

The Memories of Mildred Yates

Mildred Yates who was born and lived in Appley Bridge all her life. During the period 1999 to 2001 she set down her memories and gracefully allowed its publication here in 2005. This account is used with permission.

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Appley Bridge, Wigan
Written February 12, 1999

This week the property on Bimson's land has been knocked down; it has made me think of the changes that have taken place in Appley Bridge in my lifetime. I was born January 1916 in a little cottage in Speakman's Lane and had two older brothers, Jack and James. Our Dad was drowned in the canal on a foggy, frosty night. Dad had lived by the canal all his life; his family lived in a little cottage, which has now been demolished, by the side of Gillibrand Bridge, halfway between Parbold and Appley Bridge. My mother's parents, at that time, lived in Ashbrow in Newburgh; they later moved to Rookery Cottage in Dalton. They used to get their drinking water from a well in [the] field.

At the time my mother was widowed there was no widow's pension; she got eight shillings a week Parish Pay and had to go to Upholland to collect it. Auntie Annie came to live with us and help my mother, they used to wash for people and as there was only a cold water tap they had the old type washing boiler which you had to light a fire under to get the water hot; they also went out cleaning.

In those days the richer people lived up Appley Lane North and had help to clean their homes; these days there are no boundaries – rich and poor live alongside each other. There wasn't any electricity in the village; I was about 18 when that came. We used to use oil lamps and even the street lights were oil; a man used to come in the afternoon, clean the lamp, fill it with paraffin, then light it.

In those days, the 1920's, the village was a very busy place with lots of shops. On the Upholland side of the bridge there was Platt's greengrocery and opposite was a row of cottages where two sisters and their brother lived. They were all deaf and dumb and used to sell sweets. Further along the row Mrs. Ashcroft sold cigarettes. On the corner of Heyes Street was Mrs. Speakman's grocery store and further along Jane Stopforth had another grocery store.

When I was about 4 my mother married again. My stepfather was a master baker and he used to bake bread and lovely barmcakes which were crisp and brown, not like the ones you get today. People used to come to see if he would let them have some bread. We had a big oven in an outbuilding so my mother started a little business in the back of the cottage where she sold bread and all sorts of things, anything she thought people would want.

The Drive and the cottages where we lived were owned by an old lady, Mrs. Speakman; she would not let us play in the drive, we had to go outside the gates which she kept locked. There was a little side entrance which we could just get through with a pram or a barrow and even the coalmen could not go with their horse and cart but had to use a little truck to take the bags of coal to the other houses. There were seven families living in the drive and it was quite a walk to the top end. On fine days the old lady would be brushing the leaves up and weeding the gardens which were on each side of the drive; she kept it beautiful. She died when I was about 8 and then things changed! The gates were opened and goods were delivered to peoples' doors.

The two shops on the bridge were occupied by Harry Holland who sold sweets and cigarettes, (later this was Edmund Taylor's bicycle shop) and Winstanley butchers. Going up Appley Lane North was Rigby's grocery shop, then Mike Hesketh's shoe shop. Set back from the road was Fenton's Printers.

The next two shops were Dixon's Grocers and the Post Office which was run by Rothwells. Then there was the Mission Church, which was the school during the week and after a row of houses there was the railway bridge. On the others side of the road leading to the station was a Bank, a barber's shop and a newsagents. There were also two chips shops in the village and there used to be horse drawn carts, vans which sold meat, fish, fruit and vegetables and a van which sold pots and pans and paraffin; you could buy anything in the village.

I went to the Mission School from about 4 years of age and we had two nice teachers. Miss Witticar was the Head Teacher and Miss Ball was the Junior Teacher; she lived at Elmers Green near Ashurst Beacon and used to walk to school every day.

