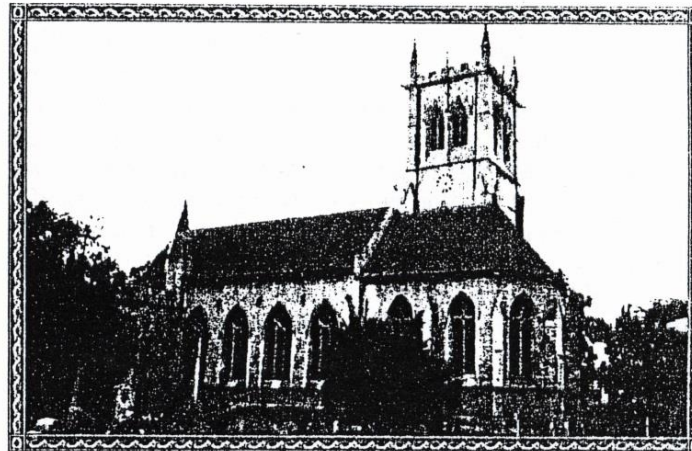


ESCRICK BEFORE YOU ARRIVED

Talk given by Bill Reader

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ESCRICK BEFORE YOU ARRIVED A VIEW FROM THE ESTATE OFFICE

There has been quite a bit of interest in the history of Escrick, particularly since Sam Taylor recently published his book, but I feel that it would be of further interest to residents to hear in more detail what life was like in the period just before development took place, and I feel I am in a unique position to do just that. This uniqueness will become more apparent as the story unfolds.

I was born in Escrick, opposite the Parsonage Hotel and was educated at the village school where I gained a scholarship to Archbishop Holgate's Grammar School in York.

In those days, the main work outlets from A.H.G.S. were the L.N.E.R., Rowntrees, Terrys, and Yorkshire Insurance Company. I opted for the Yorkshire Insurance Company, but, as it was 1941, wartime, they would not offer any permanent employment, as they were hoping those who had joined the forces would return after the war. I therefore accepted a permanent position with the National Farmers Union and Avon Insurance company. This also entailed taking turns in fire watching at night on the roof of our offices and Marks and Spencers in Parliament Street. That "permanent" job lasted for 3 months when I was offered an opening in the Estate Office. My predecessor having just joined the RAF.

At that time, Escrick Village was just Main Street, and all the houses belonged to the Estate and nearly all were occupied, by workers on the Estate or the surrounding farms, as tied cottages, and I knew everyone in the village. There was no Wenlock Drive, Dower Chase, Dower Park, Skipwith Road, Escrick Court, Woodlands, The Glade, Carr Lane, Carrs Meadow, Escrick Park Gardens, nothing between the bridge and LynGarth (which was the Doctor's house), or between the bridge and the Escrick & Deighton Club, and no infilling beyond that. I haven't forgotten Halfpenny Close, which in those days would have been referred to as ha'penny Close. That name has developed from the ha'penny dike which passed through what is now the Village Green. so called because a ha'penny rate was levied by the Ouse & Derwent Drainage Board to maintain it.

The Escrick Park Estate covered land and cottages in Escrick, Deighton, Stillingleet, Kelfield, Riccall, Skipwith and Wheldrake and rent days were held twice a year in April and October. Tuesday would be at the Estate Office in Escrick from 10a.m. to 3.p.m and Mr. Thompson would ring the bank, which closed at 3.p.m., to let them know he was coming in, and they would open up for him. This was a relic of the old days when rents were paid in gold sovereigns. The Riccall audit was held at the Hare & Hounds on Wednesday and the Wheldrake one at the Wenlock Arms on Thursday.

The staff at the office consisted of the Land Agent, Claude Thompson, the Assistant Agent, Frank Bass, the Agent's Secretary, Mary

Martin, and myself.

Mr. Thompson came as Agent to Lord Wenlock in 1904 and retired in 1955, thereby creating a record of 51 years for a Land Agent to one Estate.

Mr. Bass came in 1934 as a qualified Land Agent from the Yarburgh Estate in Lincolnshire, and in 1955 succeeded Mr. Thompson, retiring in 1960 when, the then Owner, Mr. Nigel Forbes Adam took over and I was appointed his assistant.

After Lord Wenlock died in 1912 his daughter, Irene Lawley (Lawley being the family name), inherited the estate and she married Mr. Colin Forbes Adam in 1921.

