

A General Study of Boughton

By David Miller

Road System.

Boughton is a small village in Norfolk, situated 7¼ miles south-east of Downham Market and 1 mile north-east of Stoke Ferry. It is in the South West division of the county, Clackclose Hundred and petty sessional division, Downham union and county court district, rural deanery of Feltwell and archdeanery of Wisbeach and diocese of Ely. Boughton could be thought of as a minor landmark as all the land, except that to the north slopes gently down, in the distance about ¾ mile, to the west of the surrounding land which is some 80 feet lower than the village. From the heart of the village Wretton lane runs to the east and at the bottom of this, some ½ mile away, is the main road, the A134. The road that goes through the village is unclassified.

At the southern end of the village is a second road running to the east which goes to Stoke Ferry, just over 1 mile away. Going southwards is the Oxborough Road which goes down to the Oxborough fen only ¾ mile distant. It is significant that this is the only road from Boughton that still is completely by thick, high hedges and trees, or the like that may have been growing alongside the other roads have been pulled up during the last 15 years as the verges of the roads have not been considered so susceptible to giving way under the weight of the transport that invariably has to use them, because the roads are so very narrow, as those of the Oxborough Road. Even though the ground is firmly held together by thickets and so forth down the Oxborough fen, several times a year lorries or tractors sink into such a great extent that they are almost on their sides due to the fact that their road-side wheels do don't sink in so far as all the load is transferred to the other side on account of the ground sloping down from the road. At the northern end of the village a road runs to the west to Barton Bendish, about 2 miles away which was tarmacadamed about 7 or 8 years ago. Another furlong to the north of the Barton Bendish road is a road branching off to the east for Wereham, which is ½ mile away. The road has been newly surfaced with tarmac during the last year. This, as the other roads stemming from Boughton, is unclassified and hardly carries any traffic. Opposite the opening of this road is really the continuation of it which goes to Fincham, fractionally over 3 miles away. The by-road which continues northward eventually reached the A134 from where the nearest towns are Downham, 7 miles, and Kings Lynn 14 ½ miles.

In the village is a private road for farm use that goes past the church and leads to an area of land that is locally known as the 'Common' The hedgerows that have disappeared from the roadside have also vanished from around most of the fields to make several small fields into one large one of a greater acreage that is easier to work. The removal of hedges not only makes the fields larger but also improves the working conditions for farm implements as they are hindered by these obstructions.

Religious Buildings.

The church of All Saints in Boughton was rebuilt in 1872, with the exception of the tower, at a cost of about £1000. It is a building made of stone in the Early English and Decorated styles, consisting of chancel, nave, south porch and an embattled western tower with pinnacles. The western tower contains three bells that are quite adequate

enough to summon everybody to church from the village when it is time to worship. There are seatings for one hundred and fifty people in the church and the population of Boughton, as far as my knowledge is concerned, has never surpassed this number so there are always plenty of spare seats.

The church's register dates from the year 1729. The register dates from this time when the inhabitants of even the parish could said to have been very few and far between. At present the living is held by Reverend Bradshaw who does not actually live in the village itself but comes to the parish from the neighbouring village of Fincham several times a week. A stone cross was erected in the churchyard in 1921 with the names on it of those who died in the Great War (1914-1918) from the parish, and the names of those who fell in the Second world War (1939-1945) have also been added to the cross.

The church is protestant and there are very few people in the village who themselves are not of the Protestant religion. Those who are Methodists go to the Methodist church in Stoke Ferry and the Roman Catholics go further afield either to Wisbech or Ely. The Wesleyan Chapel was built in 1871 and is a building in the Gothic style. It has seating for about 100 people although very rarely does the local congregation go above 30 people as most people who I have spoken to find it a very dull experience and extremely boring. The churchyard is kept tidy by one of the villagers, namely Mr Smith, while the church and chapel are kept clean inside by Mrs Payne.

The Pond.

