

Memories of Hilda Lord (nee Mudd)

April 2012

{NB: the pictures can take time to load up - it can sometimes help to click on the titles}

I was born at 16 Schoolside, Ainsworth, almost 85 years ago. Some of you may wonder where Schoolside was. In fact it was what is now Bradley Fold Road. Before the present building, now the Church and Community Hall, was built in 1838, there was previously a school on the eastern side of Bradley Fold Road (then Schoolside), in the fields. In my early memories of Bradley Fold Road, there was a sweet shop at number 6 and across from my home, at number 3, was the Police station, where we had a resident policeman. A little further along, just beyond the present back entrance to the churchyard, was the chip shop, a wooden building. This was opened by one of Clarice Wood's sisters (either Ethel or Lillian Brooks). This later closed and the chip shop moved to 45 Church Street, where the present Chinese take away is.

Where Broomfield Close is now, there was a poultry farm and later a small nursery where we bought our plants etc. Beyond this there were no more houses for a considerable time. Then in 1924 the band room was built to accommodate the village band. The band was a flourishing concern. Two of my uncles were members. Once a year they played for the hymns in church, sitting in the gallery, this was known as Band Sunday. Another annual event was when the band played on Christmas Eve, walking and playing around the village in the early hours of Christmas Day. The band ceased during the war, and the instruments were given to another Bury band.

At the time when I was about 8 or 9 years old, we had a village cricket and a football team. The football field was just beyond the band room, in front of three cottages. This was at the back of what is now Broomfield Close. Just across from this, separated by an unpaved path, was the cricket field. I loved going to watch the cricket. There were wooden benches along the side of the field for spectators, but I especially liked the tea break, when the players' wives served tea and cakes from a wooden pavilion. There was a footpath across the field from the cricket ground, which came out on Ainsworth Hall Road, and on each side of the footpath there were hen pens. Quite a lot of people kept hens around the village and we always bought our eggs from them rather than the shops.

Towards the top of Ainsworth Hall Road was Bankfield, a building now divided into flats, but years ago it was a gentleman's residence, belonging to the Hardman family, who had woollen mills in Bury.



Bankfield (from Ainsworth Hall Road)

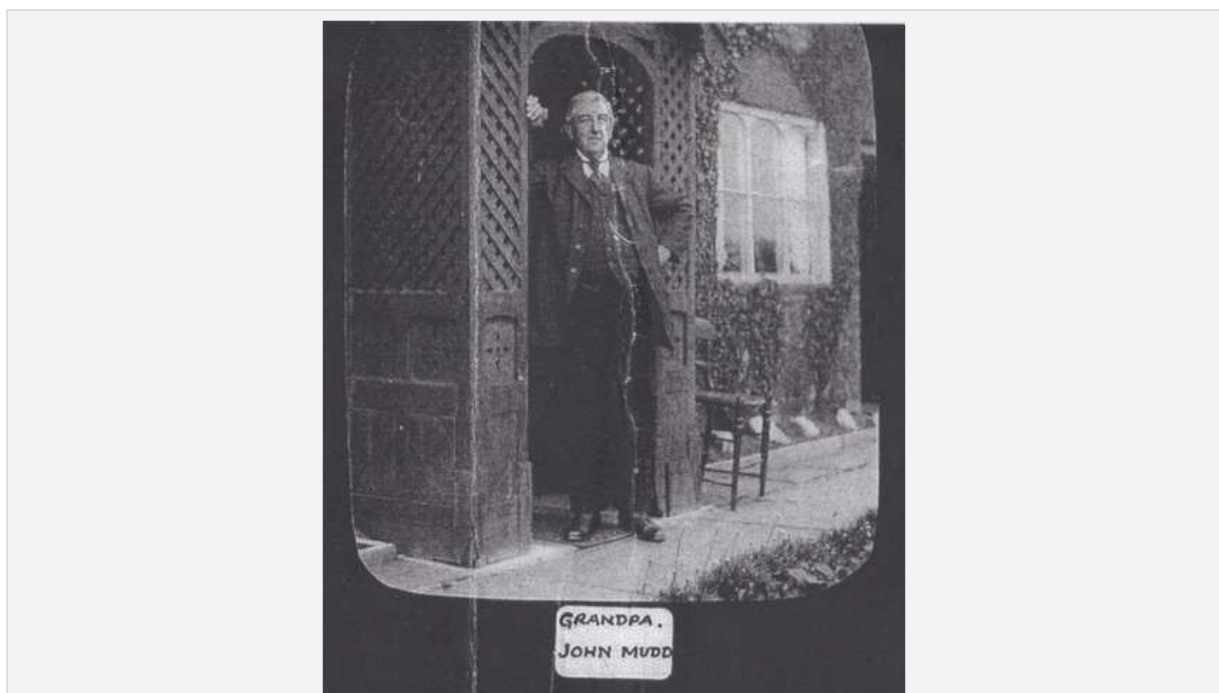
The Hardman family attended church, sitting in a private pew, where the choir vestry is now, which had a fireplace. Every year, during the summer, the church people were allowed to have a Garden Party in the grounds of Bankfield, to raise money for church funds. Ladies from church were able to use the kitchen of the house to prepare refreshments, and there were games and sideshows, including a fortune teller

