

# The Way We Were 20<sup>th</sup> Century Bidford

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**A Journey along Bidford High Street between 1905 and 1960**



January 2018

## Overview

During the twentieth century Bidford changed enormously. The population of 1,800 people in 1930 grew to 2,400 people in 1961 and over 5,000 people today. This population growth includes younger residents and many newcomers, all keen to learn about the village as it existed until 1960. This eBooklet provides an overview of the village appearance and of some aspects of its social life in the first half of the last century.

The booklet is drawn from a presentation, of a journey down Bidford High Street in the period 1905 – 1950, made at the December 2017 History Society meeting by Bob Marshall and Rodney Crompton. The presentation was based on their recollections, supported by photographs from their personal collections.

For ease of reference the presentation is formed of six chapters, which are:

- Introduction to Bidford in the early 20<sup>th</sup>. century
- Waterloo Road to Old Market Place
- Around Old Market Place
- Old Market Place to Bidford Bridge
- Waterside Views
- Bidford Bridge Crossing and West Along High Street

Village scenery has changed greatly. For most of the old photographs there is also a modern copy taken from the same viewpoint, to assist with orientation.

**Authored By Bidford and District History Society; [www.bidfordhistory.org.uk](http://www.bidfordhistory.org.uk)**

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## Introduction



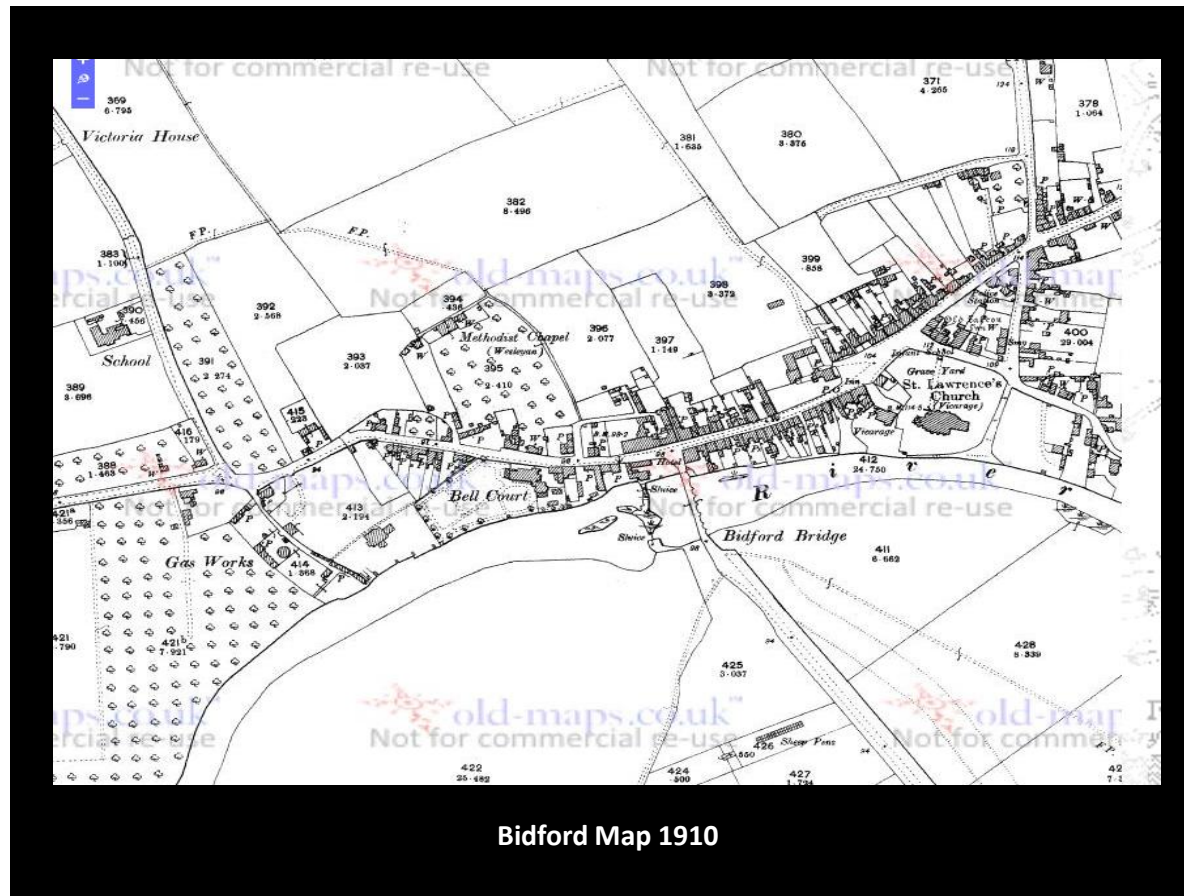
In the 1920s and 30s the High Street was a very different place from today's quiet residential area. It was the main road from Stratford to Evesham as there was no by-pass and it was also the heart of the village. It was full of shops and you could buy anything - *anything* – in the High Street.

That was because of limited transport. Virtually nobody had a car, there were buses, but people did not have fridges or freezers so had to shop every day for food. Nearly everyone worked as well as lived in the village. It was a rural economy where most people worked either on the land or in jobs to do with agriculture. The village was surrounded by farmland where now there are houses.

So the High Street would have been full of local people all the time and not just people but animals – Mr Wilkes (his dairy farm was where Wilkes Way now is) herded his cows down the High Street twice a day and everything had to wait until his cows had gone through to the meadows.

So, imagine the noise of people talking and animal noises and the smells, some nice – from the bakeries – and some not so nice – cow and horse dung. Yes, the High Street was a constant hive of activity

Prior to construction of the bypass in the 1970's, all the traffic went down the High Street. This included lorries and tanks during the 2nd World War, going to Long Marston army stores, the US army camp at Honeybourne and the adjoining airfield.

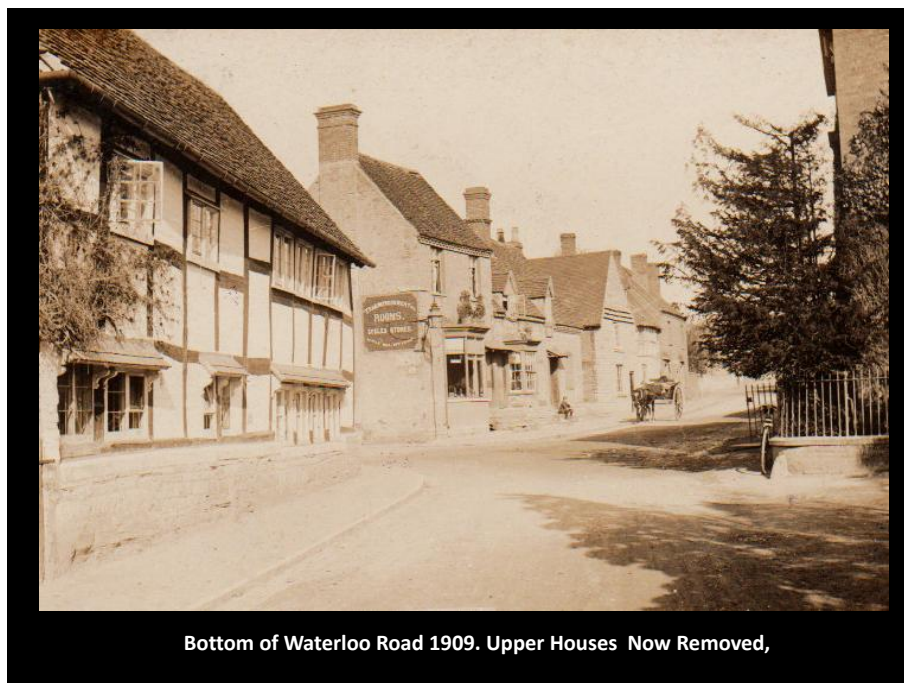


The village was small. Land around the village centre was farmland and orchards right up until the 1960s. The undeveloped land on this map is where all the new estates have been built.

