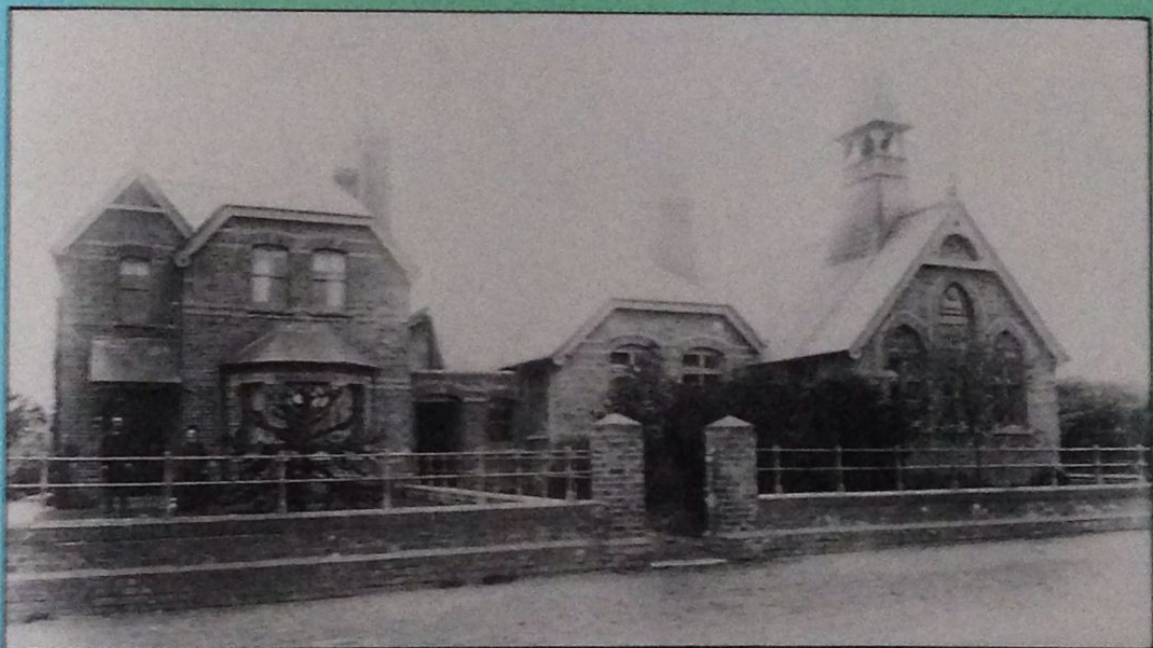


THE STORY
OF
SARACENS HEAD

SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE

by Chris Chouler
and Mary Waters



THE STORY OF SARACENS HEAD

A FENLAND VILLAGE

by Chris Chouler
and Mary Waters



This sign originally hung outside "The Old Saracen's Head Inn" reputed to have been over 400 years old, and demolished in 1961. The village derived its name from this inn.

This sign was obtained from Steward and Patterson, the last owners of the inn, by Mr. A.D. Temple, the headmaster from 1943 until 1965. .

Dedication

Dedicated to my late father. He was the local correspondent for the Lincolnshire Free Press and Spalding Guardian from 1890 to 1925 and constructed a monumental scrapbook of his newspaper cuttings without which the story of Saracens Head and district could not have been written.



*Entrance to the village from the north in the 1890's.
Note narrow bridge. House on right is the Bakery. The General Store kept by Henry
Stevenson next.*

*Note the old pram and the little girls dress outside the store.
You can feel the silence when looking at these photos of days gone by.*

Contents

1. Early History
2. The Inns
3. Education
4. Religion
5. The Two Manor Houses
6. Trades and Occupations
7. Landscape
8. The Farms
9. Village Life
10. Extracts from Mr. W.H. Chouler's scrapbook
11. Mansion House
12. Orchard Close
13. Ancient & Modern Times
14. Aerial View of Village

Acknowledgments

I want to thank all the people who have helped me with information and have answered questions so patiently.

It would be impossible to list them all but this booklet owes much to their help. Also those people who lent me old photographs which I had copied.

My late father had old school photos dating back to 1888 and photographs of Saracen's Head, all of which I had copied. I took many photographs myself of the present day.

Thanks to Mrs. Grace Barnett for a photograph of the old drovers inn "The Old Saracen's Head" and all the information about it. To Charlie Carter for past memories of his father and grandfather who ran the threshing business and Jack Slator who gave me the information about the Blacksmiths shop.

C.C.

As most people will know, before the book was completed Chris had died. I have tried to put things together as best I can to form a book that is interesting.

The word "I" sometimes means me.

It was understood that I would complete this book. I did not feel I could include all the older houses.

M.W.

Introduction

Bartholomews Gazateer of the British Isles lists Saracen's Head as a hamlet 2 miles north-west of Holbeach, Lincolnshire — with Post Office.

The dictionary says that a hamlet is a small village, especially one without a church. People still say in conversation "I am going into the village" and we shall refer to it as the village for the purposes of this book.

The main road that passes through the centre of Saracen's Head is the Washway Road, although today it is known as the A17. Before I started typing this the By-pass had been completed. The Washway Road was a great highway years ago, thousands of beasts passed through on their way from Scotland and the North of England to markets in East Anglia and elsewhere.

On the north side of the village where Saracen's Head bridge is "the bridge bend" was known as "Calamity Corner" because of the vast number of accidents over the years.

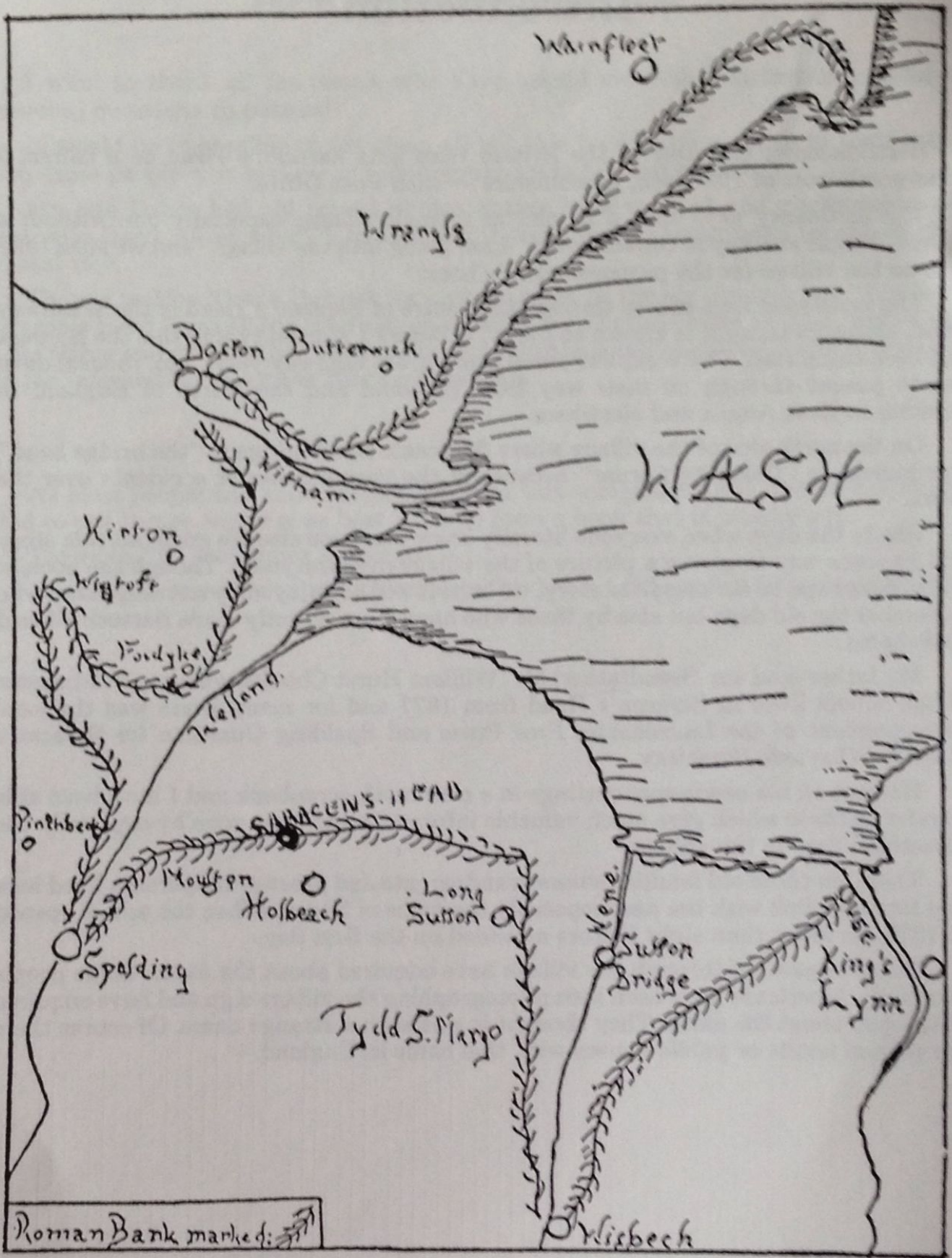
Really the days when everyone literally knew everyone else are gone but this story will go some way to giving a picture of the village over the years. Though the booklet will not perhaps be the complete story, we hope it will be enjoyed by not only those who remember the old days but also by those who have more recently made Saracen's Head their home.

My father (and our Grandfather) Mr. William Hurst Chouler who was headmaster of the school lived at Saracen's Head from 1877 and for many years was the local correspondent of the Lincolnshire Free Press and Spalding Guardian for Saracen's Head & Whaplode Washway.

He kept all his newspaper cuttings in a mammoth scrapbook and I have been able to refer to these which give much valuable information of days gone by especially the disastrous fires in the village.

There are those old families whose grandparents and great-grandparents lived here and formed a link with the past especially the name of Slator. When the school opened in 1878, no fewer than eight Slaters attended on the first day.

Tourists passing through the village have enquired about the name. Some people especially Americans have been seen photographing the village sign and have enquired at the pub about the name. They thought it was such a strange name. Of course there are several hotels or public houses with this name in England.



THE ROMAN BANK



Early History

The oldest part of Saracen's Head is the old Roman Bank.

