

LOCAL HISTORY REMINISCENCES OF WILLIAM STACEY OF GELSMOOR

THEY APPEARED UNDER 'THE CHARNWOOD OF YESTERDAY'
ARTICLE IN THE LOUGHBOROUGH ECHO -18th MARCH 1950

COPIED AND EDITED BY SAMUEL T STEWART FROM THE ABOVE
NEWSPAPER

Mr. William Stacey knows as much about Coleorton and district as most people. To look at him, one finds it hard to believe that he is eighty-two years of age, physically alert, a brain responsive to his every probing and a memory retentive to the last tiny item of his far-distant youth. Proudly he relates that his mother died as recently as six years ago—at two years short of the century. She was left an orphan at four and on her marriage to Simeon Stacey she brought up eleven children . . . and she never used a pram, not one of the eleven ever fed from a bottle or sucked a dummy! His mother, he says, was never ill.

WILLIAMS' S FATHER SIMEON WAS A BUTCHER WHO LIVED IN THE WOOLROOMS in a two up, two down thatched cottage rented from the Beaumont Estate. Thomas Bird, who was commonly known as Thomas Richards lived directly opposite Simeon, across a dirt track, in a thatched cottage also. He had been christened twice, but Bird was actually his officially recorded surname. Thomas was a pit deputy, and was drowned at the age of 41 in 1863 when the No.2. Coleorton Colliery (known as the Califat) was flooded, leaving his wife and their 10 children destitute overnight. Along with other neighbours, Simeon Stacey came to their aid. Simeon supplied the family with bones, from which along with vegetables, provided by other friends, they could make broth. In this hand to mouth way, the children survived, until they were old enough to earn an income.

William's father was a butcher, well known throughout the lanes and paths of this extremity of Charnwood, and a familiar figure at Whitwick Market and other busier places. He dealt in cattle and horses, for he knew and understood animals and their potentialities as food or on the farms, as the case might be. Each year he visited Belton horse fair, to buy animals, which he would "break in." Mr. Stacey recalls one famous kicker with which his father had to deal: to subdue this rebel he had to harness it to two 56 lbs. weights and drive it round and round until it was tired.

Of Simeon's aptitude as breadwinner for such a large family, Mr. Stacey leaves it to be inferred that they were a happy and well-fed household living near the Woolrooms, a site since sadly marred by subsidence.

"STRAIGHT" BOOTS

In addition to the men who worked on the Beaumont Estate and the miners, a number of tradesmen managed to make a very satisfactory living in this sparsely-populated area. There was **George Fowkes**, the boot-maker, for instance, who made "straight" **boots** (i.e. the left foot the same as the right). The advantage of this style, says Mr. Stacey, was that each boot could be changed over day by day, so as to wear evenly!

Swannington Heritage tell us that George Fowkes (1823-1904) uncle Joseph was a shoemaker and George took up the trade when he moved to live at the Outwoods, Coleorton.

BUTTER 6d. A POUND

He remembers butter being sold at 6d. per pound at Ashby Market. He remembers, too, the succulent hams bought at the same price from Tom Kirby, the miller, whose mill stood in the field next to St. **George's** Church. Prime cuts of beef were 9d. per lb., with ordinary quality at 6d. and liver at 4d.

As the nearest markets were at Whitwick and Ashby, and transport was not plentiful, Coleorton folk of those days were constrained to a degree of improvisation which led to their being largely self-supporting. Coleorton, says Mr. Stacey, was always a poor place for water, and he remembers household supplies having to be carried from the Paddeck to the Woolrooms.

Concerning the multiplicity of lanes and cul-de-sacs which still abound in Church Town, Farm Town, Griflydam and Pegg's Green, he says that they made it nearer for pedestrians to travel! But, he adds, most of them were in a shocking state, and he rejoices that in these days they are in fair condition.

Charlie Marston, the **nail-maker** had his workshop at the Wool-rooms. He made one nail at a time, and when he could he persuaded the youngsters to operate his bellows for him. His products included **boot-nails** and the larger ones for the carpenters and farmers on the estate. Another source of interest was the "bauble" shop run by Peter Wallace, who turned out wondrous ornaments from Derbyshire "spar". Johnny Bale, who was the recognised local carrier to Ashby, one had an exciting experience when his horse fell down the old railway ventilation shaft.

