

Buriton at the end of the Second World War

A good picture of changes in village life in Buriton at around the end of the Second World War can be obtained from notes recorded by the Secretary of the local Women's Institute group – on behalf of all her members.

Amongst other things, it was noted that:

“It is not necessarily easy to say, in definite terms, what good things have been lost in village life. Some changes come gradually – so slowly indeed that we are scarcely aware that anything has happened ...

“However, a little quiet reflection will make us realise that many changes in our village life have been taking place for a long time and that we may perhaps not have noticed them because, in the main, they have been changes brought about by a general improvement in our material resources.

“Our standard of life is higher and we have been able to benefit by the discoveries of the scientist, the inventor etc and not a little by the local bus service to the nearest town from which we can travel further afield by train.

“The wireless, too, reaches us from the ends of the earth and all this, I think, means that the village has lost much of its individuality. It is no longer a small, more or less self-contained community.

“To a degree this goes to show that village folks are becoming conscious of a wider and less peaceful world and to a certain extent they no longer feel themselves to be the independent country people of a few years ago.

“We much regret having lost the village crafts, that of the cobbler, the wheelwright, the blacksmith and the thatcher – and also the beautiful needlework and quilting done by the women. We also miss the housewives skilled in the art of bread-making ...

“Many of the crafts have vanished because of changes taking place in the agricultural industry. Few things have survived the modern methods of mass production and the consequent cheapening of so many things in daily use that we formerly made ourselves.

“In this mechanical age we can only regret the passing, not only of the village crafts themselves but also of the sturdy independent body of men and women who followed them.

“We have lost, too, the village pigsty. True, the war brought it back but, we fear, only temporarily. It is a pity, for the inhabitant of the pigsty was a topic of endless conversation, whose decease was an event much looked forward to.

“Truth compels us to say that we do not think our village is so closely identified with the Squire and the Parson. It is no reflection on either of them, it is just that time marches on.

“As to the future: of primary importance is a good water supply and the use of electric light and power in every building. We want more and better houses with a bath in each house but above everything we want the houses to be in keeping with their surroundings and so allow us to retain the natural beauty of our village.”

We are perhaps very fortunate in Buriton that, not only have we obtained the running water, electricity and baths (!) sought by Women’s Institute some 75 years ago – but we have also largely retained the look and feel of our village as the years have passed.

The Second World War did, however, bring one other notable change in village life – with a significant loss of local employment. The local chalk pits and limeworks ceased production during the war and the area was taken over by the Admiralty. Unexploded enemy mines were brought to the site so that the explosives could be steamed out – and any clever booby-traps or trigger systems detected so that important information could be passed on to the military services elsewhere.

At the end of the war the quarrying and lime production never restarted as cement took over, helping post-war development across the country. As one villager recalled in the 1960s: “the closing down of the limeworks made a lot of difference. It employed 40 men. I remember seeing them come home from work for lunch like men leaving a factory. At the end of each day their horses would be ridden, bare-back, through the High Street to be washed in the pond – before racing back to the limeworks: an exciting sight for the village children.”

Although these sights have been lost, the old chalk pits are now a popular Nature Reserve with a wonderful mix of species and some fascinating trails which still excite local children.