Boughton is lucky in having a large pond in the middle of the village that is a source of pastime for many of the people. This is because it is well stocked with fish, mainly rudd, but with some roach, pike, perch and eels. It is extremely difficult to get fed up with fishing in this pond as one is sure of getting numerous 'bites' which makes it interesting even though you may be unlucky enough not to catch any. The pond is an attraction of a good number of fishermen from the surrounding villages and on Sundays there may be as many as twenty people dotted round the pond fishing. The reeds that once hindered the fishermen in the pond were cut down a year ago and this has improved their conditions a great deal but has removed a nesting place for the moorhens and a roosting place for the thousands of swallows that used to congregate there in the summer. The ducks were once over-crowded on the pond when there were about 70 on it but recently nearly half have gone and at the last count two thirds of these were drakes.

The Population and their Occupations.

Most literature that can be found on Boughton states the population to be approximately one-hundred and fifty and when I did an accurate survey of the population I found that there were one hundred and forty four people. Obviously it would be pointless to go through the names of the people one by one and it seems to me to be just as explicit to put the age groups into categories. There are 41 children ranging from small babies to those up to 20 years of age. Apart from the six children that are too young to go to school all the others have a daily chore somewhere. This excludes Miss Judith Proctor who at 20 years old is now a qualified nurse.

There are sixteen children who are still young enough to go to the primary school in the village, five who go to Downham Secondary Modern and one who goes to Downham Grammar. Of the rest five go to private schools, all four from one family go to Swaffham convent and the other four are studying at universities. Recently there has been a tendency to try and avoid Methwold Secondary school and Downham has been the school where everybody seem to prefer going. A young gentleman by the name of Michael Payne is intensely interested in birds and when he catches them in the nets he sets up for the purpose he rings them, mainly swallows, to see if they come back to the same place the next year.

From the forty seven women in the village three go to work at the Smedleys factory in Kings Lynn, four at the new Jaegar factory, also in Kings Lynn, and one goes to the coffin factory in Downham. The remaining are all housewives but some render other services to the community. Mrs (name unclear) cooks the school meals, while Mrs Rix cleans the school up after the finish of school lessons each day. A few of the women act as cleaners for the older people and are a great help. The Post Office is managed by the Clarkes although most of the work is done by Miss Clarke. The parish nurse lives in Boughton and has just had a new bungalow built.

The men just outnumber the women as there are fifty six, and seventeen of these are retired gentlemen who occasionally help a farmer if he needs it during the peak working months. The rest all work on the land apart from four who are a great asset to the village. Mr Savage (John) is an electrical engineer, Mr Frank Savage is the village shopkeeper, Mr Walton is a solicitor and Mr Jones is a builder. There is a blacksmith in Boughton but he combines this occupation with being a farm worker.

Buildings.

There is only one wooden building in the village and this was built by converting two railway carriages into a small compact, and quite adequate house. The compartments are still discernible although some have been enlarged and of course there is no partition down the middle, but a central narrow corridor. The house is called appropriately 'Whyworry' and Mrs Pentelow lives there. There are four recent modern bungalows in the village, built within the last three years. These are made of brick with tiled roofs and have all been built for understandable reasons. One was built for the parish nurse to live in, one for the Poplars farm cowman, the other two were built for new inhabitants of the village coming to live there. There are five much older bungalows but they were still built with brick and have tiled roofs.

Only one council house has been built in the village and in one side of this is where the barber-cum-paperman lived and this is Mr Rix. The remaining houses are the traditional semi-detached made of brick and slate roofs. This is with the exception of the three large farm-houses and one belonging to Hallmark Hatcheries. There were two public houses in the village, built of flint and tiled roofs, namely 'The White Horse' and 'The Bell' but these were closed down almost simultaneously two years ago on account of lack of trade. The odd time when they could take a fair amount of money was if there was a cricket match in the village but when the cricket team was extinguished four years ago this source of income went.

The only shop in the village is owned by Mr Savage and caters for everybody in the village very adequately and up until it was built 12 years ago the inhabitants had to bike or walk to get their goods from Stoke Ferry or Wereham. The post office is looked after by Miss D Clarke who brings round the mail at 7 o'clock in the morning and then at about 5 o'clock in the evening. Mr Clarke takes care of the office when she is not able to do so.

