

Memories of Boroughbridge by a young man 1939 to 1948
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I used to visit my grand parents at the Foundry Boroughbridge. The house where they lived is now where the Veterinary practice is on New Row.

My first memory was as a 6 year old in 1939 going with my uncle Charles into Fountain Square (St James Square) with a big milk churn to fetch water from the fountain. There was a great queue of young men dispatched by the local households to obtain there water requirements with all types of receptacles. A lot of pumping was done as each person set too on the handle of the pump. The Water Works had been opened a year or two before and this was presumably a temporary fall back to what must have been the norm a very short time before.

After the war I used to love going to Boroughbridge from my home in York during the summer holidays as there was so much of interest. My Uncle Jack lived in the house on the right of the entrance to Foundry Yard and he had before the war started a private boat mooring and repair yard on the site which is now Body's Timber Yard now run by his son Frank. During the war Uncle Jack made life boats and afterwards turned to the cutting of large timber logs and other trades but that is the story for Frank to follow up.

Uncle Charles took over the Foundry after he was demobbed from the air force in 1945. As a twelve to fifteen year old I used to spend my time down in the foundry and also wander down to the blacksmiths, about opposite the butcher's shop, on Horsefair where today you can see a large round metal well cover on the pavement. To think this was the AI where he used to shoe horses and carry out other blacksmiths trades. My memory was of him getting me to pump his fire (forge). This involved pulling down on a long lever which pumped air through his coke fire to increase the intensity of the heat whenever he needed more heat to shape what ever iron or horse shoe he had to then hit on his anvil. The difficulty was that I could not reach up to the end of the lever and consequently a lot more effort was required due to the lack of leverage.

I used to spend a lot of time on the iron bridge which spans the River Tutt from the foundry side of the river to a small building, now knocked down for new housing, on the other side which had an engine powered by a water wheel which was situated between the small stone wall ,evident today, and the building. The entrance from the foundry to the bridge can be seen in the wall which has now been bricked up (replaced by a window). At the foot of the damn was a deep hole which always had a decent size trout. My fishing method was first to catch some minnows in a wine bottle lowered on string baited with bread. There after the live minnow on my hook was lowered into the minnow school and when the trout charged the minnows, the slowest was eaten and that used to be my minnow as he was restricted by having to pull the line and float. I would catch the one trout and take it up to my Grand mother who cooked it for my following day's breakfast.

Jobs around the foundry included holding an iron bar so that a cross piece skimmed the top of the red hot molten cast iron as it was poured into the moulds. Pouring the iron was done once a week in the building, (now a café), where there was a large chimney with a fire at the bottom and old cast iron pieces were recycled (smelted) along with some new "pigs" until it was hot enough to pour. During the rest of the week the men responsible for moulding were at work filling the holder (moulds) with sand which had wooden templates set in them. They were then split and the template removed leaving imprints. They were then careful polishing with small trowels and the top half replaced with a hole at the top to take the red/white hot molten iron. The casts were such as sewer tops, Punch and Judy door stops, wheels for

Cambridge rollers which my Uncle retained and made up to a full roller with a central axel and fitted with a tractor tow frame and sold as a unit. I attended the Yorkshire Show to sell these to farmers who still used these in the 1940s and fifties.

Some of the pieces needed machining and they went across the yard to the machine shop. There was a long bench on the far wall which held power tools such as emery wheels and lathes powered by an overhead belt which continually ran and was brought into play for a machine by moving a big lever which moved the belt across to the mechanism of that machine. I spent many an hour in there making among other things a steam engine complete with boiler and pistons etc which I have somewhere to this day. Its problem was that not being conversant or even aware of the expansion rates of different metal it used to leak steam out of the piston chamber as it heated up.

My horror was to be sent down to clean the tunnel in which the large water wheel was situated to power all this equipment. The dam in the River Tutt was evidently built to raise a head of water which could be diverted down this tunnel to drive/rotate the water wheel built into it. As the tunnel would silt up it was necessary for a small boy (me) to go down the tunnel pulling a bucket with two ropes attached. Once the bucket was filled with silt my uncles would pull the bucket up and empty it. I would then pull the trailing rope to retrieve the bucket and continue with my cleaning. Before entering I remember pleading for my uncle's full assurance that on no account would they let any water into the tunnel whilst I was down there. In retrospect I now know that they would have put stop logs at the top so the water could not be diverted down the tunnel.

My Grand mothers house, (Grand father had died during the war), was lit by gas lamps which needed their mantles being very delicate needed changing frequently. To raise or lower the light you pulled on a little chain. Cooked was done on an old range, and a kettle hung over it on what was called a wrecking bar. Clothes's ironing was done by heating up a heavy iron on a cast iron stand which was swung across the fire. A clean shoe was the fitted just before use. Two irons were used. While one was in use the other was being reheated. The washing was done in a Peggy tub in which one placed a stool type contraption with a long handle which was swished about in the washing and water which had ordinary soap therein. The wringing was of course by the old fashioned mangle. Turning the handle was one of my jobs. Another was holding the scales of wool in both hands and moving them side to side as my Grand mother rolled the wool into balls. She was always knitting. The toilet was 'down the garden' which meant passing the beehive on the way. Toilet paper was cut up pieces of news paper as paper was very difficult to get just after the war.

Uncle used to keep pigs at the bottom of the garden by the river. Each pig belonged to a family as there was only one permit per family.

Happy days as I used to cycle from York and spend a long time at Boroughbridge only marred by having to return to York every Thursday for my piano lessons, all to no avail.

When I became fifteen my summers holidays, were spent on a farm with me earning a wage of 10 shillings (fifty pence) per week plus board.