



# Some Memories of Langham

Dorothy Palmer

Some Memories of Langham in the early 1920's  
by  
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with  
additions by her husband Fred Palmer b. Langham 1913  
and  
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The Langham we were born into was a village of about 700 inhabitants of which the majority were working class. There were several large houses; The Old Hall, The Manor House, Langham House, Ranksborough Hall, The Grange and The Firs (now Cotton Cottage) where the “gentry” lived, and these were often let as “hunting boxes” during the winter months.

Quite a number of villagers were employed at these houses; women and girls as indoor domestic servants and men and boys as gardeners, grooms and chauffeurs etc. There were also several farmers employing a few labourers and a number of people known as graziers who worked on their own and owned a few acres and a few cows, pigs, and hens etc. and sold milk. Their wives would also take eggs, butter and cheese to sell at Melton market. There was little in the way of other employment apart from the Brewery and a few girls found work at shops in Oakham.

People who had to work outside the village would often have to walk several miles to get there or, if they were very fortunate and owned a bicycle, they would ride. Motor cars were just beginning to come into more common use and eventually there were several car owners in the village. A bus service was started between Oakham and Melton, which was invariably late and sometimes didn't arrive at all and became a standing joke. At one point the buses used were redundant London double deckers with Tilling Stevens engines. They were open topped, had hard tyres and frequently broke down. I remember seeing engineers replacing the big end bearings at the side of the road.

The streets in the village were not officially named, nor houses numbered, but were referred to as Middle Street (Church Street), Well Street and Backside (Manor Lane).

Backside was little more than a farm lane with no buildings on either side apart from a near derelict stone cottage near the Ashwell Road end, which was used as a barn. There were also farm buildings at the rear of the Manor House and towards the Melton Road end some old buildings used by Harry Minor. In the 1920s when the four new houses were built on the corner of Melton Road and Backside they were considered so smart they were immediately nicknamed “New England”. They were built by the Owen Smiths to re-home some of the occupants of School Row when they did alterations and extensions to The Old Hall and its gardens.

Mrs Smith had the two on Backside near the Bowls Green and the two opposite the Old Vicarage built with old bricks so that they did not look new and out of place, but the bricks proved to let in the damp and so were painted and the ones near the Old Vicarage were clad with wooden shingles.

There were three pubs, *The Wheatsheaf*, *The Noel Arms* and *The Black Horse*; three grocers, Stacey's on Bridge Street, Tidd's on Church Street and Rowett's on Well Street. There was also Munday's butcher's shop on Church Street and Papworth's the pork butcher's shop in the Wheatsheaf yard, as well as two bakers, Mantle's on Melton Road and Steele's on Church Street by the bridge. The Post Office was originally in Church Street in the house at the back of Tidd's shop and next to that was “Pashie” Shuttlewood's second hand furniture shop. Pashie visited the salerooms in Oakham and would bring his bargains back to Langham on a well-loaded handcart.

When Eric Munday was a lad he released the brake on the loaded handcart as it stood outside the shop and it ran down the road and tipped up outside the Institute! Pashie paid a visit to Eric's father resulting in a good telling off for Eric. The village also had a cobbler, Johnny Fawkes in Bridge Street (now the bicycle shop), a blacksmith, Mr Crane on Well Street, and Mr Austin the wheelwright on Cold Overton Road. Mr Bristow was the carpenter and funeral director with a workshop at the back of his house on Well Street next to the shop. Elijah Sewell, who was a cripple, lived on School Row, worked as a tinsmith and did cycle repairs.

The Main Road running through the village had very few buildings on the south side from the top of Melton Road to the Burley Road corner. First of all there was the gated entrance to Ranksborough Hall with the two stone cottages on the left-hand side, which together with the Hall were built with stone quarried from the pit to the right of the entrance. This was filled in many years ago but it had provided stone also for the house on Cold Overton Road known as 'Pasture Gate' and for the extensions to the Old Hall in 1926. Pasture Gate was built by Lord Ranksborough for his farm bailiff. The four houses at the bottom of the hill were the first Council houses built in the village, those at the top near the Whissendine turn were built many years later.

From the Cold Overton Road corner, which was no more than a cart track with grass growing up the middle, to the Oakham Road junction there were no buildings, save a few farm sheds. The road to Cold Overton was a gated road with Lord Ranksborough's hedged and fenced land to the right and to the left was the Pastures, many acres of open land. Many people in the village kept a cow or two and these were taken up to the Pastures each day and let loose through the first gate to wander and graze where they pleased all day.