Hall Mark Hatcheries.

There is an extremely minor branch of Hall Mark Hatcheries in Boughton which is managed by Mr Claydon who took over some years ago from Mr Loxton. He employs two local men, Mr Sherwood and Mr Carter, as there is just sufficient work to keep the two men occupied. There are two separate parts to the hatcheries, one where the turkeys are hatched and kept until they are about one month old and the other where the main sheds are and also free range.

The whole institution is controlled by Mr Claydon and the clear thinking of this man has paid dividends since he took his office. The food is stored in both sections and this means that a minimum amount of 'lugging' it about is done when the time comes to pluck the turkeys everyone from the village who wishes may go along to help and are paid so much per turkey that they pluck. H C Beart always supply the turkey food but not the same firm takes the plucked turkeys each year.

Education.

Boughton Primary School is mixed and was erected in 1879 and rebuilt in 1888 which is shown for all to see on a placard above the front door. The rebuilding of the school was thanks to the complete financial support of the late Mr Richard Harwin, and was taken over by the County Council in 1913. It was built for the purpose of taking forty children at a maximum each term and is still the same today. Fifteen of the children are in the infants' class and the other twenty-five in class 1, as it is called. The garden that used to be in front of the school has been cleared and instead the children have got a small sandpit. The playground has been equipped with netball posts and also other apparatus, like a see-saw and swing, for amusement.

Up until five years ago Miss Hanbury and Miss Field had faithfully served the school but they decided it was time to retire and someone else had to be found to teach. Mrs Barbay took over Class 1 and Miss Rye in the infants' class but Miss Rye soon left and a local woman, Mrs Savage, who has a good knowledge of teaching substituted until another fulltime teacher could be found. This continued until 1966 when both teachers were again changed. Mrs Hayes came as Headmistress and luckily a young local girl who had been studying to be a teacher said that she would like to take on the job full time as she was going to be married. These two have been teaching ever since apart from when Mrs Hayes had a short illness and Mrs Warner took over. The old school building of 1879 attached to the Wesleyan Chapel is now a Sunday school.

Traffic Observation

I did not think it would matter when I did the traffic survey as the traffic is much the same every day, very sparse. I eventually decided to do it on a Saturday morning,

Saturday April 5th, over a period of one hour, from 9 o'clock until 10 o'clock, when I hoped there would be an interesting mixture of vehicles. The figures turned out to be; Cars – 10; Lorries – 4; Motor-bicycles – 2; Bicycles – 5; Vans – 7 and tractors – 12. The results obtained were a little higher than I think is completely true of the amount of traffic, although the numbers are true of most days. As can be seen cars come through Boughton very occasionally whereas the vans, bicycles, tractors mainly come from the farms and are comparatively more frequent for the type of transport they are. The lorries were those bringing some commodity, or taking it from the farms.

Agricultural Holdings

Sir Henry Bedingfeld bart is lord of the manor, Messrs R G Robinson, The Poplars farm, R S Proctor, Church farm, and W Miller and Sons, Hall Farm, are the principal landowners. The chief crops grown are wheat, barley and sugar beet. Boughton's land area of 1,353 acres is of a soil of varied description one half being strong clay land; subsoil clay. Mr Robinson owns 850 acres which is all heavy land and most of it arable. However, he has a few acres devoted for pig keeping which is gradually growing to be more intensive. He keeps about 30 beef cattle and around 80 sheep. Mr Robinson employs ten labourers who have various jobs apart from two who have a full time job looking after the pigs. The cattle and sheep are not of so great importance to him and these are fed and cleaned by some of the normal workers. He had his own drier installed some 12 years ago as this is a necessity with the large output Class combine he has and the large number of acres he has to cut.

