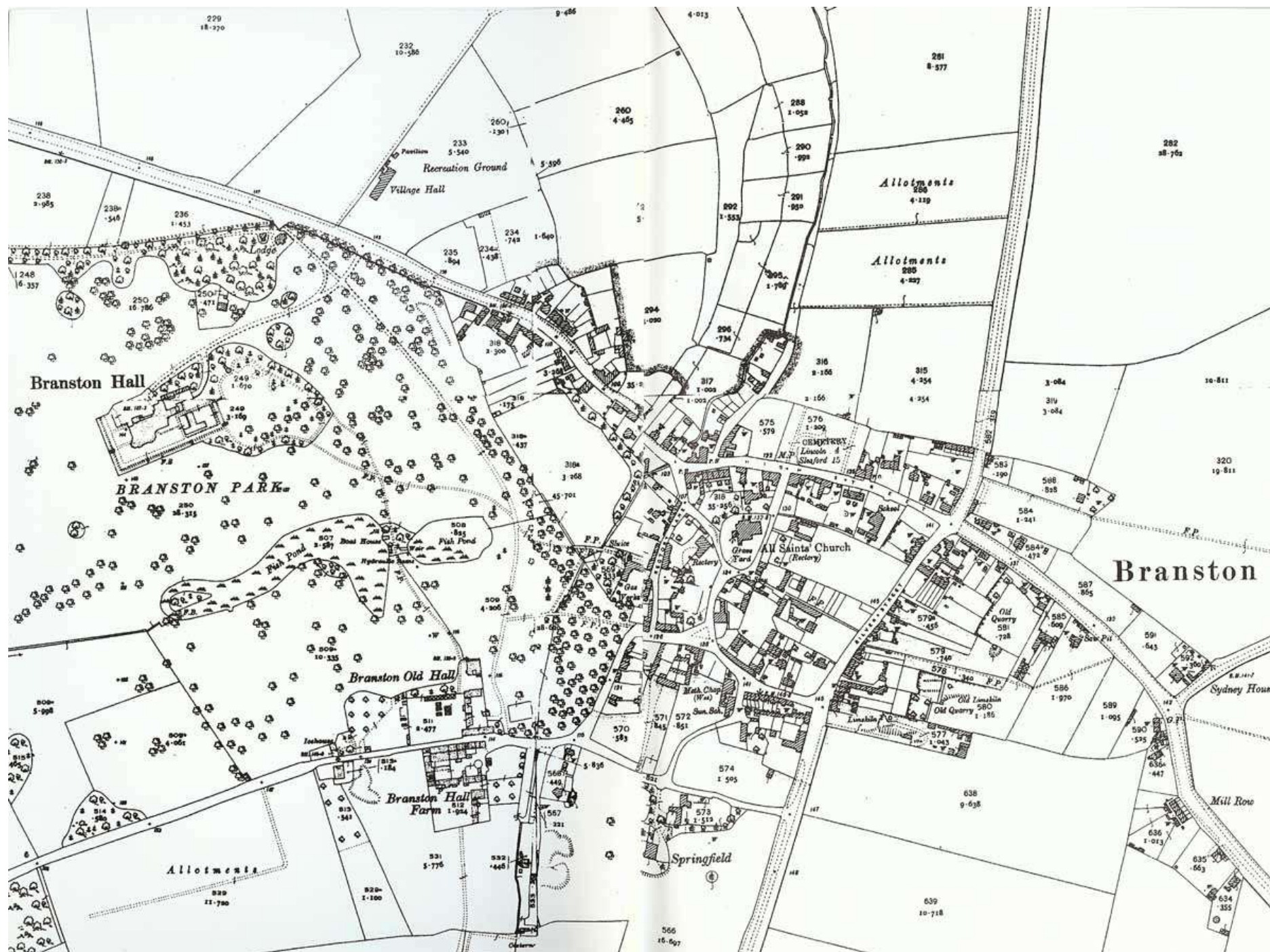




*Branston
Remembered*



BRANSTON REMEMBERED

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PREFACE

The village of Branston has ancient roots with signs of human activity in the parish as far back as the prehistoric, but many of its present residents are newcomers to the village, for whom Branston is essentially a commuter village to Lincoln and beyond. The spirit of Branston's past and its impact on the present thus remains to a great extent unknown as people pass by everyday sights around the village, such as the water pumps, without recognising their full significance. This book therefore intends by photographs and commentary to unveil Branston's recent history and show how its peoples' lives changed radically, as Branston rapidly expanded from being a small, tight-knit agricultural community and adapted to the new socio-economic conditions and technological innovations of the twentieth century.

The photographs contained within the book, particularly the older ones, are in themselves a social and historical statement, for a century ago photographs were taken mainly by professional photographers, or wealthy amateurs. Hence the early photographs tend to be formal and posed, it being an event in itself to have one's picture taken. For Branston's poorer residents there would have been even fewer opportunities for photography. A newspaper article from the early 1900's consequently records the excitement and awe with which a Branston man called Mr Brown, celebrates his Golden Wedding by having his photograph taken for the first time in his life, for "he had lived to pass his seventy-second birthday without facing the camera."