About 4 p.m. they would all congregate around the gate waiting to be fetched home for milking and this was usually done by the village lads who would earn about two pence a week for doing it. It was not a difficult job as the cows usually knew where they were going and would peel off from the herd when they reached their home and go into the cowshed and wait for the lad to fasten a chain around their neck.

Where the Little Grey House now stands was what one might call a scrap yard. It belonged to a certain Harry Minor who was a man who dealt in anything and everything. He also took in dead animals and sold the skins, bones and offal to Mays of Bourne. Eventually there were complaints about the smell and that part of the business was moved to the old wooden buildings on Backside referred to earlier. One day Lucy Harris, a cook at Langham House, took a new maid for a walk along Backside and nearly frightened her to death by getting her to look through some old wooden doors where she saw Mrs Minor skinning a bullock!

When the Cottesmore Hunt held races at Burton Lazars, Lord Lonsdale would go from Barleythorpe Hall on a Sunday afternoon to inspect the course for the races held on the Monday. We children waited on the Cold Overton Road corner to watch him go by, he was sometimes in a carriage and sometimes in a twelve cylinder Daimler Silent Knight.



*Lord and Lady Lonsdale*

From the Oakham Road corner towards Burley Road there was the new school playground, opened in 1912 on land acquired from the Earl of Gainsborough. Next to the playground were a few farm sheds belonging to the farm across the road and after that no buildings save the Brewery, Harewood House and further along the farm buildings belonging to The Limes.

The first development along here was three houses opposite Brewery Row (now Briggin's Walk) followed by the houses now called Jubilee Drive.

The house at the far end of Jubilee Drive was built for the pork butcher Cecil Papworth and so the road was promptly nicknamed Sausage Alley. Cecil moved his business from the small red brick building which stood where the bus shelter once stood at the bottom of the Wheatsheaf yard and had once most likely been a little cottage.

The business was only run in the winter months as there were, of course, no refrigerators in those days. The pigs were slaughtered in the "Old Malting" on Well Street, where coal was once brought from Oakham and stored. John Austin had the job on certain days of handing out the coal allowance. I guess this must have been after World War I when coal was rationed. Ellis and Everard were the coal merchants in Oakham and also delivered paraffin.

The Papworth's pork pies and sausages were made entirely by hand, with Mrs Papworth making the pastry for the pies and "raising" them on wooden blocks. A familiar sight was Mr. Papworth carrying long trays of pies on his head up to Mr. Mantle's bake house to be baked. The pies and sausages were renowned and were posted to gentry all over the country and even as far as Scotland. In those days we did have a First Class postal service, with next day delivery. "Nattering Nan" brother to Curtis Williamson worked for the Papworths and had to find other work during the summer months.



*The Papworths*

Langham had a good school built for the village by Lady Gainsborough in 1841 with the playground across the road on land given later by the Gainsboroughs. When I was at school Mr McClelland was the headmaster. When the Meet of the Cottesmore Hunt was held at Langham it was outside the school in the middle of the road and the whole school was allowed outside to watch. Many of the boys did not return to school but followed the hounds which usually made the first draw at Ranksborough Goss as it was called. They would eventually arrive back at school about 3 p.m.

As a special treat Mr McClelland would read a ghost story about that time in the afternoon but those that had followed the Hunt had to stay outside and miss the story.

The arrival of the dentist's van in the school playground was not looked forward to as you can imagine. I suppose it came once a year as it made its way around all the village schools. Fred Williamson and his horse would be sent to collect it from the last school it had been at. It was supplied with water from the school which was carried across the road and the waste, discharged from a pipe under the van, was often found to contain the extracted teeth!

There was also the Baptist Chapel and the Church around which much of the community life centred. The Village Institute (now the Village Hall) was also a hub of community life and consisted of a large room and a smaller one called the Reading Room, which was open every day, with a lovely fire burning during the winter months and newspapers to read. Mrs Bellamy was employed to light the fire very early and then she went on to clean the school before the children arrived at 9am. Men and boys could pay an annual subscription to use the room and its facilities, which included a billiard table, cards, dominoes and other various games. Elderly retired men used it a good deal during the daytime to read the daily papers, play cards and to keep out of the wife's way.

The roads in the village were made of flint chippings and there were plenty of potholes but there were usually two road men employed in the village who filled these in and kept the grass verges and greens tidy and swept the streets. In the winter when the snow came they would be out as soon as it was light to clear the footpaths so that people could get around. There was little motorised traffic through the village, most was horse drawn, so it was quite safe for children to play in the streets, which they did all the time. Although most people had a piece of garden it was not lawned for the family to play on and enjoy, but had to be used to grow the vegetables so necessary to feed the family.

The stream which flows through the village was always called "*the Dyke*" it flowed parallel to Church Street as far as the small Church gate, turned along by the small Church path, across the front of the Church and continued its course behind Church Cottage.

