

LAKENHEATH



By
JOE MORLEY

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From 1929 to the early 1930's the population of the village was 1400 people. The High Street then was about three quarters of a mile long from Undley Road to Quayside. Leading from the High Street was Undley Road going west, and Broom Road going east. Broom Road then was a sand track to Lakenheath Warren, and leading across to Wangford and the old Brandon Road.

Lakenheath Warren was an enormous piece of waste land, an area of 2,300 acres. On the Warren were thousands, yes, thousands of rabbits. When I was a young man, we would go poaching at night, with a torch with a good spotlight. When the rabbit was in the spotlight, it wouldn't move, so we were able to catch them and have some meat for the winter. But, to go poaching, you had to have nerves of steel, with three gamekeepers about. However, we had the knowledge and the layout of the places. We never went to the same place for a few nights, maybe not for a week.

From the Back Street, there were only four houses in Broom Road. All the rest was open allotments all the way to the warren. From the High Street, where the War Memorial is, was Plough Lane, right where the Plough Inn is. It is called Mill Road today. Mill Road was from the Back Street from Pickworth's Old Place (named after Dr. Pickworth, who practised here for several years), up to the school. There were ten houses in Mill Road back in those days, plus the Baptist Chapel. All the rest of the ground was people's allotments.

From the High Street going east, was Wings Road, which had eight houses. All the rest was allotments, including Mr. Prewer's field of Kohlrabi. We would go and get one or two and eat them on our way home from school at teatime. Three of the houses had names. Mr. Vine's house next to the Wesleyan Chapel, was called Wangford House. The big house on the right was Mr. Bilsland's and was called Brandon House, and opposite was Mr. Fincham's house, which was called the Hawthorns. Mill Road and Wings Road joined at the school and then it became Cemetery Road, where there were eight houses.

The Cemetery House was then the last one going out of the village. From there the road went up onto Maids Cross Hill and onto the warren (the road from Cemetery Road, is now called Maids Cross Hill). In those days you could walk where ever you liked, but over Maids Cross Hill today, you cannot go very far as it is split into two very unequal parts by the American Air Base.

In those old days, every Good Friday the whole village would go up there to what we called "Good Friday Hill". It was a good day out with games and picnics and having friendly fun. There were all sorts of stalls set up. Old Timmy Halls, who was my grandfather on my father's side would be there with his shellfish stall. Cockles, whelks, shrimp, and winkles. Winkles were the children's favourite. You had to take a pin with you to get it out of the tiny shell. If you had a half pint of them, you could sit on the grass for a quarter of an hour, and enjoy your winkles. There were sweet stalls and fruit, not forgetting Miss Drew with her home made ice cream.

Coming back to the Cemetery house, opposite there was a large yard called "Top Yard". In that yard were eight houses. Today, that is the entrance to Highfields housing estate. From Lakenheath football ground (at the north end of Back Street), the Back Street runs parallel with Lakenheath High Street, to Broom Road. In Back Street in those days, there were eighteen houses and one pub, called "The Fox". It was the locals favourite pub, but is now no longer there. In Back Street, also, were two chapels. One was the Independent Chapel, which has changed its name many times since, (now called the Assembly of God Church), and the other was the Wesleyan, which is now called the Methodist Church. A plaque on the wall in the Methodist Church says that John Wesley actually preached at Lakenheath during his lifetime. When my mother was a young girl, she sang solo in the Wesleyan Chapel, and she always told me that the hymn that she sang was "Jerusalem." What is now the Lakenheath Village Home for the elderly, used to be the vicarage for St. Mary's Church just across the road, and fronting onto the High Street. Just over the junction of Back Street and Mill Road is the Plough Inn yard, and next door to that was the Blacksmith's shop, run by Mr. Fred Smith. He shoed all the horses and made and repaired all kinds of metal equipment. Pictures from the early part of last century show a Mr. Parsons as blacksmith at the time.

In front of the Methodist Church today is the car park. In those days it was Mr. Raven's farm yard, going right down to where the fish shop is today. There were lots of cowsheds where he would bring his herd of cows home for milking, from the large grass field which is now Quayside. The cowsheds would stretch up to Back Street.

