



HOPTON. RECOLLECTION BY CLARA SHICKLE (1885-1976)

A compact little village on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk, with a population of about 500. One cannot say there is anything historical about it. In the seventy three years of my life, I have seen a great many changes, both in the people and the village.

I was born in the house in which I am now living. It was called the Old Hall. A family named Goodrich lived in it. At the old gentleman's death the school and the Church were endowed with so much money.

We have a grand old Church of about the 16th connected Century. I was christened, confirmed and married in it and have been connected with it all my life. I have seen eight Rectors here. The first one that I remember died and was buried at the East end of Market Weston Church, our churchyard being full and the Cemetery was in the making, but not consecrated. How well I remember all the school children going in the Funeral procession, each carrying small bunches of flowers.

We also had three chapels, one was used as a day school. If you attended there you had to pay twopence each week. The Methodist was built in 1885. The Wesleyan was a large, red bricked building which collapsed and was never rebuilt. They had a band which played for the services there.

We also possessed a village band which practised each week on the Rectory meadow.

Sixty years ago this village was full of industry. We had three large provision shops which sold drapery as well. The people from the villages all around came here to do their weekly shopping. Anything special they wanted it would mean a trip to Bury St. Edmunds in a carrier's cart or van starting at eight in the morning; a three hours to three and a half hours journey; leave at four in the afternoon arriving home about seven in the evening.

Butchers there were three. I can remember one shop being burnt down. Now in its place we have a fine up-to-date shop. We had joiners and cabinet makers. A tailors if you went into the High Street you would see three men sitting on the board sewing chiefly gamekeeper's suits or coachman 's livery. One poor old gentleman would come round with a donkey delivering coal, another would come from Harling with a horse and van and sell it for tenpence per cwt. Blacksmiths, we had three. In those days there were land horses to be shod. Farmers kept six, seven and eight horses and what more lovely sight than to see the horses ploughing in the

fields. At the Harness maker's in the street there would be a load of straw tipped over and three, sometimes four men sitting there stuffing the horses collars.

Mat weaving, that is rush mats. As children we loved to see the old man with his mule and cart going round selling his mats, his legs through the floor on to the axle.

We had a resident chimney sweep who would go for miles around.

The Shoemaker would measure and make the heavy boots for the men who worked on the land; he was also a Barber. On Saturdays his shop would be full of men waiting for their shave just as they came from work, chiefly those who had been working with the thrashing engines, of which there were three sets going at one time.

Then there were the maltings where the corn was dried for Brewing of beer, almost everyone brewed their own beer.

Our school treats were looked forward to with great joy, in the summer we had tea on the lawn. Parents coming after tea and our Village Band played for dancing and after that fireworks. At Christmas it was Tea and a large Christmas Tree. The Rector being Father Xmas and giving each child a present.

With the Choir too we have had some very happy times. Our outing in the Summer was great fun. There were five men, ten boys, and five women in the Choir in those days. It was generally Yarmouth we went to for the outing, we had to start at 6.30 a.m. to get to Harling Station by 8 a.m. to catch the train. We went in a waggon drawn by two farm horses.

The big event of the year was Whitsunday Parade and Sports on the Monday. On the Sunday the Church would be just packed and crowds lined the streets outside. Foresters Paraded with the Band in their Regalia. On Monday morning they would go round to other villages in waggons and play at intervals coming back again in time for a good dinner in a marquee.

In the afternoon there were sports. Races for young and old. Mile Race for which cups were given, also cups for bicycle racing. The last few years of sports we had motor cycle racing.

1939 saw the finish, then we had about 2,000 spectators.

In those days we had the schoolroom for Whist Drives and Dances. Great fun we had at the fancy dress dances, people were satisfied with a good piano player, now it must be a good band.

Written about 1959.