

SAWBRIDGEWORTH in the 1930's

We will start by taking a walk around Sawbridgeworth as I remember it in, say, 1937.

Starting at the Railway Station we will walk up Station Road, at the double roundabout we turn left along London Road down past the Chapel to Brook Road, turn left into Brook Road and continue along East Drive. At the end of East Drive turn left again into Vantorts Road and up the hill to the Fair Green; turn right down Sheering Mill Road over river and railway, at T-junction left into Sheering Lower Road, finally left at Hyde Hall back to the station.

You may be wondering what is significant about this. With very few exceptions, every property on your right hand side then backed onto open fields; only a couple of dozen houses/bungalows on Bullfields Estate, no Crofters, Roseacres, Gilders, The Crest, East Park, Vantorts Estate, and in the centre of all this The Orchards was an orchard. Also all the houses along High Wych Road backed onto farmland or Rivers Nursery.

The only private housing estate, as we know them now, was The Forebury, which had been built primarily to house employees of Walter Lawrence at the Joinery Works. Council Houses were built in small groups along existing roads not in large estates.

Although the population was much less than it is now there were 4 large grocers viz: International Stores, Star Stores, Forest Stores and the Cambridge Co-op, plus several corner shops selling newspapers, cigarettes and sweets. None of these were self-service; customers queued up at the counter to be served, in the larger shops you sometimes had to queue at two different counters for say bacon and dairy produce on one side; packaged goods i.e. flour sugar, biscuits and tinned goods on the other. Fruit & vegetables had to be bought at the Greengrocers.

In addition there were five Butchers' shops where carcasses were hung up inside the shop and cut to order by the butcher while you waited. Butcher's shops always had sawdust on the floor to soak up any blood spills. At Christmas turkeys and chickens would be hung outside the shop complete with feathers.

Shopping took much longer than it does now and was done on a daily basis as few people had fridges or freezers.

Apart from the Joinery Works the town's largest employer was the Maltings and a familiar sight along the river were the barges transporting grain to the Maltings and Flour Mills in both Sawbridgeworth and Bp's Stortford. These barges were pulled along by large carthorses walking along the towpaths, with usually two men in attendance, one on the barge the other walking with the horse.

An annual event in the town was Fireman's Sunday, when the Sawbridgeworth and other local Fire Brigades paraded through the town with local Brass/Silver Bands finishing up at the Cricket Field. This was a spectacular sight on a bright sunny day as there was a lot of brass on the engines and the firemen wore brass helmets, all of which were highly polished.