The photographic journey through Branston's past, together with personal reminiscences and accounts therefore provides us with evocative images of 'old' Branston, as they record people, places and events that belong to a very different village from the present. For those who have lived long in the village, it may provoke further memories, as they see familiar photographs, or read of shared experiences. For those who are not part of Branston's story, it is hoped that it will provide a window into a community, that at the start of the third millennium is still redefining its identity in a rapidly changing world.



Studio Photographs of Willows Family, c1890



Branston Remembered

BRANSTON'S TIME LINE

AD

300 - Coins of Emperor Constantine (335-340 AD) and Roman candlestick found at an excavation of Moor Farm in 1973.

Pre-1066 Hamine, a Saxon has 12 carucates of land sufficient for 10 plough teams at 'Brantzune'.

1086 Domesday Book - Branston has a church, priest, four mills, 3 fisheries, 60 acres of land and woodland for pannage. Walter D'Aincurt is 'Lord' of the Manor.

1190 Robert Patricius, or Partridge, with the consent of his wife Agnes gave to Branston church one acre and a half of land situated upon the Holme, so that a light would be burnt in the church for their souls on the altar of St Peter and St Paul.

1240 Hospital of St John the Baptist established at Mere used for lepers and later as almshouses.

1466 Branston annexed by City of Lincoln to contribute taxes.

1619 Garratt Charity established, with a sum of thirty six pounds given annually for apprenticing village boys.

1680 John Curtois becomes the first Curtois Rector at All Saints' Church. There were to be another 6 Curtois rectors, for a period of 211 years, until Peregrine Curtois's death in 1891.

1765 The open fields and commons of Branston are enclosed, following a meeting at the 'Bertie' Arms. The total amount of land enclosed was 4,357 acres. Lord Vere Bertie who is thought to have built Branston Old Hall in 1735, dies in 1768.

1769 At a Vestry Meeting on the 23rd October, it was decided that there should be a Workhouse, as a method of relief for the poor of Branston's parish.

1830 Hon Alexander Leslie Melville, the first member of the Melville family comes to Branston Hall, they were to be important sources of patronage for the village. A new Branston Hall is built in 1886, the old one burns down New Year's Eve, 1903.

1836 Rev Peregrine Curtois starts a school in the church annex for boys and girls.

1837 Hon A L Melville builds a school in Hall Lane, attended by about 70 children.

1873 A new 'National' school is erected in the High Street at a cost of one thousand and three hundred pounds.



Branston National School, c1910

1897 Branston celebrates the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria on June 29.

1908 Celebrations for the Golden Wedding of Mr and the Hon Mrs Alexander Leslie Melville on September 30.

1911 Branston celebrates the Coronation of King George V on 22 June.

- 1914 - The First World War - 37 Branston men are killed.
- 1918
- 1932 Final installation of a water scheme at Branston.
- 1939 - Second World War - 8 Branston men killed.
- 1945
- 1946 Welcome Home Dinner for Second World War veterans.
- 1953 Celebration of Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, from May 31st to 6th June.
- 1956 Branston Secondary Modern School opened.
- 1962 Fire at Branston church, evening of Christmas Day.
- 1970 New primary school on Station Road opened, to become the Junior School in 1976.
- 1972 The first Community College in Lincolnshire is established at Branston.
- 1976 Infant School on Beech Road built, which retained Church of England status.
- 1977 Branston celebrates Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.
- 1981 New Village Hall built.
- 1997 Ceremony at Lincoln Cathedral on July 16 to mark 25 years of education at Branston Community College and the 21st anniversary of Branston's separate Infant and Junior Schools.
- 1999 Branston twinned with French town of La Chatre sur le Loir. Community gardens designed and opened on September 26, with re-dedication and lighting of War Memorial.
- 2000 New millennium greeted with bells ringing and service at All Saints' Church, New Year's Day.

INTRODUCTION TO BRANSTON

Branston is today a major village lying 4 miles to the south east of the city of Lincoln on the B1188 Lincoln to Sleaford road between the Heath and Fen area of North Kesteven. It is the centre of an ancient parish, with evidence of settlement being traced back to Roman times, the finding of a Roman funerary monument in Folly Lane indicating that there may have been a villa site to the west of the village.

Branston's name further emphasises its historical roots, its probable meaning being 'Brand's-tun', 'Brand' being an old Scandinavian personal name and 'tun' the Anglo-Saxon word for homestead. The first recorded spelling of Branston appearing in the Domesday Book as Branztune or Branztone, when it was stated to have a church and priest, 4 mills, 3 fisheries, with around 1,200 acres under the plough. It also possessed a considerable population of about 365 people, at a time when most villages consisted of between 60 - 100 people.

It was not, however, until the 19th century that Branston started significant growth, with the population expanding from 446 in 1801 to 1,337 in 1871. In the latter part of the twentieth century Branston's population again rapidly grew, with nearly 2,000 inhabitants by 1951, over 3,000 in 1981, and now a population of over 4,000. This has meant many obvious physical and social changes to Branston's character with the old part of the village mainly sited near the church, now surrounded by new developments of housing, schools, shops and local amenities.

The village remains the nucleus of the parish of Branston which is the largest in North Kesteven, extending to Longhills, the Mere area to RAF Waddington and the community of Branston Booths alongside the River Witham. Branston Booths and Mere have their own considerable heritage, Branston Booths has, for example, the Roman Car Dyke running through it and the Mere has connections with the Knights Templar who established a hospital there in the 1200s. They also highlight the geographical contrasts of the parish from limestone ridge to drained and cultivated fen. It is, however, the intention of this book to concentrate on the main village of Branston, which possesses echoes of the past, whilst being very much part of today's society.