Also in Back Street is a large pit where people of village would dump all their old pots and pans and other rubbish. It was called The Molepit. There was chalk underneath the soil of the village, and it was dug up and burnt. This was mixed with sand and water and used as mortar. Squared blocks of hard clunch chalk were used for the walls of some of the buildings. The pit where the blocks were quarried about 350 years ago is now the Lakenheath football ground. This piece of information came from Mr. Munday's book "How we lived in Lakenheath 600 years ago." At the top of the pit, going towards the school, was Parrot's field with several acres of open land, and full of hen huts and hundreds of hens and young chickens. The whole area was what is now Wingfield Road to Mayfields, Wingfield Avenue to the Plantation and Breckland Avenue. Now it's all built up, and a little hamlet of its own.

In the High Street, was a large pond, next to the War Memorial, where the cattle of the village and other cattle being driven through the village would stop to drink. In the winter time, two or three sharp frosts, it would be the children's ice rink to play on. Opposite the pond were two large meadows, one next to the old Co-op shop, and the other where the British Legion Club is today, with a public footpath going down to the old Camping Close, and River Lode. Camping was a game the villagers played years back, rather like hockey. The footpath is still there today.

The last week in June or the first week in July was Fair Week. People would come from miles around and from the Fens on a Friday and Saturday night. There were two fairs side by side in the two meadows. One was "Dack's" and the other was "Thurstons", so you could wander from one to the other. The old village would be crowded out with people coming to see friends that they had made over the years. There was plenty of food and beer. There was High Bridge, the Half Moon, Chequers, which is now the undertakers, and Philipino restaurant, The Bull, now a private house, The Tap, the Bell, now known as the Cromwell, The Plough, The Fox and The Star, both now private houses. So people had plenty of choice for their drinking. Everyone was laughing and joking and singing the old songs. If I had to give it a name back then, I would have

called it "Lakenheath Beer Festival."

In the High Street were sixteen shops. Three butchers, three bakers, two fish and chip shops and one milkman among them. At the corner of Wings Road, was Mrs. Raven's shop where you could get most things including fresh milk as Mr. Raven had his herd of cows at the back. She would have a whole big cheese on the counter, and would cut it through with a piece of wire with a wooden peg on the end as a holder, and all the while she was cutting it, she would keep nibbling scraps that fell off it, just like a little mouse. That shop is now the fish shop. By the shop at the corner of the junction with Wings Road, is a small empty space. That is the spot where the gallows were. The criminals would hang there for quite a while, but that was well before my time, many years back.

At the top of Anchor Lane, there was two shops. They were Cook and Mason. Shires Estate Agents shop is there now. Across the other side of the road was Flatt's shop, which became Curtis Bros., and sadly, which has now closed. In the old days the saying was that if you want anything, Flatt's would have it. As indeed it still was when Curtis Bros. had it. However, no longer. Back once again to the other side of the street, and Mrs. Susie Morley had a sweet, fruit and vegetable shop, which is now the opticians. The Post Office, still in the same spot, has not altered a great deal over the years, although up to the time when the Mallett's were there, they sold groceries, haberdashery and wools, as well as providing the normal post office services. The post office house was called London House, and for many years, Lloyds Bank used it as their premises in the village until they moved to their present site opposite Cards 'n Candy.

Moving up the High Street towards the church, on the same side as the fish shop is now, and the row of shops, you had the Bull Inn, now converted to a private dwelling place, and where the telephone shop is now was a large farm place from the High Street to the Back Street, with a row of sheds with their back to the High Street. The farm belonged to Mr. Rolph. The locals called him "Tapman" because he owned The Tap pub. He lived in the house behind the pub and it was called "Brewery House." I must not forget that in the High Street was the cinema, next door to what was the Dry Cleaners before

it closed. That was Mr. Fincham's shop, where we would go and get a half penny of cheap sweets, all stuck together. There was also Tom Martin's cycle shop. The old cinema used to show a serial every Saturday night called "The Mark of the Frog" by Edgar Wallace, and Tom Mix in cowboy films, Jessie Matthews in her young days, and many more. Next to Tom Martin's shop was Ike Clift's shop, where you could buy anything, have your shoes mended, and get your hair cut. If he was mouldy, he'd say "come back tomorrow", and we also had a town crier, Mr. Luke Coleman was his name, but we called him Luke Bubby. He was like a boy in a dress. He would go down the High Street with his bell and cycle and tell people what was on, or coming to the village.

