

George Bourne

When I worked in the smithy, all farmers from around came; we'd got horses coming from Elworth and coal horses. We had a good clientele of horses, there were always 3 or 4 of us shoeing and repairing farm machinery and carts, making barrows, it was all very interesting. My uncles smithy (Lewin St), was well up to date when I went in 1934, they'd got two fires, well four but when the horses were phased out dropped down to two. He had an electric blower for the fans, two big drilling machines, a lathe, circle saw and 5 new grinders. We were well off, the yard was full of implements; boat horses were there for 8 o'clock in morning waiting to be shoed. The boat horses would come in to have their shoes taken off and had a sharpened piece of metal across the toe and bring it up sharp like a chisel and the heels you would sharpen them off and knock shoes back on again. Other horses had different types of screws and studs, you can't believe it. Seddons horses used to come at least every fortnight, they used to take salt up regular and wear the shoes out, they were inch and half by half inch, 18 inches long with toes and heels on. Toes had a piece of metal on and on the heels a band about 1 and a half inch wide, you'd put two rivets on that, the shoes wore out but they were very good. We made air raid shelters, working overtime, we made them for Northwich and Winsford, we should have got time and a quarter, but didn't get any extra money for working overtime.

We used to work five and a half days a week, we never stopped for a cigarette or a drink of tea all the time I was there. It was only after we did the overtime that my auntie Martha used to come down and give us a jug of tea and a piece of cake, after that we'd have a can of tea, ready brewed, we hung the can on the side to keep warm. You never stopped work.

I was a bricklayers labourer at the salt works for a while, when pans were being repaired we used to go underneath them, where salt dripped through it had formed what they call 'cats', they dripped down and formed solid, you used a hammer to chip those off.

In Lower Street, I remember Seddons Salt works, I remember two men who used to sleep at the salt works because they'd got no home, one was Joe Pip, tall and thin, the other was Dallier. I think they helped the lumpmen from time to time and got the odd penny for it, that was what poverty was.

I knew how the fires went and how they lifted the pans, marvellous how it worked. Fires lit at the front, the heat would go under the pans, through the brick flues, right down to the hot house and finished up at the chimney. I worked there for 18 months, I think 70 men worked there. I'd be near 18 when I left. I knew most of them by name wallers, lumpmen, firemen, labourers, storemen, joiners, men who worked up at the grinding room. There were two gangs of pan smiths, four different men fired the common pans as they called them, nearly always a pan out of action. The people on the canal, a lot of them never went to school. I only remember two of them but up Booth Lane where I was born they all had stables behind them, they were all right, no bother, they'd moor up for night and move on, there wasn't many who came to school but that's how it went you see.