**CHARLIE MARSON WAS THE MATERNAL GREAT GRANDFATHER OF
SAMUEL STEWART**

THE BLACKSMITH

Yet another character of note was Samuel Eagle, whose grocery store and bakery were on the site of the present Post Office. The local blacksmith—who officiated in a very **ancient** shop near the top of St. **George's** Hill, long since demolished for road-widening—would **shoe** a hackney or a hunter all round for 2s. 4d., and a cart-horse for 3s. to 3s. 6d.

"NOT MUCH MONEY"

But for the ordinary rank and file of workers there was not much money. Mr. Stacey remembers the time when a deputy at Coleorton pit would account himself well blessed with this world's goods on a wage of 4s. per day. Old Tom Turner, who died a few years ago at the age of 83, was, he says, the first to work at this local pit. Therein was absorbed the greater part of Coleorton men.

COW OR PIG

The low wages, explains Mr. Stacey, were not such a hardship as they might have been, because many men managed to keep a cow or a pig. But they undoubtedly had to work hard, whether in the mine or on the estate. On the timber-yard, which belonged to the Hall, the workers had to do all their sawing by cross-cut, as there were no circular saws. As for the miners, if the pit was on short time they had to manage as best they could, doing casual jobs, and theirs was a sublime content and an unfailing optimism in their passage through life.

RIPE OLD AGE

This old veteran, who spent most of his working years in railway service, by the way, seems to think it quite an ordinary matter to reach the age of four-score. Quite casually, he mentions that there are three octogenarians — Fred Hodges, William Roome, and Jim Fewkes — living in Ashby-road, Coleorton, at the present time.

" PICTURESQUE FIGURE "

At the Coleorton Church School the headmaster was Billy Briggs, who was a great-uncle of Mr. F. W. Forgham, now head of All Saints' School, Coalville. But a rather more picturesque figure remembered by Mr. Stacey was that of Frank Barkby, the headmaster of the school which stood near the foot of Zion Hill. He was often to be seen at the doorway, dressed in "box" hat and swallow-tailed coat and holding a cane in his hand. There was also a school in one of two small cottages behind the "Railway Tavern", and over this Mr. Woods, a stately personage with full beard wielded his authority for many years.

" STROKES AND POT-HOOKS "

But it was to the school at Newbold, near where is now New Lount Colliery, that Mr. Stacey was sent to learn his "strokes and pot-hooks." Mr. G. H. Mosedale was the master at that time, and he had the co-operation of his sister in the training of the Newbold youngsters and those from Coleorton who were old enough to walk the distance.

pal, Wright Fowkes, did not get on very well with singing, so that it was, maybe, for the sake of the other scholars that Mr. Mosedale would say before each singing lesson: "Stacey and Fowkes, you go out, as we are going to sing." Thereupon, for a half-hour or so, Stacey and Fowkes absented themselves on a blackberry-picking expedition or whatever other diversion was offered by the circumstances.

But Mr. Stacey does not forget to mention, with a pardonable pride, that his grandson, Mr. John Stacey, is the present headmaster of this same school at Newbold, and he is well aware that the present-day curriculum there is something very much more involved and advanced than it was in his day, over 70 years ago.

THE BEAUMONTS

No Coleorton reminiscences would be complete without some reference being made to the Hall, lately transferred into area headquarters of the National Coal Board—a transition which, to say the least, would have been amazing to the old-timers who knew the Beaumonts, and who lived and moved and had their being under the several reigns of successive baronets. Mr. Stacey remembers four generations of the Beaumonts. He knew Coleorton when the whole village was owned by the family, and when there were right royal spreads at the annual rent dinners, for those able to travel to the Hall to partake thereof. Those tenants who could not make a personal appearance at these functions by reason of age or infirmity were entitled to send for their portion of good things, to be consumed by their own firesides.

WORDSWORTH

The Beaumont family — Coal Board or no Coal Board—will ever be associated with Coleorton and Gracedieu. They encouraged the use of the Hall as a centre for recreation and recuperation of characters world-famous in the Arts, Music and Literature. To this day, the real Coleorton folk feel a measure of reflected glory in the fact that Wordsworth penned lines in the precincts of the Hall, and that Sir David Wilkie painted

THE "SERMONS "

But there were great times at the prayer meetings and at the annual "sermons", although a collection amounting to £5 at the latter was a very rare thing indeed. Services began as early as 7 a.m. on a Sunday. As for the week-night prayer meetings, there was a devotion and loyalty about them which might well be emulated today in many places. The old miners, on their way to night shifts, would snatch a few precious minutes to join in the services, hanging up their "snap" baskets on the hat-pegs as they went in

