

Miss Elsie Heath – reminisces in the W.I. scrapbook circa 1951.

NORTH RODE

The pleasant little village of North Rode, charmingly situated on the banks of the River Dane, lies under the shadow of the Cloud near the eastern border of the county.

Described in Domesday as 'waste' it seems to have been the happy hunting ground of a succession of Norman Knights. At one time it was held by the Davenport family, and later came into possession of Sir Randolph Crewe. "Crumwell", "Brammall Hill" and "Rode Green" are mentioned as the forest boundaries. The two last named are now farms and a verdant clearing by the River Dane known as "Cromwell" is popularly supposed to have been a haunt of the famous Oliver, but research shows this to very unlikely. The house has now disappeared.

It was not however until the late eighteenth century, when the estate came into possession of the Daintry family that the real story of North Rode as a separate community begins.

Even as late as 1840 George Osborne dismisses it as "land which is indifferent, supporting an agricultural population of about 250 inhabitants." In 1851 there were 54 houses and 278 souls.

That North Rode was once largely forest is indicated by the picturesque names of woods on an old ordnance survey map of 1871, some of which still survive. Shellow Wood, Beancroft Wood, Scissorcroft Wood, Hungry Hill Wood.

A directory of 1860 contains the names of the following farmers and craftsmen: -

Richard Bailey,	Dobford.
John Bostock,	Ladder Stile.
Peter Ford,	Bank Farm.
Joshua Heapey,	Colley Mill.
Thomas Sant,	Yew Tree.
William Wallworth,	Rode Hall.
Joseph Thornycroft,	Cheney Gate.
Charles Nickson,	Rode Green.
Eliza Kelsall,	Primrose Hill.
Thomas Slack	Shoemaker.
James Stanway	Wheelwright.
William Clowes	Blacksmith.
Charles Hawkins	Stationmaster.
Joseph Thornycroft	Vict.Cheney Gate.
Joshua Walker	Schoolmaster.

Even after the opening up of communications, the cutting of the canal in 1820-30 and the railway in 1845, North Rode still remained a self contained and largely self supporting little community with its own miller, shoemaker, wheelwright, undertaker,

blacksmith, joiner, clogger and tailor. The building of the school in 1835 and the church in 1846 helped to preserve this close relationship.

Today, the main roads to Macclesfield and Leek touch only the fringes of the parish, and the village itself, with its narrow country lanes it shows little change with the passing years. But the life of the village has changed. The old craftsmen have been given place to the garage proprietor and the agricultural engineer; most houses have electricity and a mains water supply.

The breaking up of the estates in 1923 resulted in the private ownership of farms and cottages, and the pride of possession is reflected in the carefully tended property, the well stocked farms, the beautiful gardens, and the old houses restored – in most cases sympathetically – to their former glory.

A link with the distant past is found in the lovely 50-acre woodland known as: **Rode Heath**, which has resisted all attempts at cultivation. In the middle years of the last century the trees were felled, the ground cleared and ploughed and planted with potatoes. The resulting crop was so poor that the land was allowed to revert to forest, and planted with conifers. The landowner, George Smith Daintry Esq., long remembered as the stoutest and heaviest man for miles around, laid out wide grassy rides, through which he was wont to drive in his low carriage drawn by two sturdy ponies. The housewives, noting his approach, would hasten to place, not one, but two chairs to support the massive frame of their respected squire.

During the 1914-1918 was the valuable timber in Rode Heath was felled, but the seedling larch and birch soon obliterated the scars, and the wood is now a place of unusual charm and mysterious beauty. The grassy rides can still be traced, bordered by heather and purple heath. There are fairy rings, and the deadly but beautiful red spotted toadstool fly agaric, surrounded by sentinel foxgloves and the lovely rosy spires of willow herb. The quiet is broken by the tap tap of the woodpecker, and wood pigeons and jays abound. A small group of ancient firs still raise their ragged crowns above the rest, the last proud remnants of a by-gone age.

