

Politics and Poverty. The Liberal Party Meetings in the Village, 1912, 1913 and 1914.

For years national concern had been growing, not just about living conditions and diseases associated with poor housing, but also there was a growing realisation that education needed to be provided beyond the elementary level if the country was to prosper and the standard of living of the so called 'labouring classes' was to be improved.

In Lakenheath, as elsewhere in the district, agricultural wages had risen to an average of 16 shillings per week, (approx. £85 today), but virtually no progress had been made towards improving the sanitation and drinking water supplies which had been in existence for many years. (*See Timeline 4, Medicine and Health in the Village*). In 1933, at the request of the Lakenheath Parish Council, Dr. Barwell, local Medical Officer of Health for the Mildenhall District Council, had reported that lists of houses which were to be inspected had been prepared and an officer had been appointed. Under the Housing Act of 1930 the District Council had the power to condemn houses following inspection by the Medical Officer of Health. The amount of improvement works necessary was said to be very large. Providing decent and clean housing for the poor was now an issue of national importance and the Liberal Party took the lead towards the improvement of living conditions.

The Dole.

In 1899 poverty was defined as being;

“Families whose total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency”.

Benjamin Seebohn Rowntree. A Study of Town Life in York, 1899. Pub. 1901.

The Lakenheath Dole List dated 7th March 1893, shows another side of what was called “the Lives of the Poor”, recording dole payments to villagers who had fallen on hard times: ages of adults are not given. Listed are 282 households receiving the dole payment giving a total of 489 people including orphaned or sick and disabled children. In language which would be unacceptable today are listed 1 idiot and 1 crippled child. All but one widow listed received 2 shillings, but the other only 1 shilling. It’s calculated that in that month 28% of people living in the village were receiving the dole, some of whom are likely to have been aged and not able to support themselves. Some of these villagers may well have eventually had to go to the Mildenhall Workhouse.

[illegible]

Lakenheath Dole 1893: the list measures 36"x22" and there are hastily written additional names on the back. It was the practice at the time to display Dole Notices publicly, quite often on the doors of Parish Churches.

*The above figures are derived from the original Lakenheath Dole List for March 1893.
Donated to the Heritage Group by Robert Rolph.*

It is likely that 1893 saw the end of the parish dole as the method of poor relief and so this Dole List will have been among the last administered in Lakenheath village. For centuries the dole was funded by a local poor rate tax which was levied on property in each parish and administered by the parish Church Vestry which was a committee of parishioners including the vicar and churchwardens amongst others, one of which would have been responsible for collecting and distributing the poor rate according to need. Perhaps some form of interview was carried out when poor relief was asked for but it's likely that in this close-knit village folk in need were easily recognisable.

In 1894 The Local Government Act was passed which removed from the Parish Vestries the responsibility for poor relief by the creation of Parish and District Councils.

Ken Turner has been researching his family. He explains something of what many villagers experienced at the end from the mid to end of the 19th century. We found his great-grandfather, John, on the Lakenheath Dole List (see above and below). As Ken says, this was a life lived by many in the village.

Tuffs Peter & Family	1	1	4
Tuffs Widow of Lewis	2		
Turner John & Wife	3		
Terrington Geo's Widow	2		
Taylor Matthew Wid ^r	2		
Tuffs Widow of John	2		
Tuffs John & Wife	2	2	8

John Turner, aged 70, and wife are receiving 3/- (shillings) in March 1893.

The Life of John Turner 1822/23 - 1901 (My Great-Grandfather).

A typical inhabitant of Lakenheath in the 1800s.

Born in Lakenheath in 1822/23, died in Lakenheath in 1901. He was the son of Thomas Turner and Priscilla Kent; he had one older sister Mary (born 1816 –1843) and was only about three years old when his mother Priscilla died.

On the first census of 1841 he (aged 20) and his father were living on Back Street with his sister Mary, who had married Frederick Hensby, Frederick died in 1841 and Mary was now a widow with two young daughters Sarah 3 and Mary 1, who in 1843 became orphans when their mother Mary died.