In this part of Lincolnshire the Romans undertook the enormous task of making the Roman Bank all the way from Tydd to the Humber, over 150 miles long. Sections of this old sea barrier remain where our own people have constructed roads on top of this bank. The rest of the bank was cleared away many years ago. It is thought that the Roman sea banks were made during the 3rd (third) century. Sections of this bank still remain between Moulton Seas End and Saracen's Head where the road has been constructed on top of the bank for many years. The road is called Roman Bank. On the east side of the village a continuation of the road through to the village of Holbeach Bank is also called Roman Bank. Nowadays this piece of road is flat and the bank was cleared away during the last century. Of course Holbeach Bank was so named because of the old sea bank in that Parish. The centre of Saracen's Head is on a rise where the bank passed and had been partly levelled. Nowadays of course Saracen's Head and Holbeach Bank are joined and all the new houses that are built have made it a built up area.

I (M.W.) can remember when Holbeach Bank was much more lonely, more like it was when my mother, Chris and their family were small and more as the older people knew it.

The Story of Saracen's Head

In early times Saracen's Head was known as Saltney which means "Island of Salt." We shall go back this far in this book.

This name was derived from the mound which stands in a meadow covering several acres and is from 12 to 15 feet high.

The mound stands on the sea side of the Roman Bank and is a relic of the salt making days. A by-road leading into the village from Whaplode is known as "Saltney Gate". "Gate" means a road or way to, in this case the way to Saltney.

A short distance along Pipwell Gate to the west of the village the meadow is surrounded by a high thorn hedge.

Many hundreds of years ago it was an important salt manufacturing centre. The Romans and Anglo-Saxons relied on salt to preserve food for a large part of the year.

The mound consists of pure salt with occasional layers of peat ashes.

The process of making salt was to let the dirty sea water run into many pits or pans and there let it remain until all the silt settled at the bottom.

The clean water was then taken out and boiled in coppers which were heated by peat or by reeds which were very plentiful in the fens.

When the brine was boiled the water evaporated, leaving the salt in the coppers.

That explanation gives you a rough idea how the salt was obtained.

The silt taken out of the pits or pans was put in a heap and in the course of centuries would accumulate and form the mound one sees today.

On very old maps this area is marked "camp" and on the earlier ordnance survey maps it is marked "Saltern".

The mound only serves today to remind us of the industry of our forebears, who were employed in many such works on the coast of Lincolnshire.

Saltmaking on the Wash shores depended on large quantities of peat turves from the fen to boil the brine.

The 13th century saw a combination of wet seasons which caused flooding and the salt works were affected by abnormally high tides.

The whole district of the fens was converted into a lake and rendered the taking of turves impossible and that salt making failed as the fens provided no alternative fuel.

In recent years much of the soil has been carted away by farmers and the local council, and they were asked to report any important discoveries they might make. The unusual thing about Saltney is the absence of any sea shells.

As everyone knows who lives in Lincolnshire, the waters of the Wash are very silty, especially when coming up the rivers and over the marshes and the water which settled in these pans would be similar to that which comes up the Welland and this would leave a large deposit of silt at the bottom of the pits and pans which would require cleaning out every few days.

Rock salt was not worked in England until the seventeenth century and by this time the salt industry in Lincolnshire was finally dead.

It was a major industry, making Lincolnshire one of the country's leading producers. The salt was exported inland well beyond Lincolnshire. Each saltern had sufficient common pasture in the fen to maintain oxen and horses, used particularly for carting away blocks of salt wrapped in woollen cloths.

Boats were also used especially to bring in peat from the Fenland peat turf grounds.

There must have been some sort of hutments for the workers to live in, the earlier ones made of mud and wattle with reed roofs.

The Wash had decreased in area as the edges silted up permanently. One of the greatest saltmaking areas was the mouth of the Fleet river. Extensive mounds of waste were established at Saracen's Head (at the mouth of the Whaplode river). There were salt-pans between Gosberton and Sutterton, against the bank of the Bicker haven and at Holbeach Hurn.

Outside the meadow were other mounds of waste. A little chapel was built on one of the hills in Pipwell Gate in 1855 and became known by the local people as the "Hill Chapel". It was demolished in 1978.

A farm half a mile away with the house built on another hill became known as Hill Farm, and no doubt there were other areas of waste nearer to the sea that have been cleared away during the last century.

One reason why the mound has remained in this area for hundreds of years is because the meadow has always been used for cattle, otherwise it would have been cleared away long ago.

During the summer the chapel fete and children's sports were held in the grass fields that contained the Saltney mound, kindly lent by the owner, the late Mr. "Bob" Waite.

The children obtained great pleasure in playing on the hills in the field but never knowing why they were there. The hills were the home of many rabbits, and burrows were everywhere.

The Inns

The Old Saracen's Head Inn

Saracen's Head took its name from an old drovers inn of the same name.

Extract from the book by e.h. Gooch "Place names in Holland, Lincolnshire and their meaning."

Saracen's Head — a hamlet in the parish of Whaplode, takes its name from an inn, so named because it was the ambition of anyone returning from the Crusades to bring home the head of an 'infidel' or Saracen.

One who was 'fortunate' enough to possess such a gruesome relic was looked on as a hero. People came for miles to see the skull of one who was not a 'Christian.'

Naturally the 'lucky' owner did not let such an opportunity slip by of profiting from these visitors to his house. He sold them refreshment and the house thus became known as "The Saracens Head."

The old inn stood by the side of the Washway Road on the north side of the village and the village grew up around the old inn. In the 19th century the village was known as Whaplode Saracens Head (being always in the Parish of Whaplode.)

Sometime during the last century the old pub closed and another inn opened in a private house at the South end of the village and became known as the New Saracens Head and it remains to the present time.

The Saracens Head opened again as The Old Saracens Head. It was reputed to be 400 years old and was the oldest building in the village.

In the early days the inn had a thatched roof but later this was replaced by a zinc roof. In the 1920's the word in large letters SOULBY was painted on the roof with white luminous paint and could be seen for a great distance when travelling from Boston advertising Soulbys Ales.

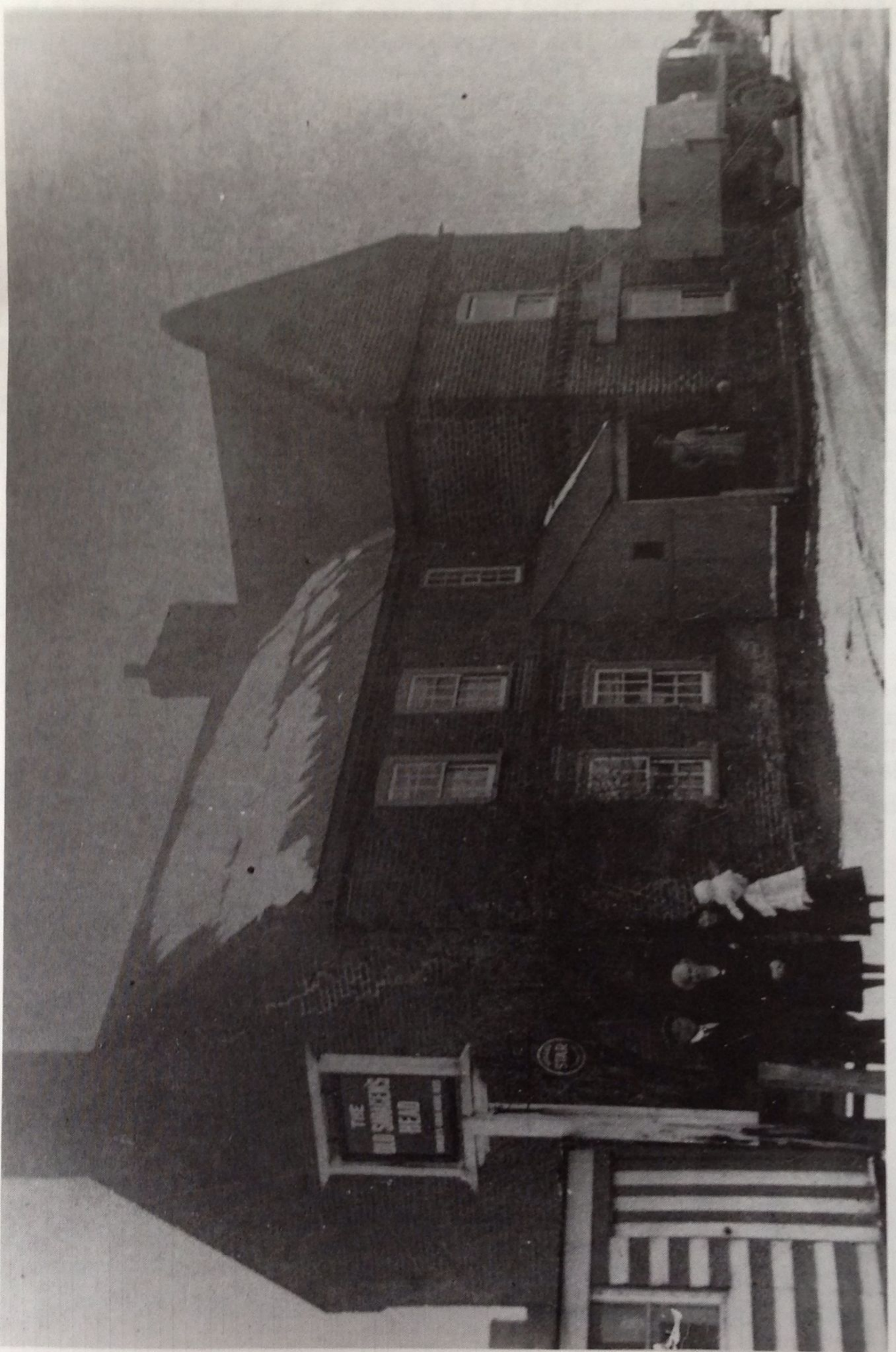
It was a Drover's inn and drovers would put their cattle in a 3½ acre grassfield adjoining the inn with a pond in it for the beasts to drink water and in earlier times on common ground to the north of the village while the drovers stayed overnight at the inn.

Inside the inn across the stairway was a little gate to stop the drovers' dogs from going up the stairs.

In the tap-room there was a pipe rack where the customers put their pipes. A skittle alley made of wood with a tiled roof was at the rear of the inn. Skittle matches took place with the other inns in the area.

Music was supplied by a Polyphone. It was 6ft high and a large steel disc was fitted facing outwards in the top half of the cabinet and a glass door closed. A tune was played twice for a penny. The inn was sketched by a tramp on the road for 2/6d in the 1920's. This was a lot of money in those days and the sketch is still in the possession of the married daughter of the last landlord.

In harvest time several smallholders stacked their corn in the large yard of the inn. The small stacks were threshed by Carters Threshing Tackle. The inn needed repairing badly but owing to the falling off of trade it would not pay to have it done, so it closed down.