In those days the Agent was all-powerful and even the owner had to ask him for things she would like - and was often refused. I remember when Mr. Bass was appointed Agent she came into the office and said "Bass, perhaps I can now have things done which I want doing"

No-one else was allowed to give orders, and I mean no-one. I remember Mr. Bass getting a rocket for telling the bricklayer to replace some blown off tiles on a farm building after he had completed the job he had been given on that farm.

Everything centred on the Estate Office and Mr. Thompson was, among other things, Chairman of the Parish Council, Chairman of the School Governors, Chairman of the Almshouse Trustees, Chairman of the Escrick & Deighton Club, Chairman of the Escrick Park C.C., Chairman of the Derwent Magistrates, Chairman of the Country Land Agents, Chairman of the Ouse & Derwent Drainage Board, Chairman of the East Riding War Agricultural Executive Committee. His wife was President of the Women's Institute. He was a virtual dictator. Not everyone would agree, but I believe he was a fair man.

In those days we all knew our place and respect was shown. Mr. Colin Forbes Adam was addressed as Sir, the Hon. Mrs. Irene Forbes Adam as Madam, the Agent as Sir, the Rector as Rector, (let me point out that The Rev. Richard Kirkman's proper title is Rector of Escrick, he may be Vicar of Stillingfleet and Vicar of Naburn but he is Rector of Escrick. There is now no advantage in being a Rector either financially or in rank, it is a relic of former days when I believe a Rector received all or more of the Tithes of the Living than a Vicar could.), the Doctor as Dr, the Headmaster as Sir and the Policeman as Constable. Younger people referred to their elders as Mr. or Mrs. Mr. Forbes Adam informed us in the office that he wished his children to be addressed as Miss. Virginia, Mr. Timmy, Mr. Desmond and Mr. Nigel. I still do.

Whilst Mr. Thompson was agent, direct contact between Tenants and the Owner was not encouraged, but following his departure, the Owner came much more into the picture. Mr. Nigel in particular felt he was privileged to own the estate and owed it to the tenants to make them feel welcome. This feeling was further advanced by the arrival in the office of Doreen Fawcett, and later, Mabel Davis, who were always

prepared to offer a cup of tea or coffee

The Police Station and Magistrates Court (later Derwent Council Offices, hence Derwent Court) was administered by an Inspector and later by a Sergeant. In the days of P.C. Moody, he would come to the office to borrow our typewriter to type reports, and quite a number of them would actually be typed by myself or Mr. Bass, to save time, as the infrequent tapping of the keys by one finger would be interspersed by "how do you spell so and so"? I must admit there were not a lot of reports as he usually dealt with complaints or misbehaviour in his own way. If he couldn't, a word with the Headmaster would probably have the desired effect. Failing that a word with the Agent resulted in the father being summoned to the Estate Office and reminded that his job, and therefore his house, were at risk, and no further action was required. Naturally, we were a very law-abiding village. Mischief Night would now be considered tame as it consisted of mischief, not vandalism, such as tapping on windows and doors, lifting off gates, putting sparrows through letter boxes etc.

There was one occasion when a trick was played on Bob Haigh who had the small holding next to the church, now Sangthai Restaurant. The perpetrators slipped into the stable and wrapped sacking round the horse's feet and then led it quietly and tied it to the handle of the back door of the house. A knock on the door was answered by Mrs. Haigh, and, as she opened it, the horse was pulled into the house.

Apart from the Escrick Park Estate, Mr. Thompson was also Agent for the Heslington Estate for Lord Deramore, Castletown Estate in Cumberland for Major Mouncey Heysham, Copgrove Estate for Major Holliday, Askham Bryan Estate for Mrs. O'Callaghan, Billbrough Estate for the Place family and Brandesburton for the Harrison Broadleys. He also managed a large farm in Shropshire for Mrs. E.M. Campbell a member of the Bibbys Animal Feeds firm of Liverpool. He was also Secretary for Reads Stand at Doncaster and York race courses, whose 200 members included nearly all the leading Owners and Trainers, including the Aga Khan. He was also an Agent for the Yorkshire Insurance Company. We had a weekly visit from the local Inspector and most claims were settled on the spot. All the records for all these activities were kept by us at the Estate Office. We did not have much spare time.

