

CRAFTSMEN AND STORIES OF OTHER COTSWOLD PEOPLE

Harry Bennett

When Griggs started to build his house in Back Ends he bought a cottage in Leysbourne and made a passage through it and some steps up to the house. Previously the only entrance to the land was through Back Ends. They made one ground floor room habitable very quickly and one of the masons lived in it and acted as a kind of watchman. I had to drop him a loaf every day, so I could go in from Leysbourne and out the back way so as to save myself a long walk round. Contrary to what has since been written Griggs was his own builder. He designed the house and bought the materials and employed the masons. The foreman was Ted Poole who came from Minchinhampton. He was a very fine workman and did all the ornamental carving, all the lettering round the side of the house was his work. It was very interesting to watch him working; he once took me down to see the barrel vaulting in the cellar, a piece of work he was very proud of. He carved his initials on the wall down there very neatly. The other masons scratched theirs underneath. The other masons were Joyful Harris, Joe Bennett and Wilson Bennett and the man who lived on the premises whose name I 30 have forgotten. He also came from Minchinhampton. They did all the square masonry, quoins, mullions, lintels etc.

I think this started my interest in Cotswolds craftsmen. I would always stop to watch craftsmen at work and came to appreciate a nice piece of walling, thatching, hedgelaying etc. The next call was Woodbine Cottages, number 1 was Jim Cooper, his widow died recently at the age of 104 and Bill Howell lived at number 2. I was born at number 2, number 1 was then occupied by Josiah Simmons, who worked at a gardener and handyman for Doctor Dewhurst. He claimed to be the first man in Campden to drive a motor car. Further along on the site of Dragon Cottages there were eight cottages, two facing the road, now demolished, and two behind still standing, and four more at a right angle facing the path. Some of these are the now the kitchen and garage and the others were demolished.



Cottages - now demolished or converted

They were known as Spires Mansion, Syke's view. Day's Entrance and Griffin's Close Too. Reading's Rag Shops, Spriggs Hotel, Tommy Norfolk's Tavern and Dick Keen's Little Hell. When I knew them all the above had disappeared and departed and a rather more

respectable lot had moved in. I only had one customer there, a Mr & Mrs Wolven - a retired Customs & Excise officer and pillar of the Baptist Church. The last customer on my beat was the Baptist Minister, the Reverend Braithwaite, so I went in from in from Back Ends and out the front way into the street home, all that for 4 pence a week. On Saturdays I worked most of the day. In the morning I did a cake round, with a big shallow basket that held 70 assorted cakes. Selling price a penny each or 7 for 6 pence. I was booked out for at 7 for 6 pence so I had to bring back 5 shillings for the 70 cakes I took out. If I could sell 6 at a penny each if I had one over I could either eat it or pocket the penny. For this I was paid 6 pence. I was expected to sell out and I usually did. In the afternoon I accompanied father on the main round with the truck.

Campden then was much smaller in area - the Catbrook, Station Road, Aston Road and Littleworth estates had not been built and there were more cottages in the alleys. Most of these were condemned when council houses were built and were pulled down or renovated and then made two into one. At this time delivery was much easier, the truck could be pushed round quite easily. One day, setting a basket on top, I tipped it up, and received a crack on the head which knocked me out and after that a safety stop was fitted on the front by Tom Barnes. Somehow it seemed to get removed later on as it wasn't there when I gave it to the museum. It was on this job that a lady handed me a golden sovereign and said "ask your father to take what I owe out of this." I did, I knew what it was because I had seen one before - Uncle Jack had one on his watch chain. He took what she owed and I took her the change and we took it at its face value, which then was a pound. When I got home father gave it to me and said you had better keep it, you'll never take another. He was right there, they had almost disappeared then. They have now been replaced by pound notes. I still have the sovereign, its present value is about £155.

When council house building started in the Aston Road and Station Road, plus some private building in the outskirts, pushing the truck around became too time consuming. So we got a horse, rather a large pony and a cart. The cart was purchased and the pony came from Jelfs, Bretforton market gardeners. But I do not remember where we bought the cart. Harry Bricknell from Broad Campden, the wheelwright, repainted and lettered it. The first time out when we collected the cart father decided we would go to Honeybourne to see his aunt. We went along quite nicely until we reached the Thatched Tavern when the pony stopped and nothing would make it move. The landlord, a man called Shorey came out to see what the noise was about, recognised the pony as having belonged to Jelfs, and said he was in the habit of calling there every morning while the previous owner had a pint. So father went in to drink a pint and I went round to Aunt Lou to tell her father was coming when the pony was ready.