When Mr Metcalfe became the vicar in about 1931, his family lived at the old vicarage, off Ainsworth Hall road. I can remember going there to play with Stella, his youngest daughter. The thing I remember most was the primitive outside toilet. Most of the village had yet to be connected to the main sewer at a later date. In this old toilet was a board to sit on, which had two holes to accommodate two people at once – all very friendly!

The field at the back of the Church Hall was where my grandfather kept his sheep for his butcher's shop, which was where the Chinese chip shop is now on Church Street. There was a slaughterhouse behind. He had three shops, one in Ainsworth, one in Tong Fold and one in Darcy Lever.

If you can imagine walking along the road, past the school and the new room, still know as the New Room, though it was built in 1929, across the road, at the end of Stanley terrace was an old stone building, built in 1893. This was the Methodist Sunday school. The present Sunday school and church hall, behind the chapel, was built in 1934. I remember before this, on the day after the Methodist Harvest Festival, there was a "fruit banquet", which was a social evening, with fruit being handed round. I always went along with my friends who attended the Methodist Sunday School.

A little way down from there, at the corner of Delph Lane, was the village blacksmith, who was Ike Earnshaw, it was an old building. Ike's grand-daughter Dorothy Brooks (nee Earnshaw) was my friend and I used to go along with her to watch the blacksmith shoeing horses. I can still recall the smell when the hot metal horseshoes were fitted on the horses' hooves. The horses weren't hurt at all. Walking along Delph Lane, we come to the cottages, which are still the same from the outside, and across from them, in the field was my grandfather's house, Meadow Cottage.



John Mudd, outside Meadow Cottage

My grand-parents lived there and in the adjoining cottage were my aunt and uncle, Tom and May Shepherd. Meadow Cottage had been bought by my great great uncle, Thomas Barrow, in 1882. Thomas Barrow also bought the Duke William at the same time. There is a brass plate on the wall, under the Reredos in church, commemorating his death. This was given by his widow, Mary Barrow, in 1908

In the grounds of Meadow Cottage was a pond, and in spring time, the banks were covered in daffodils. And to me it was a magical place. Going back years later, the pond looked much smaller. I was told that when the bungalows were built on Delph Lane, a lot of rubble was tipped into the pond. Behind Meadow Cottage were two disused quarries and a path leading behind the bowling green and to Well Street. There is still a row of cottages on Well Street, overlooking the recreation ground, but when I was young, there was another row of cottages going towards Delph Lane and in front of these were three more cottages, known as the "whetherornot", though my Dad told me that their real name was Willow Cottages.

Until 1939, there used to be two cannons in the Recreation Ground, we used to play on these, using our imagination, pretending that they were all sorts of things. I think they had come from the First World War. They were removed, along with all the metal railings from there and also from our front gardens for the war effort, to be turned into armaments of all kinds.

Coming along Church Street, we had numerous shops, confectioners, which later become a chemist and later still a television shop. Next to that was Henry Openshaw, the clogger and shoe repairer, then the post office. The co-op was also along this street with an office, grocery, drapers and later butchers.

Where the restaurant, La Tama is now, was a grocers' shop and further along a greengrocer, Albert Firth, who mainly went out with a horse and cart. Where the present chip shop is, was my grandfather's butchers shop with a slaughter house behind. His sheep came by train to Bolton Station and then had to be walked to Ainsworth, with the help of his sheep dog, Old Bob. The sheep were kept in the field behind the new room where the houses are now. There was another grocer's shop, just further along Church Street, known as "Nora's". on the other side was another greengrocers, Billie Barlow's, he used to sell his produce from horse and cart My great uncle, Fred Brooks, also had a greengrocers shop, later run by his daughter and son-in-law, Clarice and George Wood. This was in the middle of the cottages and on the corner of Bradley fold road was the co-op butchers, later John Kirkman's paper shop. There were several other traders who came round with either horse and cart and later with vans etc. There must have been at least twelve shops, plus hawkers coming regularly, and though the village has grown, we are now reduced to just the post office in the centre of the village.