In the early 1920s the course of the Dyke was altered and the land filled in to form what we called the New Churchyard. The new wide footpath to the Church door was made and the original main path, opening opposite New Lane, was made into the small path. For many weeks men were employed digging soil from a bank up on the Pastures and bringing it down in carts to fill in where the course of the Dyke had been and to level the ground which was taken in for the new churchyard and entrance.

We children loved to play down by the Dyke but this was not really very desirable as all the drains of the village emptied into it. Mostly there was a good flow of water, quite deep in places, but in summertime during a dry spell there would be a foul smell. In winter after very heavy rains there would be much flooding, particularly near the bridges. The little low cottages of the Rookery were flooded most winters. I remember a particularly bad flood when the school was closed and my elder sisters took me, aged about 5yrs, to see the water high up the Church wall in Well Street.

There was no mains water supply in the village. Most people had a well in their garden from which they drew supplies, and those who didn't have a well fetched their supply from the pumps dotted about the village on the Greens. There was no main sewerage either and the W.C. was a hut or shed, usually at the end of the garden, where there would be a wooden box seat over a pan. The pan was collected weekly for emptying and was replaced by a clean one by the "pan man" who came in the early hours of the morning, heard but not seen! We were very fortunate in having a man who did an unpleasant job in a very efficient manner for so many years.

In the large houses where the gentry lived, they had their own water supplies pumped from their own wells and their own sewerage arrangements. The filter beds for Langham House were at the back of the new garages and they were emptied out periodically by a man with a horse drawing a special tank. It was done after midnight and you could hear the horse and tank rumbling along the village streets all night as it went back and forth to the fields. Langham House also had its own arrangements in case of fire, there was an underground water storage tank in the stable yard at the back and a Merryweather Firesure Water Pump, installed by workmen from Hays Wharf in London owned by Mr Owen Smith.

I remember watching it being installed with great interest and when it was first tried out, it shot water so high up into the air that it landed in the Square. The filter beds for the Manor, and most likely The Old Hall, were between the left hand side of the Manor gardens and a house at the end of Weston's Lane which is no longer there.

The big houses also had their own generating plants to provide electric lights, though up to this time most had gas lighting, provided by Oakham Gas Company, a privately owned company on the Braunston road in Oakham. The workshops and stores were where the Vets are now and the coke ovens and gasometers were opposite where the flats and Hubbards the plumbers are.

There were some big steel gates, and if you looked through you could see the men stoking the coke ovens. Langham was fortunate in having a piped gas supply with many people having gas lighting and a few, even a gas stove for cooking. Some people had paraffin lamps for lighting and even a paraffin stove with an oven for cooking. For most people though, cooking and heating facilities were from a black kitchen range which had a fire grate in the centre with an oven on one side, a boiler on the other, and usually a hook hanging over the fire on which to hang a kettle.



*Emily Eades*

I was born towards the end of the First World War, at the house in the Square (the junction of Church Street and Bridge Street) where my Mother was the postmistress.

My Father was in the army stationed at Loughborough. The Post Office had now moved to the Square with the counter inside the front door and the sorting office in the room to the right of that. The post box was in the front wall of the house and all the mail was franked at Langham then sorted in the next room by the postman who came out from Oakham each day.

Before her marriage my Mother had been an Assistant Mistress at the village school during the time that Mr and Mrs Eades were at the school. I was the youngest of nine children, four boys and five girls and, as was often the case with large families, we had a “mother’s help” and a dear lady we called “Sheltie” who came to help on washdays and any other time when extra help was needed.

When I was a year old, my eldest brother turned seventeen and became eligible for an assisted passage to emigrate to Canada. So off he went to join my Aunt and Uncle who had gone to settle in Saskatchewan some years before. Shortly after this, my Mother was left on her own and, having a large family and the Post Office to cope with, my next two eldest brothers also went to Canada. My oldest sister went to live with my Mother’s Aunt Caroline in Gloucester, so reducing the size of the family somewhat.

My Grandparents, Edwin and Lucy Marshall, lived a few yards along Middle Street at the Black Horse where they were “mine hosts” for forty seven years. Grandfather had also had a farm at Bulwick which had been run latterly for him by my Aunt and Uncle before they went to Canada and which he sold up after their departure.



*Grandfather Marshall*

Although becoming increasingly crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, he continued his farming interests at Langham as a calf dealer and travelled around to the markets in a float. As he was so badly crippled he had to remain in the float to do his buying etc. and so always had to take a boy with him to do the running about.