Like scores of Lakenheath males, John worked all his life as an agricultural labourer, poorly paid and struggled to bring up a large family, 3 sons and 6 daughters.

In 1844 he had married Mary Mackender, Mary had several sisters and brothers, her younger brother James, his wife Susan and their 1-year-old daughter Ann sailed off to Australia, on arriving weeks later in Sidney, because of sickness aboard, the ship was placed in quarantine and little Ann died aboard ship. James and Susan went on to have a large family in New South Wales.

The next census in 1851 John and Mary with son Kent, and 2 daughters Priscilla and Susan were now living in a cottage near Cupola Farm Undley. Agricultural labourers were poorly paid, men who were skilled horsemen or cowmen stood more chance of regular employment, others had to find work anywhere in the locality, sometimes this meant walking 3 or 4 miles morning and night. Most lived a life of hard work in poverty and needed help from the parish. John may have earned a few shillings by sifting for stones on the warren, there were also working chalk and sandpits in the village.

In 1861 John and Mary were now living in Anchor Lane where they lived the rest of their lives, there, 6 more children were born, John William, Emma, James, Eleanor, Mary and Jane.

On the 1901 census which was taken on the 31st of March, Mary Turner was now stated as Head of house, also there was unmarried daughter Priscilla, as was married daughter Mary (Luscombe) from London, son James from London (stonemason) was a lodger at the Bull Inn, they had probably come for their father's funeral.

On the 1901 census sheet was written "Husband just died". So poor John was probably there in his coffin.

A report in The Bury Free Press of Sat; 6th of April stated. "Death by paralytic stroke."

On Tuesday morning week (this would have been 26th March) when the men employed on the roads went to get their tools which were kept in a building in the Back Street, they noticed one of their number John Turner an aged man in his 79th year fall to the ground. As the poor old man fell he caught his eye and cut it badly. It is supposed that he was overcome with the paralytic stroke, he died next morning not having spoken to anyone. Dr Pickworth attended him so that there was no inquest.

That is the hard life of John Turner (1822/23-1901) he came into this world with nothing and left with nothing, Mary died in 1903, they were buried in the new recently opened Lakenheath Cemetery, no gravestones.

One of their sons, John William (1853-1905) would be my grandfather, his son John William (1896-1987) would be my father.

Ken Turner, (1929 - ???).

It should be noted that the closeness of the village to fen and warren was the saving of many labouring families and this continued to be true in the early part of the 20th C, especially in times of national hardship and two world wars.

A keen public interest in politics had developed nationally and it's hardly surprising that this was the case here, as the meetings of the local Liberal Party were to demonstrate.

It was declared that, "*Governments must legislate for the multitude of the country*"

Lakenheath Liberal Demonstration. 1913. Reported in The Bury Free Press.

Lakenheath non-conformism being very strong, the Liberal Party had a great deal of support from the congregations of Methodist, Baptist and Independent Chapels, and so it's reasonable to think that there would have been considerable interest in the policies of the governing Liberal Party (1906-1916). In 1884 the Parliamentary Act had resulted in two in three men having the vote.

The Lakenheath and District Liberal Association held several large annual meetings, sometimes called 'Demonstrations', in the Lakenheath Council School Hall. Mr. R Bilsland and Dr. Pickworth were leading lights of the association.

Among the policies of the Liberal government were:

Home Rule for Ireland.

The provision of an Old Age Pension. (Introduced in 1918/9).

Improvements to the provision of education.

Reduction of poverty in the labouring classes so that destitution and recourse to the workhouse was avoided and families kept together.

The establishment of Labour Exchanges to support those who were deprived of work.

An Insurance Act to provide some security against the effects of sickness and consequent loss of work which often led to poverty.

Speaking at the 1913 'Demonstration' the former MP for the constituency, Mr. Hardy, stated that

"under the Liberals pauperism has reduced from 62% to 19% per thousand".