On the north side of Church Street was the Delph, which is now a grassy area where people can play etc but in my younger days it was a disused quarry which had been flooded and was very deep. It was later filled in in the 1960's.

Further along Church Street, on the north side, was Moorside Mill, manufacturing cotton cloth. Many people from the village worked there. When I was 9 or 10 years old, I was asked by an old lady, a Mrs Greenhalgh, if I would take here disabled son's dinner to him in the mill. Her son Fred had great difficulty walking. I was allowed out of school a few minutes early at dinner time to go and collect Fred's dinner, which was packed in a basket. I had to take it between two mill lodges, one of them hot, and through the weaving shed with all its machinery running. I don't think Health and Safety would approve of that.

The church played a very important part in our lives. I remember especially Sermon's Sunday which was in July and later in May. The week before was very busy, the church yard was a scene of great activity. Family members came to scrub their gravestones and to put flowers on them. It was something of a social occasion. My mother, who lived back to back with the churchyard, was kept busy providing buckets of hot water to clean the gravestones and making cups of tea for all the people she knew who had come, sometimes from some distance, to tend family graves. I can still picture it in my mind, with all the lovely flowers, pink carnations, blue scabious and gypsophila.



Hilda Mudd in 1931

We had a procession before one of the services, ending up at the church gates, where we always sang "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord". The church was packed at every service, friends travelling to Cockey Moor sermons. We sometimes had an overflow service outside in the churchyard in the evening. What a happy occasion it was. The church choir was augmented at the sermons, by friends of the organist. We always had a full house, as my mother provided tea for these guest choristers and their families who came along with them. We also had a children's choir of which I was a member in my younger days, and which later I trained after Sunday School each week leading up to the sermons. I was a Sunday School teacher and Superintendent for about 40 years.

The Church Hall was the main school and until 1947 had children up to the age of 14. After that, all the pupils over 11 years went to a secondary school. Those fortunate to pass the 11 plus exam went to a grammar school. In the infants' school room, the back classroom, were two glass cases containing stuffed birds and animals, mice etc. I wonder what happened to these. Monitors were appointed to see to the milk, flowers and, on Friday afternoons, the boys were sent down to the cellar to mix the ink and fill the inkwells. The desks had seats attached and we had to sit still, as they were rather rough and if we wriggled were likely to get splinters in our legs and other parts of our anatomy. On Empire Day, 23rd May, we children took Union Jack flags to school, marched around and did country dancing.

Sunday School prizes were distributed each January at a Congregational party. Everyone came to a "knife and fork" tea. At the end of each table there was a shining copper tea urn. These were taken home by some of the ladies of the congregation, to be polished and cherished until the next occasion, and often had pride of place on the sideboard in their homes. At this time we had a stage, and in my childhood and teenage years, we often had concerts providing our own entertainment.



Hilda in Panto 1945

Later we had a Dramatic Society, and performed plays and pantomimes, spending many happy hours rehearsing, whilst a group of workers made costumes and scenery. We went “on tour” with our pantomimes to other churches in Bolton, Radcliffe, Harwood, Leigh etc and during the war, in about 1944, we performed for soldiers at the Army Camp at Lowercroft.

During the 1930’s, three day bazaars used to be held, local dignitaries were invited to open these events. Sometimes children performed the opening ceremony.

These days we think it hard work having a sale lasting for three or four hours. How did church members cope in those days?

When I was young, there were three doctors’ surgeries held in the village each day, you just turned up and waited your turn. These were held in private houses, one room being used as a waiting room and another for consultations. If requested the doctors would visit sick people at home. Very different from these days. This was before the National Health Service and doctors had collectors, who would call each week for a sum of money (probably about a shilling) to pay for sick treatment.



The Races

In the spring each year, the Holcombe Hunt Races took place. These were known locally as Cockey Moor Races, and also as The Millworkers Grand National. The starting point of the races was in the fields between Barrack Fold Farm and Bentley Hall Farm. The horses ran almost to Walshaw, then behind Bentley Hall and across the fields to Bury Meadows at Harwood. There were several jumps over hurdles of brushwood and the water jump was over a stream which was off Arthur Lane, near the electricity sub-station. One year Raymond Glen-Denning a BBC commentator was there commentating, I suppose for local radio. There was always a good number of bookmakers there, taking bets. On race day, there was a continual stream of traffic into the village from all directions, and special buses were laid on. There was an endless procession of people walking along Knowsley Road and Arthur Lane to the racecourse.