FARMING DAYS

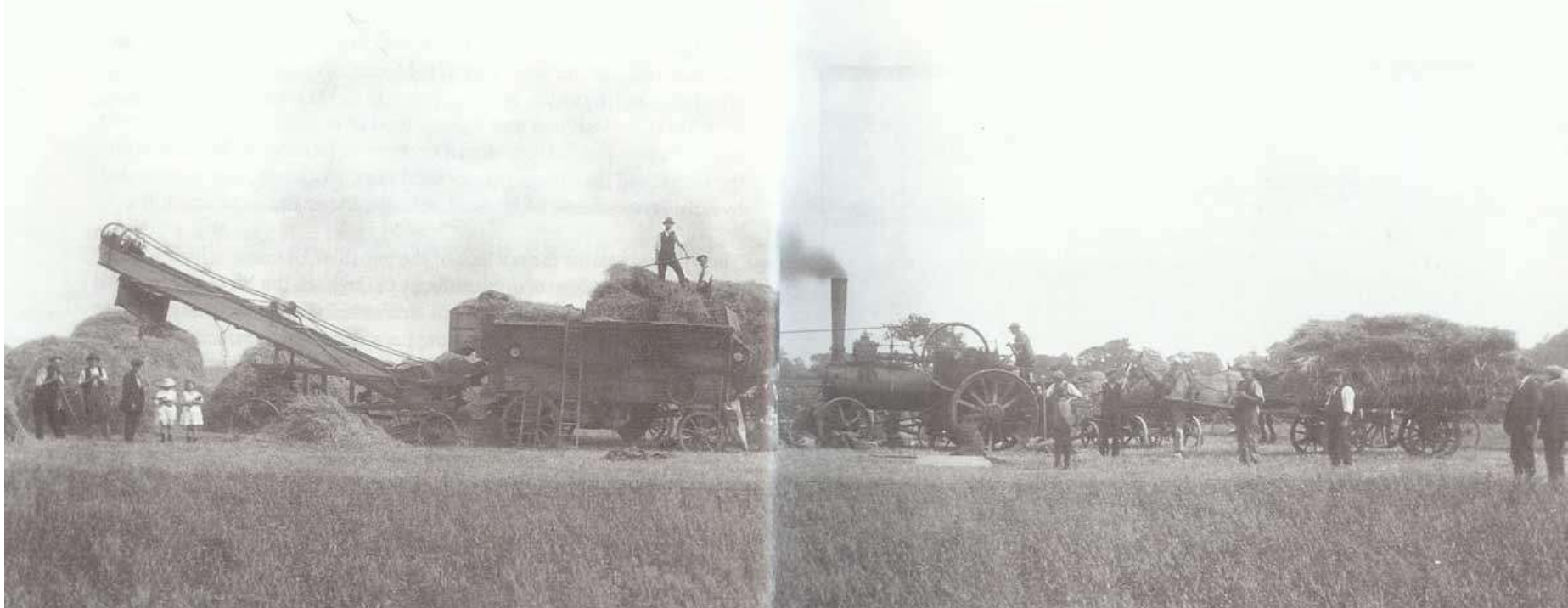
The landscape of Branston has throughout time been dominated by the needs of agriculture, indeed it still remains a village surrounded by arable and pastoral fields despite rapid expansion. The photographs of the late 1800s and early 1900s nevertheless depict a different agricultural world to the present in terms of implements and manpower, where instead of combine harvesters and tractors, the scenes are ones of threshing machines, steam traction engines, horses, carts and plough teams.

Child Labour

What the photographs do not necessarily convey, however, is the typical harsh life of most agricultural workers and their poverty. Indeed the difficulties of providing for often large families of ten, or more children,

with meagre wages meant that children from as young as seven or eight had to help on the land, sometimes walking long distances to gain extra essential money, as recorded by Richard Brown who lived in Branston from the middle 1800s to early 1900s:

“There were ten of us youngsters, besides father and mother... We had to do as well as we could... When I first started on the land, I got as a boy, the wage of sixpence a day. Then I got a fresh job. I went to Nocton for sevenpence, and had an hour's walk back at night. That was two hours walking for a penny... I have tramped as much as ten or twelve miles, taking the journey out and home for a day's work... I have had to get up early to walk to Dunston Heath for a day's threshing, then walk home again at night after it, and up early again the next day.”





