

## MEMORIES OF WHISSONSETT BY PETER THATCHER, RECORDED 1990.

We moved to Whissonsett in 1949 when I was one year old. My father was head teacher at Whissonsett school. One of my first memories was of a Good Friday when walking with my brother to the bakery at Stock's Hill to collect hot cross buns. There were two bakeries in the village in the late 1940s, the second being in London Street almost opposite to Mr Barraclough's shop. I remember Mr and Mrs Barraclough serving etc. and the rows of tins of loose biscuits. Their shelves were always very well stocked and there was even a hardware section. Mr Barraclough would wear a long white apron which buttoned onto his waistcoat button at the top front.

Cars were only just becoming available so most people purchased their daily needs in the village with perhaps a weekly trip to Fakenham by bus on market day. Up the hill from the stores was Mr Pye's fish and chip shop, a little green building which belched black smoke from the chimney when frying was in progress. Nearby, James (Darkie) Howling had his cobblers and cycle repair shop. It was a fascinating place full of odds and ends, smells of oil and leathern. There was a big pit in the centre of the village which attracted children as a playground until it started to be filled with rubbish. At the top of the hill stood the Swan Public House in a very prominent position next to the cattle warden's house. No vets needed here in those days, you just needed to call Mr Jack Hammond, the cattle warden. Further along opposite the 'Camping Land' was the Methodist Chapel, known as the 'Top Chapel'. The Wesleyan Chapel or bottom Chapel was down London Street. Further along from the 'Top Chapel' was Nelson's stores and Post Office which had a petrol pump standing outside. It had a warm feeling in there on cold days with the old paraffin heaters glowing. When I was old enough I enjoyed helping Reggie and Monica Nelson with the Christmas post, especially the fortified coffee we got at the end of the post round. The baker's shop was next to the Post Office. I remember the bakery closing and the giant mixing bowl being used as a drinking trough for cattle. There was a bench at Stock's Hill used by the retired men of the village, no doubt on the spot where the village stocks once stood. I thought Stock's Hill was very steep. The King's Head was there, I remember Banker Makins being taken home from the pub in a pony trap, by a pony who knew the way very well.

I remember the herd of cows with full udders at Albert Daniels's farm and can just recollect them threshing with an ancient Field Marshall 'Popper' tractor owned by the Cranes. John and Edward Daniels were a bit older than me. They were always making pop guns from elder bushes and some really lethal bows and arrows. Along the New Road opposite to Alec Barrett's I can recall one year there being a fete and gymkhana on the grass fields. The thing I most remember is the heavy horse race. At that time Daniels and Stangroom still had working horses and it was a tremendous sight to see the massive clods of grass being thrown everywhere by those charging giants. Alec Barrett's son John and I spent many a happy hours helping prepare the animals feed, chopping chaff, slicing mangolds and cake with ancient hand turned machines that were eventually driven by a noisy smelly engine with long flying belts. His workshop was a very interesting place as he was a carpenter and builder, he also made coffins for local funerals, There was a marvelous collection of hand tools on his bench.

There was a grass field across the road from there with a pond where many skating sessions were held. The only way to test the ice was to walk on it and hope for the best! We used to say 'If she cracks she bears, if she bends she breaks'. At the end of the road were the ancient row of Spring Well cottages! the occupants drew their water from the little well by the road. At the junction with London Street was the white house where

the Cranes lived and opposite was the blacksmith; Arthur Bussey. I still use a wheel barrow that he made for my father. Mrs Bussey was one of the teachers at the school. Almost next door was the other blacksmith, Mr Fox. I remember seeing horses shod and iron tyres being fitted to wheels in both those places. Further up London Street lived Sam Titlow who did a great deal to keep the churchyard tidy. Most weekends I was sent to collect the meat from George Daniels at the butcher shop. The most peculiar item I saw there was not for sale or to be eaten! It was a giant coypu! A few days earlier I had seen it running through the church lanes. It was huge! George or someone had shot it and hung it up on his garage door for everyone to see. We always enjoyed his meat especially the pork cheese and sausages. Also in London Street was a cottage called the Reading Room. I never knew why when I was a child, but I have since been told that people could go there to read books and newspapers, how it worked I don't know. Then there was the village hall with the bowling green behind it. I have a photo of a Sunday School party of 1954 taken in the hall. The other bakery was in London Street but I cannot remember it working. It must have closed before I can remember.

I lived in Whissonsett for twenty years and I have fond memories of the people I knew. Now alas most of them are in the graveyard. I was taught at school by both my parents and was given a good start in life by them. Mother taught the infants. Mrs Bussey taught the middle class and Father the seniors. When I was thirteen the school was reorganised and the seniors went to Litcham school. I remember walking from school through the Church Lanes to collect leaf mould and to the playing field to play football. Most boys played in hobnail boots I remember going through the little turnstile gates in the lanes I have never seen any others like them. I hope they will always be kept as part of the village of Whissonsett.

My memories of Whissonsett in the 1950s

Peter Thatcher