

A WALK DOWN THORNES LANE IN THE NINETEEN FORTIES.

As a contrast to the picture Mr Baines describes at the beginning of his book "History of Christ Church" I would like to describe what Thornes Lane looked like, as I remember it, about eighty years ago,

I am standing in Thornes Lane looking towards the river with my back to one of the bridges of the 'ninety nine arches' which crosses Thornes Lane at that point and carries the main (L.N.E.R.) railway line to London. Behind me, through the bridge, is St James' School, although it is not actually in Christ Church parish, it is 'our' Junior School. The girls' playground is the first thing that you see, though perhaps 'see' is not the right word as it is surrounded by a high brick wall, running parallel with the railway arch and along the side of the Duncan public house. At the top end of the dirt playground is built the school and the windows of standard three and standard five classrooms face this playground, there is also a door by which you can enter standard three classroom. At the other side of the school building is the boys' playground, overlooked by the windows of standard two and standard four classrooms, though when I say overlooked, I use the term loosely, because all the windows in the school are very high and there is no way that the children can look out of them. Running across the back of the boys' playground is another railway line (the old L.M.S. line) which carries trains into Kirkgate Station. In the centre of the school is a fifth classroom the windows of which run along the side of the school that faces the railway arches, this classroom is divided from standard five by a screen which is folded back for morning assemblies and prayers and similarly at the end of school, at four o'clock in the afternoon. At the other side of the school and in the respective playgrounds are built the outside toilet blocks for boys and girls, also at this side are entries to the school via separate girls and boys cloakrooms.

(During the war years in the boys playground two air raid shelters were built, thinking of which immediately brings to mind air raid drills and gas mask inspections III However, going back to my starting point and looking forward to beginning my walk.)

To my left I see a small shop which sells provisions and pet food, it is built right into the arches over which the railway line travels. The people who keep the shop are called Brown and the shop is often referred to as Cocky Brown's. Next door and built on to this shop are two houses and, set back from the road beside them, are two or three other houses with quite long front gardens, rather unusual for this area.

On the opposite side of the road, on the corner of Tadman Street (*a street still there today*) is an off-licence shop, kept by some people called Whiteley, beside the shop and towards the railway arch is a row of three or four more houses and behind these are several rows of houses, built at right angles to the railway arches, stretching back along Tadman Street which are known as Tadman's Buildings'.

On the other corner of Tadman Street and opening on to Thornes Lane is the Co-operative Store behind which and running along the other side of Tadman Street are built more small houses.

Moving across to the other side of Thornes Lane there is a small piece of land before you come to a row of about four houses at the end of Russell Street. On the other corner of Russell Street is a fish and chip shop owned by some people called Kirk who moved here after their previous shop on Commercial Street was burned down. Next door to the fish shop is a small sweets and grocery shop, owned by Mrs Sally Longbottom next door to which is the Calder Working Men's Club.

Back to the right hand side of the lane again and beside the Co-op store is a house next to which there is a malt kiln with a large yard, beside the malt kiln is another rather nice bay-windowed house next to which stands Christ Church Infants School, school house and playground. The entrance to the school is on Mark Street, the next turning right off Thornes Lane. The school takes up most of one side of the street, Christ Church is at the end of the street, on the same side, separated by iron railings and a privet hedge. Turning left here would take me into Church Street but I am turning round and walking back towards Thornes Lane on the other side of Mark Street. Opposite the Church on this end of Mark Street is Union Square which I am passing and crossing a large passageway before coming to a building where sacks are repaired and made for use in the surrounding malt kilns. Beside the sack repairing building is the Mission Room, this room is used for various meetings connected with the Church for Sunday School and is also sometimes used by the school. Next to the Mission Room, on the corner of Mark Street and Thornes Lane is the Christ Church Vicarage and garden. Opposite the School and Vicarage on the other side of Thornes Lane and next door to the Working Men's Club are two more rather nice houses with bay windows, next to which is Peter's Place. Next to Peter's Place there is a terrace of three storied houses on the end of which is Palmer's grocery shop and Post Office. At the side of the post

office is the access road to Craven Piece where, periodically, members of the Church Army when they visit the Church hold their "Sunshine Corner" outdoor meetings and invite the local school children along to sing the choruses and listen to the stories. The children (including me) enjoy these meetings and they are very well patronised. Facing on to Craven Piece are the houses in New Brunswick Street which can also be accessed from Thornes Lane Wharf and from the other end via Russell Street.