## Waterloo Road to Old Market Place



This first view looks towards the top (east) of the High Street in 1909.



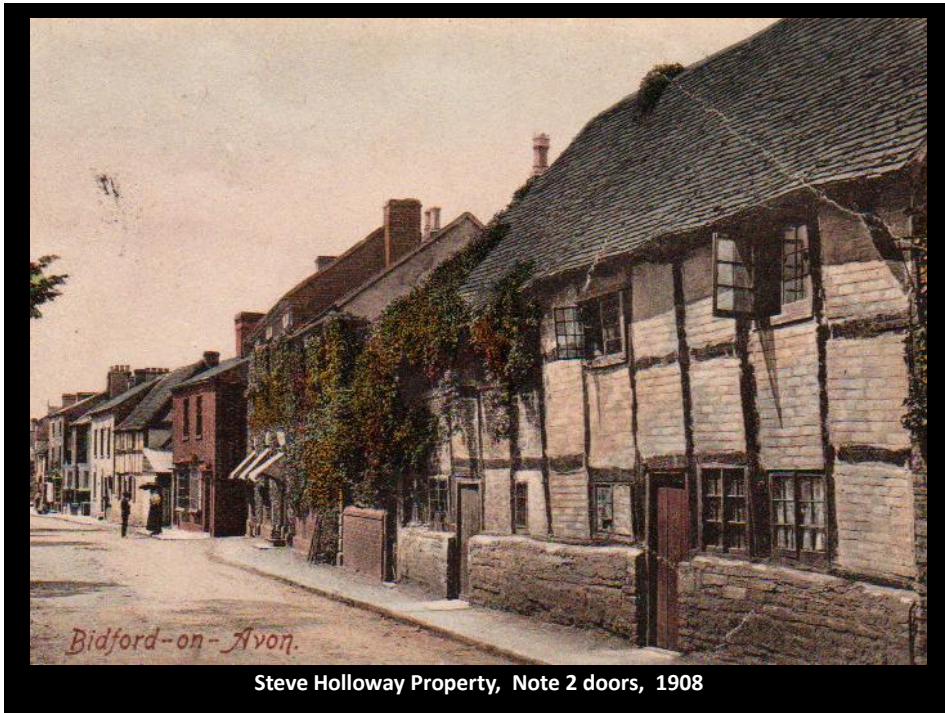
Bottom of Waterloo Road 1909. Upper Houses Now Removed,



The view today

At the top right was a farmyard, on the left was the Alcester Road, (now Waterloo Road). The house on the left belonged to Miss Porter. The big house was a cycle shop.

Overleaf is a view of the top of the High Street in 1908, Miss Porter house now on the left. The 2 doors which are no longer there. The red house on the right was the coal merchants, remember, no central heating and everyone relied on coal fires for heating. On the left side was the Police House - as Bidford had its own village policeman. Opposite is Fosbroke House which was occupied by Dr Fosbroke who was medical officer of health for Worcestershire, his chauffeur lived next door.



The view today



High Street, Note Falcon Overhang to left

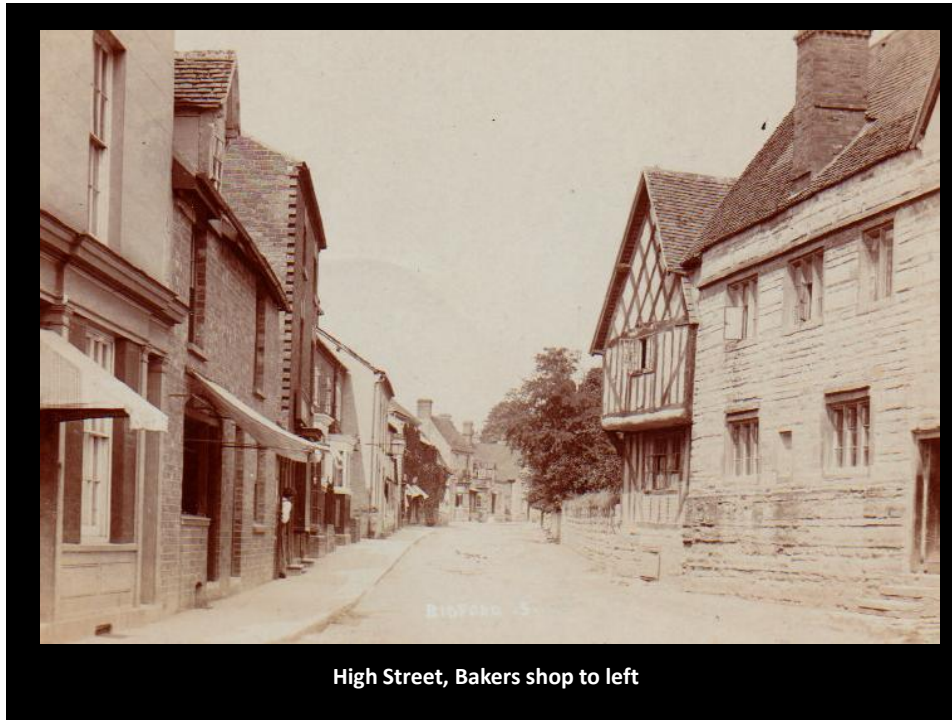


The view today

The above picture shows High Street with Falcon overhang. This overhang was demolished in the 1960s as the lorries coming along the High Street kept hitting it!

On the right the doctor's waiting room and surgery. The house next door was where Dr Hobbs lived. It became a sweet shop called Frouds, then it became an antique centre and is now a house. The next house on the right was Saddler Dowdswell as horses were used in agriculture then Cowper's the coal merchant, with no central heating then, everyone had coal fires.

**At entry to old market place:** On the left -hand side, the building with the awning was Smith's the bakers. It then became Bloodworth bakers. *In the Spring of 1939 Rodney remembered his mother pointing out to him a spectacular Easter Egg in the window of Bloodworth's and telling him to have a good look at it, because it would be some years before he would see Easter Eggs like that again. Even then people knew that war was likely.* The shop later became Falcon Stores and is now a solicitors' office.



