

1956 Autobiography of William Pepper Jr.

In the year 1860, William Pepper Senior, kept a public house in the main street of Mountsorrel, known as 'The Exhibition Inn', with a coal wharf at the bottom with a pair of canal boats, for carrying stone from Mountsorrel Granite Quarry to Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire and bringing coal back, so therefore he was a publican and a coal merchant.

In that same year, a boy from Long Whatton named Thomas Pepper, came to the Granite Offices as an office boy. In 1868, Thomas Pepper married the daughter of William Pepper. No relation has been traced. He went to live at the bake-house at the corner of The Green, Mountsorrel. I, William Pepper, Junior, was born there in 1869.

In 1872, William Pepper Sen. took over the Crown Lane Farm, later known as The 'Home Farm'. This house was formerly known as the 'Crown Hotel' in the coaching days, where they used to change their horses. Up the yard were nearly all stables. These were lit up by gas. There was a big lamp in the yard, also a saddle house with a fireplace for the harness. The land let with this farm is around the Quarries and adjoins a small farm near the Wood, later known as 'Buddon Wood Farm' which he had for 30 years.

William Palmer of Island House, Loughborough, a grocer, attended a sale of property at 'The Crown Inn' or 'Hotel', Mountsorrel and then bought for the sum of £327, a beer house, which was later known as 'The Free Trade Inn'. (This was taken from a newspaper cutting).

William Pepper Sen. left the Exhibition Inn to live at the farm, and Thomas Pepper took over the Exhibition Inn and Coal Wharf. He sold the baking business at 'The Green' Corner. Thomas Pepper, was my father.

There was a Windmill on the top of a hill, named Broad Hill, which was used for grinding com for the farmers. It had to be removed because of the quarrying of this hill. William Pepper Sen. bought this Windmill and brought it down and placed it in the field at the back of the Home Farm. There came a great gale one day and blew this Windmill down in 1875. Then my Grandfather built a Steam Flour Mill down the Exhibition Yard in 1877, now, a Leather Board Mill.

As a boy I practically lived with my Grandfather and grew up with him on the farm, until I was about 18yrs. Then he told me I was too big for my clothes, and I left him. I went apprentice to the Pork Butchering at Market Place, Loughborough, under Mr. Frank Wright. Later, I married the daughter, after her father had died. We carried on with the Pork Butchering for 10 years. Three of my daughters were born there.

After my grandfather knew I had picked up a good wife, we became great friends again. He had retired from the farm by now and had let my sister and her husband take on the tenancy. One day he wrote to me saying that my sister and husband had given notice for the farm. He advised me to take it. I wrote to the land agent and had no trouble in getting it, owing to the good character of my Grandfather. I held the farm for 43 years and made a success of it, 1948.

As a little boy I went everywhere with my Grandfather, to Shows, Markets etc. I learnt a great deal in the years that I spent with him. My first recollection is the Irishmen coming and sleeping in the bam each season. They came to cut the grass with scythes and the com too. Later they dug the potatoes up with forks.

Then we went to the Royal Show at Nottingham and bought a mowing machine to cut the grass. We took it in to Goodes' Meadow and tried it out there. The Irishmen laughed at us, because it would not cut. It ran over the top of it. The field grew a lot of grass and the machine could not take it, so the machine was taken back and exchanged for a stronger machine. This was quite successful. We were told the grass would not grow after being cut with a mowing machine.

Later we bought a machine that would cut grass and com. This machine was fitted with a rack. I used to sit on the machine over the wheel and pull the com on to the rack. When there was enough to tie up into a bundle, I used to push it off, the men were at different places in the field to tie up the bundles. There were two horses and one man on the machine to drive them. We could cut 8 acres a day, with a change of horses.

After this came the Binder for the corn. We could put 3 horses side by side and I could drive them and the Binder would tie the sheaves up in one operation. Now we have the Combined Harvester which goes in to the field, cuts the com, picks it up, threshes it and blows out the chaff.

We also grew a lot of potatoes in my young days. The Irishmen dug these up with a fork. One day my Grandfather had a new potato digger come. This made the men grumble. We tried it out in a field that had a lot of red clay in it. We used two horses. First the digger was not down deep enough and consequently cut the potatoes up. Then when it was deepened it stalled the two horses and two more horses had to be used. This was unsatisfactory and had to go back.