By the time I was 10 years old I had 4 more younger brothers. My eldest brother James had been living at Grandma's at Gillibrand and had gone to school at Parbold. After we had turned 7 Jack and I had gone to Shevington School; the building on Miles Lane that was our big school is now a nursery school. We didn't get a bus, we had to walk past the brickworks and alongside the railway and the clay pits (Barratt's Estate is now built where the clay pits were). Appley Bridge was a lovely village; there was no Jubilee Terrace, no White Terrace. Jubilee Terrace was built in 1935 and White Terrace in 1938; there were only three houses at Rydal Mount the Hodges' houses, Speakman's Drive, Heyes Street, Speakman's houses and the Alison Arms Pub which had a lovely bowling green at the back; there was a groundsman to take care of it. The Alison Arms was the last place in the Upholland district and in the wall opposite was a stone which divided the districts of Wrightington and Upholland, but it is still Appley Bridge. Nearer to the canal are two big houses and across the road on the right were eight cottages, four of which have been demolished and the other four have been made into houses for two families. Going further on there was a blacksmith's and some stables; by the side of these was a place we called "the hovel", and I think you would call it a little flat. It had two bedrooms, a tiny

living room and a back kitchen and as you opened the back door you were on the edge of the River Douglas; the rooms were all on one level and over the top was another flat which went right over the smithy and had steps leading up from the roadside. The blacksmith was a very busy man as in those days the canal barges were pulled by horses and the boats were coming and going all day, which gave the blacksmith a lot of work.

As you came to the bridge on the left canal bank was the Merrick Arms Pub (it is now a private house), and in the front room of the pub Mr. Goulding had put a clog and shoe repair shop. When we were little we used to take our clogs and sit and watch him put the irons on. Further along the canal bank were two stone cottages and then a row of six brick built ones and quite a lot of children lived there. Across the water from these houses was the linoleum works; there was a boiler house or engine house and I remember it shining with brass at night. A little further down was the lock and on the other side of the canal was the lock house with a little office in front; the boatmen had to get a ticket as they went through the lock. On the left a little lower down was another row of cottages, I think there were six, then further on was a farmhouse. They didn't have water on tap and had to get their water from a well near the farm. The daughter from the farm used to deliver milk round the village from a low cart pulled by a pony. I remember it was called a milk float and carried a big churn filled with milk; people used to have a jug or can ready and the milk people would measure a pint or a quart with a measure which hung from the side. The lady at the farm was the local midwife and when there was a baby due someone would go and let her know; we didn't have phones in those days and when was called out she had to walk to the village. Coming back to the main road and going over the bridge was the Railway Hotel on the left hand side where they had stables for horses if the boats were staying overnight.

Across the road were Harry Hollands's shop and Winstanley's butchers (already mentioned); the paper and tobacconist's shop later became a grocers and the butcher's shop became a chip shop. All the shops on both sides of the bridge are now private houses; there is not one shop in the village! Higher up from the Railway Hotel was the Lino works and opposite it was the little Mission Church and School; there was also a Mission all where we had some good times, concerts and dances guides and scout meetings; one time we had a pantomime. The Hall has now gone and the Church is a private house. Going further is a row of houses called Western View because of the good view until they extended the Lino works and built in front of them. Nearer to the railway there were two big houses, one of which was the Doctor's Surgery but when the mill was extended they were pulled down and the surgery was held in one of the houses across the road.

Crossing over the railway bridge there used to be stables on the left for the quarry horses. On the right side was the road which led down to what used to be a very busy place; there was a goods yard behind the waiting rooms with a goods line which ran through to the Lino works and a short line at the yard where the coal wagons

came and the coalmen came and bagged up their coal; it was horses and flat cars in those days which went round to deliver the coal to houses. On the left of the goods yard was a very busy parcels office and the porters used to deliver the parcels between train times; there is a garage there now. We had to cross the goods line to get to the platform which was always kept clean. On the left of the main line were the booking office, waiting rooms and toilets which were also kept very clean. Fires were kept burning in winter in the office and waiting room. I remember, in my teens when my friends and I used to go and sit in the waiting room by the fire; we never did any damage, just sat and talked. Sometimes the porter would look in at the door but he never turned us out. It used to be a very busy station but now all those buildings, including the stationmaster's house, have been taken over. Now they have been turned into a restaurant. The goods line has gone, also the crossing from the Wigan side of the platform to the Southport line; there is a cabin-type waiting room on that side of the platform and a footpath which leads to the main road. There is also a footpath from the goods yard which goes down to Mill Lane.