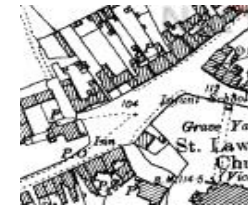
High Street, Bakers shop to left



The view today



## Around Old Market Place



**Church Street:** At the top you can see the stone mason's premises; Houghtons with the memorials outside. Also, a wheelwright, George Bryan, necessary as the farms used wagons and horses. Next door was the blacksmith, Tinker Wilcox. There was also another blacksmith in Victoria Road. On the left stood Phyllis Locke's greengrocers and the present church hall which was then the village infant school.



The view today

Further along, at the end of Grange Road in what is now Avonside lived the village GP, Dr Crawford.

**Site of future War Memorial:** The tall house on the left was Mr Sill's shop who commissioned the commemorative pottery of Bidford. It later became a chemist shop and is now a private house. Notice the gas lamp – there was no electricity in the village until the 1930s and then only in some places.

On the left is the Bull's Head pub, run by the Spiers family for over a hundred years. It was also a parcel depot (*Rodney remembered being sent by his father who owned the garage to go and collect parcels from the Bull and being in trouble with the landlady when he forgot to collect a tyre sent from Stratford which had been in her way!*)

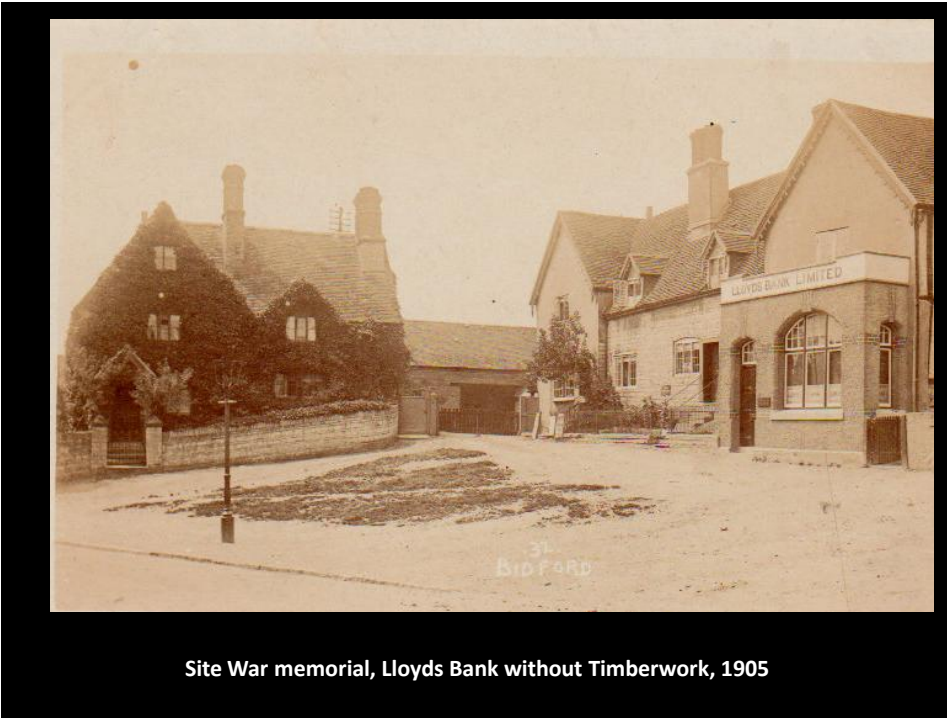


Site of War Memorial, Sills Shop 1912



The view today

**Site of the Future War Memorial:** Notice the position of Lloyd's Bank in this 1905 postcard. There is no timberwork as there is now, so it is mock, not real Tudor woodwork. The end building was the paper shop run by Miss Jones. In the background you can see part of the Co-op bakery and butcher's shop.



Site War memorial, Lloyds Bank without Timberwork, 1905



The view today

**Inauguration of the War Memorial, 1923:** The memorial was unveiled by a local ex-soldier, Paddy Locke, who was a veteran of the Boer War and fought in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War from 1914 right through to 1918. Two months after he unveiled the War Memorial he and his family emigrated to Australia.

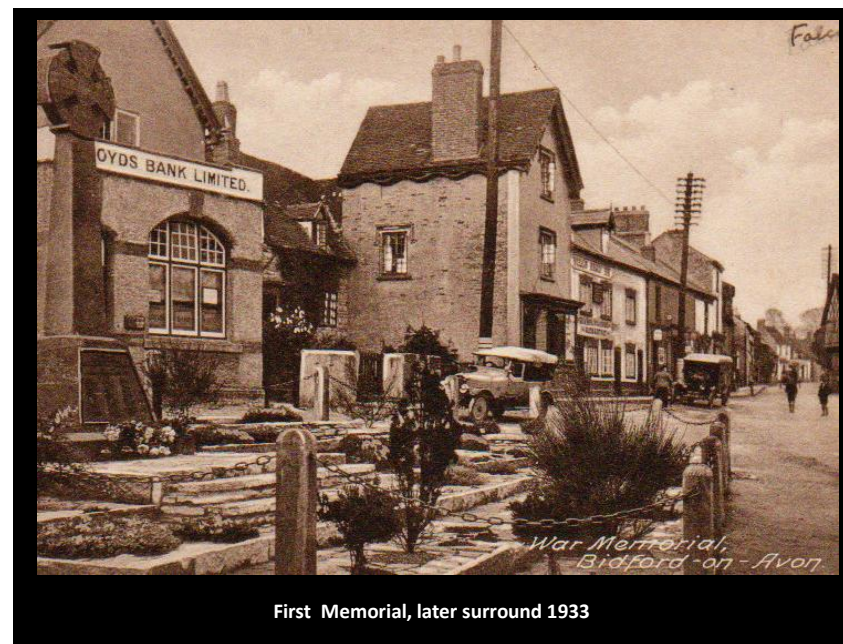
The area around the War Memorial has changed many times with wire fencing, steps & chains and then bushes