The Bury Free Press Saturday April 19th 1913.

The improvement of housing standards for labourers, particularly in agricultural areas where wages often were insufficient to rent a 'decent' home, and to prevent 'turning out' if the house had been sold, became an important Liberal policy.

It's clear that most of the government's policies were relevant to villages like Lakenheath but there was another policy which was fundamental to the development of a genuine democratic society. This was the abolition of 'plural' voting.

Plural Voting.

Sir William Dunn, a Liberal MP until 1906, had at least two votes at each General Election because he owned his London address in Kensington and also Churchgate Farm as well as The Retreat; the last two, being in the same constituency, only gave one vote. The Liberal Party had come to regard plural voting as being a block in the development of democratic rights since power was concentrated in the hands of land and property owners. There is evidence to suggest that, for instance, *owners of breweries could potentially vote in each constituency in which one of their pubs was situated. The Liberal Party was determined to change the law which allowed this.

**Hansard vol. 33 cc131-208. 30th. April 1895. House of Commons Debate.*

Plural voting was not finally abolished until 1948!

You might notice however that votes for women were not included in these policies!

The 'Demonstrations', 1912,13 and 14.

The Bury Free Press reported in detail the annual meetings or 'Demonstrations' of the Lakenheath and District Liberal Party. (Headlines below).

“LIBERAL RALLY AT

LAKENHEATH”

“EXCELLENT SPEECHES”

“THE HOUSING PROBLEM”

“COTTAGES AT MILDENHALL NOT FIT

FOR A PIG TO LIVE IN”

Sat. April 6th. 1912

“A ROUSING LIBERAL DEMONSTRATION AT LAKENHEATH”

Sat. April 19th 1913.and,

“MAGNIFICENT MEETING AT LAKENHEATH”

Sat. April 11th 1914.

Each meeting began with the annual public 'meat tea' which was provided by the ladies committee of around 40 members.

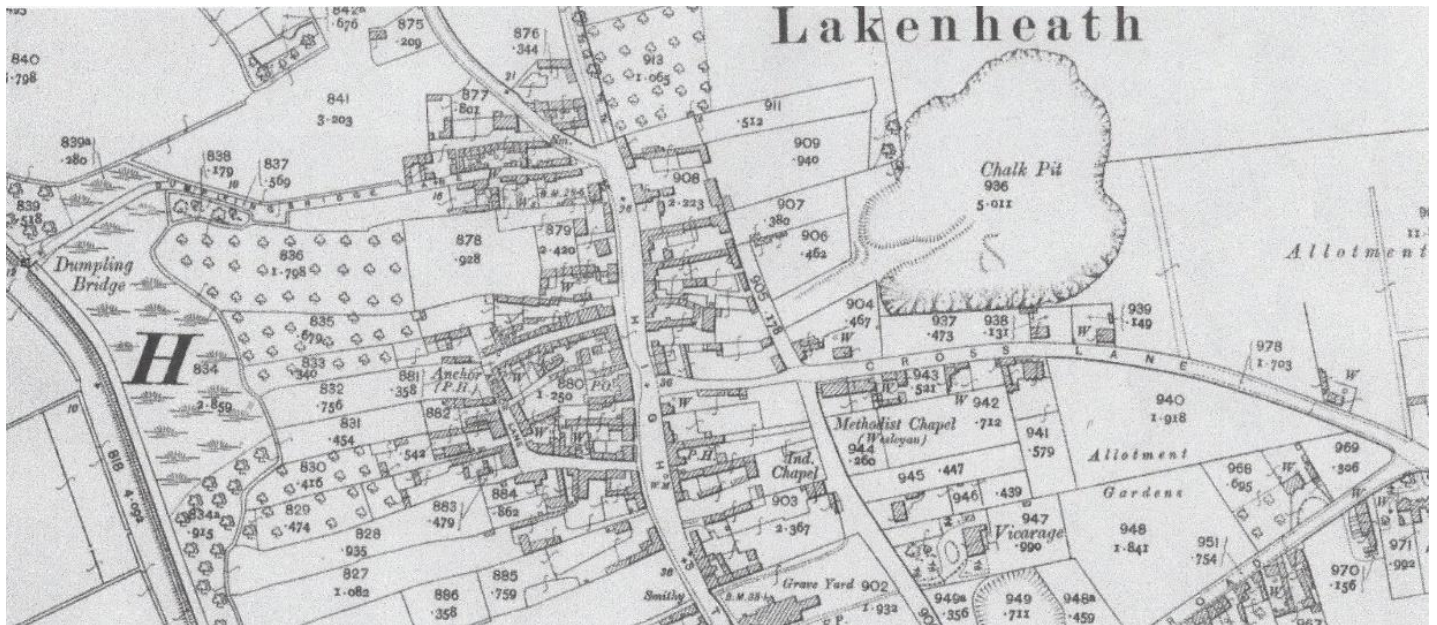
The ladies must have been very busy!

