

VILLAGE ECHOES

More years ago than I care to remember, when I was a child I intrigued my grandfather by sweeping a few feet of our garden path with my little broom before stopping and looking around, a few more feet and another stop, leaning on my broom handle I had another look around. The next time I stopped I would pretend to roll a 'fag.' My reply, when asked what I was doing, was "I'm playing road mans". This was in the days when we had 'lengths men,' council employees who were responsible for a length of road in the parish.

Equipped with a handcart, broom, shovel, scythe and bagging hook, they kept the verges cut and the road and pavements swept clean of rubbish, leaves etc. Ditches were kept clear as were the run-off grips, keeping not only the road surface clear of water but also helping keep the underlying road foundation dry. Minor repairs to the roads were also carried out by the lengths men.

The names of most of these men escape me but I recall Mr Marchant, who was responsible for the village. Bert Blunt had the area around the Chequers. It must have been in the early 1960s the handcarts and most of the men were replaced by two men and a Ferguson tractor & trailer, painted green instead of the usual grey. The trailer had a toolbox and a small hut built on to it for shelter in bad weather for 'Coopy' Pilbeam and George Coventry if my memory serves me correctly.

Even though the verges etc were looked after by the County Council, many householders took it on themselves to cut the verges & hedges around their property. Ditches were also kept clear. Granddad Brissenden, a retired farm worker, still cleared the culvert that ran under the lane and the ditch that ran through the garden of his rented cottage in Blue Coats Lane when he was eighty years old. 'Good hedges & ditches mean good neighbours' I recall him saying. In the village itself the trades people and householders kept the outside of their businesses and homes clean and tidy. Early morning would find Bert Brown at the bakers, little Albert Osborne for Freddie Southon the butcher in the High Street and other owners or employees of shops and pubs in the village sweeping the frontage of their property. Any weed that dared show its head was swiftly removed.



Some of Freddie Southon's staff, Albert Osborne on right

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