Old Inn.

Sadly, the old inn was demolished in 1961. A tiny brick building still remains and is used for tools by a local farmer and it acts like a memorial (while it stands) to the old Drovers Inn from which Saracens Head took its name. The inn had the usual clubs, competitions and matches in the 19th century and well into the 20th century. There was a large number of members present, the club room was crowded. There were several first class songs sung during the evening.

The host and hostess were Mr. & Mrs. Carter and the accounts were audited by Mr. Chouler. The annual meeting was reported in the Free Press.

This was a Dividing Club and the dividend distributed in December 1925 was 18s.10d. This was greatly appreciated by the 45 members. Officers and Committee were elected. This was the 31st annual meeting.

In living memory the old pub was kept by Mr. & Mrs. Reid.

Beer was brewed locally years ago at Penny Hill and at Brewery House in High Street, Holbeach owned by John Hardy Carter. The beer barrels were brought on horse drawn trollies and years before that inns brewed their own beer.

Note:

Penny Hill was named from the Latin "Penna" meaning "a wing". They used to fly hawks there years ago. Thus many names are a derivation or "corruption".

The New Inn

The New Inn was situated in Pipwell Gate on the edge of the Saltern. Like so many other inns in the district it had finally closed down in the mid-sixties. Motorists were going further afield and trade was beginning to drop off. It is now a private house. The inn made an impressive sight painted all white in its hey-day.

A shop selling fruit and general stores was tried after the inn closed. The private house is now called "The Old New Inn". This ridiculous name is a reminder of the old pub.

Mr. John Feeney was the last tenant of the inn. When he left he took over Cecil Hotchkins farm in Saltney Gate in 1974. The New Inn was owned by John Hardy Carter of the old brewery at Holbeach. In 1905 it was sold to Soames and Steward & Patterson were the last owners of this inn.

The Inn had the usual clubs, competitions and matches in the old days. In 1912 a Ploughing Match in connection with the New Inn was held on Mr. G. Twells field. The Competitors numbered 60 and all these were experienced men at the plough.

There used to be a public house called "The Carpenters Arms" in the house on the Bank Road that later became a Post Office. We think this was just an ordinary pub, but it is worthy of mention. I have heard my Grandma say that her father used to go there. We can only imagine those slow-living days a long time before the days that we know.

(See Orchard Close)

The New Saracens Head Inn

In the early part of the century there were three inns in the village. Before the turn of the century there were five.

At the rear of the New Saracens Head was a paddock in the old days before 1930 where sheep and cattle rested before going on their way but this building was not actually a Drovers Inn.

A cutting from the scrapbook mentioned that two steam engines pulled into the yard while the drivers stayed the night before the First World War. During the early part of the century Mr. Harry Slator was the local baker before taking over as Landlord of the New Inn. This was during the first war. Then during the second war the Slaters moved to the New Saracens Head. One daughter, Miss Connie Slator, became the Landlady.

There were some alterations done and it became privately owned and a Free House. In history the usual meetings were held of the Dividing Clubs who then paid a dividend to members. They were called the Eclipse and the Excelsior Clubs. Mr. Hardy the blind fiddler accompanied the songs which were sung between toasts and speeches.

On Boxing Day 1893, a supper was provided by Mr. Bailey who was then the Landlord. About 30 people attended this and the dividend allocated was 25s.7d. each. Mr. J. Mashford was again elected Secretary.

People called Cope and then Franks ran this Inn and then Slaters in more recent times. 30th April 1980 was the last night the Slaters were at the Inn, being in that line of work for 65 years.



Education

Whaplode Saracens Head Board School 1878 — 1975

Board School means a school under the management of a School Board. This was discontinued in 1903. From then on the school came under the Holland Education Committee. The name Whaplode in the title ceased to exist and it became just Saracens Head School.

The most important building in the village was the school. It served the village for 97 years but it was destined never to see its centenary.

On the first day of opening on 13th May 1878, thirty-nine children — 30 boys and nine girls had their names put on the register. At some times over the years there were over 100 children on the register and on the last day there were 78 children attending the school. There were nine headmasters during the lifespan of the school. In the days before school buses some of the youngsters walked three miles to school carrying their lunches with them. As they reached the village they were greeted by the school bell letting them know that 9 a.m. was near. The bell disappeared in the late 1920's when the belfry had to be removed because it was unsafe.

Before the school was built many children walked to school in neighbouring villages. Also a lady who lived in a house in Saltney Gate, taught many children locally and they paid 1d. a week. The children took their own slates and slate pencils. One side of the slate was plain and the other side was marked off in squares for sums. A damp rag was used for rubbing out. She had bead-frames for counting and no doubt there were other lessons given in a very elementary way. This house was demolished in the last century. Up to the 1920's during playtime and dinner breaks the children played all over the road in the centre of the village.

In 1880 Mrs. Slator the teacher of the infants for many years was paid £13 a year. By 1920 the Headmaster received a wage of £150 per annum approx. Mr. A. Temple who was headmaster for 22 years, while there made a retirement presentation to the longest serving teacher at the school. Miss Bertha Reed joined the school as a four year old pupil before Mr. Chouler was Headmaster and stayed 61 years as pupil and teacher. This was a wonderful record. She finally retired four years after Mr. Temple started there in 1947. Mr. Temple began a school magazine which was a favourite in the village for several years.

In 1948 Moulton Seas End School closed down. Mr. Temple welcomed the pupils to his roll and wrote in the school magazine:-

“The closing of any village school is a tragedy. The very young children must of necessity undertake a longer journey and be away from home for longer each day and the centre of the village fades.”

The school building was used for all local functions, numerous concert parties with local talent and regular whist drives, especially at the turn of the century. By this time cooking facilities had been installed and the children had cooked dinners. With extra pupils on the register now a permanent brick classroom was built separate from the main school, and later a portable classroom to cope with the number of scholars. When the school was built the bricks were made from the clay dug from Marsh Meadows pit at the end of Cranmore Lane, Holbeach and brought to the village by Mr. Henry Slator, a Saracens Head man with a horse and cart.

Paraffin lamps in the school were the only means of lighting during the Winter months until electricity arrived in the early 1930's and a coke stove in each room was the only means of heating.

The flag mast in front of the school was put up by the village people for the Coronation of the Queen in 1953.

In the earlier 1900's the Summer holidays were arranged late so that the children could help with the potato picking.

On 10th Feb. 1912 it was reported in the Lincs. Free Press that the iron Weathercock that had reigned supreme on the top of the school for 34 years, attempted an aerial flight and disappeared from its perch.

Many of the inhabitants were weather prophets and were sorry about this incident as they were interested in the vagaries of the wind which often foretells the coming weather.

The children were presented with prizes for most regular attendance in each standard during the year. Some children had to walk 1½ or 2 miles each day and these had prizes. There were also prizes for progress and good conduct. In October 1988 there were 99 children on the register.

One Headmaster for 38 years

William Hurst Chouler

(1887 — 1925)

The longest serving headmaster was Mr. Chouler. He first saw the village in 1887 and finally retired after many happy years in 1925. He came to visit the village of course before taking the job. He travelled by steam train from Peterborough where they had been living to Holbeach. He then hired a bicycle to travel the two miles to Saracens Head. In 1887 on this journey there were only three houses and it was so lonely and the roads so rough he thought he might stay for two years when he took the job. He actually stayed for 38 years as Headmaster and then another 18 years in retirement.

William Chouler was a remarkable man. He acted as a leader in the village in many ways. He had several sidelines. He was the Peterborough area agent for the London & Lancashire Insurance Company. This meant a visit to Peterborough twice a year in the days when the only means of getting there was steam train from Holbeach station. He was a Land Surveyor and cycled round to the local farms with the measuring equipment on his cycle. When I was a small boy I used to "lead the chain" for my father and he gave me sixpence for doing it. So did my sister. He bred and showed rabbits at various Shows especially the breed of Chinchillas.

He had an orchard at Holbeach Bank, one mile away, growing apples, pears, gooseberries and currants.

He was Auditor for village clubs, collected butterflies and kept pigs. He had a marvellous collection of stuffed birds.

Most important, he was the Lincolnshire Free Press reporter. He reported all the local news for the village and surrounds. Coming out of this he constructed a monumental scrap book of newspaper cuttings dating back to the 1890's. His scrapbook ranked almost as a museum piece.

He was 26 when he first arrived at the school. He married later in life an ex-pupil, Kate Mashford. The couple had four children. Mr. Chouler died in 1943 at the age of 82.

He was a Councillor in the Whaplode Parish for many years.

He believed in maintaining discipline at the school and even ran outside after boys with a cane. Boys were seen running through the village with Mr. Chouler after them.

In those days the roads in the fens were in an appalling condition and in the 1890's he possessed a cycle with hard rubber tyres.

There was a large garden with the school and he planted it with fruit trees. Under the trees there grew daffodils which were sent to market.

He had an advert in the Free Press in February 1904 for Grand Black Minorca Cockerels at 5 shillings each.

He obtained third prize for Belgian hare rabbits. This was at the East Sussex Livestock Society's Show at Worthing in 1895.

We have never heard of anyone doing so many things like this as sidelines.



The Teachers

Religion

The Two Chapels

Religion played a very important part in the life of the community. Two brick built chapels were built in the last century. They were both on the Holbeach Circuit Plan and were listed under the title of Whaplode Washway which is another name used for the village and Washway Road area. Congregations gathered from a wide area on Sundays.

The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, the larger of the two is of course now in ruins. It was built in 1825. When the chapel was built it was only half the size. Messrs. J. Slator built the second half in the 1860's. A full roof to cover the whole building was built in 1928 and a concrete floor replaced the original board floor.

It closed in 1971 but had been used for 146 years.

Years ago preachers came on horseback, on foot and cycling. If they were lucky they came by pony and trap. There was a small stable at the rear for the horses who needed it. Of course the highlight of the year was the anniversary.

The other great occasion was the annual outing to Skegness for children and parents when most of the village went. This was the only outing that most people had in one whole year.

The Harvest Festival was held on the first Sunday in October each year. No doubt chapels like this must have looked their best when decorated with garden produce, flowers and sheaves of corn.

It was only in the last few years of its life that the chapel was registered for marriages and only one wedding ever took place there.

When the modern church was built at Holbeach Clough there combined the village chapel, Holbeach Bank chapel and the old tin structure of St. Martins. This is known as St. Martins New Church.

The second chapel and smaller of the two was built in 1855 and closed in 1946 lasting only 91 years.