“There was a great demand for admission to the large room....., and soon every available bit of space was occupied, even standing room being at a premium”.

This is perhaps not surprising as there had been the prospect of a good feed before the speeches!

A number of speeches occupied the evening, given to *“A LARGE AND ENTHUSIASTIC GATHERING”*, including one from the prospective parliamentary candidate, Mr. E R Holland, who was supported by delegates from the County and National Parties.

Newspaper research: Michael Tuffs.



Suffolk XII.5 revised 1903 published 1905

Attribution Creative Commons - Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland map images

website.maps@nls.uk

The Ordnance Survey map of 1903, published in 1905, gives accurate positions of the buildings (dwellings) at the time. There is reason to think that there may well also have been a few of temporary inhabited timber lean-to's built against wall of other properties. A map produced in 1914 as part of the sale brochure of 'The Retreat' shows the positioning of water pumps, Anchor Lane only had one pump to serve around 200 people.



- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| A Brewery House (Bala House) | D North Entrance to Anchor Lane | G Brewer's Tap |
| B Anchor Pump | E Now the Co-Op Yard | H Site of Cinema (Early Church Orchard of Medieval Vicarage) |
| C First Post Office & Bank | F South Entrance to Anchor Lane | |

View of the northern end of the village from the church tower.

This photograph, taken at the turn of the 19th-20th century, gives an idea of the crowded areas of Dumpling Bridge Lane and Anchor Lane which are shown towards the top of the photo. The photo can be reliably dated because the 'Tap' is yet to have its upper floor added. It's just possible to make out the Lakenheath Lode appearing as thin streak at the top left of the picture. The Lode provided water for a number of families living in Anchor and Dumpling Bridge Lanes as well as providing a very basic harbour for barges which transported gravel excavated from Maids Cross and the Warren as well as sand from Sandpits which was located at the northern end of the village near Sharp's Corner.



Anchor Lane

Edited extracts from the Bury Free Press report. Feb 16th 1935. This article refers to Anchor Lane and Dumpling Bridge Lane. The conditions described are those pertaining in 1935.

SLUM CLEARANCE at LAKENHEATH

Ministry of Health Inquiry at Mildenhall.

Thirty-nine Cottages Affected.

"Following the making of demolition orders by the Rural District Council, under the Housing Act, 1930, in respect of 31 houses at Lakenheath and eight at Barton Mills, a Ministry of Health inquiry was held at the Council Offices on Wednesday".

Area no.1. Anchor Lane.

"The houses were greatly overcrowded, were very old and in a very insanitary condition, and were quite beyond repair."

"Dr. Barwell, Medical Officer for the area, stated that this embraced six houses in Anchor Lane.....there was at the back of the houses a yard which was in an appalling condition. There was a closet accommodation, but there was no drainage or sewerage, and there was nowhere for these people to empty their slops except down a drain, which was blocked. There were supposed to be four lavatories but two of these were

UNDER WATER,

the floors being totally submerged. Two more had been put up in a shed by the tenants themselves. There were ash heaps all over the place and were covered a mass of decayed vegetable matter. The houses themselves were very old and in a very poor condition. The windows were coming away

Area No. 2 . Anchor Lane comprised 15 houses, where if anything conditions seem to have been worse. Dampness was present in almost all the houses. One well supplied all the houses.

