

## KINGSLAND

Kingsland, the village where I was born and brought up lies 4 miles to the West of the North Herefordshire market town of Leominster. At the time I was born, 1932, there was no electricity in the village, Very few people had cars. Most people relied on the 2 bus services that ran through the village to the nearby market town of Leominster. One farmer had a tractor but most farm work was done with horses though there was a contract firm that had about 4 tractors available for hire with drivers.

It was essentially a farming community and the majority of people either walked or cycled to work. There was a small bus company which ran daily services between Leominster and Kington which detoured through Kingsland and another which went from Leintwardine to Leominster. They were used by children going to school and people working or shopping in Leominster. There was also a train station with a train service running between Leominster and Kington and some trains went further to New Radnor. Being somewhat on the edge of the village, once the bus services were running, the train was used less than before except for journeys further afield than Leominster.

In many ways the village was largely self sufficient. At its centre was the Church with foot paths radiating out to the more outlying parts of the village. Near the centre was the Post Office which had a manual telephone switchboard for the village, not that many people had 'phones in those days. An indication of how few was that our number was Kingsland 29; in all probability there were no single digit numbers, and an indication of how slowly phones were installed in the village was that when my grandparents moved to a new house they built in 1938 their number was 39. Also at the heart of the village was the church school, a grocers shop and bakery with a delivery service round the parish. Opposite the school was a sweet shop and next door to it a carpenter, wheelwright and undertaker. There was a garage business which provided petrol, a repair service and, quite importantly in those days before electricity was available, charged "accumulators", wet cell batteries necessary to power people's radios. It also ran a bus which was pretty much dedicated to bringing older children daily from the neighbouring village of Shobdon to school and taking them home again. In addition, on Friday mornings the bus took older children, who had failed to get to secondary school, to Leominster where the boys did carpentry and the girls cookery. There were two pubs near the village centre as well as two outlying ones.

The doctor lived near the village centre and held his surgery in the evenings so that people didn't have to take time off work to see him. A little further out lived the district nurse. In addition there was a cobbler, the village butcher, a paper delivery round and two of the farms provided milk deliveries. There was, too, a second carpenter and undertaker.

Away from the village centre there was a cider mill, flourmill, blacksmith, and a second butcher. Three brothers variously had a small bus company, a haulage and agricultural contracting business and a coal delivery service. At the time most farm work was done by horses and only one farmer in the village had his own tractor. Others used contractors when necessary to supplement what they could do with

horses. There was a knackers yard and, based adjacent to it, was a chap with a stock lorry used mainly for transporting livestock mainly to market but no doubt bring carcasses to the knackers yard when necessary.

Each year, in early October, Kingsland Foal Show was held. Various classes of horses were judged and probably some deals done as well. Also it provided an opportunity for farmers and farm labourers to seek arrangements for employment for the year ahead. As school children we benefited because we always had the day off and an opportunity to go to the show without playing truant. In fact summer school holidays were geared to the farming cycle. There was a fortnight holiday in June to coincide with haymaking and the main summer holiday was somewhat delayed for the hop-picking season. It enabled mothers to take their children for long days earning a much needed supplement to their husbands labouring income. We were not allowed to venture near the hop fields, a bit beneath the family's dignity.

Probably the biggest employer in the village was the sawmills located alongside the railway station.

One way and another most of the daily needs of villagers could be met from within the village. There were also delivery services from a Leominster grocer and an "oil-man" who delivered paraffin, essential for lighting in the absence of electricity, as well as soap and the like, products which were not appropriate to be transported with food.

Home was a two-bedroom bungalow where I was born on a snowy day in February 1932. It was set behind two others along the main village street and reached from the road by a short lane which led on to fields behind home. The houses lining our side of the road all had orchards behind them and ours had been built in one such orchard. There was a lawn to the front and with a drive to a garage and shed. To one side of the house was a lawn and flower beds and to the other side a vegetable garden, separated from the front lawn by a flower border. Behind was a small orchard where, in addition to a range of fruit trees, hens were kept to provide eggs and, when they finished laying, they provided a Sunday meal. The large front gate had a high latch so I was effectively fenced in but, for all that, there was plenty of room for a toddler to run around.