The tractor force is nine, the latest addition being a four-wheel drive 'Roadless' which is still being put through its paces. His crops this year include mustard, barley, wheat, sugar-beet, potatoes and a new drilling of cocksfoot. There are 25 acres of mustard, 150 acres of barley, 100 acres of wheat, 80 acres of potatoes, 120 of sugar-beet and 60 acres of cocksfoot for next year. The rest of the acreage is made up of crops such as oats and peas although a good amount is left fallow. The extent of the land to the west is bordered by the Barton River which is a small stream only about 1 foot deep. Mr Robinson's main farm buildings are in the village but he also has some down the Common where pigs are kept, and also two sheds at Oxborough that again house pigs.

The water here is still drawn up by windmill. Although the orchard is fairly small at 5 acres the apples are still packed and sent away, which is another source of income. The apples that fall to the ground and turn rotten are fed to the few pigs kept in small sheds in the orchard. The apple production is taken as a serious source of money as the apples are kept in good condition by various sprayings of the trees. Like most, or at least a great deal of his produce, the apples are transported by his Bedford TW lorry which can also be transformed into a cattle float when market day comes. He does not connect himself with any contractors at all, showing he has all today's necessities of farm machinery, as even muck spreading is done by his own tools. Although farm work never seems to be at an ebb on Mr Robinson's farm the hard work appears to pay dividends each year by the good crops he obtains.

Mr Proctor, with an acreage of 230 acres, employs two workmen and a full time conman. The cowman has a herd of forty to milk and with the new equipment that has been installed in the parlour his work is made considerably less. The milk is collected

by a bulk tanker from the 2000 gallon bulk tank of Mr Proctor. As Mr Robinson, Mr Proctor's land is heavy and will not work at all after a good amount of rain. Of the 230 acres some 80 are pastureland for the cattle. The remaining land is taken up by crops of barley, wheat and sugar-beet. (Barley 60 acres, wheat 55 acres and sugar-beet 45 acres). On account of the greater part of his acreage being taken up by cereals he has his own Ransomes combine and storage shed. He has four tractors which easily do the necessary work and has no need to get contractors. Going back to the subject of cereals he has his own drier which was built into one of the old existing sheds. A new bungalow is being erected for him and his two boys to live in on a piece of land facing the pond.

Miller and Sons have a total land area of 450 acres, 90 acres light sandy soil, 70 acres fen soil, and the remaining 290 acres are heavy land at Boughton. When Mr Miller realised that he would need to increase his acreage if he was to increase his income he decided that more land would have to be bought. As there was none readily available in Boughton he had to look further afield. He soon found 90 acres of light land which he could rent at Whittington and 70 acres of fenland he could rent at Methwold Hythe. His labour force of four was still enough to cope with the extra land and so there was no need to obtain another labourer.

All the land in Boughton, as Mr Proctors and Mr Robinsons are drained by 6" pipes on the whole to get rid of the large amounts of water that the land holds. If the land was not well drained when heavy rain falls or rain come then it would nearly all be like treacle. The only grassland on the farms besides 30 acres besides cocksfoot is a small field of 8 acres at Whittington used for keeping a neighbour's cattle on. The rest of the land at Whittington has been utilised in the following way this year, 30 acres of barley, 20 acres of sugar-beet, 30 acres of potatoes. This is contrasted with the use of the land at Methwold Hythe, 35 acres of potatoes, 10 acres of carrots, 25 acres of sugar-beet.

The heavy land at Boughton especially and that which is nearly as heavy down Oxborough road are kept mainly for cereals as they are not very easy to get about if the land is wet. Here there are, 30 acres of cocksfoot, 40 acres of sugar-beet, 120 acres of barley and 100 of wheat. All the sugar-beet from the land at Boughton and that for a sizeable radius about is taken to Wissington which is now being nearly thrice enlarged to become the biggest beet factory in Europe. The cereals are collected by H & C Bearts from Wisbech and the potatoes are under the guidance of Beesons and Wisker. Mr Miller buys his cereal dressings from Sinclair's of Boston and this includes the cocksfoot.

Footnote:

The document ends at this point so may be incomplete. A note at the beginning of the piece attributes information to Local Knowledge and interviews with Mr R Robinson, Mr R Proctor and Mr Claydon.

Thanks to Bill Miller for sharing this unique insight to the Boughton of the past.

Peter Agate – Boughton Parish Council