Ploughboy, Arthur Milns, c1910



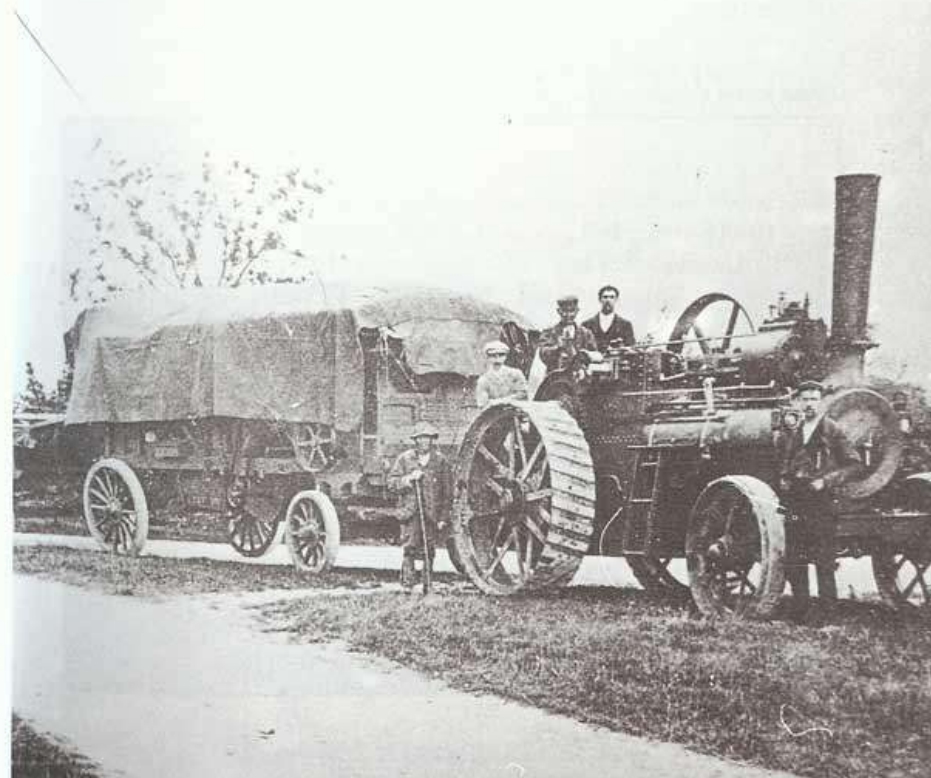
Farmboys, c1910

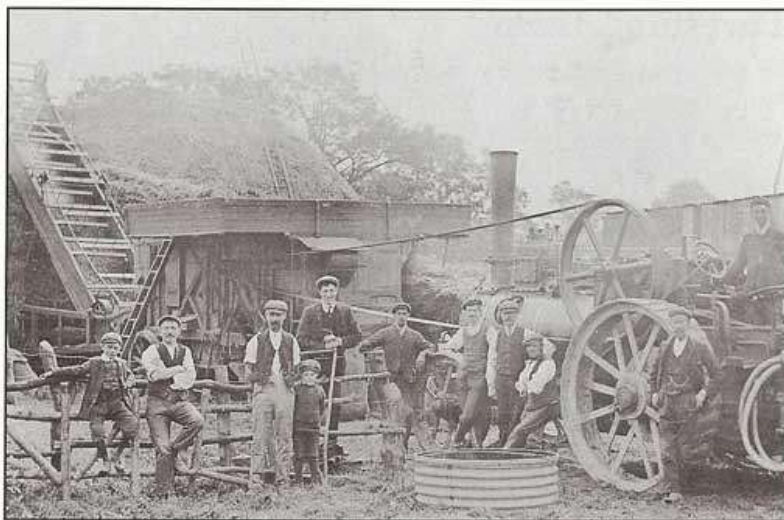
Threshing Teams

For those who owned the threshing machinery life was equally hard as Frank Harrison records in his memories of 'Grandfather Forman', who lived in the 'Monkey House' on Sleaford Road:

"He worked 7 days a week all through the year maintaining his two threshing machines which were his only livelihood. He had his two sons to help him eventually, Harold and Bill. They were always busy threshing corn for farmers and travelling many miles, sometimes leaving at 4am to get steamed up for a day's work and perhaps getting home at 8 or 9 at night."

Traction engine pulling threshing machine, c1910





Threshing team

Foster steam threshing set at work, c1910



Poverty

Their occupation was, however, more profitable than that of agricultural labourers who usually struggled to feed and clothe their families and had to resort to using limited resources as effectively as possible. Often meat was a rare delicacy, with families learning to subsist on foods, such as potato, as further related by Richard Brown:

"I have sat down to dinner scores, I may say hundreds of times, when all there was on the table was a kettle full of potatoes, with a helping of salt."

Edward Cram, a grocer and market gardener of Branston during the late 1800s and early 1900s, similarly reflects in a newspaper article on the paucity of most agricultural workers' lives, stating that if "two particular factors could be named that helped the agricultural labourer to live, they were the pig and the potato..."

The potato was prolific enough, of course, and cheap enough, and as regards the feeding of the pig, what he took to fatten him up was not really missed in many households. The potato largely fed the pig and the potato largely fed the household."

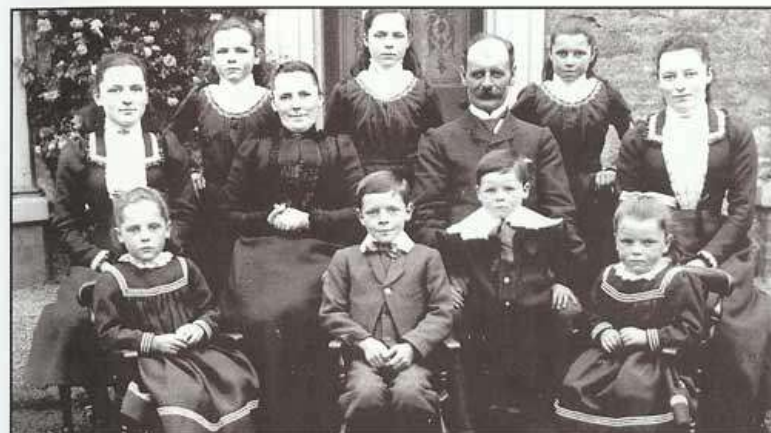
To augment such meagre incomes there were also charitable trusts, such as that of the Garratt charity, which in 1842 awarded ninety pounds to Branston, to be dispensed in apprentices' fees and distributions of money, coal, clothes and medicine to poor people. A receipt of January 1897 from the Post Office, Branston on page 16 indicates how some of Garratt's Charity, was similarly distributed.