Past St. Mary's Church, and where the Library is today, was Mr. Rutterford's shop. His nickname was "Doody" Rutterford. He sold sweets, tizer, cigarettes, and many more items. That's the place where I first started smoking, by guessing the number of the cigarette card which was in the packet. There was five of us to guess the numbers from 1-10 and on to 41-50, so if your number was one of them, the packet of cigarettes was yours. They were Players cigarettes, ten in a pack. Next to "Doody's" shop was Mr. Sizer, the butcher, and a small Co-op clothing shop, which is now Humphreys Newsagents. Opposite was the Co-op store which had its own bakery.

Moving further up the High Street was Hammond's Bakers, and next door to that was Mr. Reeve's butcher's shop, almost opposite the Lakenheath Hotel. We would go and see Mr. Reeve's kill his pigs, and afterwards he would pour boiling water on them to get rid of the bristles. We'd wait for the pigs bladder to play football with. Back on the other side of the High Street you had Cash's, shoe repair shop and then you had the Star pub. Back on the other side of the street, Mrs. Leader ran a small sweet shop in the middle of three small cottages, which is now the single building next door to the now closed Lakenheath Garage. Where that is, there was Mr. "Easy" Raven who had his agricultural contracting business and a blacksmith's shop. Next to that was a row of nine houses. One house stood on its own, end on to the High Street, and it was called 'The Teapot House.' Those houses backed on to the Back Street, and went up to the area that is now the Surgery. On the other side of the road was a row of flint cottages where

you had to step down into them, the rooms being just below street level. Behind them were another five cottages, running at right angles to them. This was called Farrow's Square.

Back down to the other end of the village, at Dumpling Bridge Lane, was a house and a forge owned by Mr. Palmer. He's the man who knocked me over with his cycle, and they took me up to Dr. Pickworth's to have my nose stitched up. They took me in a wheelbarrow with my legs hanging out. I still have the scar to this day.

I can remember when the church was struck by lightning. Lenney, who kept Churchgate Farm opposite the churchyard let his son go to the top of the church and put the fire out.

In those days, there was plenty of work in the spring and summer. Down on Chivers Farms, who owned all Sedge Fen from Russell Farm to Shippea Hill railway station. There was thousands of acres. The had six farms, which were: Russell Farm, Poultry Farm, Lee Farm, Decoy Farm, Albion Farm, Flack's Farm and the old jam making factory, which is still there today. Before it was broken up and sold into different lots, Chivers employed nearly half the village in casual labour for the fruit picking season, plus other jobs like hoeing and weeding the sage and parsley fields, strawing the rows between the strawberries to keep the fruit off the ground. The soft fruit for making Chivers Jams was plums, raspberries, currants, loganberries, gooseberries and Damsons. The best plum was the Victoria, normally called Vic's. In the apple orchard were all different varieties which are not grown today. There was even a small orchard of crab apples. One of the last fruits to be picked was the Bramley apple. That would be the end of the fruit season for us. But, by that time we had plenty of "Morley" home made jam and Bramley apples for the winter. The Bramley was a good keeper, so we had plenty of apple puddings and tarts. We then had to find a bit more work before the winter, so I went to Pearson Brothers for potato picking which was four to five weeks. That was the other side of Shippea Hill Railway station. It was about five miles from the village. Some of the fields were down at a place called the Golden Ball. There were seven or eight of us in a gang to do the picking. We had to bike to work, there were no roads in those days, only muddy tracks. If it rained, we had to stop and poke the mud

out of the mudguards so the wheels could go round, and coming home with nine or ten pounds of potatoes on your back, it was hard work. We would all bring home the same. It depended on the size of your bag and who your "ganger" was. That's what the foreman was called. That was about the end of work for the year, so with Chivers fruit and Pearson's potatoes, we were stocked up for the winter. After that, I went on the Parish, as it was called in those days, and got three days a week doing stone sifting. That was using a sieve to take the stones from the sand on Lakenheath warren, along with a lot of older men. I was twenty at that time. We worked at a place called The Sandgalls. I was getting four shillings a day, so for three days work, my wages were twelve shillings for the week.