St.Michael's Church

The lovely little church dedicated to St.Michael was consecrated for divine service in 1846. The interior contains some very fine carving. The rood screen is of particular beauty, and the oak cross surmounting it was carved by Mrs John Ridgway in 1899. The font cover, in memory of James Hogg, was carved by eight members of the choir, who had been taught their craft by Mrs Ridgway. In 1904 new oak choir stalls were added, the work of the Macclesfield School of Carvers.

In 1946 the church celebrated its centenary, and a special service was held. The Bishop of Chester preached the sermon. At a social gathering in the school the hundred candles on a cake were lighted by Mr Thomas Clayton, and the cake was cut by Mrs Daintry, the patron of the living.

The present vicar is the Rev.Orlando Evans.

The Rev. Julian Harvey, M.A. Cantab. was vicar of the parish for thirty five years from 1902 – 1937. A scholarly man with a kindly sense of humour, he is remembered with affection by many parishioners. His old fashioned four-wheeler, drawn by “Admiral”, the old white pony, was a familiar spectacle in the country lanes, long after more rapid modes of transport prevailed.

The School.

There was a school in North Rode in the eighteenth century. Francis White’s Directory says:-

John Plant, by deed, dated August 11th 1780, conveyed certain premises in trust and directed the yearly profits thereof to be paid to the schoolmaster of North Rode for the instruction of poor children, born of indigent parents residing within the township. The interest arising from this bequest amounts to about £10 per annum. Wade Stubbs of the Bahama Islands, by will, dated the 17th of October 1821, gave to the trustees of the poor school of North Rode £500 sterling. The sum of £200 has been received on account of this charity by the trustees of the school.

The present school was built by the late John Smith Daintry Esquire. In consideration of the above gifts, the master teaches 24 children free, who are appointed by the trustees; the remainder pay 2d., 4d. and 6d. per week according to the education they receive. The school is conducted on the national plan, but not under government control. About 60 children attend. Mr Joshua Walker – master.

A lovely bust of Queen Osberga – mother of Alfred the Great – looks down with benign expression from a niche in the wall. It is the work of Sir Hamo Thornycroft, the famous sculptor whose family have associations with North Rode and Gawsorth.

North Rode is now a one teacher school for children aged five to eleven. The older children are taken by bus from North Rode to a school in Congleton.

The Macclesfield Canal

An ancient map dated 1825 shows a plan and section of the Macclesfield Canal

“Surveyed under the direction of Thomas Telford, Engineer”.

The section which cuts through North Rode on its way to Congleton is a waterway of great charm and beauty in its setting of quiet pastures and lush meadows, with the long ridge of Cloud End looming in the background. The canal was once very busy, and it was a common sight to see as many as 20 barges with their characteristic decoration of castles and roses, waiting to pass through the locks. Cargoes were varied – flour, wheat, coal, beer, chemicals, pottery and during the war – munitions. The old barges often kept hens and were wont to turn them out to scratch on the canal bank. Heavy horses, light horses, donkeys, mules – all were familiar sights on the towing path, but the last horse drawn barge disappeared about 12 years ago. Now only 2 commercial barges use the canal, but during the summer months pleasure craft ply up and down continually, a pleasant leisurely way of enjoying the quiet beauty of the remoter English countryside.

North Rode Viaduct

In 1845 the North Staffordshire Railway Company came into existence and Congleton obtained a connection with Manchester and Macclesfield. The North Rode Viaduct, noted for its beautiful masonry, was completed in 1849 and the line between Congleton and Macclesfield was opened.

No doubt many people deplored the coming of the railway to North Rode, but the magnificent span of 20 arches with the fine sweep of the Cloud in the background makes an unforgettable picture of dignity and beauty.

Several inhabitants have heard stories of the great crash following the collapse of four of the arches, the noise of which was heard for miles around.

The local blacksmith, one, Thomas Clowes, claims to have driven the first locomotive over the viaduct.

