

I.

GUILDSFIELD IN RETROSPECT. 1950 - 1958.

It is not easy to recall from the sweet stillnesses of memory impressions which have become blurred and out of focus down a vista of over a quarter of a century. Much has happened to change forever some of the prevailing scenes and activities of the time.

One came to a typical village which was rustic rather than rural, a village having definite, age-old characteristics untouched as yet with a "dormitory" spirit. The over-all impression was one of stability, a quiet which was grounded for centuries in agrarian patience, a "coziness", if you will, where minding everyone else's business was a way of life. I suppose that the topographical setting of the village lent itself admirably to this concept. Of course, we had a village "square"; a focal point where a beautiful church nestled in its yew-tree girdle. Near it a "pub", where else could the village parliament assemble but at the centre of activity? And what else could one call a typical Montgomeryshire farm-house but "The Square"? Narrow winding roads radiated from the Square revealing houses of unique architectural styles - the homes of solid retainers whose ancestors had fought at Agincourt and whose tranquility was shattered by the "Double Decker" 'bus which left for Welshpool every morning (Sundays excepted), come hell or high water, at precisely 9:40AM. The village would return to tranquility by the trilling of the Bele Brook (the "Pole-Cat" Brook, and we had one of the varmints under glass at the village school). The school was typical, an oasis of learning amid nature's languorous splendours, where successions of rosy-cheeked pupils wrestled with introductions into the technological world so alien from their accustomed lives, and yet, to stand in the school-yard and see a solemn procession of goats headed by the venerable ladies of Bod-Isa transported one to Biblical times, where time was not of the essence but was only relative to what one was doing .

The country crafts, the cottage industries had largely disappeared by this time. The huge water wheel at The Mill was rotting on its axles, the Smithy was silent and long closed, although the Smith, a man of many parts, turned his hand alternately to construction, wheelwrighting, clock-mending, "Vergering" and undertaking - truly a man for all seasons!

The area was divided into "Guiltsfield within" and "Guiltsfield without". The titles were always intriguing to me because no-one was certain what they were without because it had been so for centuries!

The course of the year was punctuated by social "highs and lows". Who could forget the Church Garden Fete on the fourth Thursday in July, The School Sports, The Agricultural Show, The Church Social and The Poultry Whist Drive? One would not dare forget! These were fixed Festivals, with reputations to be defended. And wasn't Monday THE day one must visit Welshpool?

and was not the Village Institute with its sagging foundations, its sputtering Tilley lamps and its doubtful heating, the mecca, the lodestone of fun-loving love-sick swains and stately matrons alike?

We were a close knit community, sharing our joys and sorrows, and this was very evident in the "New 'Ouses" - "Dolwen" in its embryo state - where on Christmas morning the roads were alive with happy children riding identical machines - all yellow, all the same model, all the same sized scooters - whizzing and cavorting, all in the same direction.

There was a wealth of "character" in our village too, those who had ignored largely the accepted norms of behaviour. Our postman still plodded along on his round, rising at 4:30AM daily (Sundays excepted) to do so. Our Parish Nurse still "Borne" our babies, hither and yon. The village tailor still worked cross-legged on his table down "Threadneedle Street", and mouthed his objection to Royalty with a protruding array of pins which he never swallowed! The roadmen still found time for a chat sitting on the wheelbarrow. One roadman's wife enjoyed the title of "May X" and I could never summon up enough courage to ask him why. I was intrigued, and my imagination led me to fields of international espionage, I was completely deflated when the explanation was that she was the daughter of an ex Police Officer!

We found the solidity of roots and branches in our community. The echoes of history in the silent ruins of the Garth Estate, a link with history in Brochwel Ysgythrog and Sir Gerald Trefor, our benevolent and unpredictable Squire, the longevity of the tenants at Lower Garth, the colourful tenants of the Red House and the bustle at the village Post Office and the popularity of the new Mobile Library. Through our long days and starlit nights the atmosphere of our village was permeated by the heavenly aroma of fresh bread from Hughes' Bakery mixed with the pungency of spread manure from our adjoining meadows. Through all this, our lives followed this quiet even tenour. The arrival of a Welshpool-born Canadian Senator in our neighbourhood driving a cottage-sized Cadillac caused a temporary flurry of interest and curiosity. We were even blessed with Old Testament prophets - Abraham Davies the Miller, and Moses Pritchard his neighbour, I was particularly blessed with the natural wit of Williams, the Roadman and Charlie, Y Greidden and my sleep was disturbed every Saturday morning by the dull thud of Greatorex's truck on its way to the Midlands with its load of country fare in the pre-dawn half-light. We were invaded annually by "Unts" who left their "Untitwmps" until "Jimmie" went to war on our behalf. These were the threads which bound us together.

The great day came when Guilsfield was "Electrified" - literally hooked up to the massive "Grids" of M.A.N.W.E.B. Lights appeared everywhere, eclipsing for ever the pale parish lantern. This advent of electricity changed the whole picture for me. The light we now had completely dimmed our past, gone was the coziness, gone the ingenuity, gone the resourcefulness, we now simply switched on our amenities and walked into the twentieth century, no, not walked, we rode in our automobiles, and with this step went the most unique omnibus route in the land - John the Bus -

entrebeirdd to Welshpool with a 1928 Ford engine with very modified chassis and his route was via every farm gate. There was no time-table, no load limit, you never waited for John, John waited for you.

This old order will never return, why should it? Its served its purpose in every detail and it accomplished largely what it set out to do. As I sit here 5,000 miles away and think of the things we did, the people we knew in those far off days and the battles long ago, they all grow more precious, loving and honourable and they will live on in my memory as folk who did justly, loved mercy and walked humbly with their God.

David G. Rees.