POST OFFICE, BRANSTON, Jan 18 97			
# Rev. J. & M. Mamel Plydell. Bought of W. G. MARSHALL GROCER AND DRAPER. BOO T AND SHOES, PAPERHANGINGS, CROCKERY &c.			
With thanks to Mrs. J. & M. Mamel Plydell	Widows Robinson 3/6	Pearson 3/6	7 -
	Flatters 3/6	Proudloves 3/6	10 6
	Wilson 3/6	Spalding 3/6	10 6
	Hills 3/6	Norris 3/6	14 6
	Shoulding 3/6	W. Moody 3/6	10 6
	R. Woodcock 3/6	M. Lilley 7/6	18 6
	G. Edinboro 7/6	G. Wright 7/6	1 2 6
	J. Johnson 7/6	J. Rooke 7/6	1 2 6
	W. Spalding 7/6	W. Fuller 7/6	1 2 6
	J. Laidale 7/6	W. Barker 7/6	1 2 6
	J. Humbertone 7/6	J. Bickett 7/6	1 2 6
	E. Jovison 7/6	J. Keasey 7/6	1 2 6
	Shoulding 7/6	E. Mattam 7/6	1 2 6
	D. North 7/6	M. Barnard 7/6	15 -
Mr. J. Huntam 7/6			1 -
Widow Holmes 13/6			13 3 0

A Farmer's Tale - Westfield Farm

The Nelstrop family have been farming Westfield Farm in the south-west of the Parish since 1881 when Robert Nelstrop took ownership. Bentley Nelstrop, records that for his grandfather, Robert, and his family of 7 daughters and 2 sons, "life" until the First World War was "about hard work, no spending, church twice on a Sunday and self-sufficiency with food being home grown, all clothes made and Grandmother held a weekly stall on the Butter Market at Lincoln to sell poultry, eggs, butter, cream, cheese, vegetables, flowers, berries, holly etc".

Robert Nelstrop and family, c1900



On one such Friday visit to market in September 1911 Bentley's grandparents returned hurriedly from market as there was a disastrous fire in the farm's Crew Yard, where a spark from the steam engine during threshing had set fire to a straw stack. The fire had then rapidly spread to the other stacks, all the Crew Yard Buildings and was advancing towards Westfield House, the farmhouse.

Whilst friends and neighbours sought to help by evacuating the contents of Westfield House into the garden, the Irish casuals who had been working on the threshing first rescued their beer from the cellar and took it to the safety of nearby woods, before returning to help fight the fire! Fortunately, the direction of the wind changed and the fire brigade managed to control the fire before it reached Westfield House. The fire,

however, meant the complete destruction of all the winter feed and bedding, a loss that farming neighbours, such as Harry Neesham of Lodge Farm, Canwick tried to compensate for with the sending of 2 dray loads of straw the next morning.

The inter-war years were still ones of difficulty for farming families when the depression meant many bankruptcies and changes of farm ownership. It was also a time of adjustment following the First World War. Indeed, out of Robert and Fanny Nelstrop's seven daughters only one was to marry, for so many young local men were killed, including two who had been engaged to the Nelstrop girls in 1914. When Bentley Nelstrop therefore moved into Westfield House in 1942 with his parents George and Bessie and brother James, on his grandfather's Robert's death, he recalls what must have been a "huge culture shock" for his mother "to move mid-war to a big rambling, cold farmhouse", with few amenities:

"Light was supplied by oil lamp and candles, cooking by black lead grate and water for drinking purposes was pumped from the well outside the back door. Soft water for washing came from the cistern which collected all the house roof water."

The Second World War with the need for self-sufficiency and an intensified use of agricultural land nevertheless meant the start of an 'agricultural revolution', that was to radically and irreparably change the agricultural landscape and the technology it employed. Higher demand and higher prices for agricultural goods meant that farmers like the Nelstrops could invest in the technological advances of the post-war years. As Bentley Nelstrop records on his return from college in 1956:

"In my first year at home we purchased a combine harvester, tractor with hydraulic loader, sugar beet harvester and 2 tipping tractors."

All these changes have resulted in farming no longer being a hard, labour-intensive process, from 8 men being employed on Westfield Farm's 350 acres in 1956, only 3 are now required to operate the sophisticated equipment that maintains the present 1,800 acres. It does, however, mean the loss of characters, such as the milkmaid Mrs Hanson who "seemingly had her 10 babies between milkings!"

