

EARBY OF LONG AGO

OLD PATHS AND THOROUGHFARES

WHEN THE BRACEWELLS LIVED AT GREENEND HOUSE

In commencing this new series of articles for the "Craven Herald" it will be advisable to review the conditions prevailing in our village 60 years ago.

At that time Earby was a fair-sized industrial village, with a population of about 1500. There were few houses in what now constitutes the West Ward, only a farm house at Lane Ends, with a few cottages adjoining. The village proper stood back a few hundred yards from the Colne to Skipton turnpike road and the railway station was fully half a mile distant from the nearest houses. The road into the village branched off the main road at Lane Ends, passed over Seal Bridge and alongside the entrance to Victoria Mills. Between Lane Ends and the station a private carriage drive branched off the highway, which led up to Green End House. There was a semi-circular ornamental entrance with iron gates, the road was fenced with iron railings, and trees were planted on each side which were then protected with a wooden fence. This carriage-drive was called the "New Road", a name it still retains, though it is now a paved street. The outlet of the road was into Green End Road, but there was also an ornamental gateway on the right-hand side leading into the grounds of Green End House, which was the residence of the village "Master" Mr. Christopher Bracewell.

Green End House had been considerably enlarged, and was the most imposing residence in the district. A bridle path branched off the road opposite the station, and this is now known as Rostletop Road. The road entered into Langroyd Road, which was a narrow lane, and a continuation of Green End Road. At the lower end of the village there was another entrance from the main road, through School Lane, which was then very narrow.

From School Lane there was an entrance to "The Grove," where Dr. Theakstone resided, and which is now occupied by Mr. Bracewell Hartley. Where the Conservative Club now stands, and the "fair ground" adjoining, there was a field known as "The Doffers' Croft." This field was immediately opposite the entrance to Victoria Mills, which explains its designation. Leading from the village to the railway station there was a footpath, a short distance from Seal Bridge, which went through the cricket field. It was a broad path made of ashes, and much used. It entered the main road, near Dodgson's Smithy. There were no side paths on the road to the station, but a covered stream, and a ditch on one side part of the way. The roads were roughly made, and when stones were put on to repair the roads it was left to the carts to crush them, and there were frequently deep ruts in the roads.

In wet weather the roads were often very dirty, and pools of water lodged in the ruts. There were no street lamps to guide the wayfarer as he trudged along, and very few signposts.

A DIFFERENT RAILWAY STATION

Many of the streets were unnamed, or were given bye-names, such as Backside, Cat-Gate, Muck Street, and a colony of houses over the stream at the bottom of Earby was called "Ireland".

The railway station gave added importance to our village, and this was increased when it

became a junction station for Barnoldswick. The station was very different in appearance in the early days of the railway. The platform for Colne and Barnoldswick trains was a long, low narrow structure, and the wooden building which served as an office, waiting room and booking hall was on the Skipton side. The signal box was a small cabin near the booking hall and close by the gates, and the levers were outside the cabin, the signalman having to attend to the messages inside and then come out to signal the trains. The stationmaster's house was near the site of the present signal-box, but it was occupied by Mrs. Andrews, the mother of the stationmaster, Mr. George Andrews, who lived at a house nearby called "Crow Beckle." Mrs. Andrews was the proprietor of a coal business at Earby and Colne, and also provided carriages and waggonettes for public hire.

The industrial life of the community centred round the Victoria Mill, and the Old Shed, both of which were owned by the Bracewell family. The Old Shed was a long narrow building, with windows at the sides, holding about 260 looms. When it was erected the loom space was for 160, and it was enlarged 20 years later. What was called the "New Shed" adjoined the Victoria Mill and had room for 600 looms. Altogether the firm provided employment for about 250 workpeople, when fully engaged, and they had a reputation of being good employers.

In the heyday of the cotton trade prosperity, following the termination of the American Civil War, the two branches of the Bracewell family associated with Earby made an imposing display.

AN ESTEEMED FAMILY

After a term of residence in Southport, Mr. Christopher Bracewell returned to Green End, and in 1874 his eldest son attained his majority. There were four sons, and loyal villagers respectfully referred to them as Mr. Robert, Mr. Willie, Mr. Walter and Mr. Edgar. There were three daughters, who were known as Miss Lizzie, Miss Edith and Miss Carrie. Mrs. Bracewell and the children were highly esteemed. There were carriage horses and hunters at Green End stables, and a coachman and footman in attendance.

Mr. Henry Bracewell, brother of Mr. Christopher, for a time resided in Thornton House, and then resided at the beautiful and imposing Manor House at Thornton. Mr. Henry Bracewell had one son, Arthur, who was very well liked by the people of Earby.

When Sunday came round the two families used to go "in state" to the Wesleyan Chapel at Earby, and they were substantial supporters of the cause.

In addition to frequent ministerial pulpit supplies, students from Didsbury and Headingley Colleges were secured, and some who became the foremost preachers in the denomination were popular visitors. Some of the most eminent ministers in Methodism visited Earby at that period, including Dr. W. Burt Pope, of Didsbury College, Dr. Ebenezer Jenkins, Missionary Secretary, Dr. David J. Waller, education secretary, and the Rev. Peter Mackenzie. Mr. Henry Bracewell and his family left Thornton for Gargrave, and carried on the business at Airebank Mills. In 1885 the Bracewell regime in Earby came to an end and Mr. Christopher, with his wife and two sons, Willie and Edgar, went to America, and settled down to farming at Denver, Colorado.

Half a century ago there was a flourishing industry at Booth Bridge, where the brothers,

Henry and Vandeleur Wilkinson had a bobbin mill. The firm were also noted makers of barrows and agricultural implements. The motive power was provided by a water wheel, and the "caul" where the water was stored, was an unfailing attraction to young men who were fond of bathing in summer time.

A HANDSOME AVENUE

Since the removal of the business to Heysham the buildings have fallen into decay, and present a rather desolate appearance.

Another feature of note belonging to the period under review was the different aspect of the village by reason of the glorious trees which were to be seen on every hand. In the cricket field, near the main road, in Applegarth, Selcroft, School Lane, Stoneybank Lane, in front of Green End Cottages, down Langroyd Lane, and up by the Moor Hall, there was a fine display of some of the most handsome trees to be found in the neighbourhood. The lane from Earby to Salterforth was a beautiful avenue in the summertime. Some of the "cloughs" on the hillside have been shorn of their beauty in recent years.

Time has brought many changes, but some of them cause a pang of regret to old lovers of Earby.