I cannot remember my Grandfather having another potato digger, but these

diggers did improve and when I was farming on my own I grew potatoes on lighter land and used these diggers to advantage. In my Grandfather's time we used to take potatoes to Leicester with 3 horses and a wagon, about 3 ton at a time, to a potato merchant at the Gt. Northern Station, at £3 per ton. In 1956 they are £38 per ton.

Mountsorrel was a long narrow street with three lanes leading from it, and one side street. It also has a village green and a market place, where a market used to be held on Friday and Saturday, when I was a boy. In the Market Place there used to be a cross under a large dome. That cross was moved to Swithland Park near the residence of the Lord of the Manor.

Mountsorrel was on the main coaching route from London - Sheffield. The chief industry of the village was the quarry which used to be Broad Hill. There is also Castle Hill on which was supposed to be a castle, but I have never seen the foundations.

After the 1914-18 War, a war memorial was put up in honour of the fallen soldiers. There is a Memorial Service held there every November in memory of the 1914-18 and 1939-45 Wars. Hawcliffe Hill has been worked out by the quarry. Nutting Hill still remains. When I was a boy all these hills were known as Common Land. Many people had a Common Rite to turn one or two cows on, but as quarries took up the land, they bought these Rites from the people.

In those days they used to bring Irish cattle in droves and sold them in the streets as they passed. They also brought goats and sold the goats and their milk to anyone. There were also Welsh ponies. We also had a man come through with a performing bear.

A Pleasure Fair was held on the Green on the 10th July. It was a lively affair. At the opening of the Fair, there was a parade, with the heads of the village in the parade. At the head of the parade was Mr. Bowler with his donkey and cart, and ringing his bell and proclaiming the fair opened. He lived at Dob. Hall near to Nunkeley Hill adjoining the railway that runs from the quarry to Swithland Sidings.

Other industries at this time were frame knitters, blacksmiths, shoe makers, flour mill, and many men worked on canal boats until about 1869 when this industry died out. Shoemakers and frame knitters worked in their own homes. Many of these people had Common Rites and kept a cow or two. They kept their cows at the back of the houses, taking them down narrow entries to get there. They used the milk for themselves and made their own butter. These cattle had to be branded the night before turning them out on to the common land, on May 11th, by Mr. Twigg and another.

Mr. Twigg lived at a thatched cottage in the centre of the Green. He was a framework knitter and also in charge of all stray cattle that were not branded. He put all such cattle in to the Pinfold at the top of the Green, and charged the owners, so much per head of cattle. His cottage was later pulled down and the Church House

put in its place, the clock on the front was given by Doctor Skipworth's (poss. Shipworth's) daughters in memory of their father.

At the top of the Green is Christ Church. A little further along the road is the Christ Church School which I attended. In the Infants Department we paid 2^D per week. In the upper classes we paid 3^D. per week. One boy in the upper class used to shout out "Fan, Dick and Tom 6^D" for his brothers and sister in the Infants Department.

At the bottom of the Green is the bake-house and the shop where I was born, now known as "The Green Bakery". When my Grandfather died, his trustees sold the property to Mr. John Dodson. When Mr. Dodson died, he left it in his Will, that his son, George should purchase it. It so happened that Mr. George Dodson married my daughter. When he passed away in 1955 he left it to my daughter, Mrs. Dodson. She is still carrying on the business 1956.

Near to the Market Place is a very old Church, called St. Peters Church. Across the road is the Vicarage. There are four Chapels. Three of them have been modernized in the last 60yrs. One is a very old one. So we have plenty of places of Worship. All my family attended the Loughborough Rd. Chapel, formerly the Wesleyan Chapel. My Grandfather, Grandmother, Father and Mother before us.

My brother and I were in the choir for over 40 years. We had the pleasure of putting the children up on to the platform for the Sunday School anniversary for that number of years. We have many happy memories of those days. The first Choir outing that we ever, had, was on an Easter Monday. We went by two carriers wagons to the Gt. Northern Station at Leicester for which we paid 6^D each return. We had a saloon coach on the train to Skegness for which we paid 2/6 return for the trip.

The next year we went to Sutton-on-Sea and Mablethorpe costing 3/- return. The following year Hunstanton again 3/- return, about 1881. Later on, around 1915 the children of the Sunday School were taken by my farm wagon for the Sunday School treat up to my Buddon Wood Field. The hot water was provided for the tea by Mr. & Mrs. Goward who lived at the farm house.