Inauguration of War Memorial 1923

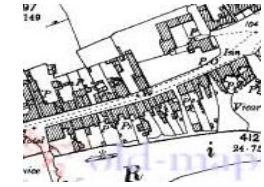


First Memorial, Armistice Day ; wire fence

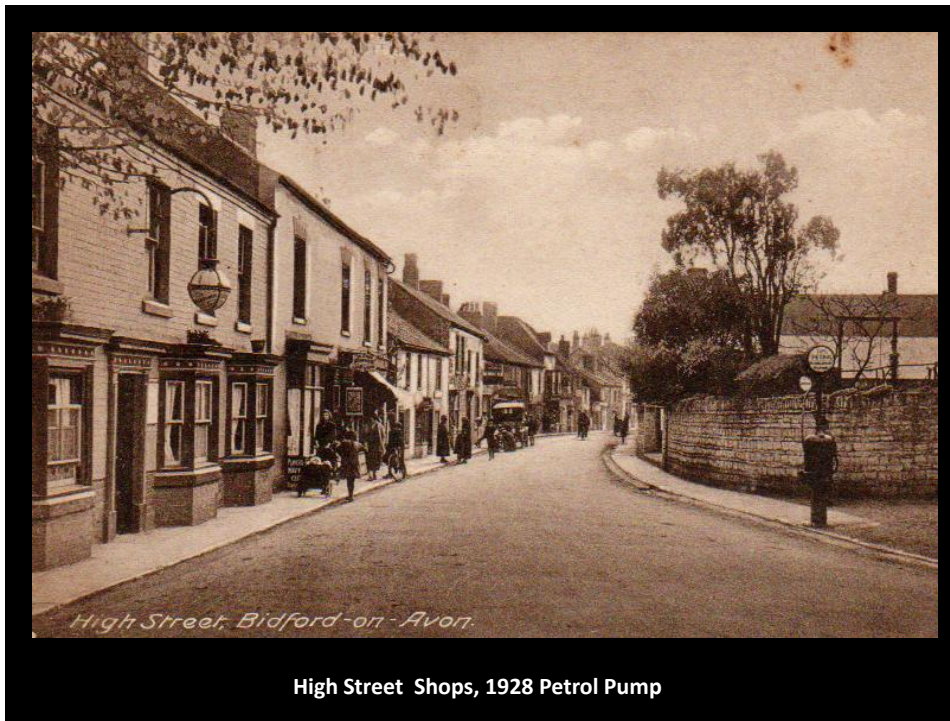


First Memorial, later surround 1933

## Old Market Place to Bidford Bridge

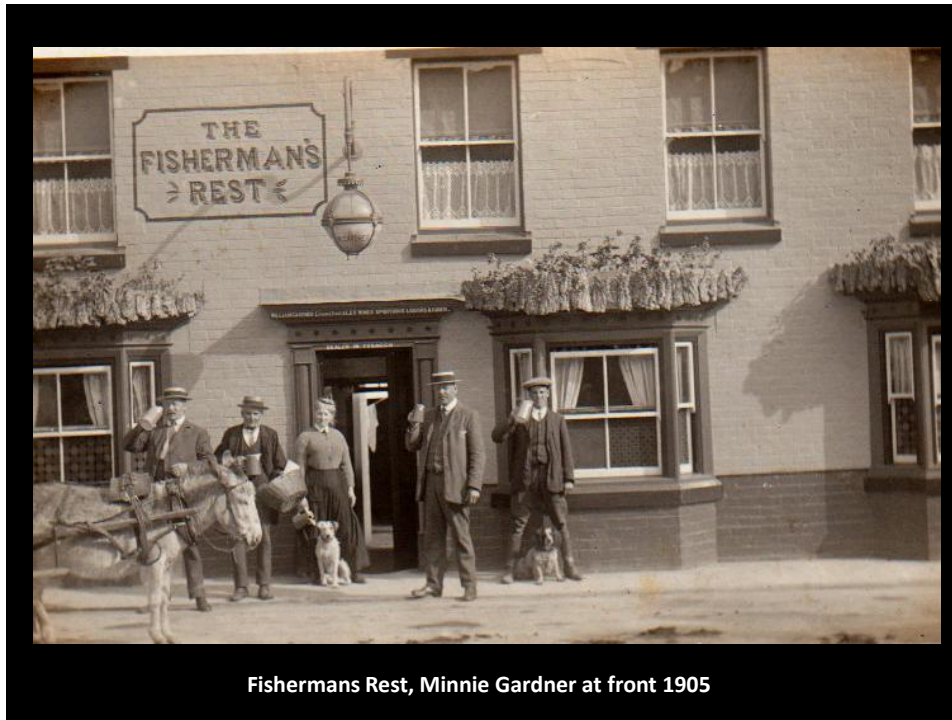


**Looking down the High Street:** On the right is the petrol pump belonging to Boshier's Garage, which was on the Bank. On the left side is the pub, the Fisherman's Rest. The next shop down was a sweet shop which had belonged to Lieutenant George Leonard who was killed in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. It was then owned by Arthur Tedd, then became Fielding's sweet shop, then Cox's and is now the chemist shop. The next building down (with the canopy) is the gas showroom, followed by Kendall the cobbler, and Churchley the hairdresser. The lane on the left led to George Cope's Dairy. The other dairy in the village was Horseman's run by Dorothy Johnson's father.



Known as The Boat until 1901 this pub became the Fishermans Rest under William Gardner sometime before 1921. The Fisherman's Rest was run by Minnie Gardner from 1921 to 1940. Minnie also owned the fishing rights. Fishermen would come from Birmingham for a day's fishing and go to the pub. The donkey and cart was owned by James Kendall who was one legged.

Later the building became Durant the Jewellers and is now a hairdresser, optician and flats.



Fishermans Rest, Minnie Gardner at front 1905



The view today

**Overleaf, Looking down the High Street:** Note the horse droppings in the road!

On the left -hand side was Le Cove Café which was the "Oriental Café" before that. Freda Houghton greengrocer shop was next and then the slaughter house for the butcher. Animals were walked to the Butcher and were slaughtered on the premises.



High Street Shops beyond Fishermans Rest



High Street Shops, Collins on left



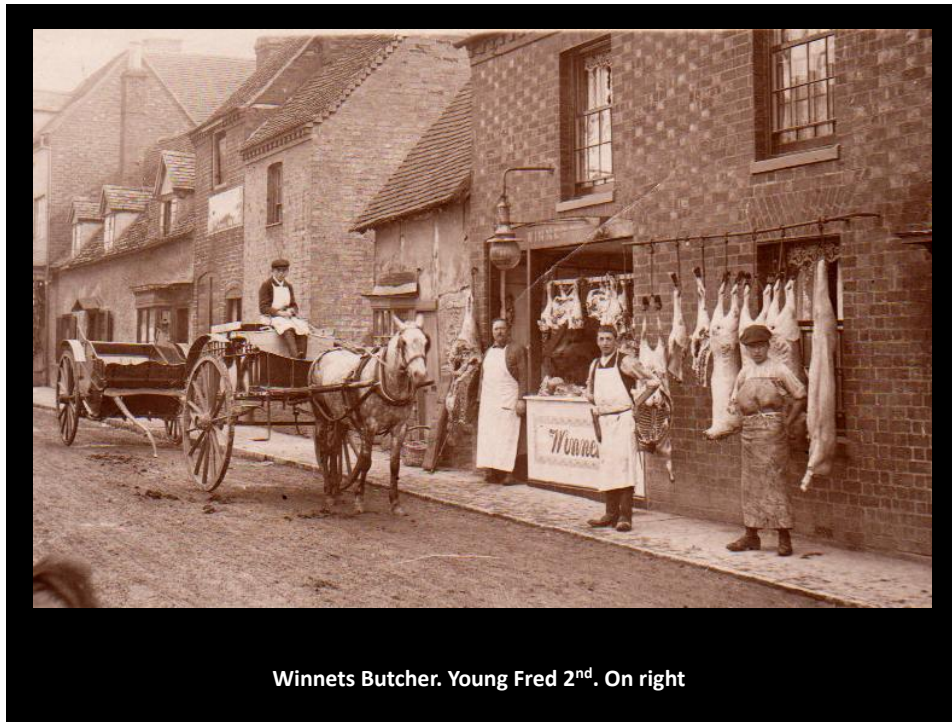
The view today



The view today

**Previous page, Looking back up the High Street towards Old Market Place:** On the left was Collins Store which became the Co-op. The Bidford and Mickleton Co-operative (to give it its full name) was a department store which sold shoes, clothes, haberdashery, coal, meat, bread and groceries. It served a large area and had at least a dozen delivery vans. You can still see the Beehive emblem of the Co-op in the brickwork. To the left was the Jubilee Hall where people watched films and shows were put on. The buildings have been replaced by private houses known as Saxon Fields.

