

*GRAFTON  
FRIENDSHIP CLUB  
1999*



*LIVING MEMORIES OF THE PARISH OF GRAFTON*

*WITH SINCERE THANKS TO THE FRIENDSHIP CLUB 1999.*

These memories tell of life in Grafton between the 1910's and year 2000.

Today, the villages have no shop or post office, and no railway services. The infant school has only recently been saved from closure. The village people are rarely seen walking about and people work and play far afield. There is no longer a vicar in the village and the community has changed beyond recognition from that remembered with affection, despite the hard toils of daily life, by those who were born in the Parish and who have lived to see the changes at first hand.

The speed of change that has taken place over the last century becomes "very obvious" when listening to reminiscences of the last 90 years. Communication was by conversation or by mail; today, communication is by telephone, radio, television and the internet. Everyone walked, rode horseback or bicycle; today everyone uses their own car to shop and to reach entertainment and work. There are seats by the roadside, between the Inns in the villages and the people that they serve, to provide a welcome break on the long walk; today they are unused and almost forgotten.

Think of how you live in the Parish of Grafton today whilst you absorb the memories of those who have witnessed the changes at first hand. We are all very grateful to the Friendship Club for the afternoon spent reminiscing on the past.

### *Grafton School*

Children stayed at Grafton School until they were 14 years old or they left at 11 to go to the Grammar school in Marlborough or beyond. There were two doors and two playgrounds in Grafton School so that the boys and girls could be kept separate; girls and boys were taught in separate classes too! Children walked to school from the surrounding villages, and in doing so had to dodge the cows that regularly grazed on the green! An old man rang a bell for the start of school each day. The school was kept warm by a large coal-fired range that had to be set going each morning. The baker was the first person in the villages to get a car and his wife used it to fetch and carry the children from the villages to the school – the original "school run"!

There were a lot of children to play on the village green between the cows! Football was the most popular village sport and many walked from Burbage, Wilton, Wexcombe and Marten to play on Grafton green.



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### Local Services

The local policeman was based in Marten. There was no doctor in the village but Mrs Giddings was the resident nurse to whom everyone took their babies when they needed help. The Olde Shoppe was initially the post office and general store; the post office then moved over to the edge of the Green and ultimately to Wilton Road. The village rick yard, for storing the hay ricks to feed the animals in winter, was next to Green Farm.

The dairy was behind the Olde Shoppe and this employed many local residents, as did the bakery that served as another handy shop for the village. There was a bakery and shop in Wilton too. Bread deliveries consisted of the baker walking round the villages carrying two large bread filled baskets. Milk from local farms often went by train to large dairies from Grafton station. Green Farm dairy provided the local milk round. The first mechanical milking machines were built in the Grafton parish, before that all the cows were milked by hand. Everyone was very aware of all the animals being moved around the village, and everyone's life was very much ruled by the seasonal activities on the farms.

The saddlers was by the green; there was a blacksmith's shop, a carpenter and a builder, all within the village. The coal merchant was in Wexcombe before moving to Burbage. The village allotments, separate allotment sites in Grafton and in each of the surrounding villages too, produced fruit and vegetables (no pineapples or bananas in those days!) and the farmers produced the meat and grain – the village folk were almost self sufficient. On the farms, cabbages were planted by hand, a job which took several days.

Visiting tradesmen filled the gaps in the local provisions. Visiting travellers would stay the night in Gypsy Lane, Wilton or Travellers Rest on the green. The cobbler in Marlborough visited monthly with his wares, he mended shoes and boots and carried a wide range of sizes. Accumulators had to be charged to enable you to hear the Radio and there were regular visits from Hungerford to provide this service. The drapers travelled from Andover to the villages and this continued well into the 1950's. Burbage shops delivered groceries and meat until the 1980's. There is a bread van and occasional fish monger delivering to this day!



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### Local Services

What luxury, these delivery men brought the deliveries into the kitchen and left it ready for you on the table! Everything was weighed for you from large sacks and drums. Keeping food in a larder (no fridges) meant that storing food at home was unusual – there would be a marble slab to keep food cool. If you travelled to Andover or Marlborough to shop you could ask for your goods to be delivered to “corner cottage” in the village to save carrying it home, this was all part of the service and you could always stop for a chat when you collected your wares! The travelling library consisted of a lady on a “butchers bicycle” which was loaded with books front and back and which came from Burbage to all the villages. The lady who delivered the newspapers travelled on her bicycle from Burbage too whatever the weather. There was a character who delivered goods on a three wheeled bicycle that everyone remembers.

### Entertainment

Village people tended to stay around the village as they had most of what they needed within walking distance. Trips out of Grafton were generally by train from West Grafton station. A walk from Marten, Wexcombe, Wilton etc to the train and a “one shilling” fare would enable you to get to Swindon. You could take a train to Andover junction that provided access to one extensive network; or go the other way to Cheltenham where the rest of the network was available.

A van went around the villages, each Christmas, carrying Carol singers collecting money to be used to treat all the children to a trip to the Pantomime in Swindon. Sometimes they dressed up as “black and white minstrels”. There were cinemas in Hungerford, Marlborough and Swindon.

The Vicarage was the home of the local priest and it was in the grounds of the house that the first village Summer Fete took place.

There was just one occasional bus to Marlborough; if this was full then people would just walk! Trips to the Marlborough fair were a “must” for the young in the villages.

Before the village hall was built in the 1930’s there was a small cottage on the edge of the green with billiard tables where the “young men’s club” met regularly. It was lit by pressure lamps which you had to take outside to pump up, in all weathers! The village hall was used extensively during the second world war.

## *Nature*

There was a tornado in the village which destroyed the monkey puzzle tree in the Church yard and a column of trees beside the road. Normally the village was full of wild life, birds, butterflies etc, all thriving in the gardens and in the allotments. It was normal for the village ponds to be frozen for weeks on end in winter, and Long Pond was a favourite for skating (children caught playing on the ice could be chased with the horse-whip for their devilment). Cottages were smaller than now, the row opposite the Olde Shoppe, for instance, was originally four cottages.

There was no piped water in the village until a windmill was erected to the south of the village by the owner of Green Farm. Even then, few cottages had water, electricity or toilets and moving to new bungalows with these amenities meant that villagers felt that they were moving to palaces! There was a well (normally at least 40 feet deep) for every 3 or 4 houses and springs fed the local rivers and ponds. There were 5 large ponds on the village green alone, Gorse pond, Bakersmiths pond, Stores pond; they all had names just as did the fields, lanes and tracks. It was the late 1920's before there was any running water in the villages, the first house on the left going down the hill into Wilton still does not have piped water, there is a pump but no bathroom or toilet there!

## *The contrast*

Today there are speed limits through all the villages in the Parish and the steady volume of traffic on the main road makes walking to school hazardous. The villagers are far from self sufficient in food, entertainment or stores. The school children travel by bus to secondary schools out of the village. Most people work away from the parish; farms are so mechanised that very few work on the land. There are fewer farms in the Parish and the village green is now privately owned. There are no allotments and most gardens are "vegetable free". Most purchases are pre-packed and little is weighed or measured, we even recycle the packaging to try and reduce the volume of waste.

At the turn of the century "home deliveries" are coming back, this time from catalogues, the internet or the telephone; the motivation this time is to "save time" and travelling costs. Farmers markets are returning to traditional selling methods and we are reflecting on the good things in the last century as we embark on the new one.