that I could collect clean jars so easily locally shows that a large part of many diets had been the contents of the same. Not surprising, because money was scarce in the late Thirties, had it not been for the weekly jumble sales, many families would have been in trouble. I wonder how many know the meaning of poor today ?

Further down the street, we had the mill, the main employer and the noisiest, especially in the summer with the doors open. Opposite was the Co-operative, once the divi came to two shillings in the pound, a real help for many. On Newby Road we had a fish and chip shop, Mr's Oliver's grocery and Stephen's sweet shop.

So, with lorries delivering, people shopping, we had, at any time of the day, activity.

The people were very proud of their homes, in particular the entrance. Early morning, flags were swept, steps pumice stoned, not for them today's electronics to enter "Come in, stride over't step. I hope you've nowt on them shoes!"

But the centre of village life was the institute. Early in the war, the entrance was protected by a wall of sandbags but once inside everyone tried to forget the terrible things happening in the world outside and for a few hours had the support of others. Of course, the dreadful words inflation or counselling hadn't been invented.

Regretfully, families in the village did loose loved ones and the way they carried on with their lives was an inspiration to everyone and we should never forget the sacrifice given.

In 1941 started the never to be forgotten Saturday night dancing at the Institute. It is impossible to think now that people would walk from Sutton, Bradley, Silsden in the rain, snow and blackout to enjoy those nights and then walk home afterwards. Could they do it today ?

This was the start of my life in music, as I joined the Hallwood Players trio. Little did I think that I would be playing for the next 62 years all over the world, yet no one gig ever gave me more pleasure than those nights at the Institute. To see all those happy smiling faces on people starved of any other entertainment, the uncertainty of their lives, and the lads wondering where the next posting would take them-what an audience!. In those days we never saw any fights or trouble of any kind. It is another world today.

So you have a different village now. I do hope you Farnhillians have as much happiness as I had there. When I die my ashes are to be brought up to my favourite spot 'the Pinnacle' so, one way or another , I will be back next year.

Keith Bunnett.