In those days, there were no benefits to claim for. Then, on a Friday, we had to cycle to Mildenhall to get our wages. It was not cash, but a grocery ticket. I think that was so we couldn't stop at the Roebuck pub in Little Eriswell on the way home. The old Roebuck was pulled down years ago, and there are bungalows built there now.

Twelve shillings a week was not much to live on, so we had to find other means to make up for that. We had many more opportunities than people living in towns and cities. Besides poaching rabbits, there were feathered friends in the plantations and moorhens in the dykes. We used to skin them and all the feathers and stumps would come off, and they would be as clean as a bald man's head. We also had sparrow and blackbird pies. The had lots of little bones, but they were good. Then there were birds eggs, both large and small. There was no law against taking them in those days. The only egg we didn't take was the starlings, it was bitter.

If we wanted a change of menu, we had the old River Lode, that was full of fish. The river has gone now, replaced by the New Cut River. Some days four of us would go fishing. We had no nets, so we would stretch a piece of wire netting across the river, then tie the string on each corner, and bend it like a half moon. Two of us would hold the net and the other two, with a pole each, would go upstream and splash towards the net. When we thought there was enough fish in the net, we would pull the bottom string up and pull the net out of the water. We would lose a lot most of the time, but we could always go

further downstream and do it all again. There was pike, roach, bream, perch and eels - all kinds of river creatures. We also used the river water for all our drinking water, and my mother used to go down with two pails, balanced by one old hoop, round her waist. You had to let the water settle for a while, and there was very often a tadpole or two in it. It never did us any harm.

My mate and I used to go "eel babbing". We would go down to the Lode at about 11 o'clock at night. First, we would get big worms, then a big darning needle and some wool, thread the worms right through their length until you had a long string of worms about two feet long. We would then twist them up like a bunch of grapes, tie them on the line, and then on to a stick which you would hold out, so that the bait would drop just off the bottom of the water. However, before you started, you had to have an old bath, which you had to tie to some reeds to stop it from floating away. We would then sit waiting for the eels to bite, then, once they had bitten, let the bait out nice and slow over the bath, give it a shake, then you would hear the eel hit the bottom of the bath. When the eels bit at the worms their teeth would get stuck in the wool. With a little shake, you got them, and they made very rich food. Of all the fish, the eel was the best. It had only one bone. When we skinned them, they would twist round your arm like a snake.

There were two main lanes leading from the High Street. One was Dumpling Bridge Lane, that's where I was born and brought up until 1937, when we all moved to Eriswell Road and the new council houses. In Dumpling Bridge Lane were sixteen houses in a very small space of about eight yards. In Anchor Lane, it was more populated, as the rows of houses were all joined and facing each other across the narrow lane. The houses were so close to each other that if you were on your doorstep and your neighbour on his, you could shake hands without stretching. There were over forty houses around Anchor Lane, so called, because years ago there was a pub at the bottom of the lane called "The Anchor", owned by a William Morley. My grandfather and his second wife moved from Bridge Lane to a cottage called "Kings Cottage" in Anchor Lane. Locally, it was called "Fisherman's" Cottage, that was his nickname. When I was just a boy, I would go and wait at the top of the lane for him to come out, and when he did,

I would peg stones at him. My wife Madge said I was just a bad boy!

When we went to school, you had the up-streeters and the down-streeters. The down-streeters used Wings Road to go to school, and the up-streeters used Mill Road, and if you dared to use each other's roads. There would be a huge fight.

Going back to Bridge Lane, very often the old Lode would flood, then you couldn't get your drinking water from there, so Mother would take her pails down to what was called "Pump Gate". That's about halfway between the Lane and the Half Moon pub. The old man at the top of our lane had a well, but wouldn't let any of us use it. His name was Jitty Palmer. Down Bridge Lane, set into a wall, was a black door. We called it "Death's Door" and always ran past it as fast as possible, we were scared of it, and in fact, it's still there today.