As I have said before, the chief industry in Mountsorrel was the Granite Quarries. The road stone used to be broken by a hammer and a ring. The men used to stand on a platform about the height of a cart and as they broke it, they pulled it away with the ring and it dropped down below them. Then it was carted away by horse and cart and tipped in to the boats down at the Wharf to be taken away when and where required. The Granite was broken at Newbold's Pit, which is today filled up. This was when I was a schoolboy. Later they bought a Crusher that could break hundreds of tons a day. This is in use today 1956.

Before they built the new railway line from the Quarry to the Barrow railway siding, the horses and carts used to take all the stone down to the Wharf and load it on to the boats on the River Soar to be taken where it was required. At that time the transport on the rivers was very good. After the railway from the Quarry to

Barrow was built, the stone was sent by rail instead of boat. Gradually the boating industry died out.

One thing that I remember was a very big flood in July about 1879. The water rose very quickly and swam the hay in to the hedge bottoms and culverts and blocked the drains up. Two canal boats broke loose and when the water went down they were found across a meadow. A wide boat half loaded with stone was half on the river and half on the tow-path, that was broken in two.

Most of the jobs at the Quarry were done by manual labour and there were a great many men working there. Someone had left a fund to help boys at the Quarry. They went apprentice to the stone dressing. Today there are not many men employed there. It is mostly mechanical and there is a great deal of stone sent away.

There used to be a water driven Flour Mill. This is not a Flour Mill now. It has been taken over by the Morris & Belvoir Laundry Co. There were also two Malt Offices in Mountsorrel. These made the malt to be sold to the malt houses that brewed their own beer.

Mountsorrel has a lot of industry today, a box factory, a hosiery factory, an elastic web factory, two boot and shoe factories, the Rolls Royce Engineering Works and the Morris & Belvoir Laundry, also large Bus Garage.

Regarding the boating on the River Soar, there appeared a notice, that the river was opened on Oct. 26th 1794 for the carrying of merchandise. Two boat loads of coal were sent to Leicester from Derbyshire on that date, which cheapened the price of coal from twelve pence to nine pence per cwt.

The flour mill mentioned above, and now taken over by the Morris & Belvoir Laundry had flood-gates which used to regulate the water in the River Soar. The mill was built in 1775 and was owned by Mr. J. S. Smith, who was a magistrate and a big member of the Quorn Baptist Chapel.

The mill did a tremendous trade all round the country. The flour all had to be delivered by three horses and a wagon at all hours, day and night. Opposite the mill, where the Central Methodist Chapel now stands, used to be six thatched cottages. They were entered by three steps up, from the road. One of the cottagers owned a large box mangle. The villagers used to take their washing there, to be mangled. The charge was about two pence per basketful.

Next to these cottages on the main road lived the Quarry Manager, Mr. Statham. They kept the horses and carts, for the carting of the stone at the back of the houses. Next to Mr. Statham's was a big barn with a big door. This barn was pulled down and the present four cottages built. A little further on was a big house, occupied by Dr. Green. This is now made into two and known as Rock House. Just before reaching the railway bridge over the road is a road leading off to the left, called New Rd. This leads up to the Quarry and the coal wharf which supplies Mountsorrel with coal, conveyed from the main line at Barrow, up the Granite Company's line to Mountsorrel.

The Old Red Lion Coffee House has recently been pulled down. The Quarry Reading Room has recently been acquired for use as the St. Peter's Church Hall. The Coffee House was open before 6.00am to provide coffee for Quarry men on their way to work. Mr. McGowan was the caterer.

Beyond the Loughborough Rd. Chapel stand six three-storey buildings, extending into Bond Lane. This lane leads up to the Mountsorrel Commons. The top-storey of these houses were used by frame-work knitters in former days.

After passing Bond Lane we come to some alms-houses, given by Mr. Castledine, for eligible widows or spinsters. Crossing over the road we see the Granite House, occupied by the Manager of the Quarry. It was here in late years that the Quarry Horses were kept. The stables are now pulled down, as no horses are used.

Passing under the bridge we come to the Granite Company's Offices & Wharf, where they used to load the boats with stone, before the railway was made. My father worked here as a boy in the offices. The larger of these offices was built on the site of two thatched cottages. One of these cottages was a shop that sold cooked meats, sausages etc. This shop was opposite the New Rd. One day I witnessed a horse bringing a load of coal down there. The load got master of him and forced him across the road and through the shop window. They had to push the cart back and rebase the horse as well as possible. The horse was soon about at work again.

