

## Winlaton Mill

Mr Raine died in April 1932, and his passing was the beginning of the end of the old village which itself had only a short while longer to live.

It was a beautiful place when I was a child; artists came from far and wide to paint it, and botanists came to study the wild flowers which grew everywhere. From the burn bridge with its overhanging willow trees one looked along the straggling main street, with gardens and the quiet mill stream on one side, and the little blocks of spotless whitewashed cottages roofed with old red tiles on the other, snuggled under the hillside, sheltered by the great oaks and silver birches of the Barkwood.

The village had an annual spring clean, and in the early summer sun, the old mill stream reflected the sparkling whiteness of the newly decorated houses. The gardens were a glory of roses, lavender, stocks, lilies, pansies, London Pride and all the heavenly scented old-fashioned flowers bloomed to perfection there. In the autumn the apples and pears, the greenjacks and gooseberries, the redcurrant and raspberries seemed to be bigger and juicier and more full of flavour than any I have ever tasted since.

The old sports of cock fighting and bull baiting had long ago died out, and were superseded by quoits, cricket and football. There were three annual events to which almost everyone went. First the Good Friday Tea at the Chapel, the Children's Anniversary and in August, the Gooseberry Show. This was held in a big marquee erected in the field near the Huntley Well – where the club is now. On a long table down the centre of the tent were small saucers of gooseberries graded according to size and colour, and behind each little dish was a coloured ticket which said '1st prize white gooseberry – so many pennyweights, winner Mr Jimmy Goodfellow' or '1st prize twin gooseberries – green – winner Mr Jimmy Brown' and so on. Behind each entry was the prize it had won, blankets, tea sets, glassware, clocks and all sorts of useful things. I remember once when my uncle won second prize and received a chamber set wonderfully decorated with pink roses and black trellis work. The jugs were displayed behind his blue winning ticket, the chambers were tactfully hidden out of sight under the table.

There was a second table of flowers. There were long slender vases each holding a single rose – perfect blooms of every colour – and similar vases with one spray of sweet peas; then there were button-holes of many kinds, and bouquets of garden and wild flowers. The colour and scent of the flowers, the warm fruity smell of berries, and the hum of talk as people passed around the tent admiring the exhibits, remain in my memory whenever I wait for a bus to Newcastle on almost the same spot where the show was held.

In the evening there was a Band Concert, and sometimes the famous Winlaton Sword Dancers would be there to entertain us. I doubt whether the poor soil of these gardens on the hill top will ever produce either flowers or gooseberries to compare with those of the fertile soil in the old village, but I would like to see a revival of a festival like the Gooseberry Show – that is if we could have it in a marquee – it would not be quite the same in the village hall.

Many of the families in the old village were intermarried or related in some way, and there was a real family spirit there. Every event which affected one family, was a matter of concern to everyone else. Every new baby, every wedding was a source of happiness to all and every death was a personal loss. Christenings, weddings and funerals each had their own little ceremonies and customs: When a new baby was carried down the main street to be christened at the Chapel, the mother always carried a small parcel called 'The Christening', which usually consisted of a piece of the Christening cake, a scone containing a silver coin, and a piece of cheese. This was given to the first child they met of the opposite sex and was supposed to bring luck to both children.

After the christening whenever the baby was taken into anyone's home for the first time, it was given 'Alms' – this usually comprised of four things – a candle to light its way to heaven, salt to give savour to its life, an egg to symbolise usefulness and fertility, and a silver coin to ward off poverty. It was a lovely old custom which seems to have died out except for the giving of the silver coin for good luck.

At a wedding almost the whole village would turn out. I have seen the guests overflowing into the street outside where they would sing and dance to the tune of old Mr Morris' fiddle. I have seen them dancing and laughing one minute, then crying the next when young Thomas Ismay sang them. To us children of course the most important part of the wedding was a 'hoy oot'. As the bridal pair left for the church, coppers were thrown out by the bridegroom; there followed a mad scramble, and sometimes a free fight from which the children emerged tousled and grubby but triumphantly clutching a copper or even two, which they spent as quickly as they could at Morris shop on ice-cream or gobstoppers, or wonderful concoctions of sherbet and spanish called 'Soda lunches'.

Funerals had several formalities which have fallen into disuse nowadays. Special mourning cards were printed and sent in black-edged envelopes to friends and relatives. These cards were printed in black and silver, and were decorated with silver crosses or lilies or perhaps with an angel. Inside was the name and age of the deceased, and a verse such as we may see nowadays in the 'In Memorium' column of a newspaper.

It was regarded as a courtesy – in fact almost a duty – to go and see the deceased person the day after the death. The bed on which the body lay covered with a fine white counterpane would be draped with white muslin and at each corner would be tied bows of purple ribbon. The whole house would smell heavily of eau-de-cologne and lilies, and small groups of people would congregate in corners talking in lowered voices and dabbing their eyes with black-edged handkerchiefs.

In addition to the formal memorial cards, every family was personally notified of the death and the time of the funeral by a man called the 'Bidder'. Mr Maxwell Massey was the 'Bidder' when I was a child and he would carry out his grim duties with great dignity, dressed in black frock coat and trousers, black waistcoat with shiny jet buttons, black tie and gloves and topper.

On the day of the funeral the black mourning coaches would row up in solemn procession in front of the house. Six chairs would be brought out of the house and the flowers-covered coffin placed carefully on them. The local preacher would say a

prayer and the sad funeral hymns would be sung, then the undertaker would call out the names of those who were to occupy the cabs and the rest would walk in double file behind. Everyone would be in deepest black, most of the women veiled, the men in bowlers or top-hats with black suits, ties and gloves. It was considered a disgrace not to be properly dressed at a funeral and most people kept black clothes especially for the purpose. There would follow a service at the Chapel and probably another at the graveside then all returned to the house. It was a long and exhausting business for the bereaved but was all regarded as necessary to the dignity of death.

I mentioned a while ago the VENTURE COACH which ran on Mondays and Saturdays from Shotley Bridge to Newcastle. This was the first form of public transport connecting the village with the outside world. The coach was drawn by six grey horses, driven by coachmen resplendent in white hats and red coats. They must have presented a very lively picture, dashing along to the beat of galloping hooves, the crack of the coachman's whip and the occasional blowing of the horn. The coach would stop at the Inn, which we know as the 'Golden Lion' but which was formerly called 'Huntley's Hall'. Here the horse would be watered, the passengers who had previously booked a seat would join the coach. The Venture Coach belonged to Mr Priestman of Shotley Bridge and the owner took occasional outings in it until quite recent times.

In 1915 the first motor buses commenced running down the Derwent Valley between Shotley Bridge and Scotswood Bridge and those of us who feel that 11d. is rather a lot to Newcastle might reflect that the cost of a journey from Winlaton Mill to Scotswood in a solid tyred, hard seated uncomfortable old vehicle was 6d. in the days when 6d. was worth much more than it is now.

There was a toll-house almost where the second weigh cabin is now and every vehicle halted there while the tolls were collected.

By: Peggy Mason