Going back up Station Road, on the right was Platt's quarry and they had a little office on the front on the right side of the road by the station. Turning right at the end of this road onto Appley Lane, there were two big houses on the left and behind them was a lodge (a deep pond) where the lads used to swim in summer; the houses and the lodge have gone now and the land has been filled in with refuse from Manchester; it is just a dump. On the right hand side of the road there was a bank, I think it was Deakin's, but it wasn't there very long and then there were three little shops; one was a hairdresser's and a barber's, one sold sweets and papers and the other was an electrical repairer. Further on were the offices for Martland's Quarry; now it is a place where they sell wet suits and diving equipment; the quarry that is behind it is now filled in with water.

Further up Appley Lane on the left hand side is a row of, I think, six houses which are still there, the three bungalows which were built later. Across the road is Ashfield Terrace, a row of stone houses which go away from the road. Back on the main road on the left hand side, going up the hill is another row of big houses with Lowther Terrace behind them and then the Village Hall which used to be a Wesleyan Chapel. Spring Bank Cottages are in a narrow drive opposite the Village Hall, and on the opposite side is Beacon View which also runs away from the road and another row of houses, the first of which used to be a shop. In Beacon View is a cottage which contains a skull that has all sorts of stories about it and the road opposite is called Skull House Lane. Facing the shop and row of houses there used to be a field with a tennis court and cricket ground; also the British Legion hut and I remember going there to parties when I was a girl. Now it is all built up with a small estate. Further along Skull House Lane there is a timber yard and warehouse, and a works where they sell marble, then some offices which have not been up many years. Further along on the right there used to be two cottages which have now been made into one; there used to be about a dozen cottages but now there are only about four left. On the opposite side is a caravan works.

When we come to the sharp bend in the road there is an entrance to Quarry Road where there was a farmhouse and buildings which have now been done up and the barn has been turned into a house. This road comes out behind Ashfield Terrace and on each side of it the quarries are filled with water. Dawber Quarry, on the right, was working when I went to school and there used to be a railtrack where small tubs used to run down the line, under the railway and across Mill Lane to the canal. The quarry on the other side of the road was a nice big field where the men used to play cricket but that is now a deep hole filled with water.

Returning to Skull House Lane there was a water spout on the bend in the road where in the old days the people used to get their water; they called it Dicky's Spout and it was never known to run dry and it was good pure water but when the road was widened the spout was done away with. On the quarry side of the road is the Methodist Church; there used to be a little cottage on the side but it was taken down and they built the Church Hall.

Nearby there is a house which used to be the village shop and across the road on the left used to be a nice little valley with a stream and trees; now I think there are six large houses there and across the road is what was the Bimson estate. When I started to write my memories in 1999 there was a big house and some small cottages; now there are five large houses, all of which are occupied in 2001; the old cottages are gone. There are still four houses, facing Back Lane, that were there when I was a girl, but Back Lane is built up on both sides most of the way up. At the bottom of Back Lane there used to be a big farmhouse and buildings and an orchard at the front; those have all gone and there are now four bungalows on the land. Next to these is Wheatsheaf Hotel and car park which used to have a high stone wall around it, followed by two stone cottages and a new bungalow. Across the road, on the right from the bottom of Back Lane, are twelve bungalows, which were built in the 1920's, and is where I live opposite the Wheatsheaf Hotel. There is now an estate behind me that has been up for twelve years and one behind the Wheatsheaf which was built in the 1960's. I forgot to mention that where the Methodist Church stands in Shevington Vale is where Skull House lane ends and Miles Lane begins, where the stream runs under the road. From the valley, back to the pub on the left and past the cottage and bungalow is Woodnock Road which was made for the estate, then the little stone cottage and then a house built in 1924. I remember going to look at it on my way home from school when it was being built; the girl who was going to live there lived in the drive near my home. We are now at Randall's corner and I will go back to the other end of Mill Lane.