It was known as the United Methodist chapel, commonly called the "little chapel" and the "hill chapel" by all local people.

It was built on the small hill adjoining the by-road in Pipwell Gate. The "hill" was a small mound being part of the "Saltern" in the meadow previously mentioned.

In those days there were teas held each year and sacred concerts. Also, there was a Fete and childrens sports. This was held in the field or meadow (adjoining the chapel) kindly lent by Mr. Bob Waite and containing the Saltney Mound. The children were able to play on the hills in the field.

When it closed in 1946 the chapel was used as a house for many years. Later it became a farm store. In 1978 the old building was demolished and a new dwelling house was built in its place.



The "Little Chapel", or the "Hill Chapel", in Pipwell Gate. Built in 1855 known as the "Reform Chapel", then changed to "Free Methodist" and later finally to the "United Methodist" Chapel closed in 1946. Demolished February 1978. After 1946 it was used as a dwelling house with a new chimney and windows made in the wall. Later it became a farm store.

The Two Manor Houses

Saracen's Head possesses two manor houses. Pipwell Manor which is 17th Century on the south side of the village and Whaplode Manor which is 18th Century on the north side, both by the side of the Washway Road.

Pipwell Manor is one of the oldest houses in Saracen's Head.

Two of the bedroom windows in the front were block up in the days of the window tax. Two dormer windows in the roof were removed in the 1920's. The house had 14 inch walls. Very old coins were found in the land around the Manor House. Pipwell Manor has been included in the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest in the area.

Mr. Parrinder Waite farmed there and his father before him which takes us back beyond 1850. Mr. Waite died in 1928 and one of the great characters of Saracen's Head had gone for ever. He was a Councillor on the Whaplode Parish Council which included Saracen's Head.

He bought the first car in the district in 1915, an "Upmobile" that was new in 1912.

There was a large orchard, a very big kitchen garden and a grass tennis court. His daughters rode horses. He rode round the farm with a pony pulling a tub cart with a little door in the back.

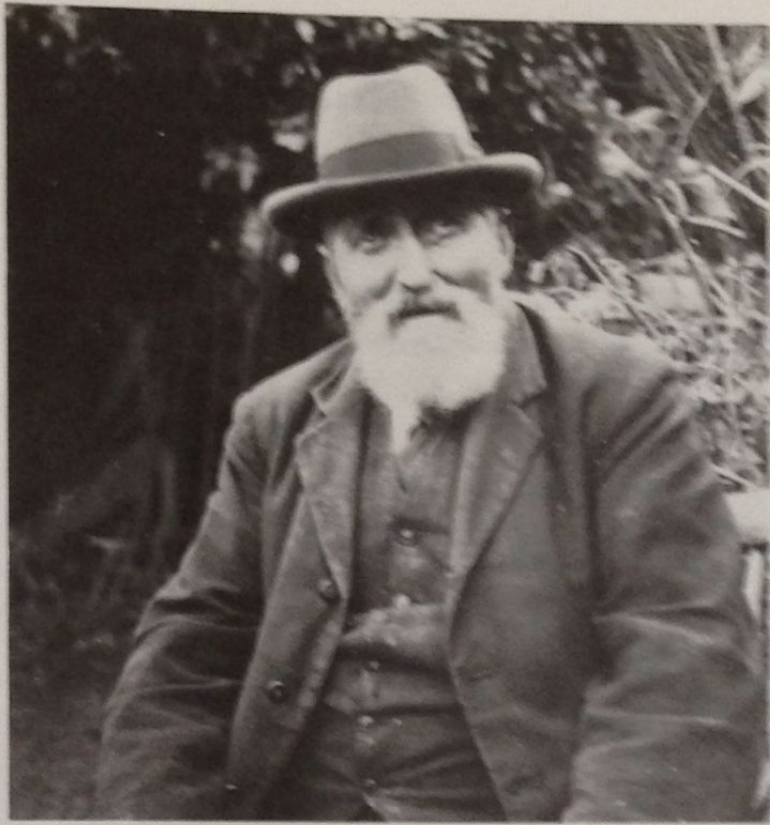
In the last century and up to 1920 much of the farm was grassland surrounded by high thorn hedges. A large number of beasts and sheep were kept. Mr. Waite employed a shepherd. The farmyard was full of stacks of corn after the harvest and thatching of the stacks was a skilled occupation. The corn was threshed by Barbers steam threshing tackle during the Winter months.

The death of Mr. Edmund Parrinder Waite on January 6th, 1928, aged 86 years removed from the district a well-known and respected farmer and the oldest public man in the vicinity.

He was the oldest member of the East Elloe Rural District Council. He was a member of the Whaplode School Board until its extinction. His father was Mr. Samuel Waite.

Mr. Parrinder Waite owned land in many of the surrounding parishes and took great pride in his livestock. A more respected man would be difficult to find. He was always trying to do someone a good turn and had been known to lend his waggons and carts even when he had been needing them himself.

He was on the Holbeach Board of Guardians and was Chairman of Whaplode School Managers and also held office as a Magistrate. At one time he was one of the best known breeders of shire horses in the district. At his funeral at Holbeach his coffin was conveyed in a waggon drawn by two horses from the farm.



Mr. Parrinder Waite — View of Pipwell Manor

Whaplode Manor was built in 1737.

On the brick buildings outside are two dates in iron work figures 1736 and 1865. The bricks for the building were made on the site. On the roadside was a single cottage and a semi-detached cottage. These were the Grooms and Gardeners cottages.

The Manor House looked quite picturesque among all the trees and shrubs in a flat bleak fenland landscape. There were some fine specimens of Horse Chestnut and a large area of Elm trees at the rear of the house. The Whaplode River ran alongside the gardens with an entrance to the farm and house from the Washway Road by a bridge over the river.

In the Spring there were scores of rooks and dozens of nests were built at the top of the Elm trees. This was known as a Rookery and the cawing of the birds was terrific and could be heard from a great distance. Rook shooting took place for about one week from about 14th May and rook pies were made for eating purposes. There are no rooks there now. The gardens were beautiful, there were peacocks and peahens strutting about the gardens. A Shetland pony pulled one of the old fashioned lawnmowers years ago.

Mr. John Crawley took over the Whaplode Manor estate in 1872. There was one son, John Crawley and four daughters. One of them, Miss Gertrude did work for the Red Cross and was presented with the Empire Medal by the Duchess of Gloucester. The wording read "Gertrude Crawley; Dame of the British Empire. For services rendered to the British Red Cross".

The youngest daughter Miss Amy was a R.S.P.C.A. collector for many years. They kept donkeys and ponies in the paddock on the west side of the house and these were often fed from a small window partly protected from the bottom with iron bars.

John Crawley the son was the last man in this area to regularly drive his pony and trap to Holbeach and back for many years.

He also rode the same pony round the farm.

While the Manor House was still farmed by the Crawley family, a light railway was built out into the fields using a small gauge and was in use until the early 1950's. It must have been the last railway built in the district as it does not appear on the 1931 Ordnance Survey Map as others do. It was used to carry potatoes and other crops up to the farm yard and proved to be very useful during very wet weather. They also possessed a portable threshing engine to thresh the corn during the winter months.

After John Crawley died the farm changed hands many times.

With the passing of the ladies the Manor House ceased to play the role it had known in the past. The Whaplode Manor house and buildings were bought by Mr. David Wood and the site turned into a caravan park. The brick buildings were used for extra rooms and advertised for Bed and Breakfast. Evening meals by arrangement. A toilet block provides hot and cold water, hand basins, showers and laundry room.

The village is only a quarter of a mile away.

The Caravan Site is open from Easter to the end of November.

Nowadays the Manor House has an access road leading to it.

The site is full at Spalding's Flower Parade and there are even flags of various nations hoisted on flagmasts denoting the nationality of the caravan owners. It provides a base for touring South Lincolnshire and Norfolk. It is a good overnight stopping place.



Views of Whaplode Manor

Trades and Occupations

The Wheelwright & Carpenter & The Blacksmith

The Wheelwright & Carpenter's shop and the Blacksmith's shop stood side by side as you entered the village from the south side.

The two trades worked together to a certain extent.

In the early days the carpenter made carts and the blacksmith would put the iron rims round the wheels, what they called "shoeing the wheels."

In the 1880's John Wesley Mashford was the carpenter. He was not a religious man in spite of his name. There were ten children in the family. He lived in the house at the rear of the shop. (One of the children was Chris' mother). He was followed by John Bailey.

At the back of the shop was the saw-pit. Oak, Beech, Ash and Elm trees were the main species of wood required. Standing trees were bought. They would be felled and trimmed and brought back to the yard. The tree trunk was rested on planks of wood at ground level above the pit. With one man standing in the pit, another man standing outside on top of the tree trunk, the wood was cut into planks with a long crosscut saw. Later, steam driven saws came along and the rural skill of sawyer vanished. All skilled work was done by hand during the last century. When timber had been sawn the required planks and pieces it was carefully stacked for long periods for the wood to become seasoned.

The carpenter made quite a few agricultural items, most of which needed iron fittings supplied by the blacksmith. A regular item was the old wooden harrow. Field gates and wooden wheel barrows were other oft repeated lines. Complete wagons and carts were made for local farms when required. When John Bailey made wheels for his carts. "Striker" Slator would fit the iron tyres, made to shape from long strips of iron bars. The iron tyre was then heated and the red hot hoop was placed in position over the wooden wheel rim. This was sledge-hammered on to the wheel and cooled by pouring water on it, which causes it to shrink and fit tightly round the wheel. The skill of wheel making is not used any more.

Since the horse ceased to be the chief power of transport these interesting old shops have disappeared.

The carpenter was always the local undertaker and coffins were made regularly. A horse drawn funeral hearse with glass sides was used before motorised transport. John Bailey moved to the next village of Moulton Seas End to continue the same trade.

In 1922 Mr. Harry Dean started his carpentry business in J. Bailey's old shop. In 1928 he built his own shop in the centre of the village.

He carried on as the local carpenter and undertaker until he retired in the mid 1960's. His son Harry Dean carried on the business which he extended to employ three men and with another shop in Moulton Seas End where the son lived. The Saracen's Head shop ceased as a carpentry business in 1978.

In 1936 he had a new house built next to the shop and lived there until he died on Monday March 23rd 1981 aged 82 years.

In 1922 the first loads of timber that Mr. Dean received were delivered from the Boston Docks. It was brought 14 miles loaded on a dray pulled by two horses and the driver walked. That was before the days of motorised transport. The Dean family were carpenters in Saracen's Head for 56 years.