The Bethel Chapel is built on the edge of Craven Piece and fronting on to Thornes Lane (the building is still there). Next to the Chapel are two or three houses and then I come to Waterloo Street on the corner of which is a shop owned by Mrs Heseltine. If I turn left into Waterloo Street it would take me to New Brunswick Street, but I am crossing the Lane and going back as far as the Christ Church Vicarage. Coming back down Thornes Lane beside the vicarage is a large passageway leading to a yard next to which is a shop owned by the Dipples and selling sweets and groceries and some second hand clothing, mostly children's I think. After the shop I come to the Commercial Inn on the corner of Commercial Street, the landlord of which for some time was Mick Exley, the Wakefield Trinity footballer.

On the opposite corner of Commercial Street (*where Slater & Crabtree's offices are now*) is some waste land and the remains of an old malt kiln which was burned down.

Across the Lane again to the other side of Waterloo Street, I pass a row of three or four houses before coming to a builders yard owned by Walter Kitson and next door to this is a watch repairers shop which is on the bend where Thornes Lane turns left.

Continuing on the left hand side of the lane towards Kirkgate I come to a left hand turn which is New Brunswick Street (mentioned previously) which runs parallel to Thornes Lane to join Russell Street where there is a small pickle factory. The next turning to the left is Mark Lane which runs through the pit fields, (*where I spent some happy times train spotting with my brother*) under the railway arches, to the Denby Dale Road, (*this road comes out now where the roundabout is, by the large car showroom*). On the corner of Mark Lane is the Mark Lane Hotel, the landlord of which is another Wakefield Trinity player, Len Marston. Next to the Mark Lane

Hotel is a little group of four shops, a fish and chip shop owned by Sam Parker, a grocery shop, owned by Mrs Freear, a butchers shop owned by the Everson's and a sweets and tobacconists owned by Mrs Booth. (*Quite a lot of shopping could be done in this small area*). After the sweet shop I come to a large archway, the entry into a yard where there are a few houses, after this on the lane there are a couple more houses and then I come to a large flour mill with a yard where there are a few more houses, this yard goes through to Ings Road, coming out right under the railway bridge which crosses Ings Road to enter the Kirkgate Railway Station. I go on past the mill and come to a public house called the Smiths Arms, passing this there are one or two more houses before I come to a newspaper and tobacconists shop owned by Mr Atack after which there are a few more houses (these houses would have been about opposite to where the Hepworth Gallery is now built) At the end of Thornes Lane, where it meets Ings Road, is a small baker's shop owned by Eddie Berry

Going back to the point where Thornes Lane turns left and walking along the lane towards Kirkgate on the right hand side of the road, beside the river, as far as the New Bridge and the weir, are malt kilns, warehouses and a hoist where grain is loaded and unloaded from the barges. There is one small shop on the river side, a cobbler's owned by the cobbler, Mr Norbury, who at one time was Church Warden at Christ Church. Further along on the river side there is also an iron framed gentlemen's urinal.

Back on the corner of Thornes Lane again I am now turning right towards what is often called "the water side", Thornes Lane Wharf. On my left are more malt kilns, on my right is a derelict site, the remains of an old malt kiln which at some time has caught fire, a particular hazard for this type of workplace, and on the far side of these remains runs Commercial Street. The whole of Commercial Street is taken up with small back to back houses and yards, with passage ways leading to the houses that they back on to. Towards the bottom of the street and situated on Church Street, which runs to the right, off Commercial street towards the Church, are some slightly larger and better properties.

In the middle of Commercial Street is a small grocery and sweet shop owned by Mrs Kelson, another similar type of shop on the corner of Church Street is owned by Mrs Murphy opposite which, on Commercial street, there are the burned out remains of a fish and chip shop which

belonged to Mrs Wadsworth.

Coming to the bottom of Commercial Street I have two choices.

I could turn left into Wilson Terrace, walk past Arthur Bell's joiners and undertakers workshop and yard on the right, whilst on the left hand side is a large garden of a house on Commercial street belonging to some people called Butcher. Next to the garden is a malt kiln, opposite which is a row of about four rather nice houses, then I come to the backyard of a row of about four houses which front on to the Wharf, but I am not going to do this!