Running down beside Bridge Lane was Death's Lane. Years ago, a man lived there called De'ath. A lot of the cottages had their back door in Bridge Lane and their front door opened onto Death's Lane. At the top of Anchor Lane, where the Co-op is today, was Mr. Coe's bakery and shop, and next door was George Lummis' butchers shop.

Down Half Moon Lane, was "The Rookery", known to the locals as Kitchener's old place. That's where some of Lord Kitchener's ancestors lived. If you go to the church door, and look right, you will see the graves of eleven Kitchener's. Inside the church in the roof are ten angels with their faces cut off. That was the work of Oliver Cromwell's roundheads.

As you got to the south end of the High Street, upstreet, as they called it) you came to the crossroads with Broom Road on your left and Undley Road on the right and going straight on is Eriswell Road, but that's a story for another day. This is Lakenheath as it was in my younger days. Good old Lakenheath.

Joseph Cooper Morley
24th December 1914 - 3rd February 2003

Sadly, Joe died before he could put any more down on paper, and give us some more information on how the village was years ago.



Eriswell Road, before the council houses were built in the late 1930's



Half Moon Lane. The last house shown, on the left of the picture is Rookery Farm, where Lord Kitchener's relatives lived.



The old High Bridge Pub, now long gone, which was on the road to Sedge Fen.

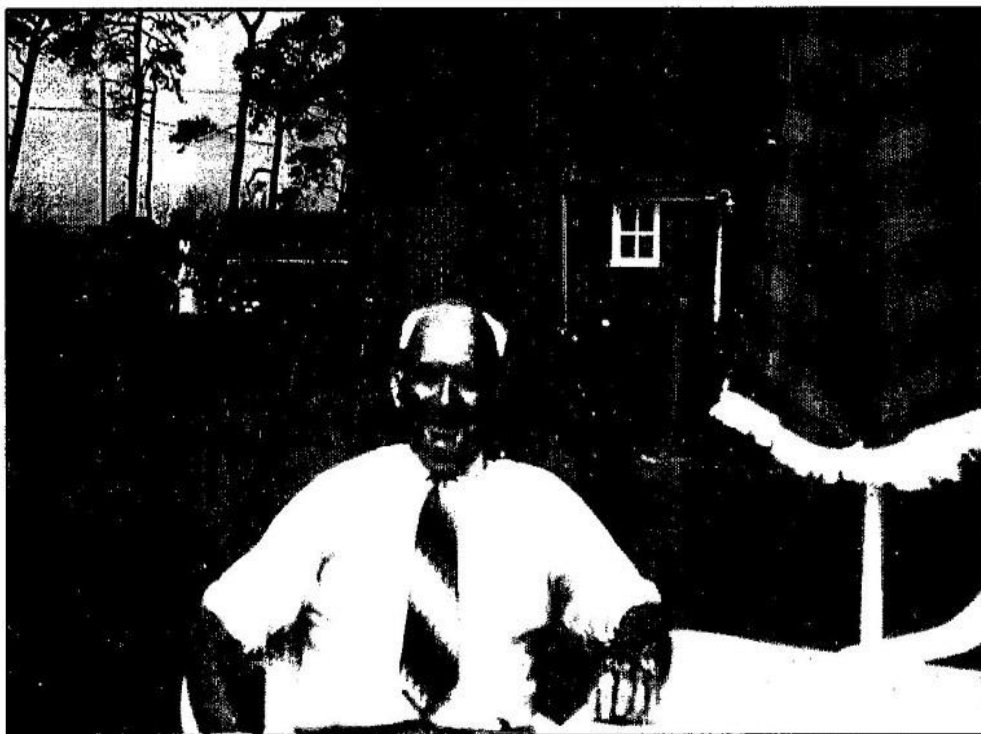


HIGH STREET LAKENHEATH.

A view of the High Street, taken from opposite St. Mary's Church



Joe, aged about 10 years, with his great grandmother Eliza Cooper Morley and sister Nancy.



Joe, in a relaxed mood, taking in the sun.