

WHAT WE HAVE LOST

As Dorney works to develop a new Neighbourhood Plan, attention is rightly focussed on the pleasant environment in which we live. The expansive common, still traditionally grazed; the many old houses in the village; the ancient manor house and church; the fields of arable crops; all are greatly valued by Dorney's current residents. How lucky we are to enjoy such a lovely place which retains so much of its history!

That set me thinking what a visitor from an earlier time might miss about today's village.

Arriving across the common from Eton Wick, our visitor might first notice the absence of a gate across the road. Dorney Gate came complete with a look-out box housing a gatekeeper ready to open the gate when traffic arrived. In 1885 the gatekeeper was an old man of 86 wearing the smock frock which had been the traditional garb of a farm labourer in earlier times, happy to engage in conversation with passers-by. This was probably Thomas Tugwood, who died in 1887, the position as gatekeeper being inherited by another Tugwood. Probably Thomas' son George, he was still on duty at Dorney Gate when schoolmistress Miss Bennett arrived in 1919:

Mr. Tugwood, the keeper of the Common gate, was one of the old school, who dressed in the Sunday clothes worn fifty or sixty years before: a black cut-away coat, much washed, tightfitting corduroy breeches, cloth gaiters, with red handkerchief and billycock hat.

Every day he stood at the Common gate, which he opened and shut for the traffic. He got a small wage augmented by tips. If a pedestrian went through with only a polite 'thank-you', the old man replied, "I've had a pocketful of them today." He had a tiny hut for wet days. He continued his job until he could no longer walk up to the gate, even with two sticks.

Both Thomas and George Tugwood worked on farms before taking on the role of gatekeeper in later life.



preparing those loaves, the appetising smells they generated and even the delicious taste of the iced plaits made by the last baker. In 1851 Dorney gained its own post office, run by the baker who also sold groceries. The post office provided local people with not only



Once through the gate, our visitor would recognise much that was familiar in the buildings lining Village Road, even though cottages that were once multiple occupancy are now restored single dwellings. It might however be puzzling to see no shops or post office. Since at least the mid-1830s, the people of Dorney had been able to buy fresh bread from the village bakery. There are residents who still remember the daily (and nightly) activity of

convenience in posting letters and parcels but also a telegraph office for immediate communication and a banking facility. Later a second bakery and grocer's shop opened. Both shops and post office ceased trading in the 1970s.

Gone, too, are the ponds that used to provide water for passing livestock on the south side of the road, although the ditch linking them is still there. In their place, the visitor would now see houses, trees and gardens. One of the modern houses is called Pond House, recalling the former use of the site. Old Pond House, of 17th century origins, still stands to one side of the former village pond.

The Palmer Arms would be a familiar sight for our traveller, but the village stocks which used to stand in front are long gone. Dorney had no gaol house but the stocks could be used by the village constable to hold securely some vagrant or miscreant. The person held sat on a bench and placed their legs in the holes, the upper bar keeping them in that position until released by the constable's key. A story recounted in 1849 told how a group of young artists fooling around managed to trap one of their number in the stocks, freed by the village blacksmith only after an hour and a half during which he was tormented by jeering local lads.

Arriving at Climo's Corner (though not then known by that name), our visitor might glance to the left and wonder what had happened to Barge Path. Formerly a straight lane running down to the river, for the use of barge horses towing vessels on the Thames and subject to the payment of a fee, the path now meanders its way to the riverbank, while the route straight on leads into Dorney Lake. But our visitor might not have been allowed access to the path in earlier times. In 1859, Henry Palmer issued a notice stating that there was no right-of-way for people to get to Monkey Island across his land, either along Barge Path or from the Thames Bank. Trespassers would be prosecuted. It was only in more recent times that both became public rights-of-way and we could then enjoy the leafy walk down Barge Path.

Continuing up Marsh Lane, the traveller's vista to the left would be significantly changed. In years gone by, much of the road was unfenced and an open field of arable crops stretched away west to the river and north towards the boundary with Amerden. This was known as Oak Stubbs field, one of the four big fields of Dorney. Beside the road part way along was a gravel pit, one of three in this field. Little by little, this field has been transformed. First came the development of Dorney Reach from the early 1900s; then came the Climos' dairy farm and two enclosed fields alongside Barge Path. In the mid-1980s arable farming in the field ceased when it was leased to Thames Water and divided up as we know it today, used for grazing horses, water extraction and rewilding. On Google Maps satellite view, the oval shape of the former gravel pit can still be made out.

Would our time traveller have felt regret at the absence of much-loved features? Or would they have simply recognised that places and landscapes inevitably change over time? I wonder.

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