My earliest memories were doing just that, mainly tagging along behind my sister, Barbara, who was two years older than me and by then was going to the village school which was little more than 100yds up the road from home. I recall mother standing me on the rail of the veranda at the front and seeing Barbara, between the two roadside bungalows, making her own way to school. Such was the nature of the village that there was little traffic and few, if any, strangers so that a 5 year old could go gaily off to school on her own. Often in her company we ventured beyond the garden gate. So far as I remember the only instructions were to be careful of any traffic on the road, of which there was little, and on no account have anything to do with strangers.

I have a vague recollection of King George V's Silver Jubilee celebration which consisted of a parade of various decorated farm wagons and people bedecked in fancy clothes making their way down the village to "the Greens", a field beside the church. This was the earliest definable event I can remember. To mark the occasion Barbara

brought home from school a commemorative Silver Jubilee Mug. Two years later a similar event took place to mark the Coronation of the new King. By that time I had started school and so two commemorative Coronation Mugs were brought home. That year too my younger sister, Sheila was born at a nursing home at Rylands Road in Leominster.

At that time my maternal grandparents lived in the bungalow beside the lane in front of us. Grandfather was a divisional surveyor for the county council responsible for the maintenance and improvements of the roads and bridges in the area. My uncle, living there, managed a limestone quarry a few miles away near Presteigne. As children we often visited them and, to this day, I have not come across a raspberry sponge cake to match those Grandmother always seemed to have available. Occasionally I went with "Grandad" on his tours of inspection mainly to see gangs resurfacing stretches of road when I was impressed by the chugging steam rollers going backwards and forwards on the newly laid surfaces.

At other times I accompanied Dad on his travels during the spring and summer. He was a fruit and potato merchant travelling to visit fruit growers in Herefordshire and the neighbouring counties of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Shropshire. This continued after I started at school during the Easter and Summer holidays when Dad gave me mental arithmetic sums to do as we travelled along.

It must have been about 1937 when electricity came to the village. This brought a dramatic change to home life. Before then lighting was by paraffin lamps and candles, the latter used to move around the house and to light bedrooms at bedtime. The longer days of summer were a godsend in reducing the need for lighting.

At home there was an open range in the living room where all the cooking was done and kettles boiled. It had a back boiler to provide hot water in the kitchen and bathroom but it meant, of necessity that it had to be kept alight throughout the year. Water was pumped by hand from a well just outside the backdoor to a tank in the attic. This was a laborious job but no more than washing clothes and mangling them, again all done by hand. Monday was routinely washday and mother had the help of a local washerwoman. Two flat irons were heated on the range alternately to do the ironing. On a good drying day the washerwoman helped with this otherwise Mother had to do it all herself the following day.

Then there was the wireless: radio was not a term generally used then This was powered by a liquid cell battery or "accumulator" which had to be taken to the local garage for re-charging on a regular basis despite the wireless only being in intermittent use, mainly to hear news broadcasts which were straightforward factual reports, in other words devoid of debate and opinion.

The advent of electricity brought a big transformation in home life. For us as children electric lighting brought the main change in our lives since at any time of the year and anywhere in the house there was adequate light for anything we might want to do. The greatest change was for mother. The open range was soon removed replaced by an electric cooker with oven and hot plates and an electric kettle for boiling water. An electric pump kept the water storage tank in the attic topped up. An electric washing machine with its own wringer plus an electric iron transformed washday. A vacuum

cleaner replaced the old ineffectual carpet sweeper which hitherto had meant carpets had to be taken up, draped over the clothes line outside and beaten from time to time, usually with an old tennis racket.

Then in 1939 our world changed. On 1<sup>st</sup> September Germany invaded Poland, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> PM Chamberlain announced we were at war with Germany. Little changed immediately in village. Soon food rationing came and there was an influx of evacuee school children from Liverpool housed in various homes in the village and filling the school to bursting point.

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