My Grandmother mostly ran the pub and apparently she always sent her customers home at one o’clock on a Sunday as their wives would have the Sunday lunch waiting, and probably because she wanted to get her own on the table as well. She was a very good cook and catered for various suppers etc., which were held in the Club Room at the Black Horse, now the garage, by various village associations such as the Pig Club, the Sick and Dividing Club, the Cricket Club and the Football Club. I remember the Club Room as a long low building, walls whitewashed and floor well scrubbed with long trestle tables and forms down the length of it. There would also be the traditional Feast Suppers of duck, green peas and new potatoes and Mrs Marshall’s curd cheese tarts. At Feast time there would be large meat dishes piled high with these tarts in Granny’s pantry. (This pantry was a fascinating place to me as a small child, it was approached up several steps and, at pig killing time, there would be pancheons of lard standing on the raised stone slab platform which was used for keeping the food cool).

At Feast weekend Langham hosted a three-day cricket match against other villages, which I think must have been played on Saturday, Monday and Tuesday, as it was not allowed on the Sunday. Many people had these days off as a sort of long Bank holiday.

Most families were large ones and were also very poor but we children were always well fed and ailed little apart from the usual childish complaints. We made our own amusements and the games we played were more or less seasonal. In spring when the roads dried after the winter snows and rain it was time to bring out the whips and tops, marbles and skipping ropes.

Older boys had a mushroom shaped top and younger children, who weren't so adept at starting the top spinning, would have a carrot shaped top. We would pattern the flat surface of the top with coloured chalks to make it look pretty when spinning.

One was considered very well off if one owned a skipping rope with wooden handles, otherwise we would borrow someone's mother's washing line and have a long line of skippers across the Square outside our house. We also had hoops, which were often old cycle wheels minus the spokes. To be very grand was to have a wooden hoop purchased from Perkins Penny Bazaar in the Market Place at Oakham or a steel hoop with a trundle made by the blacksmith. Cricket was played in the Square with the wickets chalked on the Noel Arms wall.

On May Day, which I seem to remember as usually being very cold, we went round May Blobbing or with a May Bush to collect a few pennies mainly from people that we knew. The May Blobs were big yellow water flowers that grew in a certain part of the stream near the second bridge in the Pastures and we would collect a bunch of these to take round. The May Bushes were really decorated twigs.

It seemed in those days that the summers were very hot and the winters extremely cold. When the snow came the home made toboggans would come out and the runners, usually made from the steel slats of old bedsteads, were polished up and away to Mill Hill we'd go as soon as school was finished. Another favourite pastime was to go into the ridge and furrowed fields where the flooded furrows had frozen hard and slide on the ice. In the summer we would spend most of our spare time, and all the summer holidays, playing up on the Pastures. It was almost unheard of to go away on holiday.

The main attraction of the Pastures was the dyke running through, where we paddled and fished for tiddlers. The older boys would dam up a part and make a swimming pool where they could bathe, but the girls were not allowed to use it. We made pretend houses under the bushes and arranged stones and pebbles to mark out the rooms. Some days, when we were enjoying ourselves, we would send one of our party home to fetch some tea instead of going home and they would duly return with jam sandwiches and a bottle of tea rolled in a newspaper to keep it warm.

*Additional memories supplied by Fred Palmer, Dorothy Palmer's husband.*

I remember going "Tin Panning" once when I was very small. I must have been quite a small lad and tagged along with my older brothers and other village boys, probably sometime between 1916 to 1918.

We went to the tip in the Pastures to find big sticks and tins to bang, then we all collected at a piece of rough ground on Well Street where Orchard Road now starts, somewhere near the victim's home I suppose.

As it was now dusk the sticks and tins were hidden under the hedge bottom for the next day.

I think we must have gathered again after school the next day and set about banging the tins as loudly as we could until it was getting late and the village policeman came along and said it was time we went home. As I was so young I did not really understand what was going on but the Tin Panning was for a local man who had got a single girl pregnant. I cannot remember if it was on the same day or a bit later but someone made a huge effigy of a man out of sacking and straw. It was then taken by a gang of villagers up to the school playground, tarred and feathered and burned.

There were several children in the village looked after by families who were of no relation to them, presumably they were orphans for one reason or another. After they left school they seemed to disappear and I guess it was because they were sent into service away from the village.

I remember Mr Shillaker, gardener at Ruddles, who was the verger and bellringer who would toll the bell to signal a death in the village. He would toll it twice, pause then twice again for a male and three times, pause then three times again for a female. After another pause he would toll the bell for the age of the person who had died.



*The Old Post Office - July 1936*  
*Back row Bob Isaac*  
*Middle Row - Dorothy Isaac (Palmer) - Alice Isaac - Lucy Isaac*