" PROVIDENCE " CHAPEL

The Baptist Chapel, marooned, even today, in the obscurity of Workhouse-lane, was built for the convenience of the people at Linby Hall, says Mr. Stacey, and there was "Providence Chapel," the ruins of which now have a house built into them. This was a branch of the Wesleyan Chapel at Griffydam, and there were Sunday morning preaching services held therein, with members of the Rowell family being amongst the chief supporters. Mr. Stacey himself came into possession of this house near the chapel many years ago, and he found that the stables had previously been used for the making of stockings. Furthermore, from the deeds he discovered that the ground whereon the house stood was originally rented for "ten shillings and a peppercorn" per annum.

"CHARVILLE'S TEAR-COAT"

Life in those days was not all work. There was, for instance, the annual Wakes — "always the first Sunday after August 26th". These were held behind Charville's pub, and the main attractions were swinging boats and small horses turned round by hand. There was much drinking at the "Beaumont Arms," of which Mr. Charville was landlord, and considerable custom for a mixture of ale and port wine — known throughout the district as "Charville's tear-coat". The reaction of any who were reckless enough to consume more than a modicum of this stimulant was beyond prophecy!

TOLL-GATES

Mr. Stacey remembers the old toll-gates—at Lount, on the Birmingham-road, near the Gin Stables and near Frank Barkby's school. The fees for passing through were 1d. if on horseback, and more if a vehicle was involved.

Most of the thatched cottages of his boyhood days are gone. One point he mentions about interior decoration schemes: instead of wooden skirting boards these cottages used to be gas-tarred from 4 in. to 6 in. round the bottoms of the walls!

**THIS WAS KNOWN AS ENGINE GATE AND LOCATED ON THE
HINCKLEY TO MELBOURNE TURN PIKE JUST OVER THE BROOK**

A DISASTER

It was a Beaumont of earlier days who, perturbed by the searing of the landscape caused by mounds thrown up from old pit workings, planted trees to hide the disfigurement and to make Coleorton a place of beauty. How many pit shafts were sunk in the vicinity at one time or another is open to conjecture, but the "Califat" pit was sunk in 1854, when Mr. Stacey's father was a boy of 14, and the disaster—when the mine and three others were flooded—in 1863, brought tragedy to the neighbourhood. One of the victims—Mr. Richards—left a widow and nine children living at the Woolrooms.

"CALIFAT"

Mention of "Califat" (named after a British camp in the Crimea) calls to mind "California" (named during the gold rush, and "Calcutta". There was also "Newbold Glory," where the coal was wound up by an old threshing engine, and where tragedy occurred in 1886, owing to "black damp."

But there was a normal quietude about the routine of Coleorton life, and the village policeman, who lived near the Fishpond, had very little work to occupy his time.

THE FUNERAL OF SIMEON STACEY – FATHER OF WILLIAM STACEY

Funeral of Mr. S. Stacey - The funeral took place on Saturday at the Griffydham Wesleyan Burial Ground of Mr. Simeon Stacey, of Gelsmoor, formerly, a well known butcher in the district, and later a small holder. He was nearly 70 years of age, and died after only a fortnight's illness. The deceased leaves a widow and ten children- six sons and 4 daughters - 35 Grandchildren and three Great grandchildren.

He was an interesting personality and often recalled the time when as a lad of tender, he worked at Whitwick colliery, and used to wear a belt around his waist with a hook upon it and helped the ponies to draw the tubs of coal. There were no eight hour working days in those times. In the winter time, it was dark when they descended the mine and dark when they came up again so that they never saw daylight except on Sundays.

After leaving the pit, he was apprenticed to a butcher, and later was in a business of his own which he combined with farming till he was 70 years of age. The deceased was a life long Primitive Methodist, and the first part of the funeral service was held at Coleorton Primitive Methodist Chapel which he had been associated with as a member for many years, the service being conducted by the Rev. J. Blayney of Ashby.

The aged widow and all the deceased's children were present, and the day of the funeral was the 50th birthday of his eldest son Mr. John Stacey of Sheffield. Two of the sons, Messrs S. and W. Stacey are well known M.R. officials of Coalville.

There was a good number of floral tributes. The respect of the villagers was shown by the many drawn blinds on the way to the burial ground.

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