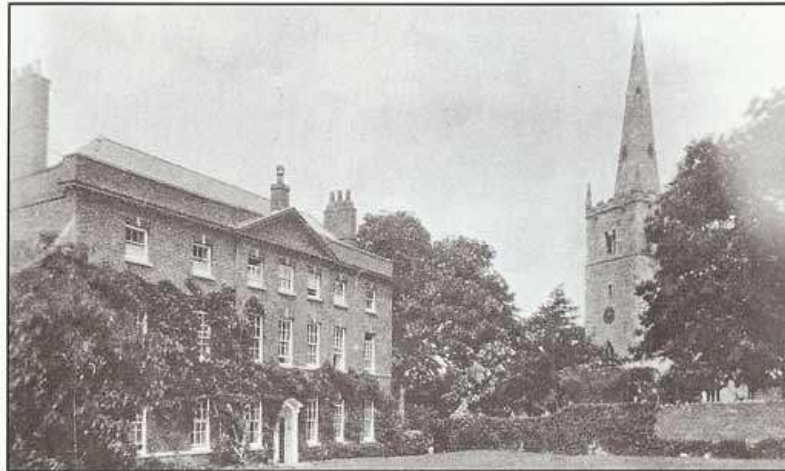
VILLAGE SCENES

Photographs of old Branston village scenes are dominated by views of the High Street and around the parish church of All Saints', which was the original 'hub' of village life.



All Saints' Church

All Saints' Church like so many churches has been built and reconstructed over many centuries, the oldest parts of the church in the south west corner of the nave and the tower being noted for their examples of Saxon and Norman workmanship. The rest of the church is primarily medieval, except for Victorian additions and alterations and the drastic restoration that had to take place in the 1960s following the disastrous fire that occurred on Christmas Day 1962.



All Saints' Church and Hainton House, c1940

The church in Branston in its various forms of building has therefore been a centre of worship and community for Branston residents for over a millennium, and holds many village memories of priests, congregations and events. Its most famous incumbents probably being the Curtois family, six of whom were rectors in continuous succession for a total of 211 years from 1680 until 1891. As owners of land received in lieu of tithes at the time of the Enclosures, they became wealthy enough in 1765 to build a large new Rectory by the church, now known as Hainton House and divided into flats. By 1842 the income for the Curtois family from the living was the considerable sum of six hundred and seventy seven pounds per annum, it is therefore not surprising that Peregrine Curtois had Longhills Hall built in 1838 at the significant cost of forty thousand pounds.



Rev. Dewey and Choir, c1950

Today the spire of All Saints' still dominates the Branston skyline and its bells, the oldest of which is 15th century, still calls villagers to services, marriages and village events. In previous times, however, the announcing bell, 'Gabriel', would have also rung for baptisms, confirmations, banns and funerals. A strict code of ringing was particularly observed for funerals, with three tolls of the bell for men, two for women and one for a child. It was also the custom in Branston to toll the bell in simple strokes after the knell to indicate the deceased's age.

When the peal of 6 bells was hung and ready to ring together as part of the 1895 restoration to the belfry and spire, a Branston Church Society of Bell Ringers was established with some strict rules. A member who, for example, failed to turn up half an hour before service times on Sunday without giving due notice was fined sixpence! - a substantial sum for an ordinary person in the late 19th century.

Bellringers' Outing, c1950

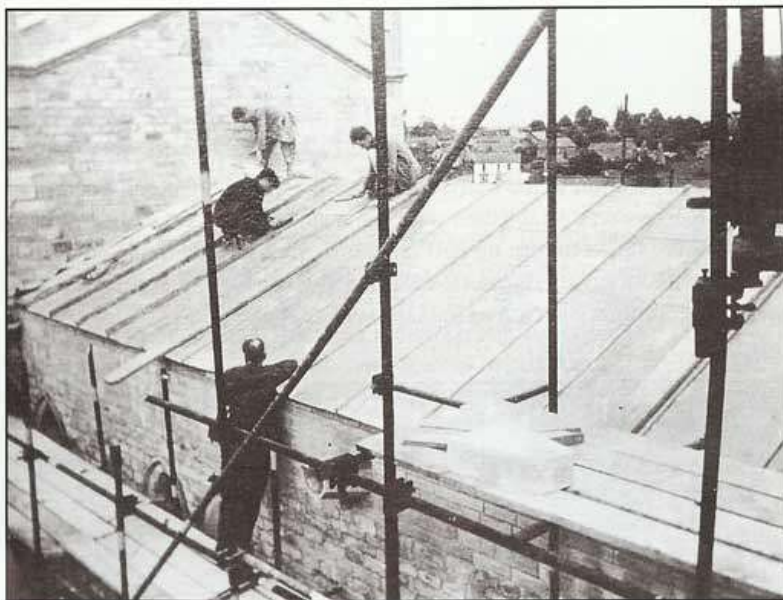


Fire At The Church

In the late evening of Christmas Day 1962 a fire was discovered in Branston Church. By the time the Fire Brigade arrived the fire had hold of the chancel roof and was reaching along the nave roof and towards the tower, to the extent that the bell ropes in the tower were singed.

For nine hours in bitterly cold weather the Brigade successfully fought to prevent the fire from spreading. Sadly the beautiful choir stalls, the Henry Willis organ, the communion table and the choir screen, designed by Miss Curtois, daughter of the Rev. Peregrine Curtois and Miss Leslie Melville of Branston Hall, were all lost.