I learnt book-keeping at school and was sent to a lady in Riccall to learn short hand and typing, and to an architect in York to learn how to draw plans. Plans for new buildings or alterations were designed by the Agent. He would often take me to measure up for alterations to houses to provide bathrooms and W.C.s etc. He never knocked on a door, just opened it and walked in. They were never locked. One house we went to measure for a bathroom, we walked in to find the lady of the house standing in a tin bath in front of the fire. We made a hasty retreat to the wash house. His designs were very practical. His advice for staircases was "make sure you can get a coffin downstairs", and for toilets "go and sit on the toilet and make sure you have plenty of elbow room".

Escrick Village and the Estate were pretty well self-sufficient employing bricklayers, joiners, house carpenter, painter, blacksmith, electrician, dairyman, drainers, woodmen, gardeners, game keepers, farm workers, estate labourers as well as apprentices. In the Hall, now Queen Margaret's School, were self-contained flats which had a Manageress and employed many domestic staff. There was also the Escrick Park Laundry with a Manageress and about 20 staff including 2 van drivers making daily deliveries. Both these businesses were overseen from the Estate Office. It was a high class laundry originally for the Hall but expanded to take in work from many country houses, hotels and the Lord Mayor's Mansion House in York. At one time one of the van drivers was Little Jimmy Powell, no more than 4 feet tall, but perfectly proportioned. He was the Mayor of Midget Town at the New York World Fair in 1939. The van pedals had to be extended and the seat raised, but he was quite capable of carrying the large laundry hampers. He played cricket and tennis. He was a keen darts player but could not retrieve his darts unless they were below treble 19. I mention treble nineteen to indicate the height to which he could reach, but our dartboards never had trebles. At snooker he used the rest permanently. He smoked a pipe and sipped pints of ale out of a tankard - and plenty of them. He loved dancing especially with tall girls and with an arm round one leg.

About 1920 a generator was installed at the entrance to the Joiners Yard, the southern end of Carr House, behind what is now the Security Office for Q.M.S., which supplied the whole of the village with electricity. This replaced the gas supply which came from the Gas House in the Woodyard, now Carrs Meadow, at the point near where the Village Green joins the wood, hence Gassy Wood. An overhead supply came from York about 1935

Water came from an artesian bore at the Hall and was raised by triple pumps to the lower tanks in the water tower and then gravitated through a Boby softening plant into underground tanks in the laundry yard, which held about 23,000 gallons. (I could never understand a Bursar at QMS filling them in, as it was such a ready source of water in case of a fire) The water was then pumped up to the top tanks in the tower to gravitate and supply the whole of the village, as far as the church and Dower House, as well as the railway station. There were five stand pipes in the village. The one opposite the church Lychgate, the one at Leghorn House opposite the Rectory (now the Parsonage Hotel), the one at Fountain Row opposite the fountain and the one near Park Row have been removed, but the one, in the form of a lion's head, outside Poplar Row near the Black Bull Inn can still be seen. Many of the cottages had their own well and pump. Derwent District Council took over supplying cottages, north of the bridge, in the late 1930's with water supplied from the River Ouse, north of York. We continued to supply water from the bore to the southern end of the village until the new Water Authorities came into being and then we were prohibited from supplying drinking water. A

pity, it was such lovely water and never failed. For many years the York Waterworks kept a connecting piece which would have enabled them to supply water from our bore in an emergency should their supply have become contaminated.

The Estate built two pairs of cottages (1948 and 1949, the 1948 pair have been sold and demolished and replaced by a larger house on the same site) for Estate workers, but the Agent resisted all attempts by the District Council to buy land for Council Houses until 1950, when he sold land for 4 pairs of semi-detached houses on back lane (Skipwith Road) separated from the rest of the village by the allotments.

Work on the Estate was a job and house for life. On retirement there was a small pension and rent free house, which also applied to widows. It meant, however, that it was necessary at times to swap houses to accommodate increases and decreases in the size of families. These were usually same day exchanges by horse and cart and arranged from the office. A death in the Almshouses could probably trigger off up to 5 exchanges, all on the same day.

There were usually opportunities for sons to work on the Estate, including apprenticeships for the various trades. Occasionally it was necessary to advertise a vacancy and it did no harm to your chances of being accepted, if you were a good cricketer.