The blacksmith played a very important part in the life of the community. The making of farm implements and repairing of farm equipment needed the skill of the blacksmith. Shoeing horses was an enormous task. Some of the large farms had 40 horses and all came to the blacksmiths shop. Horses working on the land were only shod in the front whilst those going on the road were shod all round.

Two shoes cost 2/6d. In early times the Blacksmiths made the shoes themselves. It says in old writings that later they came from Belgium at £12 a ton.

John "Striker" Slator was the blacksmith at the turn of the century.

In "Whites Lincolnshire" of 1892 it states that Mabell Pratt Slator, father of John Slator carried on the business.

The skill and craftsmanship was passed on in the family. There was not much in the way of drawings and textbooks.

Mr. Slator made one set of seed harrows in 1932 for £3.

The blacksmith was the most important trade in the village in the last century and for many years the shoeing was most important work.

There were no tractors then of course and horses were used extensively on all the farms and supplied the main tractive power on the roads. The school children loved to look in at the open door as the old poem says as "The Village Blacksmith" was really there in Saracen's Head as it was in so many other villages.

In 1934 this old business finally ceased to exist in the village.

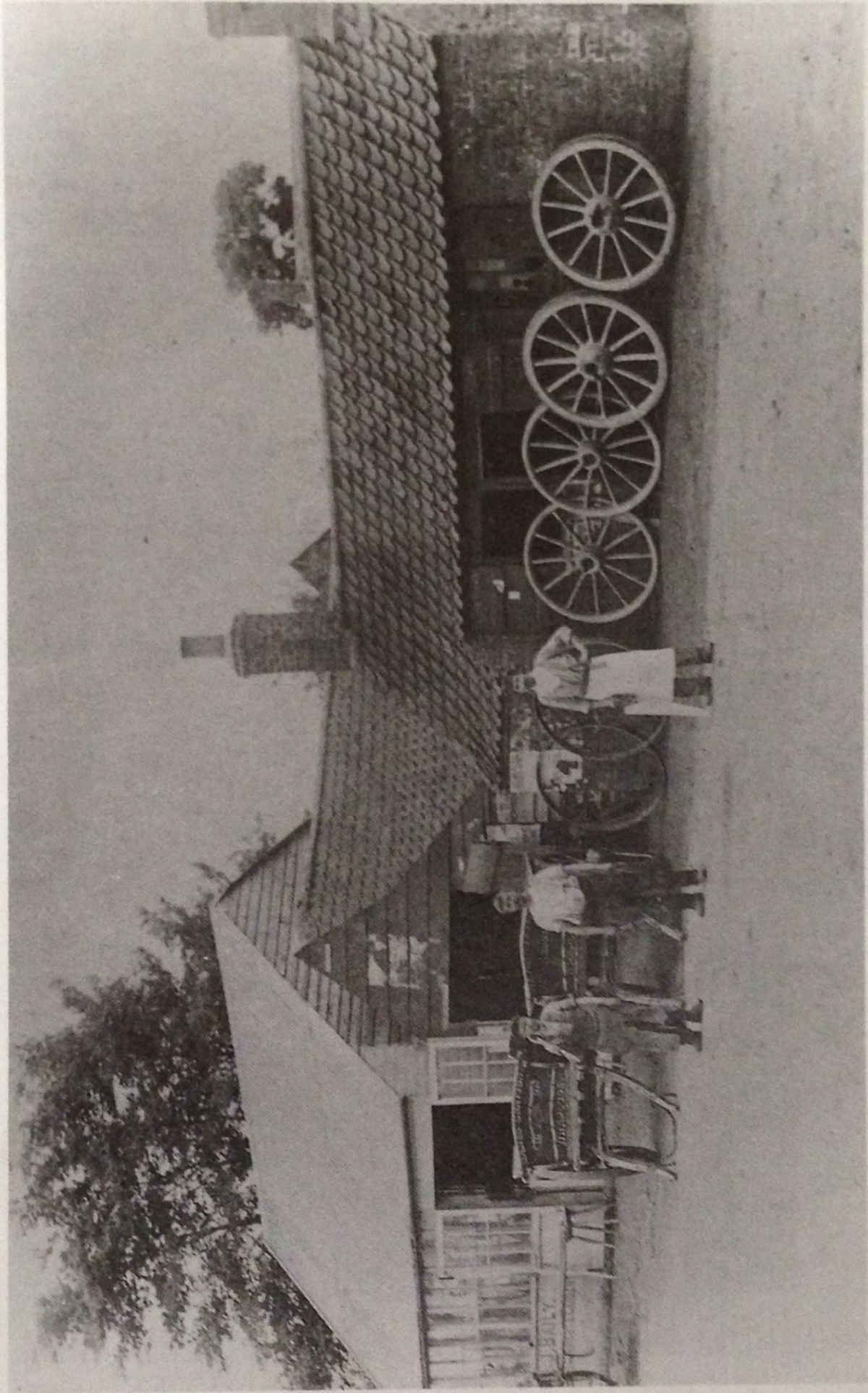
By this time tractors and other motorised transport were beginning to appear on the farms.

The following is just another poem about the decline of the Blacksmiths which is worth including in this book.

The Village Blacksmith

No more the anvils rhythmic beat
Rings its note o'er rural street
No more by brawny arm and skill
The bellows blown, or red flame spill.
No more the leather apron holds
The mare's fleet foot within its folds;
No more the tools from pegs descend
Their master's needs are at an end.
No more his smile to greet the day
And cheer the traveller on his way
The village loss is hard to bear
But we remember; we who care.

Marie Callender-Rule



The Blacksmiths Shop and Carpenter and Wheelwrights Shop (on left) after 1900. John "Striker" Slaton (centre), John Baily (carpenter on right), George Rowley (a journeyman blacksmith on left).

Date 1901 on carts.

Note the two iron rims used for putting round the wheels called "shoeing the wheels".

The General Store & Bakery at the turn of the century

The General Store and the Bakery stood next to each other on the main road in the village. The wooden store was in the occupation of Henry Stevenson, grocer, draper and provision merchant in the year 1890. Mrs. Edna Thrower took over this general store in 1916.

It was finally closed in 1956. Mrs. Thrower had kept the shop for 40 years. I (M.W.) remember it well from childhood. She had large jars of sweets on the shelves in the old fashioned way. She was a widow for many years and then it was sad for her when the shop closed. She lived in the ivy-covered house adjoining the shop. She died in the 1960's.

The Bakery was owned by Mr. Harry Slator. There was a bakehouse, stable and cornstore. He has two carts for his break, one horse for each cart. Before Harry Slator, Tip Hart was both the baker and butcher in 1880. He had a stall on Holbeach Market every Saturday until 9 p.m. The house was a dwelling house for many years after that until it was finally demolished in the 1960's. It was situated next to the bridge over the Whaplode river, known as Saracen's Head Bridge.

It would be the last building on the end of the row before the corner and bridge and there was a signpost pointing to Fosdyke.



Ivy House



The centre of Saracen's Head 1920's.

The General Store and the Bakery house in 1900 and outbuildings of the Old Saracen's Head Inn in the distance over the narrow bridge.

The Carrier's Cart business of Mr. Elsey was on the right further back along a short roadway. No pavements in those days.

The Butchers Shop

At the turn of the century the butchers shop and slaughterhouse were next to the school and often the beasts when they sensed they were going to be killed, got away and ran through the village until they were caught again. They had been known to run through the school yard.

One day when my mother (Chris' sister) was a little girl she was sitting with a doll in the front garden of the school house where she lived when a bullock came charging out across the railings into the garden. She screamed and ran indoors. The bullock broke the railings and these remained broken for at least 65 years.

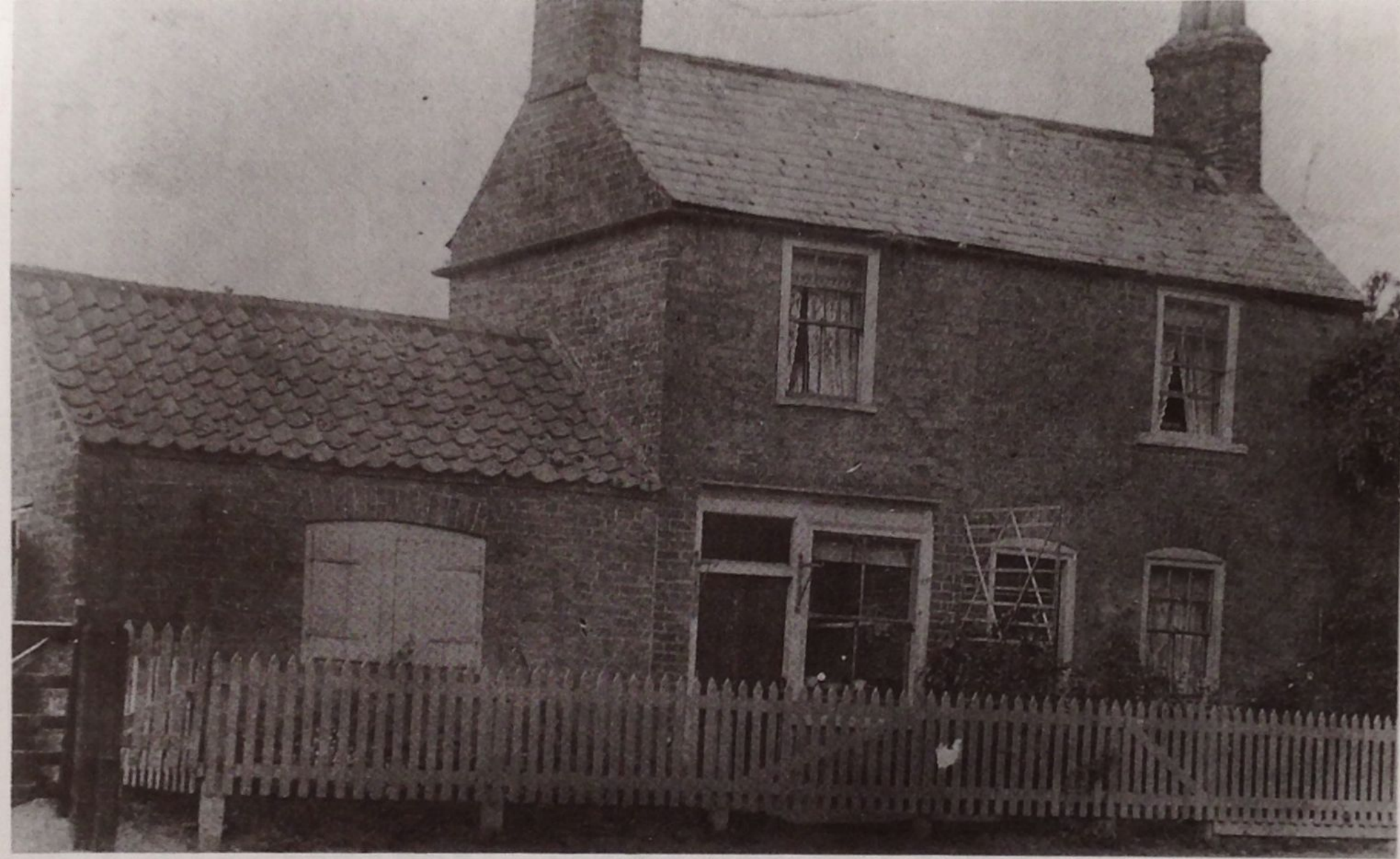
Mr. Benner Thorpe was the butcher at that time and he came on his meat round with a horse and specially built cart and cut your meat up in the cart. He was another great character in Saracen's Head in those days.