Coming to the bottom of Commercial Street, I could continue on, past the top of Wilson Terrace, along a narrow snicket which leads me to Calder Street. Turning left at the end of the snicket would take me down Calder Street, passing on the left a cottage, where some people called Dutton live and on the right Penrice's scrap metal yard and would bring me back onto the Wharf. Turning Right at the end of the snicket would take me to two bungalows, one either side of the track, in which live members of the Cooper family. I cannot travel any further along this road or I will be trespassing on the private land of Coopers Haulage Company.

I am not going to take either of the above routes because I am going back to the point where I deviated and went across to Commercial Street, the junction of Thornes Lane and Thornes Lane Wharf. This time I am turning right and walking along the wharf.

Walking along the wharf and passing a large malt kiln on my left, I come to a public house on my right called the Jolly Sailor, (*a building which is still there, though very much altered*) the people who run it are called Sykes. Opposite the Jolly Sailor, at the side of the malt kiln, is a small cottage where, at one time, there lived a man who owned a small boat and, for a small charge, would row people across the river from a small wooden jetty. Next door to the Jolly Sailor is a small grocery and sweet shop owned by Mrs Flowers and next to this, on the corner of Wilson Terrace, is a small cottage where some people called Wadsworth live. Walking further along the wharf I pass two more terraces of houses and come to another public house, the Navigation Inn, next to which there is another malt kiln on the corner of Calder Street. On the opposite corner of Calder Street is a scrap metal yard owned by the Penrice's. Next door to the scrap yard is another

malt kiln which is on the corner of Wellington Street, in fact there are malt kilns on both corners of Wellington Street.

I live at number one Wellington Street, the first house on the left hand side, in a terrace of six two up and two down houses. Opposite these is a yard where there are three or four one up and one down houses with large families living in them.

Continuing on along the right hand side of the street is another yard with one up and one down houses and next door to a small malt kiln. Adjoining the malt kiln is a row of about seven or eight two up and two down houses and at the side of these houses is a small piece of waste land known to the local children as 'the piece' where we often play marbles. Beside the 'piece' are a couple of houses with gardens and built facing the top of the street. At the top of the street is another yard with about half a dozen of the same kind of back to back houses. Across the top of the street are two large, high and heavy wooden gates which close off the premises of Cooper's Haulage Company. During the day the gates are open to allow the, originally horse and carts, but nowadays lorries, to pass up and down the street. Behind the gates is a rather nice house where the Cooper family live. *(The house is still standing there, though somewhat dilapidated).*

Coming back down Wellington Street on the left hand side there are more of the same type of houses and yards before you come to a smallholding, run by Mr Fred Rogers with rather a nice house and a small area of land. Moving down the street there are more of the same type of small back to back houses and yards until you arrive back at the terrace where I live. At the back of these houses are about five or six allotments, which some of the people in our terrace (including my father) garden, and they are often a hive of activity. At the end of the garden plots are the coal heaps belonging to Wades Mill which runs along the back of the allotments and to whom the land belongs. *[The mill building is still there and belongs to the Double Two Shirt Company)*

Continuing to the bottom of Wellington Street, past the malt kiln on the corner and turning right at the bottom I am now looking towards the real 'waterside'.

Passing on my right the wall surrounding the mill coal heaps at the end of the allotments and the large gates, which give access to the coal heaps from

the wharf, I pass the Mill offices, the Mill itself (*remembering the lovely oily, woolly smell which came from the open door*) and the mill yard and come to another malt kiln (*reminding me that my mother worked there during the war*) next door to which is a row of houses called Woodbine Terrace. Walking across the access way to this terrace brings me to a small sweet and grocery shop owned by Mr Goddard which is on the end of another row of two up and two down houses called Riley Terrace. At the side of this terrace is access to a large yard at the back of the houses and walking further along this path brings me to another row of houses called Casson Row. Walking on past Riley Terrace down the towing path, where the horses walk when they are towing the barges, I come to another group of very small houses built close to the railway arches, which brings me to the iron bridge carrying the railway across the river and the boundary of the Christ Church Parish.

I am now at the end of my walk around the Parish of Christ Church and, as you can see, there were many small houses and lots of workplaces for the many people who lived there. Nearly all of the houses were demolished under the slum clearance orders, leaving only two terraces in Wellington Street still standing and none at all further along the Wharf. A lot of the people went to live on the council housing estates at Lupset, Flanshaw and Eastmoor but my mother lived in her house until the day she died in 1970.

Dorothy Clayton (nee Man)

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