

## AYNHO STATION FROM 1905

Nothing has been written of the old days in this district, so I will try and give the reader a view of what life was like in those days. I am not a good writer but I have a very clear memory of them.

I was born at Aynho Station which is situated on the borders of Northants alongside the old Great Western Railway, now BR, and the Oxford Canal. It consists of four cottages and a pub, the 'Railway Arms', and is six miles south of Banbury. My father was a signalman at Aynho Junction, where the Oxford railway joins the Princes Risborough line. Our family was five in number, four boys, one sister. I am the third one. I was born on July 18, 1905.

We were a happy family. We had to make our own amusements. We were not handled very much as our parents did not have the time. The youngest were strapped on the high pram, one at each end. The others ran or crawled about the house with a wooden frame fixed across the doorway. I liken it to rearing lambs. Then when a little older, out in the garden. At four we started school, walking to Aynho village one and a quarter miles. During the winter evenings we played cards, ludo, snakes and ladders and draughts by the light of the brass oil lamp. Mother was usually making or mending clothes for us. Dad kept a stick behind a picture which he used quite liberally when we misbehaved. We took it in a good way.

It was a children's paradise where we lived. We roamed the fields and along the canal. We never stayed around the house. But when we were seven years old we had to help father gardening. He had half an acre of allotments, some on the side of the railway and some on the canal side. We could use any garden tool at the age of nine. We had apple trees, plums, red and black currants and strawberries. Mother made hundredweights of jam. We kept pigs, two in summer, one in winter, and hens, so we were nearly self-supporting, with home cured lard. We had lovely meals. Mother had been a cook at Eton College in her service days.

Our neighbour, Mr Mathews, was a brick maker. The bricks were made by hand. It took him and his assistant a year to dig the clay and fill the kiln. The bricks had to be stacked in the kiln a certain way. It was fired with coal fires for several days. We liked to watch the fires, especially the glow at night.

The old clay pits were a lovely wild-life habitat, with an oak tree. There were all the finches, warblers, blackcaps, tree creepers, fly catchers, woodpeckers, also coots, moorhens and dab chicks, pussy cat willow in abundance. There were plenty of fish, mostly pike and perch, some very big. They were black skinned as it was stagnant water. We spent many hours there.

Then a sad thing happened in 1930. The pits were filled in with mud when the canal was dredged. It was a sorry sight to see acres of mud. It is now part of a field.

Mr George Hawkins lived in the canal wharf house. They had six children. He weighed the coal for the horse trolley to deliver to the nearby villages. He also sold corn chaff, hay and straw to the boat people and salt for the local bakers. The salt came in long square bars, six to a hundredweight. The Railway Arms was kept by Mrs Sophia Howe and two sons, Frank and Ben. They kept three horses, two for delivering provisions from the railway to the local shops in the villages, the other horse pulled a coach which was called a fly to take people from the train. No buses in those days. During the summer he had a rowing boat on the canal which he hired out.