**Butcher's shop:** Originally Gould's, then Winnett and then Hunt butchers. Imagine having the meat outside and exposed to everything going by! The slaughterhouse was to the left of the shop. The shop is now a house but the rail where the meat was hung is still there.



Winnets Butcher. Young Fred 2<sup>nd</sup>. On right



The view today

Fred Winnett (*in the photo*) was killed in a motorbike accident and is buried in the churchyard. Next door was Cash's store.



From JOHN GOULD, Family Butcher, BIDFORD, R.S

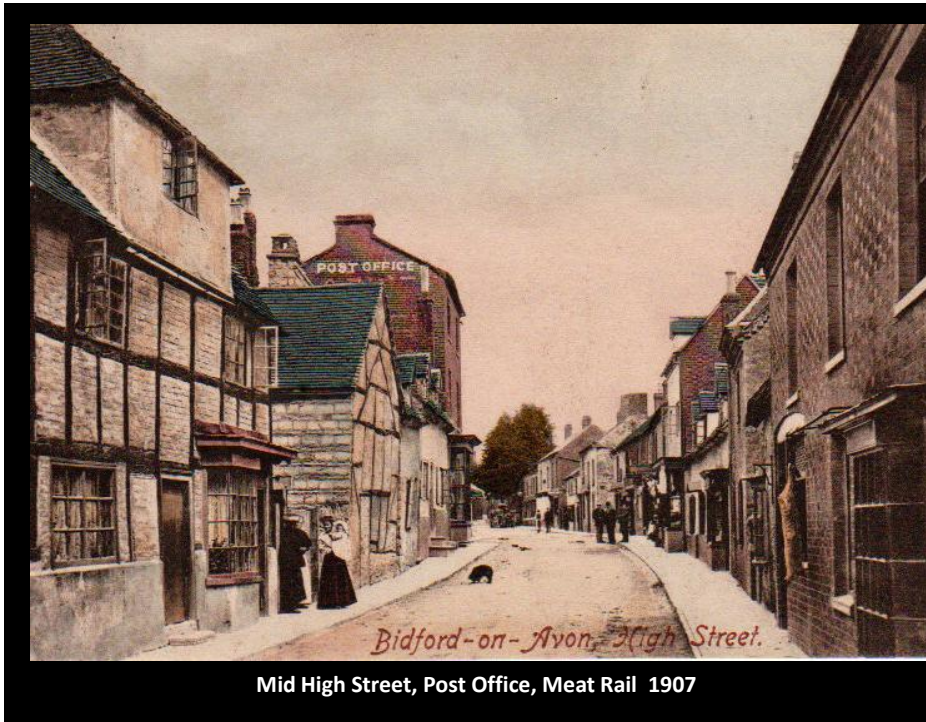


Gould Butchers 1908

Try ordering your meat by postcard today!



The same shop as John Gould butcher



The view today

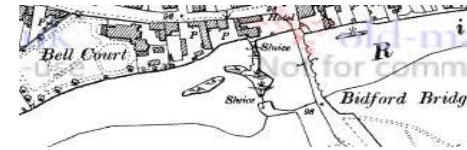
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### Looking back up the High Street from near the bridge.

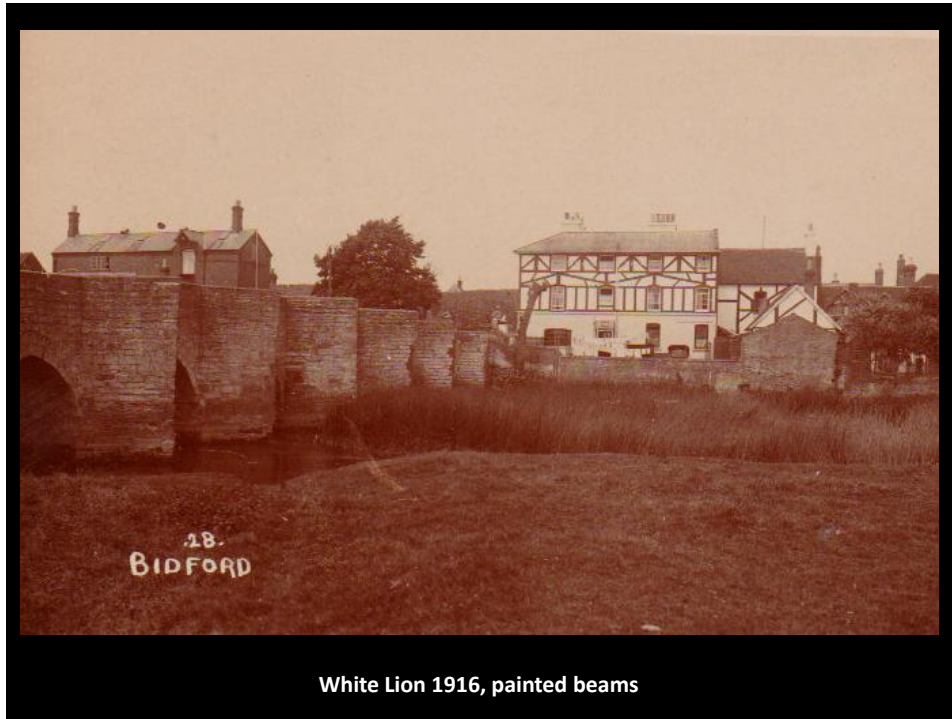
The above 1907 picture is from just below the butchers shop on the previous page.

On the left side those half-timbered houses have now all gone as has the barn which in later years was Dick Mason's radio shop. The Post Office sign is visible above the rooflines.

## Waterside Views



**View from the Meadows:** Looking across to what was the White Lion Hotel and now turned into flats. Note the painted on black beams! On the left of the bridge are the Assembly Rooms.



White Lion 1916, painted beams



The view today

There was a pub on the site of the White Lion since the reign of Charles II. From the early 1900's the pub catered for a boom in cyclists and fishing. In the 1920's it advertised accommodation.