Several owners contested the finding of the inspectors with regard to dampness, and one suggested that if the Council would provide a night soil cart it would greatly improve the sanitary arrangements. Some tenants agreed with both points.

Area 3 included 10 houses in Dumpling Lane where it was said,

"there was tremendous overcrowding in addition to similarly poor sanitation where ashpits and closets were right on top of the cottages. There was a disused well which people would not use, and water had to be obtained from the Lode, 200 yards away".

The onset of the first World War caused most of the Liberal Government's policies to be shelved and those particularly concerned with housing were not introduced until the early 1930's.

Never the less the drive to improve living conditions was begun even though two world wars and the massive economic problems of the 1920's and 30's seriously reduced the rate of progress. But at least, in the village, a start had been made.

New Houses at Lakenheath.



Photo: F. G. Dunham.

Some of the new houses which have been built in Avenue Road, New Town, Lakenheath. Forty houses have now been erected in this healthy spot and with good roads and pavements and a row of pine trees on each side of the road, present an attractive appearance. Sixteen more houses are about to be built amid these surroundings.

Lakenheath's first council houses.

Some time after this story had appeared on the Heritage Pages of the web-site I was shown a short introduction for what was intended to be the recollections of Dick Crane, former landlord of The Fox on Back Street. Dick was the third generation of his family to hold the tenancy of the pub. He wrote it all in capital letters.

“.....BUT MAINLY IT WILL CONCERN THE YEARS BETWEEN 1915 AND 1939 FOR THAT IS THE TIME I THINK OF MOST WHEN LOOKING BACK TO OUR VILLAGE LIFE AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED HERE. THEN TIMES WERE HARD WITH MUCH UNEMPLOYMENT OWING TO THE OVERALL DEPRESSION IN AGRICULTURE WHICH WAS THEN THE WORK OF OVER 75 PER CENT OF THE WORKING POPULATION.(In the village). EVEN SO LIFE DIDN'T SEEM DULL OR UNEVENTFUL AND MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS ARE OF A VILLAGE FULL OF POOR BUT KINDLY FOLK WHO WOULD GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO HELP A MORE UNFORTUNATE PERSON.....”

He goes on to write about the difficulty of finding a place to live:

“MY PARENTS WERE MARRIED IN OCTOBER 1914 AND THAT WAS OF COURSE JUST AFTER THE START OF THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918. FROM WHAT I HAVE BEEN TOLD EVEN IN THOSE DAYS HOUSES WERE HARD TO COME BY. YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS COUNCIL HOUSES IN OUR VILLAGE AT THAT TIME AND VERY FEW HAD THE MEANS TO BUILD THEIR OWN. THE BIGGEST PROPERTY OWNERS AT THAT TIME WERE Mr. JAMES ROLPH, NICKNAMED ‘TAP-MAN’, Mr. JOHN PARSONS WHO HAD A BUILDING BUSINESS, AND Mr. PRESLAND WHO WAS ALSO A BUILDER AND UNDERTAKER. ALL OF THEM OWNED QUITE A NUMBER OF COTTAGES AND I’VE BEEN TOLD THAT THEY ALL HAD A LIST OF WOULD-BE TENANTS WAITING FOR A PLACE TO BECOME VACANT. I’VE ALSO HEARD HOW IF ANYONE DIED THE VILLAGE PEOPLE WOULD BE PESTERING THE HOUSE OWNER BEFORE THE CORPSE WAS COLD. SMALL WONDER THEN THAT MANY PEOPLE STARTED THEIR MARRIED LIFE BY SHARING A HOME WITH RELATIVES OR FRIENDS.”

With thanks to Rosina Bowers, daughter of Dick Crane.