It is now November 2001 so going back to the canal bridge, I remember that when I was about 10 years old the bridge was very narrow, what they called hump backed, with stone walls on each side and the road was cobbled. On fine days and at weekends the men used to meet at the bridge; they could sit on the walls and there was a space between the road and the Railway Pub wall; the canal wall went round as far as the pub wall, and once a year, in October, when the fair came to Wigan, for one

night there used to be a pot stall. Everyone looked forward to that! They used to sell tea sets, vases and odd pots of all kinds; they used flares for lights. I don't remember when they gave over coming. In the 1960's the old stone bridge was pulled down and a newer, wider bridge, which was not as steep, and has iron railings, was built.

In those days I remember the older people used to call Mill Lane "thowd cart road". As you enter Mill Lane from Appley Lane there are two houses which stand back and have gardens running down to the road. Facing them is a newly built house on the right hand side and then a row of six cottages called Glovers Row. When electricity came to Appley Bridge in the 1930's a sub-station was built opposite them. Further along on the left is another row of houses known as Butler's Houses. Mr. Butler Senior was landlord of the Railway Hotel and he had six daughters; he built a house for each of them at the beginning of the 1900's. By 1911 he had built two more houses next to them, one of which was for his son, my Uncle Harry, who married my mother's sister, my Auntie Maggie.

Across the road from those two houses was where the canal widened and it was called the canal basin. On the edge of the canal there was a little cottage called Basin Cottage and there were stables behind where they had the quarry horses and overnight boat horses. Behind the stables were the lines which ran down from Dawber Quarry, under the railway bridge which ran under the end of the station platform and the goods line, across the road and down to a little jetty on the canal. Five or six little trucks, loaded with stone, would run downhill together to the canal to be loaded onto a boat. There used to be a man at the back to put a brake on and they used a horse to pull the trucks back up the hill to the quarry when they were empty. Now, where the track came down is the Telephone Exchange, a new house, and a railway bridge over the road.

On the right hand side, where the Water's Edge Pub is, there used to be a croft with shrubs and brambles and along there by the side of the railway was a footpath which we used to go to school. The croft went quite a way back and then we came to two more bridges under the railway; we had to go under the first one to get onto the path that took us to school; the other bridge was used by the brickworks where they had little tubs on pulleys that went to the clay pits (where the Barratt Estate is now). The brickworks carted the bricks away with smaller lorries than we use today; they went under the bridge and along a cart track which is now just a footpath between the back of Mill Bank and Barratts, where The Dell is now. The bone works used that track as well but most of their materials were on the railway sidings. The bone works was behind the brickworks, between the canal and the railway. We used to run to school alongside the railway and with the clay pits on the others side, we went up some wooden steps then came to Bell's farmyard, then onto Broadriding Road, which was then a cart track, and which joins Miles Lane.

There used to be two railway bridges over Mill Lane but one was demolished when they finished with the goods yard. In the early days, Mill Lane was not used for heavy traffic but at the end of the Twenties the road was tarmacked, and a bus service started. The bus ran from Wigan to Dangerous corner every hour. Going under the railway bridge, there is a footpath on the left which leads to the station. In the early days there used to be a big garage on the side where Mr. Bamford had a steam wagon, it couldn't come out under the bridge but had to go to Miles Lane. Pearson's cement works came next; the buildings are still there but there are different industries there now. Further along there is a bungalow and a few houses which I think were built in the early Thirties, the bungalow later, and more bungalows have been built on the right after which we come to the place where the brickworks lorries used to come out onto Mill Lane. When they started to build Barratt's Estate there was a very big old house and farm which stood back off the road and it was pulled down which I think is a shame because it was very interesting. Also, there was a stone built dam on the roadside which was filled with water and used to supply the works with water. Further along are six Council houses that were built in 1933; the two bungalows were built later. This brings us to Randall's corner but we haven't quite finished along Mill Lane. Opposite The Dell is the footpath which goes through to Bimson's and on the left of the footpath is the East Quarry.

I think it was 1935 when Randall's shop was built and the road was made much wider. Before Randall's shop was built there was a wooden hut, owned by Mr. Challoner and he used to sell all kinds of things. Across the road is Booth's farm house, which is now coal and oil, not forgetting the Old Mill Cottage and The Nook across the way.

These are my old memories; the lovely old village of Appley Bridge has been spoiled. All this building and there is still not a footpath along Mill Lane.