We have a beautiful ground in front of the Hall (now QMS) and Escrick Park C.C. have played on it since the early 1860's. It was leased to the Yorkshire Gentlemen, who are responsible for the maintenance of the ground and pavilion, in about 1933, but, under the terms of the lease, the Escrick Park C.C. are guaranteed a certain number of home fixtures. The Owner's husband, Mr. Colin Forbes Adam was a regular player with Escrick, and his sons Mr. Timmy and Mr. Nigel have both served as captain of the club. The agent was a keen cricketer and before the war both he and his sons played. I have it on good authority that the Agent sacked George Streetly, who worked in the sawmill, for some misdemeanour, only for his son Eric to say to his father in the office "Father, you can't sack George we have a Myers Burnell Cup match on Thursday". George was duly re-instated and must have done reasonably well as he went on to receive his pension. Before the war there was a beautiful thatched pavilion and score box. It was used as a reception centre when evacuees came from Hull and Middlesbough when war broke out, but was burnt down when the Brownies, who were holding a large gathering, lit the boiler and sparks from a bird's nest in the chimney set the thatch alight.. had gone in minutes. The score box went to Pocklington School.

The Agent and his Secretary occupied the office upstairs and Mr. Bass and myself downstairs. My desk was in the window looking up the drive but I could also see down the street. I didn't miss much and I knew everyone in the village. No one went directly upstairs except the Owner and members of the Agent's family. We had an intercom to announce any visitor, who had to wait downstairs until called.

The office hours were 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., 12.30 on Saturday, but unless you had an appointment with the Agent there was little point in trying to see him. Mr. Thompson would appear round the corner of the Red House drive about 9 a.m. accompanied by a dog or dogs (Border terriers), bringing with him the mail which had been delivered to the Red House. He would open the letters downstairs, hand over what we required, and then go upstairs, accompanied by his Secretary, to dictate his letters. His aim was to leave the office by about 10 a.m. and go out on his horse around the Estate, that is unless he had a special appointment away or was on the Bench. The more wise or crafty tenants would arrive at the office after 4 p.m. and start by talking about cricket or horse racing before getting to the purpose of their visit. It seemed to work very well for some. He appeared to have a sixth sense whenever you wanted something - like a rise, and an appropriate time seemed to take ages to arrive.

One farming tenant, who was somewhat aggrieved with Mr. Thompson, came to the office one morning about 10 a.m. and, whilst waiting, told us he was going to give him a piece of his mind. Eventually the door opened and Mr. Thompson just looked at the Tenant and said "You want to get your spouts cleaned out", - shut the door and was on his horse before the Tenant could catch his breath.

There was a bell in the joiners' yard which one of the workmen was deputed to ring at 7.30 a.m., 12 noon, 1.00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m. to let the workmen know when to start or knock off work. There were fires in all the workshops and the first job was to light the fire. Nothing changes!

The Agent would visit the workshops and sawmill any time from 7.30 a.m. and the workmen would always appear to be already busy. Small pieces of mirror discreetly placed enabled them to see when anyone approached, especially when they were standing round the fire. The bricklayers at the Lime House, which was alongside the dike at the junction of Carr Lane and the A19, had no windows, so the Bricklayer's Paddy was placed on look-out. The Bricklayers Paddy was also a mole-catcher for which he was paid 6 pence per dozen. He would come to the office on pay days with a tobacco tin full of tails which we had to count.

The Border Terriers were always left upstairs when the Agent went on his horse and we were always well informed when he was about to re-appear. Unfortunately they were keen hunting dogs and were always on the look-out for an open door, and would then streak off round the Red House drive and disappear down rabbit holes or under the rhododendron bushes in Gassy Wood or Mill Hill Plantation. They didn't bark when hunting so they were difficult to trace, and many a time about half the workers on the estate were looking for them. It was important to find them quickly as stray dogs were not very popular with the gamekeepers, whose ever they were.

Earlier, I mentioned the station, which was on the mainline from London to Edinburgh, (all that remains is an infill site where the bridge on Stillingfleet Road goes over the cycle track, which was the main line), and

in consequence of Lord Wenlock allowing the line to be built across the Estate, he was permitted to stop any train should he wish to travel. Although the line and the station have now gone, the avenue of evergreen oaks (Luccombe Oaks in fact) between the Hall and the station remain, as do the station cottages. Visitors were met at the station and transported to the village by pony and trap. My father used to do this, and this is how he met my mother, who came up from Kent to visit her sister and husband who managed the Black Bull Inn for the P.R.H.A. She came for a month, but never returned except for holidays.