**The old weir** – with flash locks on it. The river was much higher then than today. On the right you can see the boatyard of the Pleasure Boat Inn, now the Frog. In foreground is the punt which belonged to Bertie Gardner and which he used for collecting the osiers for basket-making.

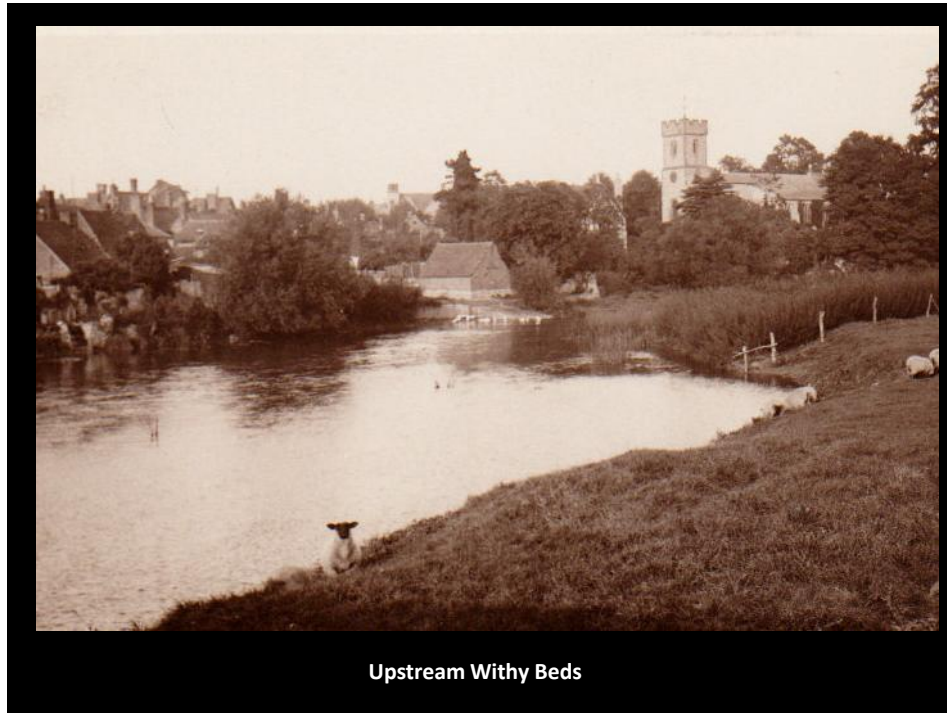


Old Weir Boatyards, Pleasure Boat and Hollands Bertie Gardners Punt



The view today

**From the same spot,** Looking up the river to the osier beds. Osiers were used for basket making. The osiers were gathered from the river and dried when they were called Withies and woven into baskets. The village had a good trade in basket making and the finished products were sent to Birmingham.



By the building on the left, there was a ford across the river.

**The river in flood:** the river flooded frequently. Notice the cleaned osiers now cleaned and dried and called Withies.

Bertie Gardner's boat moored just below.

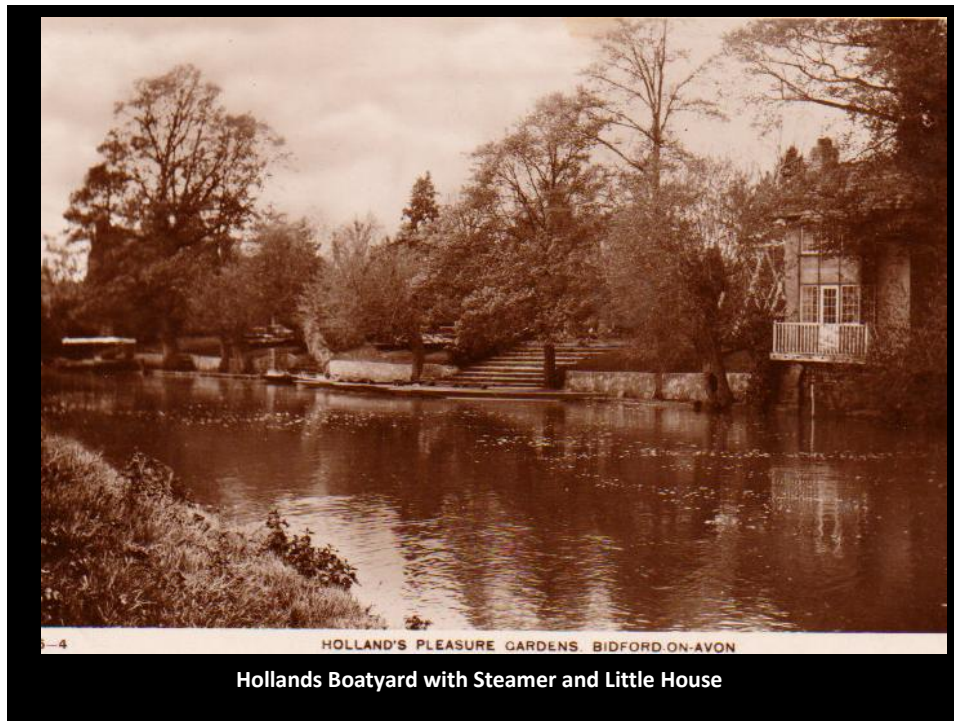


River in Flood, Cleaned Withies on Right



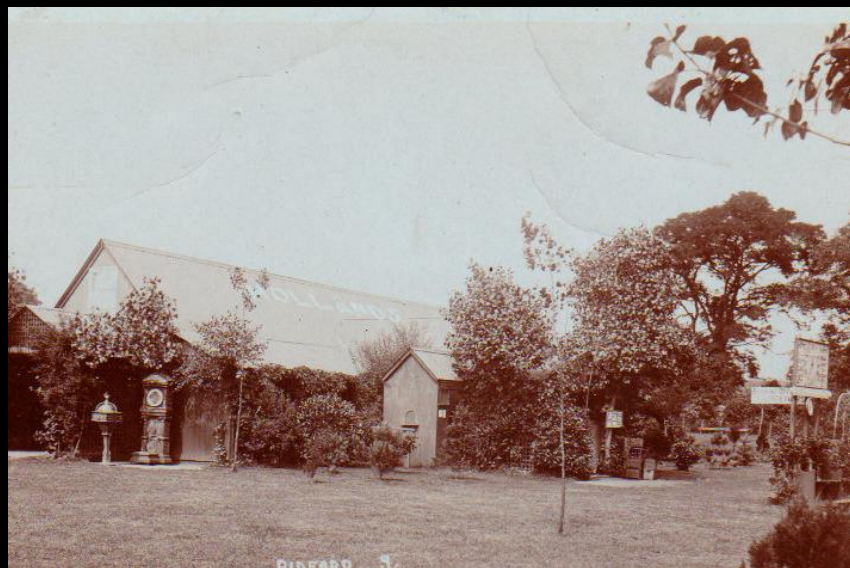
The view today

**Holland's Boatyard,** Bidwell's boats is where narrow boats today can be rented for holidays. In the 1920s and 30s it belonged to a man known in the village as 'Daddy' Holland who ran what was called Holland's Pleasure Grounds. Meals were served there and rowing boats could be rented. Also, streamer trips ran from the boatyard down to Cleeve Prior.