Holcolme Races

It was an ideal location for spectators as the fields sloped, giving a good view. At one point during the morning, a stagecoach drove through the village. The hunt used to meet several times a year, at various public houses, and ride over the fields surrounding the village. These days there are differing views about hunting, but it was a colourful sight to see the riders in their hunting pink, and to see all the hounds and hear the huntsman's horn. The races were later transferred to Kirby Lonsdale. I read an article in the Lancashire Magazine recently, which stated there would be no races at Kirby Lonsdale this year, but that land had been bought by the Executives of the Peel Group, at Hulton Park Bolton, and an agreement reached to allow the races to be stage there next year.

Snow

During the early 1940's there was very deep snow and the village was isolated for days. This was during the war and there was a camp at Lowercroft, and huts had been built to accommodate the troops. The soldiers were commandeered to come with spades and dig out the road through the village. As they shovelled the snow and threw it to the side of the road it was so deep that the houses couldn't be seen and paths were dug up to the doors.

Haymaking

During the summer, local farmers employed casual labourers to bring in the hay. Some of the labourers came from Ireland and stayed for a time. They used to go to the village post office, to send

letters to their relatives. Some of them couldn't write and would ask the wife of the Post Master to write a short note for them to send back home. When she asked what they wanted to say in the note. They would answer, "write what you think, you'll know better than me"

Mill workers

Many of the people of the village worked in the mills. Quite a few of them worked in the mill at Walshaw and they had to walk past Whitehead's lodges to get there. In foggy weather they took bundles of newspapers and matches to light, to guide them and prevent them walking into the water. Some of the workers were only about twelve years old and worked half-days in the mill and half days at school. My mother was one of these half-timers when she was about twelve.

War time

During the war, we had Air Raid shelters in the back streets. They were very crude brick buildings with concrete roofs and wooden planks to sit on. When the siren sounded, we would go to these shelters. The siren was at first on the church roof, but later on a post, behind the Air Raid Wardens post, which was in the library. I think there were some incendiary bombs, which landed in the field near Barrack Fold, but didn't do any damage. There was a searchlight and ack-ack unit on Ainsworth Hall Road.

Ainsworth Nursing Home

The Nursing Home In Knowsley Road, was formally a smallpox hospital, quite a long time ago. And was still kept in reserve for many years, with a caretaker and his wife looking after the building and they lived in a bungalow in the grounds. There was a patient there, with suspected smallpox, about sixty years ago, and we in the village, who had not been vaccinated previously, had to be vaccinated against smallpox. When the nurses' home, across the field from the hospital, was demolished some years ago, it had to be burned in case there was any trace remaining of the infection.

Stonemasons

Where the school is now, there were just fields and some hen pens and also the stonemason's yard, where George Willie Brooks and his sons Eric and Gilbert, made gravestones and carved inscriptions. I remember when I was an assistant at the school, we took small groups of the children to watch them at work, a highly skilled job.

Street sweepers

There were no mechanical machines cleaning the streets, there were two men, Mr Brooks and Mr Barnes, both lived in Bradley Fold Road. They went regularly round the village, with brushes, spades and a wheelbarrow, sweeping the streets and in frosty weather, spreading salt.

May Queens

As children we used to organise May queens. Someone was chosen to be queen, usually someone who had been a bridesmaid and therefore had a long pretty dress. The queen's train was usually a lace curtain. The rest of us just wore summer dresses. We walked round the village and collected money for charities, usually what was known as the "Waifs and Strays", and is now called the "Children's Society", this was all before 1939 and world war 2 After the war, the churches started to have their own Sunday School Queens with their retinue of attendants, and these led the Whitsuntide processions. After the walks on Whit Sunday, the band which had led the procession went onto one of

the fields where races were arranged for the children and adults. Refreshments were served in the school, usually half a meat pie and a cake and a cup of tea.

Bankfield

I previously referred to Bankfield. This had been a school which took in boarders, this was during the war, it was a private school for younger children. Around Christmas time, the local Air Raid wardens arranged to go carol singing in the village, and a few other people joined them. I was one of these, along with a few of my friends, whose fathers were wardens. We went to Bankfield and all the young children, in pyjamas and nightdresses were gathered, sitting around the Christmas tree, to listen to the carols. It was a lovely sight which I shall always remember.

You will have gathered from my ramblings, that I love Cockey Moor and have so very wonderful, precious memories, I could go on talking about it for ever. A few years ago, someone used the expression "putting the worth in Ainsworth", but in my opinion, the worth has always been there, and long may it continue.