Left with a seriously damaged church, help was immediately given from all quarters. The Methodist Church offered the use of their premises, RAF Waddington provided drying equipment and donations were immediately forthcoming. The total cost of restoration, which took 4 years, was £44,000.00 and was generally covered by insurance.



Restoration of the Church

Chapel

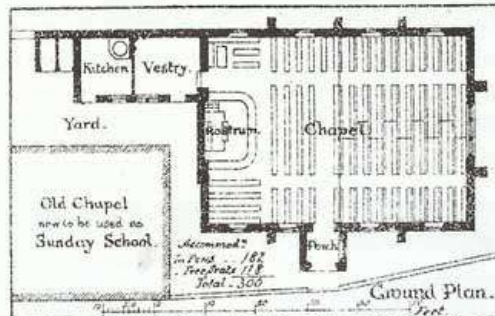
The present closure and intended sale of Branston's Methodist Chapel, in the appropriately named Chapel Lane, is a source of great loss for the village, particularly as in the nineteenth and early twentieth century the Chapel was just as much the centre of the village's spiritual and social life, as the Church.



Sunday School Outing, 1931

Indeed, in 1851 the first Wesleyan Chapel erected in 1819 and extended in 1839 contained 235 sittings, almost as many as All Saints' Church, which then had 260 sittings. The clerical competitors also claimed in 1850-51 to have similar average attendances to their chief services each Sunday, of 245 Anglicans and 230 Wesleyans, which in both cases must have meant a full congregation.

In 1883 the present Chapel was built on land donated to the village by the Grimes family, who were local farmers, with the old Chapel being used as a Sunday school. Renamed as a Methodist Chapel, the new chapel had within it the 'Chair', which was used as the first Methodist pulpit in the village. Since the closure of the Chapel, the 'Chair' has been placed because of its historical significance in the Wesleyan Museum at Epworth.



NEW WESLEYAN CHAPEL,
BRANSTON, near LINCOLN.
H. C. Turner, A.R.I.B.A.,
Architect.



View from East.

Plough Inn on the High Street, c 1900



Pubs and Coffee Houses

For recreation and diversion from often harsh lives the old village pubs of the 'Plough Inn' and the former 'Waggon and Horses' provided alternative solace from the church and chapel.

Frank Harrison in his reminiscences, for example, records the exploits of Peg Tindall, who was so-called because of his wooden leg:

"He used to get down to the pub and play his fiddle. He used to get so much beer down him that he'd probably be fiddling away laid on his back, and at the end of the night somebody had to be good enough to say "Come on, we'll take you home" and they used to carry him home."

To counteract such attractions of pub life a Coffee House and Reading Room were



Coffee House and Reading Room, c1930



established at the bottom of Lincoln Road, under the direction of Mr Melville, Mr Abel-Smith, the Vicar and a committee of twelve, who had a rota for regular visits.

Villagers were allowed to play games at the Reading Room as well as reading, but whilst dominoes, billiards, darts and draughts were permissible, ping pong was not! The average attendance for the reading room is recorded as 28, with no similar data for the alcoholic alternatives of the 'Plough' and 'Waggon and Horses'!



Rear of Coffee House with Grandma Applewhite and others

All these establishments except for the 'Waggon and Horses' were to have their demise in the twentieth century, the Coffee House becoming a semi-detached house, whilst the Reading Room and 'Plough' were demolished and the 'Waggon and Horses' rebuilt set back from the road, as part of road improvements in that area of the village.

'Lovely' Houses

Clustered around the church and the old part of the village are a number of notable cottages and houses, that caused even Pevsner to remark of some in Silver Street, as being in a 'lovely style'.



One of Pevsner's 'Lovely Style' Houses, c1920

In this Branston was fortunate in the nineteenth century to possess the combination of a stone and limestone quarry by the 'Wong', off Silver Street, which was sometimes used for local buildings and by some talented, if sometimes eccentric stonemasons.

Of all the houses Stonefield House on Sleaford Road, termed a 'Victorian folly house' by Pevsner, is probably the most interesting because of its previous ownership by a stonemason named Lobley, who whilst working on various Lincolnshire churches brought some of the gargoyles home to adorn his property. Stonefield House was hence known in the village as 'Monkey House' because of some of the gargoyles having appearances like monkeys.

TRADESMEN AND SHOPS

In the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century Branston was an almost self-sufficient community, its craftsmen and shopkeepers catering for most of the needs of the village, at a time when even getting to Lincoln would have not have been an easy journey, either by foot, or horse and cart. White's directory of Lincolnshire in 1892 consequently records for Branston a plethora of tradesmen and craftsmen including:

- 4 blacksmiths, 2 saddlers and harness makers,
- 1 wheelwright, 4 joiners, carpenters and builders,
- 2 tailors and drapers, 2 boot and shoemakers,
- 4 grocers, 2 butchers, 1 baker, 1 patent medicine vendor
- 2 market gardeners, 1 seed merchant
- 1 glass and china dealer, 1 skin dealer.



'Wheelwright Pearson' in bowl

Branston even had its own renowned brewer and malster in Alfred Healey who took over Branston Brewery from the family of Kirton in 1880. From its premises in the High Street ale was produced in three strengths, Strong ale, XXXX, Mild ale, XXX and Bitter ale.