The view today

**Holland's Pleasure Grounds.** Bidford was a very attractive tourist and holiday destination in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. There were weekend day trips from Birmingham and visitors could stay in the local hotels, such as The White Lion. People from Birmingham and around the West Midlands would catch the train to Salford Priors and walk from there to Bidford, going to the Pleasure Grounds for teas and meals, with rowing trips and excursions on the steamer up to Cleeve Prior.



Hollands Pleasure Gardens, 1930



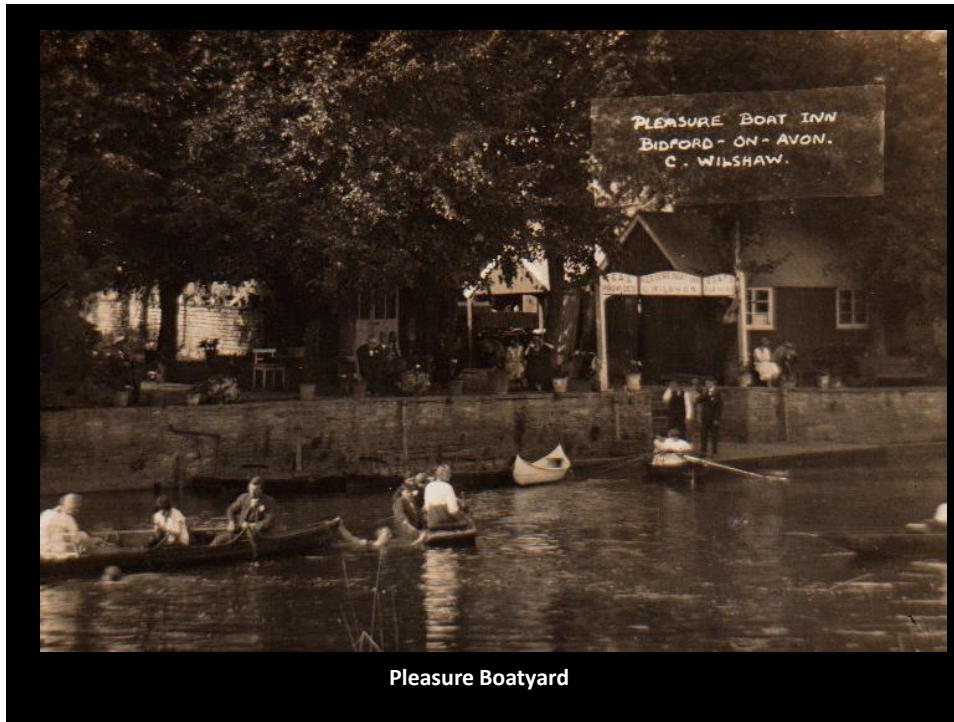
Hollands Pleasure Gardens, Tea Anyone?



Another view of Holland's Pleasure Grounds. The big shed still exists.



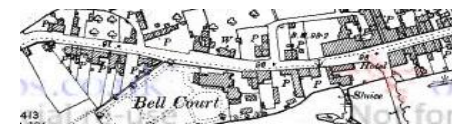
Not to be outdone by Holland's Pleasure Grounds, the "Pleasure Boat Inn", (later called the Frog and Bullrush and now called The Frog) had its own boats for hire, owned by Mr Wilshaw.



Pleasure Boatyard



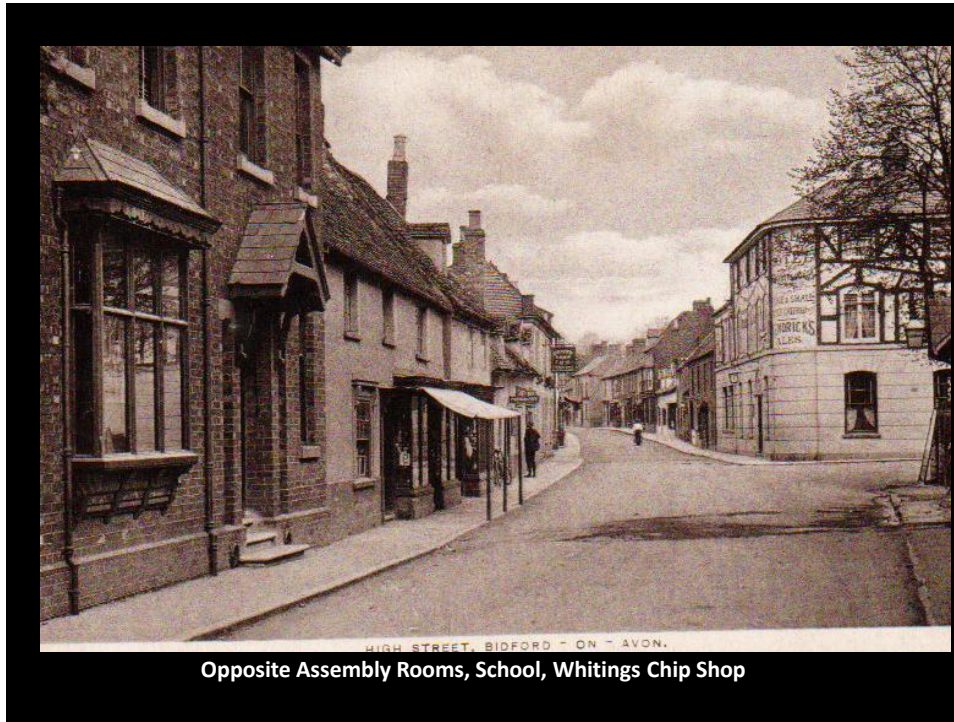
## Bidford Bridge Crossing and West Along High Street



The view today

The picture is a view east at the bridge junction, taken in 1939 with the village policeman Bill Mundy on point duty. No traffic lights on the bridge then. On the left is the Mason's Arms pub which became the Anglo-Saxon pub in the 1960's and is now a Balti. To the rear was the Anglo-Saxon burial ground and also the Bowling Club bowling green, where the modern car park is now.