I, William Pepper, Jr. took over the 'Home Farm' in 1905. Also the 'Buddon Wood Farm'. The 'Home Farm' was taken over for a stud farm, for breeding Shire Horses and large black pedigree pigs. The 'Buddon Wood Farm' was used for store cattle, sheep etc. A lot of it was also arable land. I had some very fertile river land by the side of the River Soar, which I used to graze Irish Bullocks on. I retained these farms until 1948, when I retired. I had forty three happy years there under the tenancy of the Earl of Lanesborough of Swithland Hall, Leics.

The Busy River Soar Running Through Leicestershire To The River Trent - By William Pepper Jr.

According to the 'Gentleman's Magazine' of Oct. 26th 1794 the first two Canal Boats laden with Coleorton & Derbyshire coal, set out from Loughborough to Leicester. They were greeted at Leicester with flags and a band of music. By transporting coal by boat the price of coal would now be brought down from 12^D & 13^D per cwt to 9^D per cwt.

On entering the canal basin in Belgrave Gate, the boats were greeted by loud cheers. The Committee boarded the Coleorton Boat or delivered an impressive speech, after which they passed along under the bridges until they reached the Wharf. They were given three cheers by the joyous citizens.

In the year 1850 my Grandfather came from Kegworth to Mountsorrel to fetch two boat loads of road stone to deliver at his father's Wharf at Kegworth for repairing the roads at Kegworth. He put his horse up at the Public House called 'The Exhibition Inn'. He heard that this said Inn, would be for sale. It consisted of a good coal wharf, where boats could draw in, the same as his father's wharf at Kegworth, so he decided he must have it.

At this time, the Mountsorrel Granite Co. were sending all their stone by boat. This made the river very busy indeed. My Grandfather now became a publican and a coal merchant. When he delivered stone into Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire for the Granite Co. he brought coal back for his own customers.

In 1860 the Granite Co. built a bridge over the River Soar. Over the bridge they built a railway to join up with the Midland Railway. This spoilt the transport of stone by boat, as it could be transported by rail much quicker. My Grandfather kept his pair of boats, and occasionally got an order for two load of stone in-to the colliery districts when he could bring back coal for his customers.

In 1873 my Grandfather took the farm across the street. It was later known as the 'Home Farm'. He asked my father to take over the Exhibition Inn & the coal wharf. I, young William Pepper, only 4 yrs old, nearly lived at the farm. My Grandfather, still retained the boats. When he did get an order from the Granite Co. he sent men with the boats, & still brought loads of coal back for my father.

I was with my Grandfather at the farm until I was about 18 yrs old. He then told me that I should never do any good. At this time I was working from 5.30am to 7pm each day. Saturdays were 5.30am to 4pm & Sundays, I had to feed the cattle. I left my Grandfather.

I think my Grandfather regretted his speech to me, as he offered me the canal boats, if I would work them myself. I went to ask if the Granite Co.'s had any

orders for boating stone. They gave me an order to take two boat loads to Derby, so I bought a horse & took the stone & brought back two loads of gas lime at 9^D per ton.

Then I had another order for two boat loads of stone to Radford, near Nottingham. Then I went up the canal to the collieries for two boat loads of coal. (Woodside best and a boat load of Nutbrook coal). They would only let me have half a load of Woodside best, so I had to make up with Nutbrook. I brought these two boat loads for my father, who had taken over the pub & coal wharf. He sold the Woodside best at 10° per cwt & the Nutbrook at 8^D per cwt retail.

The Granite Co. then gave me some long distance journeys to Northampton & Kensal Green Gas Works, London. I also had shorter journeys in between such as Crick, Welford & Winwick. Owing to so much stone going by rail, we had to wait so long for an order to come along by boat. This meant that I was often out of work for a fortnight, so I decided to sell my boats and get a job. I sold my boats (or rather gave them away) to a coal merchant in Loughborough. I got a job as an apprentice to a Pork Butcher in Loughborough.

Certain boats were very busy on the Soar. Fellows & Morton ran a light boat carrying 20 tons from Nottingham to London. They earned perishable goods such as tea, sugar etc. They called it the fly boat. They changed horses every so far. The boats that were carrying slack to the Gas works, also the boats that were carrying pig iron to the Stanton Iron Works, in fact all boats that carried heavy goods were gradually dropping out, until there wasn't a horse boat on the Soar. Later, the Canal Company's started putting engines in to some of the boats in an effort to revive it. However it all failed. Now it is all pleasure boats : 1960.