The most disastrous fire that the village ever saw happened on 6th February 1909 when the butchers shop, the house, and the buildings were gutted by fire. There was a gale blowing at the time and this terrified Mr. and Mrs. Woods at the Post Office on the Bank Road. Thousands of sparks blew down the road and over their house.

Outbuildings in those days were made of wood and easily burnt.

The family were homeless and neighbours took them in. The fire started in a haystack, it must have been very frightening. The Fire Brigade from Holbeach was drawn by two horses and the pump used was hand-pumped with the help of local people. A plentiful supply of water was obtained from the pit across the road. The gale that was blowing added to the devastation. The reflection in the sky was seen eight miles away at Spalding.

A new house and shop were built on the site, the one that remains today. Since those far off days, modern buildings have been built, a factory and shop constructed under new regulations and the name of Eric J. Swepstone & Son carry on the business. From the factory at Saracen's Head they sell cooked and uncooked meats, pork pies, pasties and all the usual things. Also, their specialist prize-winning Lincolnshire sausages. They are Wholesale and Retail Butchers, also Bakers & Confectioners.



*The slaughter house butcher's shop and house destroyed by fire on Wednesday evening
6th February, 1909.*

*The fire engine from Holbeach was drawn by 2 horses and the water pumped from "the
pit" in the Pipwell Manor grassfield.*

Mr. Benner Thorpe was the butcher at this time.

*Three horses and two beast were lost in the fire. Pigs were saved. The glow in the sky
could be seen at Spalding.*

The Post Office and General Store

In the 1890 volume of White's Lincolnshire it states that Henry Askew Woods, was Wheelwright, Carpenter and Sub-Postmaster at Saracen's Head, Holbeach.

His son, David Woods carried on running the Post Office in the same house in the Bank Road until 1930's when it was carried on from a bungalow in the centre of the village. So in those days the Post Office was merely a room in a private house which was used as a living room after closing hours.

Mr. Addington was Postmaster for a few years in the bungalow in the 1930's but sadly he was killed in an accident at Wards Corner, Moulton on a bicycle.

I (M.W.) remember Mrs. Addington serving us through the window of the bungalow on Summer days when I was very tiny.

On the side of the house was a wooden sign which just read "Post Office."

This continued until Albert Housham became the sub-postmaster and delivered groceries by car on a small round in the area. First he had a tin structure erected in Pipwell Gate to act as the village Post Office and General Store. Shortly after the Second World War the building moved to a site on the Bank Road which was part of the old orchard. The Sub-Postmaster delivered the mail himself by car, one delivery only before opening hours.

Before this mail was delivered by Mrs. Buxton on a bicycle twice a day.

Earlier it was a walking round but later postmen were allowed to use their own bicycles if they wished.

Upon Albert Housham's death in the 1950's his assistant Tom Hunt became the new Sub-Postmaster. While it was standing alone with no house attached, the Post Office was often broken into by thieves. In one such incident on 15th February, 1974, thieves ripped open the roof and took chocolates, tobacco and tinned foods and the whole stock of Easter eggs.

Mr. Tom Hunt retired early for health reasons in 1984 and Mervyn Bunn and his wife Jenny took over the Post Office and Village Store although they had two children. They lived a short distance from the old post office in a new house built in 1972. The Bunns had an extension built on their home to accommodate a new shop and post office and moved into the new store in October 1985. The Saracen's Head new Post Office was officially opened on 23rd November, 1985 and is known as the Willow Lodge Stores and Post Office. This is a lovely shop and Post Office.

At the turn of the century there were no telephones, there were no pensions to be paid out and the National Insurance Act was a thing of the future. Clearances and deliveries were done by horse drawn vehicles. Now we have this modern building in the same lovely setting.

The Police Station

Before the year 1900 the local Policeman lived in a house in the centre of the village. Later, and before the first world war, a private house situated down the Bank Road became the first local Police Station.

It was in the Saracen's Head area but a board outside had the words "Holbeach Bank Station, Lincolnshire Constabulary."

Sgt. Walker was the first officer and privately rode one of the first motorcycles with a red tank called a "flying eight."

Before 1900 the Policeman walked on his beat and later rode a cycle over a wider area.

There used to be hundreds of cases of people riding a bicycle without a light after lighting up time.

In 1936 a new Police house was built by the side of the Washway Road, known as the A17, on a piece of land bought from Pipwell Manor. In those days it was still known as the Holbeach Bank Station. It was occupied by a Police Constable.

By the 1950's motor bike patrols were started and a wider area covered. It ceased as a Police Station in 1971. By this time the Policeman was driving a Panda car. He continued to live in the Police house but operated from Holbeach. By 1979 the house ceased to be a Police house and has been a private house ever since. Pc Dunning was the last Constable to live in the house. A few names to be remembered from 1890 to modern times are Pc Warner, Pc Walker, Pc Wilkinson, Pc Wardlow, Sgt. Starr, Pc Lynch, Pc Russell, Pc Shaw and Pc Leggott.

Local Policemen lived in ordinary houses before Police houses were built of course. Some of these later reached a quite high rank. Bert Shaw became a Det.Sgt. and later reached the rank of Chief Superintendent, in charge of the Holland with Boston Police Sub-division.

The Carrier's Cart

Towards the end of the last century the only means of public transport was the Carrier's Cart. This was pulled by two horses. Although called a cart it did have four wheels and was covered in. It was owned before 1900 by John Bailey, the Carpenter's father. Later it was passed on to his son Ted Bailey, who was landlord of the New Saracen's Head Inn and it operated from there for many years.

In 1915 Robert Elsey bought Bailey's cart and became the Carrier. He lived in the centre of Saracen's Head. Later he had a new cart made by Waltons of Long Sutton. The Carrier's cart regularly visited Holbeach Market two miles away on a Thursday and Saturday and the Tuesday market at Spalding. Other journeys were also made to these towns. They took passengers who sat inside on removable seats. Produce was also carried. Poultry was carried a lot in those days and under the cart at the back was a large box which would hold twelve small pigs.

The Carriers Cart brought iron for John Slator, the Blacksmith, and iron for Davis the Carpenter of Penny Hill and it would carry a ton of iron on top and round the sides. The tail board was often full of chickens in boxes for market. A ladder was always carried. It cost one shilling (or 5 pence now) to carry a crate of chickens from Moulton Seas End to Spalding.

In December 1921 Robert Elsey suffered a dreadful fire. Helpers pulled out the Carriers cart and set free two horses. Straw, stables, sheds, hovels, hay - everywhere was a fierce mass of terrible flame. Willing workers strove hard to keep the fire from other buildings nearby. The damage was estimated at £600 and was covered by insurance.

On Sunday hundreds of people visited the scene of the fire. Holbeach Fire Brigade attended at the time under Capt. Hardy and obtained a plentiful supply of water from the drain nearby.

After a time Robert Elsey had his dark brown coloured cart tinned over to preserve the wood and painted red. It was still a thriving business after the First World War although motor transport was now beginning to appear and steam wagons to carry produce.

On Tuesday morning the cart left Saracen's Head at 8 a.m. for Spalding market via Moulton Seas End picking up passengers on the way. There was a long wooden seat on either side and a long removable seat to fix down the centre if needed. The front was open where the driver sat with two canvas curtains on a rod to cover the front in bad weather. There was only one oval shaped window at the rear of the cart. The full journey was 6d return for passengers for the 8 mile journey. Journeys were made in all weathers. Frost nails were fitted by the village Blacksmith on the horses hooves when the roads were frozen during the winter months.

He went to Holbeach on Thursday market day via Holbeach Bank. On Saturdays a similar journey was made. Market Days on Thursday and Saturday were great occasions in the old days.

While at Holbeach and Spalding the Carrier put up at hotels, where there were stables, food and drink. Of course our market days are still very important to us at Spalding and Holbeach. It is usually easier for us to get there.

In Spalding there were also Carriers from Crowland and Deeping and some other towns. There was very little motorised transport then.

In Holbeach and Spalding the streets were paved with small cobble stones and most roads in the countryside were very rough, with deep ruts caused in wet weather. The main roads were much better. Late in the 1920's this form of transport ceased to exist. The early buses were appearing with hard rubber tyres and later with pneumatic tyres.

This slow but friendly form of early transport was an essential part of rural life. Many men walked to market at Spalding by going across the fields on the footpaths and then following the main road from Moulton.

Most of the farmers possessed their own pony and trap.

I (M.W.) have often heard my Grandma talk about how she and friends cycled to Spalding from the village as well, even sometimes in the evening in summer. They travelled often in the Carrier's cart.

The Garage

The present day "Saracen's Head Garage" was built on the site of the old blacksmiths shop in 1928 by Jack Rix, a local builder.

Harry Fox was the first proprietor and was followed by George Walker from 1937 to 1945. He saw a Rolls Royce car in a Bradford Scrap Dealers yard. He bought it and brought it home and spent many hours restoring it. It has been a strange sight in the district compared with the most modern cars and is often used at Carnivals and functions.

Next, the garage was owned by Horace Chapman. There used to be three petrol pumps. Then, in the early 1970's the garage was not allowed to sell petrol any more because the frontage is right on the road. Of course the petrol pumps were too close to the road to be within the law. So they had to go. It was situated on a dangerous bend on the main A17 trunk road. Mr. Chapman continued to repair cars with the help of one assistant. Recovery was available with a Landrover. There were numerous accidents and they were there to help. There were many regular customers living in the district.

