

An Old Ramsgateonian takes a walk through St Lawrence c.1930

My mother took me for my first day at, “St: Lawrence Infant’s School”. It stood opposite to the entrance to the recreation ground in, Newington Road, where the swimming pool is now. The Girl’s school was next to the infant’s school and the Boy’s school was across the road below the entrance to the recreation ground. At that time my youngest sister was attending the girl’s school and for a while she took me to and from the school, thereafter I went with friends or on my own.

Walking from Southwood Road towards St Lawrence, this was before the bungalows were built on the left hand side of Ashburnham road and there was just a tall flint wall surrounding the grounds of Southwood House. On the right hand side after the row of houses in line with the coal yard, -now a small housing estate-, and ‘The Australian Arms’ public house there was a tall fence known to the locals as the ‘black boards’. It was made from boards that had been coated in tar, a common preservative in those days. Inside this fence there were the ruins of a large house that had been badly damaged by fire and then neglected.



St Lawrence High Street viewed from near the junction with Ashburnham Road

St Lawrence High Street was a narrow thoroughfare with a number of small shops on each side. On the left hand side was a row of farm cottages belonging to Nethercourt Farm, Brett's sweet shop, a shoemakers and a building that is still there housing the Fire Escape machine. This was simply a large wooden rope operated extension ladder, mounted on an axle with two large wheels that enabled it to be moved easily by being pushed, to wherever it was needed in the locality. Then there was the old St Lawrence Parish Hall, -since rebuilt-, a few more houses and then The Red Rose public house. This pub was demolished in the 1950's.



Next to the pub was, Morris and Simons Garage. It no longer exists but was where they sold and repaired cars and had a number of petrol pumps. We would always look at any cars that were there and one day I saw my first Gully Emptying machine there. It was probably a demonstration model as it was painted red. It was a large tank on a Dennis lorry and the lorry had what was known as a 'pig snout bonnet'. This was quite a popular model at the time and the East Kent Road Car Company ran a number of small coaches of this design. Before the arrival of this gully emptier, two men did this job with the aid of a horse that pulled a wide, wheel mounted narrow tank that had a heavy lid. The men lifted the drain covers and removed debris from the bottom with long handled scoops and emptied them into the tank. (It was interesting to note that when the war started in 1939, these horse drawn tanks came back into use. Latrine buckets from the deep air raid tunnels under Ramsgate town were carried up to the surface and emptied into them for disposal elsewhere). Finally there was St. Lawrence Church itself.



On the right hand side of St: Lawrence high street there were some cottages, one was used by a boot and shoe repairer where I remember having new studs fitted to my football boots, then came 'Lawrence the bakers', Tyrell's the post office, a slaughterhouse where sometimes live animals were being delivered as we came out from school to go home in the afternoons, a 'Forge' where we could sometimes watch horses being shoed or other forging works taking place. There was a large circular steel plate in front of the forge. We were told that it was used when iron rims were fitted to cart wheels, but we never saw this done. I will always remember seeing one old lady, a Mrs Pring. She and her only son, who came to our school, lived just round the corner from the forge in Chapel Road. It was obvious to us all that they were poor and on this occasion she was trying to persuade the blacksmith to repair the ash can from her Kitchener a common fireplace come oven that was to be found in many homes in those days. Apart from the front that was made of cast iron the sides and back had almost burnt way. I didn't see the outcome, as I had to hurry on to school. Finally on that side as far as we were concerned, because we then turned off in the direction of school, there was Mrs Morlin's sweet shop where we spent our pocket money. I think we had a penny each Tuesday and Thursday and a penny from dad on Saturday, our 'penny days'. We didn't go to school on Saturday so we spent that money nearer home.