

BASKETMAKING

Recording of Frank Clarke, who was apprenticed to Bert Ellis, Evesham

There were numerous kinds of osiers ie New Kind, Goldstone, Glebskin, French Germain, Black Moll etc Besides what was grown in this country we also had large quantities from abroad. In this country there were I should say thousands of hamper and basket makers. But the pay was so low that people began to leave the trade. As an apprentice I started off with 5 shillings a week 50 hours I did spare time work to earn extra money.

When I got married at the age of 22 my earnings were between 35 shillings and £2 for a 60hr week. In the summer I earned 55 shillings for 66hours making 66 fruit picking baskets. Today a man would be lucky to make 30 in a 40 hour week on day work.

There were a lot of men who would only make pot and ½ pot hampers. They were sold in 1000's the price of these was between 2s 3d to 2s 5d in the early 30's.

We would work with an oil lamp by the side of each man, and our heating was a smoky coke stove. The osiers were cut in the winter and then dried. They were then boiled and used as brown osiers. To get buff osiers the brown willows were boiled all day and then peeled. To get white osiers, the osiers were cut in the spring when the sap was rising and peeled straightaway. Any cane used came from abroad.

We were not paid for any holidays and we usually had ½ day at Easter, Whit and Aug and a day at Christmas. In 1933 or 35 I cycled to Tenbury Wells from Evesham, as we were short of work. I was cycling down Bridge St Worcester as the clock was striking 6 on any Tuesday morning. I kept myself in food and came home weekends for three weeks until my boss got more orders. Sometimes there were as many as 16 workers in our shop, at other times I have been there on my own. The reason for this, I was an all round worker, and some of the men could only make square work.

From the age of twenty I was a spare time fireman, and if the hooter went I would leave my work and go to the fire station
was three minutes in the day and four minutes at night.
was Tom Ellison, who at the age of 76 or over still does
a few baby's rattles.

Separate letter to Museum - 'The shop in which I served my time is still standing, at the back of the cycle shop at the bottom of Bridge Street'