They were able to offer that personal touch so often missing today.

In the early days of the garage, cigarettes were sold and even fireworks too. They also did servicing and MoT inspections.

Nowadays it is owned by Mr. Russell Matson who took over on the retirement of Mr. Chapman in 1990.

It is nice that there is a garage still in the village.



View of pond when flooded with garage.

Landscape

Saracen's Head had its wild parts, but they have gone now. One in Pipwell Gate, on the edge of a grass field, with a wide dyke filled with reeds and with willow trees and bushes, it reminded one of the years gone by and was left just as it was but in about 1982 Messrs Cooley Bros bought a large area of land for agricultural purposes and with modern machinery laid it all bare, including a long length of old thorn hedge by the road-side, thus depriving birds and small animals of an area of undergrowth and leaving the countryside even more bare and desolate.

In many areas of intensive farming hedgerows are virtually the only cover left for scrub and woodland nesting species. Nesting activity in the hedgerows reaches its peak during May.

The most typical of all hedgerow birds must be the hedge sparrow. The sight of a clutch of the sky blue eggs in the little nest of moss and twigs hidden deep in the thickest part of the hedge is one of the delights of the countryside.

The animal that is associated with the hedgerow is of course the hedgehog. Hedgehogs hibernate in a nest of dry leaves and moss in the bottom of the hedge. The cow parsley is the first of the common wayside flowers, a great attraction to a host of spring insects, like hover-flies and bees seeking nectar and pollen. June (mid-summer) the hedge bottom is overgrown by grasses. Many are in full bloom during June as anyone who suffers from hay fever will know to their great discomfort. July is the month for haymaking, every farmyard had one stack of hay years ago. Today grass cut to make hay is practically non-existent.

Growing in the wild part too were beds of stinging nettles which support an astonishingly rich insect population. The caterpillars of two of our commonest and most beautiful butterflies, the peacock and the small tortoiseshell feed on stinging nettles. I could go on, but this gives you a little idea of the appalling loss to the countryside in laying everywhere bare in this part of South Lincolnshire.

Another wide part was by the side of the drain, shown on the maps as the Whaplode River, that part beyond the bridge that crosses Saltney Gate. There were tall trees growing by the side and dense undergrowth. Before 1930 it was always half full of water and teeming with small fish, especially sticklebacks, commonly called struts, also tiddlers and eels. One of the pastimes of years ago for the boys was fishing for eels, which made a very nice meal when cooked, often using a bamboo cane as a rod, and not like the modern method of fishing today, where you have to have a permit and only fish in certain rivers. It was a case of throwing the line in and if you got a bite just pulling the eel out. It caused great enjoyment to the lads who had to find pleasure on their own door step.

Sluice Gates were built where the drain joined Holbeach Marsh and water was not allowed to come into the drain. In a hot dry summer the drain consequently became dry and all the fish died, and the only purpose it serves now is for land drainage from the small dykes that run into it. When the water was exceptionally high in the drain, the water would rise in the hard water well belonging to the houses situated by the side of the river. Now most of the wells have been filled in and are not used any more as piped water is laid on to every household. When the fish died, a very pretty bird disappeared from the area. The kingfisher who lived on the small fish. It was usually seen as a flash of blue flying by. Fewer waterhens or moorhens are to be seen now with the

disappearance of the undergrowth though they still live on the Whaplode river in Spalding Gate. All the tall trees have either been chopped down, or the elm trees had elm disease and died and after standing bare for a number of years they too were chopped down. The Kestrel Hawks, the Sparrow Hawks, Magpies and Woodpeckers to name a few birds are seen no more in this area, and very few owls too. The grass side of the drain is now cut by mechanical means using a tractor. Years ago, the thorn hedges when not trimmed regularly were allowed to grow very long, then cut in the winter months, tied in small bundles, and carted to the River Welland and used as brushwood to strengthen the banks. Lorry loads of thorn were a regular sight on the roads years gone by. Bats are very seldom seen now, flying by night with the disappearance of the old farm buildings, and they are now a protected species.

Collecting birds eggs during the month of May was a pastime for the boys years ago, but not today with TV and other pastimes to fill their lives.

Reeds grew in dykes and flag iris too, and every kind of wild flower, grew on the road-sides and at the local flower shows it was no trouble for children to fill their vases with a great variety of bloom that cannot be found today. The wild road-sides have gone and the remaining small patches of growth are cut bare by tractors.

There were scores of frogs in the water-filled dykes and after a storm it was a delight to walk down the lanes and hear the frogs croaking, and now to see one frog is almost a thing of the past.

A delicacy for the dinner table in days gone by were pigeon pies and sparrow pies.

Many large pits were scattered around the area. The clay dug out was mostly used for making bricks. One such pit, covered a large area, and was situated just outside Saracen's Head, by the side of the main Holbeach Road, and was known by the local people as the Sand Holes or Sand Pits. It was always filled with water, had tall trees growing one end and around the outside it was covered with reeds. It was the ideal nesting place for water hens. Local people began to throw their rubbish in the pit, as there was no salvage collection in those days. Later it was filled in, and was used as agricultural land. Later it was built on with a row of new houses, and only people who lived in the 1930's and earlier knew it existed.

The refuse was later collected by a horse-drawn farm cart, the labour and the horse were found by a local farmer who contracted for the work. The amount of domestic refuse was less in those days. People tended to burn more and tinstuffs were not used to anything like the same extent as they are today. Work was from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. for 6s. 6d for the days refuse collection. In 1940 a mechanised scheme was introduced by the East Elloe Rural Council, and came through the village picking up refuse once a week.

Towards the end of July in 1915, Saracen's Head had experienced a terrible whirlwind. It swept over the village on a Saturday. The noise commenced with a distant hum and rapidly increased in volume until it was almost deafening. From reports of men who saw it, they said it looked to be about 400 yards away, high in the sky, something like water spouts dropping from the sky. It was about half-way down. There were two inverted cones, and these seemed to meet over Saracen's Head. Looking lower down towards the end of the cone could be seen great branches of trees caught up and floating about 200 feet in the air. They were whirling round and round and with each spiral they seemed to go higher and higher until they got to the outer ring of the whirl, when they fell. It seemed to pass right over the top of one cottage and the tiles were lifted off just as if they were being sucked up by a huge suction pump. They were heavy and only rose about twelve feet falling all round the house.

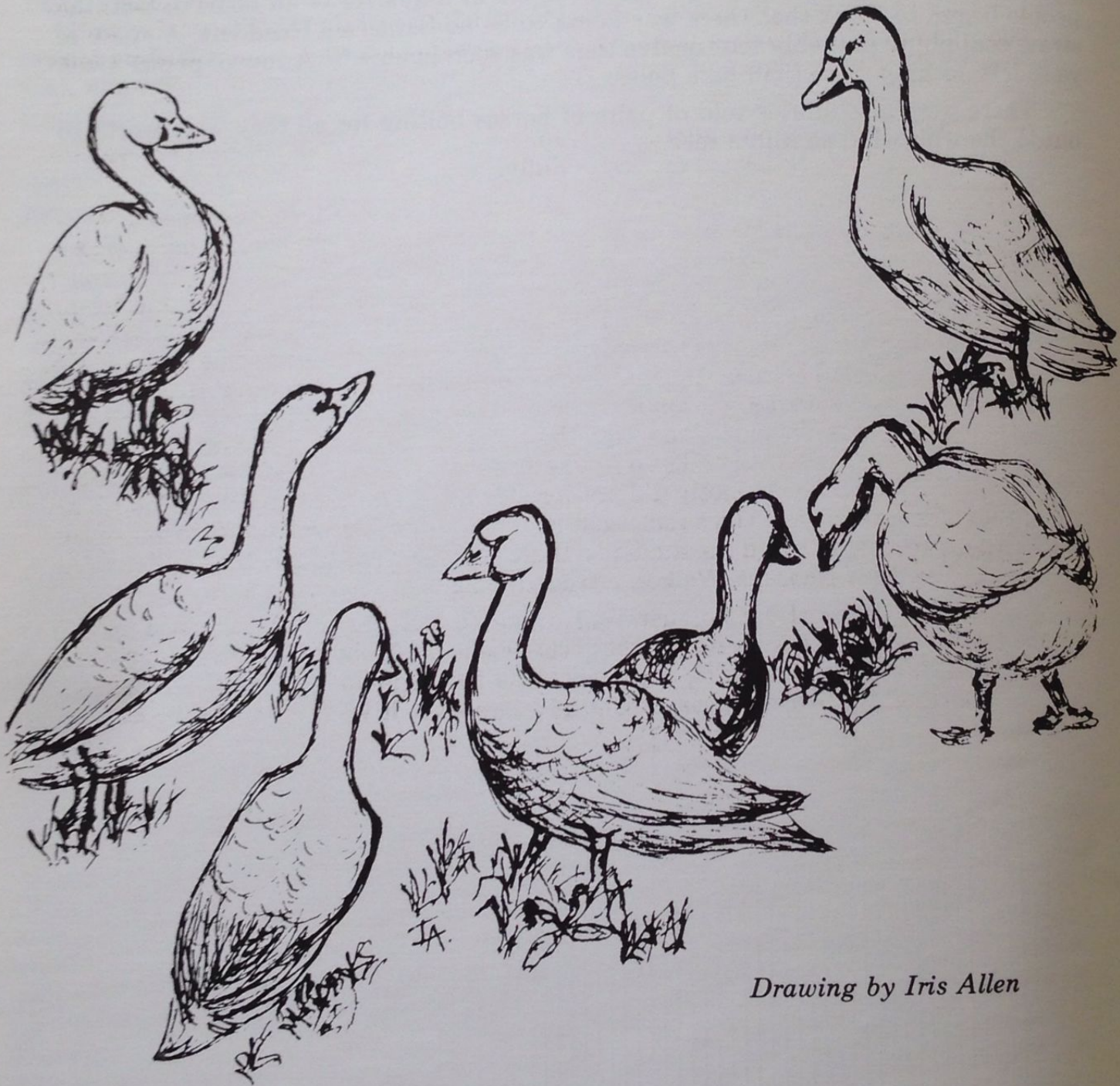
Another 50 yards further on, a pair of houses were being built. The wind lifted the galvanised sheeting and scaffolding and scattered it about all over the place. It also took the roof off a hovel and deposited it on the road. It took the roofs off two clover stacks which were whirled over the fields and lost. It finally exhausted itself over the Holbeach Clough river. One man said he saw the wind take off the top of a tree and whirl it a distance of 250 yards. Still advancing for another 100 yards, there was a wagon and four horses. The first two horses were completely twisted round while the men's overcoats and things in the wagon were lifted out and disappeared in the sky. It was Saracen's Head which had to suffer the spite of the elements.