Inns and Taverns

The Wheatsheaf Farm on the Buxton Road was once the Wheatsheaf Inn. Its extensive cellars and ancient cobbles seem to point to the likelihood that it was a calling place for travellers in the old coaching days.

There was also an ale house at Colley Farm, which no doubt enjoyed a period of great prosperity during the two years when the building of the viaduct was in progress, employing as it did, two thousand men.

The only inn remaining in the parish is the “Chain and Gate” on the Macclesfield to Congleton Road. Until recent years it was known as “Cheney Gate”, and the present appellation is no doubt a reversion to the original name, but locally it is still, and ever will be “Cheney”.

Yew Tree Cottage

Perhaps the oldest house in North Rode is Yew Tree Cottage, a picturesque half timbered house situated near the meeting of the waters of the Dane and the ‘Cowbrook’. The house is said to date from the thirteenth century, and it is easy to believe that the ancient yew in front of the house may be even older still. It seems likely that the cottage may originally have been the home of a forest verderer; perhaps the yew tree supplied the huntsmen with their bows. Much restoration has taken place since those early days, and it may be that the first village settlement was here. Ancient Colley Mill is not far away, and it is interesting to note that all the oldest houses are in the river valley. In Victorian times Yew Tree Cottage was the home of John Beresford, the village cobbler and clogger. Old people remember the stacks of clog soles piled on a grassy plot in front of the house. This is now known as ‘Ethels Green’. Miss Ethel Hogg planted the two horse-chestnut trees on the spot, and the triangular green is now enclosed by a white railing. A toll house once stood here, and the original toll gate notice, a large wooden hoarding, headed – ‘Colley Lane Gate’, and containing a list of charges for various vehicles and animals, is now in the possession of Mr. Eardley, White House Farm, Eaton.

The old black and white house by the River Dane, part of which is dated 1444 is all that remains of Colley Mill, where the farmers once brought their corn to be ground. The mill wheel has disappeared, but stones from the mill can still be traced in the out-buildings, and there is the open loft to which the flour was hoisted. The narrow, humped bridge over the Dane has the appearance of an old pack horse bridge, and large stones in the bed of the river suggest that there may once have been a ford there. After heavy rains the river rises and the inhabitants have often seen part of their garden washed away.

Between the adjoining cottage and the bridge was once a right-of-way for farmers bringing their sheep to be dipped in the river.

Cheshire Craftsman

Lea Street was a master wheelwright. He was born on June 19th 1863, and came to reside at Colley Mill in 1890, and stayed there until his death in December 1950 in his 88th year. He was a well known figure in the parish; having made carts, wheelbarrows, milking stools etc for farmers for many miles around. When a wheel had to be hooped, it was a great day at Colley Mill, everything had to be prepared the day before; a huge fire of logs was built round the hoop and every available utensil was filled with water from the Dane:

When the fire was lit and the hoop was red hot it was lifted on to the wheel with long iron bats called Dogs; and was tapped into place; while lots of helpers came forward with buckets of water, which they poured on the hoop until the danger of fire was over.

Mr Street made the school floor of Maple wood given by Mr Midwood who then lived at the Grange; also two pews in the church and various other things around the parish which we shall remember him by.

Changes

The Bell Farm, once the home farm attached to the Grange, so called because of the great bell which used to summon the workmen to start or cease their labours, was for many years a meeting house for primitive Methodist worship. Old inhabitants can remember in the days of their youth, congregating in the great farmhouse kitchen joining heartily in the singing –

“Let all be pi-
Let all be pi-
Let all be pi-
Let all be pi-ety.”

With somewhat irreverent enthusiasm they would translate the last line –

“Let all be pie-
Let all be pie-
Let all be pie- and tea!”

They recall the long extempore prayers of the local preacher, with his final exhortation to – “God bless our brother Amos Rathbone and take him safely home to Fools Nook.”

The meetings ceased about the beginning of the present century.