About 1927 John Skey, landlord of the Lygon Arms decided that with the coming of motor cars, his stables were no more use. So he converted them into a large room for meetings, wedding receptions etc. So we had to find new accommodation for the pony. So we rented the tithe yard. This is now the site of Tithe House opposite the Church. It was then a large ruined barn. This was Campden's tithe barn - it was demolished about 1938 and the stone used to build the house. There were also some more modern buildings, stables, tackrooms, pig styes etc. and a small paddock and orchard. Although father never went on holiday he used to go to some of the big race meetings, the Derby, Ascot etc. and retired baker from Broad Campden, John Cox, used to come to help. One

morning we had got the bread in the over and he said to me, here's sixpence, go up to the bar and get me a pint of beer. I went to the off sale hatch to get it. At first John Skey said he could only sell it if it were in a sealed container to people under 18, I told him it was for John Cox and I had only got to take it down the yard, so he said all right, but keep it out of sight. As soon as I got out into the hall, I thought I wonder what beer tastes like, so I had a sip, it was quite nice, so I had a good swig. This posed a problem as the pint was now a good inch short of the top - if I told Cox I'd drunk it this would lead to trouble, if I told him I had spilt it it would still lead to trouble and I'd be no better off. But half way down the yard, there was a tap - it is still there so I filled the mug up with water. Cox took one mouthful and he swore - I'd never heard some of the words before - but he came to the conclusion that Jack Skey had been washing 34 the pipes out and had left some water in and that he had happened to get the first pint after the cleaning operation. I didn't bother to enlighten him. He always fetched his own beer after that.

In 1928 I left school and became a full time baker's boy. Tin cleaning, tin greasing, washing and cleaning dried fruit are all jobs that are now done mechanically. At the time I left school wireless was not exactly in its infancy but very few people in Campden had a set - most of these were amateur built. I became interested but it was expensive so I got a part time evening job helping Bert Huckvale make coffins. John Skey of the Lygon Arms was also an undertaker and when a funeral came along Bert and I were sent for. I held things while he screwed them, passed tools, poured the boiling water on to bend the boards, it used to take us two nights. I earned a shilling - 5p in present money. It was at this time I was building a two valve set and I had negotiated a second hand loud speaker from a dealer in Evesham for 7 shillings and 6 pence - 37.5 p. But I only had 6 shillings and six pence so he agreed to hold the speaker until the following week when I said I would be back but the following week I still only had 6 shillings and six pence so I asked mother if she would lend me a shilling - why did I want a shilling -1 said it was to make up seven shillings and six pence for a loud speaker, well why did you say you'd have enough money by next week - oh well I said I was hoping somebody would die! Oh dear, that was the worst answer I could possibly have given. Wishing people dead to get a shilling. I was ordered to give up my job.

One of the services we gave to customers was drying bacon. A lot of cottages still kept a pig at the bottom of the garden which was killed in the autumn and the sides of bacon and ham salted. These then had to be dried in a warm room. And the flour still room over the bakehouse was the ideal place. It would take about three of us to hang a big fitch on a beam; after a month one man could lift it down quite easily. There was no charge for this service but they usually cut us a piece off the end for doing it, which came in quite handy as we used to cook our own breakfast in the bakehouse. Home cured bacon and eggs. Another sideline was bookmaking. Betting was illegal in those days except by post. But a lot of it went on. The bookmakers had agents who picked up the betting slips in the pubs etc and then phoned the bets to the bookie. Most of the pubs collected them but John Skey would not do it. I think it was because he was illiterate. So father collected slips for Jack Sansome. These were mostly sixpenny and threepenny affairs. I don't know how the system worked but during the lunch hour father usually went through them, sorted out the likely losers and kept the money. If they did win he had to pay them. I then took the rest to Jack Sansome who I believe kept the ones he could afford to pay and hedged the big ones off with his London bookmaker. These could be posted provided the envelope was date and time stamped before 2pm

on the day of the race. I think the police closed their eyes to a lot of these affairs. On another occasion I washed a bucket full of sultanas and put them on a sieve outdoors to dry in the sun. Soon afterwards we heard a terrific droning noise, a swarm of bees had settled on them. As it was just outside the door we couldn't get out so I had to be pushed out of the window to fetch Willy Greening who lived a few doors away. He came with a box and took the swarm and most of our sultanas as well.