

Times To Remember

Growing up in Hathern —hard but not wicked

GREAT interest has been shown in the series of articles about Hathern and a number of people have been telling their stories of childhood.

Former village boy, 90-year-old William Rossell, who now lives in Blackpool, has written his life story, which includes many interesting notes about Hathern.

And another pensioner, though a youngster by comparison, has recorded his story. He is Mr. Peter Spencer (72), of 56 Mount. fields Drive, Loughborough, who left the village 40 years ago.

First, Mr. Rossell's story, which begins with his birth at Hathern in 1886. His father, James, came from Shepshed and married a girl called Annie Peat. They had six children. At the time, Hathern had 3,000 inhabitants, many of them earning a living by collecting hosiery orders on Monday and delivering on Friday.

His father was Hathern's blacksmith and he made the railings which still protect the Chestnut tree planted to mark the jubilee of Queen Victoria.



The first thing William can remember is being britched, the moment his last frock — a Scots plaid — was exchanged for trousers. "All little boys had to go to the Anchor Inn where the landlady, a widow called Mrs. Cooper, placed a new penny piece in the trousers pocket", he recalled.

William was a strong boy and he was supposed to be growing-up to be a blacksmith like his father. He was taught to say.

"When I'm a man, I'll be if I can, and I can, clang clang with my anvil ring. And this is the way the blows I'll swing. I'll shoe your horse, sir, neat and tight. Then, I'll trot down the lane to see if its right. When I'm a man."

That was all in the future. Young William had time for boyish games and these changed with the seasons. In the spring it was battledor and shuttlecock for the girls, marbles for the boys. The chief marble was a stopper out of a pop bottle.



Next, there was violet picking for the girls and cricket for the boys. Football in the winter and gleaning in the fields.

There were also Sunday School treats. He still remembers the farmers' wagon rides to Woodhouse followed by tea and a walk up to Beacon Hill or Hanging Stone rocks.

The annual wakes, with swings and roundabouts were held at The Banks a fortnight after Shepshed wakes. There was also a band concert and Hathern boasted two brass bands — one for the Tories, another for the Liberals.

For Hathern's youngsters, the winter was an exciting time. Floods were common and the children spent a lot of time watching the water. People from Shepshed used to walk across the countryside to enjoy the spectacle of the Soar valley under water.



These lakes eventually froze over and were a playground for sliding and skating youngsters. "The winters were much colder than today and youngsters were better off for sports," said William.

When he was older, he used to help his father. "I had to blow the bellows and in the winter I had to get up at 6 a.m. and hold a tallow candle so Dad could see to put shoes on a horse.

"Sometimes, on a frosty

morning, there would be a dozen horses waiting for shoes before they could start work."

One day, his father's apprentice took some metal from the forge and a piece fell down William's trouser leg. He plunged his foot into the

water trough, but too late. Young William had a terrible wound.

He was in bed for weeks and the doctor finally decided to clean the wound. The doctor put some blue stone and caustic on the leg, a drastic medication which caused terrible pain.



Aged 11 William left the village school and worked around the blacksmith's shop, but when he was 16 he was apprenticed to be a wheelwright with Peat Brothers, of Shepshed. For six shillings a week, increasing by one shilling a year, he cycled two miles each way in all weathers.

His first job was to help finish a coffin. He also worked on butcher's carts and wheels of all sizes. "I cannot say I was enthusiastic but as an apprentice I had to make the most of it. I was more interested in religion."

William had learnt to play the harmonium and on Sunday he was busy playing in the village chapel, or leading classes. In 1907, his apprenticeship served, he stayed close to home because his father had just died.

In 1912 he started work in Preston, which was to become his home. He moved north after getting the sack, along with 50 other men, from the Brush works.

"This was a bombshell but not surprising as the Brush company was noted for working the men to all hours and then

sacking them", he said. Since the age of 10, William had been friends with a village girl, Lizzie Randon. It was a long courtship, with William vowing not to marry before he had £100 in the bank. But with £70 saved, he asked Mr. Randon for his daughter's hand.