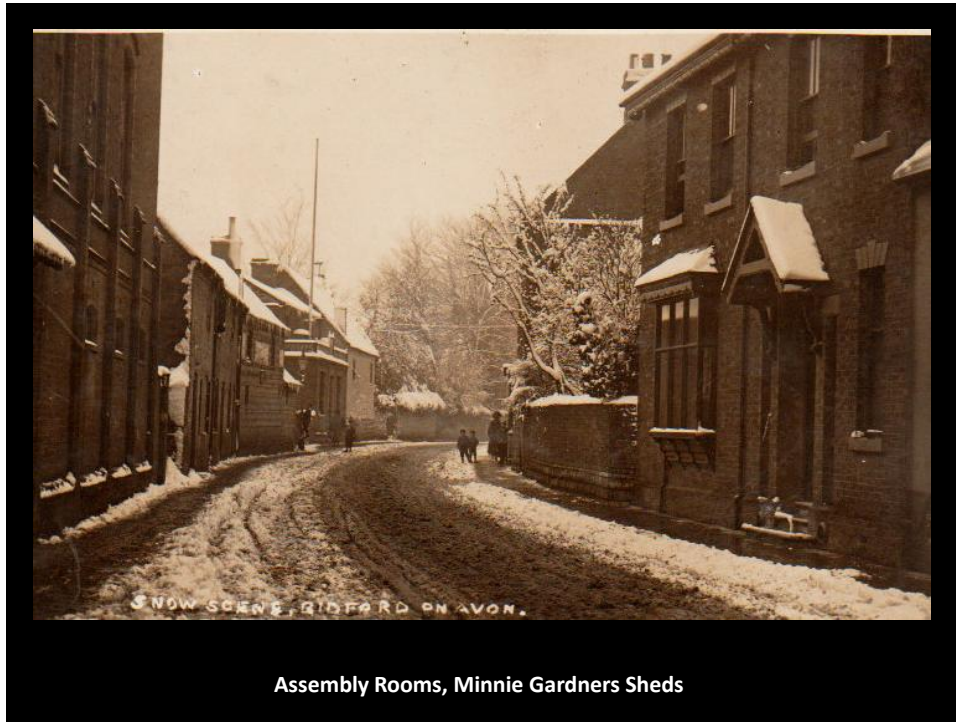
After crossing the bridge traffic turned right towards Stratford and Alcester, and left towards Evesham.



The view today

This is the view is from further back (with the present Chinese takeaway and Fish & Chip shop behind you). It shows the buildings before the road from the bridge to the by-pass was built. The place with the shade was Barber Bennett shop and he was also a photographer.

Just beyond was grocery store called Noaks and Crofts which had a car-park next to it, now replaced by the road up to the by-pass. The One Stop is on the site of Noakes. There was also a butcher's shop and ladies' outfitter, Mrs Richards.



Assembly Rooms, Minnie Gardners Sheds

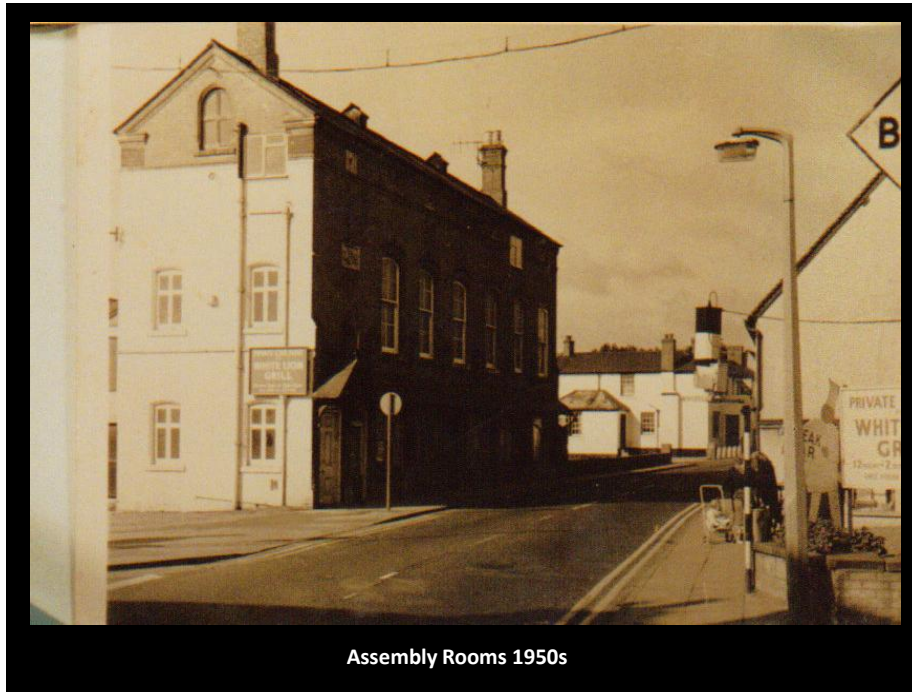


The view today

**In the opposite direction** On the left are the Assembly Rooms. The Bridge and car parking for The Frog now occupy this land.

Next door to the Assembly Rooms and just beyond in the picture was Minnie Gardner's house and drying sheds for the oziers.

On the right side the building with a shallow porch was a private school run by Miss Groves.



Assembly Rooms 1950s

The Assembly Rooms are on the left and on the right the part sign indicating 'White Lion.'

The Assembly Rooms originally had warehousing; there was a derrick on the river side.

Inside this building later on were shops at ground level in an arcade, Freda Houghton's shop, Mabel Wakefields's greengrocers, Jackie Nunn's ice-cream parlour and above was a hairdresser.

There was a hall where films were put on and dances were held attended by American soldiers from the base at Honeybourne.

There was also a corn merchants facing the river side. During World War II there was a 20lb gun on the ground floor to defend the bridge. If it had ever been used, the building would have collapsed!



The view today

**Further along**, beyond the present Frog. On the right side was a general shop run by Mrs Sweetzer, selling sweets and the Bedford Drivers' Café. She also delivered paper (*"Have you had your papers yet love?"*) The Sweetzers owned Bell Court where they lived and the billiard room was the public library (now a printing business). Bell Court is called that as the church bells were brought up the river from the foundry in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and landed by Bell Court.

On the opposite side of the road the shop on the left was successively a green-grocer's run by Mrs Vincent, an electrical shop then a cycle shop, a sail board shop and an antiques shop (now a computer shop). The next house was a hairdresser (now the undertakers).

There were 4 butchers' shops in the village, also a wet fish shop and fish and chip shop. While a butcher and baker remain much of the food retailing is undertaken by a supermarket.

## A Reflection on subsequent years.

*“Bidford emerged from the Second World War as a close-knit community well served by rail and road links, a wide range of High Street shops, an established Junior and Infant school and, since 1938, a secondary school with a growing reputation.*

*During the next 40 years, however, the village was transformed. There were positive developments – the provision of main drainage in the early 1960s and the creation of a stock of affordable council housing over the following 15 years being two of the most important – but the loss of the railway of 1962, (Bidford and Salford Priors had stations) the secondary school in 1985 and the High Street shops from the sixties onwards were a succession of body blows to the life of the village.”*

‘Yesterday’s Children’

Copies of “**Yesterday’s Children**”, an history of Bidford during the twentieth century, are available from the Society.

In 1901 Bidford boasted a population of 1,369 people who supported 6 village centre pubs. Today just 2 of those pubs remain, while restaurants and take out establishments have sprung up. For those interested in the local pubs Richard Churchley’s book: “**Having A Drink Around Bidford**” provides descriptions of Hostelryes in the village. For a copy contact Richard Churchley by email: [rachurchley@totalise.co.uk](mailto:rachurchley@totalise.co.uk)