

Worfield During and After the War

This article has been compiled from memories provided by Bob Adams and a book by Adrian and Neil Turley entitled 'The US Army in South East Shropshire 1944.'

Worfield during the war had certain landmarks which have now gone. The Main Street looked much the same as it does now but Rindleford Mill seems to have relocated to the banks of the Worfe. In the War Worfield Mill was operating as a corn and saw mill and was part of Sonde Farm. When the Mill was demolished in the 1950s Sir Oliver Leese put up mushroom sheds on the site and subsequently the land was sold for building. Now the only memory of Worfield Mill, once so important to the parish, is the name of the road, Mill Close.



China Bank, the name for the hill going up to Hallon is a reminder of another Worfield landmark which has now gone. Across the road there was once a bridge built in the Chinese style. This met its end when a piece of agricultural machinery hit the support although the brickwork does seem to be listing somewhat in this picture. And who is walking down the hill pushing a bike?



The China Bridge

Going up China Bank the houses which stand there now were absent, of course, and on the right going up the hill was the Davenport Estate Builders' Yard. Going across what is now the housing estate at Hallon was Church Avenue, a walkway through an imposing line of trees which ended at the top level of the Lower Churchyard.



Church Avenue

In Hallon on the corner of the road leading down to the Church was the Smithy run by Arthur and Henry Seedhouse. The blacksmith played a vital part in village life, keeping not only the horses in tiptop condition but also the machinery. Cart wheels were repaired, with the metal rims being heated, placed on the wooden frame and then cooled with water for a tight fit. The skills of the blacksmith have been passed down from Arthur to Henry then to Mike and to Ian. Worfield has been fortunate in having such a talented line of craftsmen. Henry was the last of the family to work as a farrier. He was a gentle man and fearless and could handle the most difficult horses (and owners) so quietly it was a joy to watch him at work. After Henry retired, Mike carried on the blacksmith's business but the Smithy was no longer required and a few years ago was converted into a house.

Worfield Garage was already in existence and was reputed to be the first garage in the country to have pumps which measured a gallon. The Garage was owned first by Mr Taft and later by Bert Bentley. The local AFS (Auxiliary Fire Service) which became the National Fire Service in 1941 was stationed at Worfield Garage during the War and its responsibility was to serve Bridgnorth while Bridgnorth served Coventry and Birmingham. There was no purpose-built fire engine, a large vehicle was converted to tow the trailer pump and douse the fire with water. Bert Bentley ran the service with the help of local volunteers, Charles Adams, Fred Millard, Fred Rayment, Mervyn Tucker and others.



The Wheel Inn and Worfield Garage

Clarke's Stores baked their own bread and delivered it around the Parish. As a child Bob Adams was sent to collect the bread but it was so good that half the loaf was gone by the time he got home. Clarke's also used to supply food to the school, rice puddings on one day and soup on the next. I would love to know the reason for what seems to be a very odd arrangement. Milk came from local farms of course. Bob went at 4 o'clock every afternoon to Wyken Farm to collect milk in a can and children all over the parish would be making the same journey to collect eggs and milk. No problem about food miles in those days. All the local streams were well stocked with trout but the right to fish them was not freely available to parishioners, it was a source of income for the landowner who owned those rights. In the case of the Worfe at Worfield, a syndicate headed by Mr Jemmitt of Chesterton held the licence to fish.

In Davenport House children from John Groome's orphanage at Clacton-on-Sea were housed with the older children living at Chyknell. A classroom was set up for them in the Club Room. Evacuees came from Liverpool and other cities and were billeted with local families. Miss Cunliffe from Bradney House had two children who must have thought they were in heaven living in such luxury. By all accounts she treated the boys well and hoped to adopt them after the War but it was not to be.

The Home Guard met at Wyken Farm and trained at Roughton. Most of the farmers were in the Home Guard and were a valuable asset to intelligence - working the land meant that they would be immediately aware of any activity which was not the norm. StJohn Trevor, a teacher at Bridgnorth Grammar School, was the man in charge. It would be interesting to find out more of the Home Guard, there must be many parishioners with stories to tell.

The Recreation Room was once again brought into use for convalescence for wounded servicemen. There must be families whose relatives were nurses there. I remember one lady who lived in Worfield until the 1980s who was such a nurse. She was a wonderful woman called Lennie Perkins and many of you will remember her. I was fascinated to hear of her work but too stupid to ask any questions.

Until 1943 and throughout most of that year, life carried on pretty much as it always had in Worfield. The War itself was going badly, so badly in fact that plans were afoot for a dramatic new

offensive in which Worfield was to play a vital role. In November 1943 work began in Davenport Park on the building of a camp for 2,500 men. A private pumping station was installed which also supplied Worfield and Bradney and the camp was completed in March 1944. Troops came shortly after completion who spoke with very odd accents. The Yanks had arrived. Some of those stationed at Davenport have written about their first impressions of the area. They speak of the beauty of Davenport Park, the green rolling hills, the hedge-bordered fields, the ancient village. One writes 'Surely this was the most beautiful place I have ever seen in my life.' another soldier recalls how he and his friends walked down Church Avenue, through a clump of trees until he came to an open area and looked down over the Lower Churchyard. They went into the Church, walked towards the altar and were overwhelmed by the peace, age and heritage of this beautiful building. This soldier wrote, 'certainly this was a place with which God must be well pleased.'

Once at Davenport, the soldiers had fitness and weapons' training for about a month and were then sent elsewhere in the country for further training. The troops were destined for one of the most pivotal battles of the war and it was important that morale was kept high. It is hard to believe that George Patton and General Bradley visited the troops in Worfield but they did just that, a short while before D-Day. Over 73,000 American troops landed in France in June 1944 so one can see how little time there was between planning the operation and the landings in France. It is astonishing to think how the work to build camps such as Davenport, which were dotted about all over the country, was carried out so quickly. To transform a green field site into a camp to house 2,500 men in just four months, was a tremendous achievement. Admittedly the finer features such as the disposal of waste were pretty primitive. The contents of the euphemistically named honey buckets for instance were collected and disposed of off site rather too infrequently according to those stationed at Davenport.

When the Americans no longer needed Camp Davenport it was used by prisoners of war, Italians and Germans. They were taken out daily by the WARAG to work on farms and there were different uniforms for Italians and Germans. In their spare time they made craft items such as slippers and entertained themselves by singing. Bob Adams described how you could hear them singing in the evenings and they were as good as any male voice choir.

The Worfield people welcomed the newcomers into their midst and local businesses presumably felt the benefit of the extra trade. When the Americans had left Davenport the prisoners of war brought labour which must have been a great boon to the farmers. Physically, Worfield had changed little. None of its buildings had been lost, its population had grown and then shrunk back. Times were hard but people managed. But there were those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Wilfred Cartwright, John Claybrook, Robert Downes, Raymond Piper, Kenneth Rowlands, Stanley Wakelam, William Williams and Sidney Winwood would never return to Worfield and many of the Americans who were at Davenport would also never return home. To them we owe a debt of gratitude which we can never repay. Thank you.