William is the oldest member of the Foresters Sick Club, a society he joined in his teens. His mother paid one penny a week for each of the children, an insurance which ensured a doctor if anyone was ill. There were only two doctors, who cycled from Shepshed and Sutton Bonington.

There was no National Insurance in those days and besides paying his fee, William had to work or be fined. His first job as a beagle involved taking members' subscriptions.



Also there were no sewers and a row of cottages shared a communal lavatory containing a wooden seat with two large holes and a smaller hole for the children. The cesspits underneath were emptied into a cart pulled by a horse.

William remembers that there were four public houses, four shops and the Co-operative. Women took their cakes to the Co-op oven after the bread had been baked.

"We were not well off, but as children we were happy, said William." I remember my father taking two of us, one on each knee, in the evening

and playing his concertina
and singing to us.

“There would be magic lantern
shows in each others’ homes
and Christmas was a wonder-
ful time. The village bands
came round during the night
and played carols.

On Boxing Day a collection was
made, with shops giving an

orange to each child. In the school stood a Christmas tree given by Lord Tooth of Garendon Hall and gifts from Lord Crawshaw of Whatton Hall."

Now, the memories of Mr. Spencer, whose interest was sparked by an illustration of Wide Street, Hathern, published on November 12.

"The area was known locally as the Round Bank and women, in their white aprons, were to be seen there in summer and autumn evenings weather permitting", he said.

"The whiteness of their aprons was obtained by the old fashioned way of washing in rainwater caught in tubs or butts, and the use of common soap. The aprons were boiled, rinsed, given a blue rinse, mangled and finally dried in the open air.



"The Bank was the cricket pitch for the boys and the outfield took in Wide Street, the main A.6 road and, sometimes, adjacent gardens. Only the local bobby could hold up play but we were generally warned of his approach.

"On the seats around a Chestnut Tree, near the main road, the women spent the summer evenings chatting, sewing, knitting and darning. It was also a common sight to see poultry on The Bank, or in Wide Street, belonging to Granny Bramley and Mrs.

Barker. Fan tail pigeons also walked about, so tame you could walk between them and they wouldn't fly away.

Further down Wide Street was Stone House Farm. It was the custom for the farmhand to let the three horses loose after unharnessing and they would gallop out of the yard up the street, cross the main road and wait for someone to open the gate into the fields.

To the village children these were the fabled nine o'clock horses which would fetch us if we were not home by a certain time.

Near the main road were two wooden seats where the village men would sit and talk. Many of the men were stockings working at hand looms in their own homes. Often, they did not finish until 9 p.m. when they would collect a hunk of bread, knob of cheese, a good size raw onion, and eat their supper. Then, they would adjourn to The Anchor to wash it down with some of Cooper's famous home brew.



"People often refer to 'wicked Hathern', but few if any could give cause or reason for this application".

Mr. Rossell, however, thinks he knows the reason. At the turn of the century nearly all the men were stockings who worked in the kitchens in their homes. They were great drinkers and sometimes could be seen drunk before breakfast. This led the vicar, the Rev. Smithers, to denounce them and describe the village as wicked Hathern.



We are indebted to Mrs. Kathleen Perry, of 49 Arthur Street, Loughborough, for her help in the preparation of this feature. She is Mr. Rossell's niece and kindly obtained for us the family photographs used in this feature.

We would still like to hear stories about old Hathern, but the next feature about the village will not be published until later in the New Year. In the meantime, work has started on a series about Shepshed — and you have guessed — we would like all the information you can supply.

NEXT WEEK: We continue the history of Brush engineering by looking at the factory's war effort in 1914-18 and 1939-1945.



Hathern blacksmith's shop with, left to right, the local preacher, Mr. Ernest Rossell, unidentified workman, Mr. Tommy Hall, who was a thatcher, Mr. James Rossell, Mrs. Rossell and their neighbour, Mrs. Fuller. The smithy in Wide Street is now disused.



William Russell as a young man. He always wore a lily of the valley boutonhole, a flower he also regularly presented to Lizzie Randon when they were courting.



A Hathern wedding in the 1890's or early 1900's. Anyone who can identify the couple and their friends is asked to contact our Baxter Gate office.