There was the Escrick & District Co-operative Society (nothing to do with the national CWS) which had a Management Committee and a Manager. The Chairman came from the Estate Office. Pre 1900 it was situated where the four Park Row cottages now stand. These were built as workers cottages, and Lord Wenlock intended to continue building them down the street, but died in 1912 and Estate Duty put an end to the scheme. You could get anything through or at the shop, including made to measure suits, shoes, pig and poultry food, as well as all food and household goods. There was also a delivery service for weekly orders. A dividend was paid in relation to your purchases during the year. We also ran a Provident Club from the Estate Office. On a Tuesday dinner time members came and paid their sixpence or shilling a week so that at Christmas it could be drawn out plus a bonus given by the Estate.

There was a Butcher's Shop next to the Black Bull Inn (now there is just a large abbatoire), where we could buy our meat, the Saddler's Shop next to the Co-op, where all leather goods could be repaired, and from where the daily papers could be obtained, a tailor lived opposite the Black Bull, and a Post Office at the end of the row nearest to the church, (hence Post Office Row) which had a public telephone. A cobbler had a little hut near where the telephone kiosk is situated opposite the Sangthai Restaurant. There was also a cycle repair shop. Coal was delivered by rail to Escrick Station and collected by horse and cart.

Nearly all our food was locally produced and most houses had good size gardens, where we could grow our vegetables, and there were also over 30 allotments for the more energetic or those with bigger families. The allotments did not look like an African township but were tidy with no huts on them. Barrows were used to take tools and bring away produce and it was unbelievable how much Arthur Moss could wheel on his large barrow, over which he had difficulty in seeing; nearly as much a one could get on a horse and cart. He had the allotment next to Main Street and you could often see him on a winter's night digging by the light of a hurricane lamp.

Many households kept chickens which supplied them with eggs and there were three small-holders in the village who supplied milk, cream, butter and curd, poultry and eggs. Apart from the butcher's meat and chickens, we lived off pests - rabbits, pigeons, rooks and sparrows. Rabbits were everywhere before myxomatosis, damaging all the farmers'

crops, and at harvest time we followed the binders to catch them. Farm tenants, workers and gamekeepers were continually trapping, snaring, ferreting and shooting them, and we were still over-run. There were flocks of wood pigeons and we were allowed to go into the woods on Friday evenings in February and March to shoot them. Flocks of sparrows descended on the ripening wheat fields and whenever you fed poultry, and they were such a nuisance in the Hall gardens that every winter the gardeners used to net hundreds of them, which roosted in all the ivy covered walls around the gardens and hall. You needed at least 100 for a pie! Sparrows have gone from being a pest to an endangered specie and it is no doubt due to the lack of grain in the farmyards over winter, (even the demise of farmyards themselves), poultry being reared indoors, and the denuding of buildings which were covered with ivy which provided shelter in winter, as well as nesting places.

With all the good development which has taken place, and the establishment of York University at Heslington, Escrick is a very desirable place to live. Consequentially property is very expensive and, with the arrival of Shorthold Tenancies, rents have followed suit. This in turn has seen family names which appeared for decades on the Electoral Rolls rapidly disappearing, as the descendants are unable to find affordable properties to buy or rent. We are an endangered specie. What a change in fifty years!

Escrick is no longer an Estate Village. The Estate Office which was at the centre and the hub of all activities is now out of sight of the village. The voice of the village is vested in the Parish Council, and power is vested in the District and County Councils, which have appeared to pay little regard to the voice of the people, and on that rather depressing note, and before you reach for your violins, I will close by answering two of the queries on the flyer.

The tree planted by the Prince of Wales is in the paddock near the cricket ground and is a type of Spruce about 30 feet tall and surrounded by an iron fence. It was planted by Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales so must be 100 years old. A slow grower!

I also mentioned the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester exercising their dogs. This was in the 1930s when they stayed at the Dower House and walked their dogs in Villa Park, now Wenlock Drive.

I now close the red book, and in the words of Michael Aspel, "Escrick This Was Your Life".