

GEORGE REMEMBERS

I was one of a big family that lived a house at the north end of Brigstock High Street, though it's gone now. Like a good many other people at the time, my mother kept a little shop in one room. She sold butter, milk for one and a half pence per pint, paraffin oil, fishhooks, groceries and sweets. Every morning she would deliver a can full of milk to the vicarage at the other end of the village.

My father had a few fields in Brigstock Great Park, off the Grafton Road, and sometimes I would have to take a horse up there before school to fetch hay. My father kept some cows and used to walk home with the milk in two buckets on a yoke. There were quite a number of small farmers in the village then who kept three or four cows, and some larger farmers had from ten to thirty.

I went to school in the village and Mr Morris was the schoolmaster and he used the cane a lot. There were three classes in the big room at the school and two classes in the small room. Mr Morris had a desk near the only fire in the room.

I left when I was thirteen years old to go to work for Mr William Beeby, the farmer. I worked from six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night for a wage of three shillings and six pence (17½p) per week. My first job in the morning was to clean all the boots and shoes for the family, which was quite a few. The farm buildings were beside the High Street (where the new council flats are) and most of the land was off Stanion Road. In the dinner hour I used to like to go and watch the blacksmith making horseshoes in the blacksmith's shop opposite the farm gates.

I worked for Mr Beeby until I was sixteen and then I went to work for Mr F.J. Steward at his farm in Park Walk, and I did all kinds of jobs but mostly farmwork and carting. Mr Steward kept bullocks, sheep and horses, which he took to shows, and Mr Jack Deans was shepherd and also foreman.

This is the time of the First World War and the Scottish Horse Regiment was stationed at Kettering and had a remount depot in the North Park. One of my jobs was to deliver hay and straw to the depot, and sometimes sawdust from the woodyard. Mr Steward also used to go to London to buy cab horses and resell them.

When the Duke of Buccleuch felled some of his avenue of trees, like the lovely avenue of elm trees called the Vista which crossed the Brigstock to Stanion Road, I had the job of carting the logs from one of the avenues near Old Head Wood and taking them to Kettering. Before the war farm labourers earned fifteen shillings (75p) per week, but during the war wages went up to thirty shillings.

In 1920 I went as an ironstone labourer to Lloyds's pit in Stanion Lane, where all the work was done by pick and shovel. The top earth was moved over the pit in barrows along planks and trestles. The planks were about three inches thick and fifteen inches wide and thirty feet long. The ironstone was shovelled into trucks

which were pulled by small steam engines. The ironstone went to Corby. We were on piecework and received eight and a half pence per ton.

In 1922 I went to work in the Sudborough pit and later in the Twywell pits. At Sudborough, Lowick and Twywell there were ironstone pits and mines which covered many miles underground and were mostly worked by men from the Woodford district, although many Brigstock men worked at Sudborough pits, they did not work at the mines. The ironstone went to Islip Furnaces, now demolished. The pits were run by Mr Colin Kidner who was killed on a motorcycle at Kettering.

The pits were taken over by Stewart and Lloyds in 1932 and things changed quite a lot. Steam diggers and draglines were used and I worked on one of these until I retired. The diggers would remove earth and stone at the rate of about three cubic yards at once.

World War II came and it was shift work, six till three and three until eleven, and when the air-raids were on the alert sounded and all the lights went out and work stopped, which was not too good as we were on piecework. The wages averaged ten pounds per week. In a good week about twenty five thousand tons would be moved. We all went to work on push bikes and took our own food, mainly sandwiches.

Since my wife died I live on my own in an old stone cottage on the High Street.

George Sturgess

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