Other neighbouring places had a share of the deluge while those outside the area didn't get any. Stacks were blown clean away, horses were spun round and round like toys, hen coops went flying over houses, and water was literally scooped from the ponds and carried high in the air. For the space of a quarter of an hour, in fact, the people began to think that there was going to be no Saracen's Head left. A stack of straw containing probably four or five tons was soon in shreds. A row of poplar trees were left nothing more than bare poles.

There were also stories told of pairs of horses bolting for all they were worth to outdo the whirlwind as if in a race.

Cackle Hill

In the last century, when transport was difficult flocks of geese were driven along the roads, a journey taking sometimes several days and a very slow journey too before reaching their destination. It was rumoured that beyond the village, one mile towards Holbeach the place called Cackle Hill was where the geese used to congregate before going on their journey. Flocks of geese came through Saracen's Head.



Drawing by Iris Allen

The Pit

The pit was situated next to the Washway Road in the centre of the village in a grassfield belonging to Pipwell Manor. Its main purpose was to provide drinking water for the vast number of beast that were kept before 1930. It was a large expanse of water and it was known by everyone as "the pit". During a dry season it was cleaned out by workmen with horses and carts. The cleaning out was reported in the Lincolnshire Free Press in 1926, this would be looked upon as a trivial item today.

The "Waites" of Pipwell Manor used to have a boat on it during the summer.

As there was access to it from the road all the steam engines using the road used to pull up, drop their water pipes into the pit and either fill up their water tanks or top them up before going on their way. I remember Threshing Engines, Steam Rollers and Steam Cultivators pulling up at the pit and the aristocrat of the traction engine world, the showman's engine made especially for the travelling showman and travelling fairs and pulling three huge vans stop on the road to fill up with water. They could travel at 20 mph.

Now all those sights have gone and steam age has passed and now the only way we can see these famous engines is at a Steam Rally.

In the winter during severe frosts the pit was used for ice skating and nearly every home possessed a pair of ice skates. The local skaters would skate after dark, with a hurricane lamp placed in the centre of the pit and they skated round in a circle. Considering the rest of the village was in complete darkness and only paraffin lamps flickered from the house windows, even the hurricane lamp didn't give out much of a glow. There were occasions when boys fell through the ice and had to be rescued. On 4th December 1923, Thomas Pilgrim, a schoolboy attending Saracen's Head School, through being too venturesome suddenly slipped through the thin ice on the deep side near the hedge where the ducks had kept the water clear of ice for several days. When the collapse came, the school children ran away terribly scared. One boy, Ken Walker, the son of Pc Walker, fortunately did not lose his head. He laid himself full length on the thin ice, seized hold of the submerged boy and pulled him out wet through to the skin. The accident occurred so suddenly there was no time to get help, but for the presence of mind of Kenneth Walker, a tragedy might have occurred.

In the Free Press of 9th August 1921, it stated that the pit having dried up had been cleaned out. There were hundreds of cart loads of slubber to remove and several weeks have been occupied with the work. The oldest inhabitant cannot remember seeing the pond dry before. It was about 23 years since it was last cleaned out.

Atkin's Avenue

A land mark at Saracen's Head that still remains and only remains because it is protected under the "Preservation of Trees" order, is the avenue of Horse Chestnut trees in Saltney Gate on the way to Whaplode. Known as Atkin's Avenue because of the farm at the south end of the avenue was owned by the Atkins family from 1906 until 1964. The house is known as Welland House.

As a boy I remember going to Atkin's Avenue to collect the conkers that fell from the trees in the autumn and I remember the school girls picking the violets that grew in abundance in the dykes in those days. The trees were a wonderful sight in the Spring with their tender green leaves and masses of white flowers.

The avenue is quite a sight in an otherwise bare landscape and in the summer when the trees are in leaf it is quite dark underneath. The farm and the house was owned by William Harris before 1906, and the avenue of trees were planted before 1900.

John Henry Atkin came in 1906 and later one of the sons Russell Atkin carried on until 1964 under the title of R.E. Atkin Ltd. Welland House had a large orchard adjoining but this was cleared away in the 1950's. Most large houses had orchards and large kitchen gardens too, but in later years orchards were cleared away and kitchen gardens diminished. Since 1964 the farm has been owned by H. & G. Oldershaw Ltd and Henry Oldershaw lives in Welland House.





Hill Farm — Home of Mr. Bob Waite.

The photograph below is Mr. Robert (Bob) Waite of Hill Farm ploughing with his two horses. His daughter Ida is by his side.

Bob Waite was a very well known character in the area. He owned the fields where the salt mounds were as already mentioned. These were known locally as “Bob Waite’s hills”.

This is the only photo I have come across of a local man ploughing and it is well worthy of inclusion.

He was fond of eating ground nuts (monkey nuts).

Seth Stevenson farmed at Hill Farm before 1900. Bob Waite followed him and was known in our lifetime.



Mr. Robert (Bob) Waite of Hill Farm ploughing. His daughter Ida by his side. Photo 1920. The orchard in the distance.

The Farms

Saracen's Head is an agricultural area, and at the turn of the century nearly all boys upon leaving school went to work on the local farms, as there was very little other work. The 1920's saw a change in farming from raising cattle and sheep to producing more agricultural produce. In the Saracen's Head area there were twenty eight grass-fields for grazing, in 1980 there were only about six, which had been drastically cut down in size. In recent years all the small farms and small holdings have been bought by bigger concerns and they don't exist any more.

Two very large farms, Majors and Birch and Bulmers to the north of the village had light railways using a very small gauge for this type of line. The trucks had small iron wheels with a flang on to run on the rails. Birch and Bulmer's railway ran to their Whaplode Marsh Farm, and then continued to the Cold Harbour farm which was rather isolated and a mile and a half from the main Washway Road.

These light railways were a great help as it was impossible during wet weather to get potatoes and other bulk loads from the distant farms to the main road through the thick mud and slush.

Many of the roadways to these isolated farms were only made of ashes in the old days.

Major's also had two sets of steam cultivators for deep ploughing. One set of large steam engines, and a smaller set of engines, the smaller ones were sold and only the larger engines were kept for ploughing.

Mr. Major lived at Abbots Manor, Spalding Road, Holbeach, and used to ride down to his farm on horseback in the 1920's, a familiar figure in those days. Major's has been taken over by HCC Tinsley & Son Ltd.

All produce from the farms was taken to the distant markets by rail, and transported to the Goods Yard at Holbeach Station by horse and cart, and horses and wagons.

With so many horses on the road, it meant the employment of a roadman by the Council with his barrow, brush and shovel, as the roads were littered with horse dirt. Steam wagons also carried loads from the farms. Messrs. Elvis of Holbeach had some Foden's Steam Wagons, in the 1920's. Horses remained the main source of power until 1945, when tractors began to appear, and with better constructed roadways, and with the disappearance of the farm horse, the light railways ceased to exist. The numerous farms that existed until the 1960's have been purchased by larger growers and only a few small holdings remain. O.A. Taylor (Bulbs) Ltd are one of the largest growers in the area now, and grow mainly bulbs, a crop unheard of 100 years ago. They have reached their present size by buying several of the smaller farms.

Since then however, few things have changed so much in the countryside as the harvest. Gathering the harvest by hand was followed by the mechanical reaper pulled by horses, when the sheaves still had to be tied up. This method was followed in the 1920's by the binder which tied the sheaves with binder twine. They were horse drawn in the 1930's, and later pulled by tractors. Once cut and bound into sheaves they were propped up against each other $\frac{1}{2}$ a dozen or more to form stooks. These were left for a few days to dry before being carted off by horse and carts and made into stacks. This was often followed by women who walked over the field picking up pieces of corn that were left, known as gleaning, and dropping them into a sack. When full, it was sent to

the local mill and ground into flour, this was a personal gift for them. Also in the early days chicken huts were carted to the centre of the fields and the chickens allowed to roam at will feeding on the loose corn. The corn was then threshed and the grain extracted during the winter months.

The line of stooks in newly harvested fields were a familiar pattern in the countryside until about 1950. Today the combine harvesters gather the grain leaving the straw to be baled separately, or burnt.

In the old days the farmer would bite the grain and tell by its feel if the harvest was to be taken in. Now an electronic moisture meter is used to test the grain, with about 16% moisture. Now we see the mechanical harvester, the grain silos and fields littered with giant circular straw bales.

Gone are the haystacks, with very little grass to cut.

A stackyard full of corn stacks was a sight that the younger people will never see now that we have combines. The stacks were thatched if they were to be kept for a period.

Another of the great characters in the area was Arthur W. Taylor who farmed a long way from the village in Stockwell Gate. Besides agricultural crops he grew bulbs and strawberries and had a very large orchard of fruit trees in the 1920's and 1930's. But like all large orchards it was cleared away later.

He used to have a gang of women from Sheffield every year to help with the fruit. He also used to do contract work over a very wide area.

He drove fast sports cars, mostly opened at the top, and was a great racing fan especially a motorcycling fan and at the age of 79 in 1972 missed seeing the TT races in the Isle of Man because of poor health. He had missed the annual pilgrimage in late May for the first time for 52 years.

He named his two sons Seagrave and Malcolm, after the famous racing drivers Sir Henry Seagrave and Sir Malcolm Campbell. He died in his 80's.

Basses

A.B. & F.K. Bassess also possessed steam cultivators which occasionally came into the area for deep ploughing in the 1920's. By 1950 tractors had almost entirely superseded horses, and they took the place of the steam cultivator which disappeared years before that. Mechanisation of sowing, planting, and harvesting of all crops followed.

In the year beginning October 27th, 1929, the Holland Agricultural Wages Committee fixed the minimum wage for the agricultural worker to be 30 shillings per week of 48 hours in winter and 50 hours in summer. From 1945 the agricultural worker received a pay rise of about £2 per week for the year during January, every year. They used to work six days a week, which included all day on Saturday. Eventually this was cut down to one o'clock on a Saturday, with a further reduction to 10.30 on this day. In the 1960's all Saturday work was done away with and the agricultural worker put in a 5 day week, with any extra hours counting as overtime.

From June 7th, 1987, The Agricultural Wages Board fixed the minimum rate per standard 40 hour week, workers aged 20 and over. Ordinary workers, £99.20,