Charles Sparrow - Blacksmith

One of the blacksmiths recorded in White's directory of 1892 was Charles Sparrow, who had started his business in 1867. Archive sources relate that he took over the business from Thomas Elvin, a valuation inventory, listing the stock agreed between both parties, totalling ninety one pounds, two shilling and three pence. This amount was repaid by instalments, with the last payment being made in February 1878 to Thomas's widow, Sarah Elvin.

After Charles Sparrow's death, his son Walter re-opened the business in 1920 as Plumber and General Engineers of Branston. The business continued to trade until 1952 when Walter died at the age of 78. A ledger of the Sparrow business includes the name of the following diverse customers; John Taylor, threshing machine & traction engine contractor; J R Sharpe, schoolmaster; W Grimes, farmer; W G Marshall, grocer; R W Birchall, farmer; Harry Paddison, farmer; C Dickinson, miller and farmer, R Nelstrop, farmer; H Pearson, wheelwright and Mr Hebdon, butcher of Branston.

Another long-standing blacksmith of the village was Pearson and Son, as shown in the photograph below. Indeed, the Pearson family were important tradesmen to the village, with 'Wheelwright Pearson' pictured earlier and 'Blacksmith Pearson' being brothers.



Shops

The village economy was therefore mainly composed of a number of small businesses, centred around a Branston family, such as Chaloner's the Saddlers, or individuals who sought to meet the particular requirements of their community.

Chaloner Collar and Harness Maker's Shop, with Albert Chaloner at the door; c1920



This meant as Frank Harrison records in his reminiscences that the relationship between the trader and his customer was much more personal and flexible than the present day. On Sleaford Road, for example, he remembers the Martins, who sold "cigarettes and all kinds of household requisites", who were very much "open all hours" for their customers:

"If you wanted a packet of cigarettes at six o'clock in the morning, Mrs Martin, she'd serve you. If you went at midnight, Mrs Martin, she'd serve you. There never seemed to be a closed door."

Frank Harrison's description of Miss Alcock's grocery shop further emphasises the great individuality that shopkeepers displayed in their shop premises, the variety of goods they sold and their very personal approach to customer service:

"Here we bought small provisions and she specialised in Friar's Balsam, Sweet Nita, Tincture of Rhubarb, Balcons Head and Stomach Pills and all sorts of things like this, all types of little medications...It was just a tiny little shop with no alterations at all in those days... But she had rice, tapioca, linseed, ground linseed, which she used to specify if you'd got any boils, got a cold on your chest - linseed poultice or linseed tea, and there you'd find Fuller's Earth. If you were sore anywhere, chafed anywhere, get some Fuller's Earth, rub it on or dust yourself. Strangely enough, whether it was because she had specified this, you seemed to get through the troubles that you had got, 'cos you'd done as she'd told you."

Craftsmen, such as 'Cobbler Dixon' on Sleaford Road similarly displayed an often idiosyncratic approach to their customers:

"He operated in a wooden shed in the yard or garden, very close to the back of his house. If you went to him for anything you needed plenty of time, he was a Jehovah's witness and you got a free sermon as well as a repair."

Carriers

For those needs that could not be met by the village tradesmen there were 'carriers', who would go with their horse and cart into Lincoln to purchase necessary and often heavy goods for villagers, such as coal. The carrier John William Hunt, for example, went into Lincoln in 1892 on Monday, Friday and Saturdays, a trade continued by his son Roland who combined being a carrier with having "pig sties, chicken huts, and cowsheds", at the bottom of a paddock, which is now Curtois Close.

The most famous Branston carrier was, however, 'Donkey Spalding', who was a familiar sight between Branston and Lincoln carrying goods on her home-made two-wheeled cart, drawn not by horses, but by donkeys.

Indeed, she was the focus of a newspaper article extolling the virtues of this 'venerable' Branston business woman:

"Her work was to bring anything the people wanted; and the general phrase "anything" covers everything. She was prepared to bring anything required, heavy or light, large or small, liquid or solid, important or trivial. Coal was a frequent order, and the old lady brought, in her donkey-cart, sacks of the mineral, which she carried on her back, as cheerily as any man, from the cart to the cottage coalhouse..."



Mrs Spalding is particularly proud of the fact that she never forgot an order - not, she avers, for as much as a pennyworth of pins. Yet she never kept a book, never made a note of anything required, and trusted entirely to memory...

The venerable merchant has been out in all weathers, and declares she started out many a morning when the snow was falling heavily....Whenever I was told I ought to stay at home and that the weather was too bad for me to venture out, I always said in answer...What is the use of sitting idle while the cupboard grows empty?"

Young's Delivery Vans

Carriers, such as Donkey Spalding, were, however, soon to be replaced in the twentieth century by the delivery van and regular bus services to Lincoln. Indeed, Branston's shops, such as that of W E Young, who provided groceries, provisions and bread were to have a fleet of delivery vehicles to supply the needs of the surrounding area. In the 1930s and 1940s they ran eight Ford vans, known affectionately as the 'Rattling Tin-Lizzies.'

Alice Creasey, whose husband Walter worked for Youngs from 1932-1952 recalls that in cold weather the vans had to be started with a winding handle and if this failed, they had to be pushed precariously down the High Street! The delivery men would set out at 7am in the morning to deliver to the Mere, Longhills, Branston Booths, Waddington, Bracebridge Heath, Nocton, Wellingore, Navenby and other areas. Before beginning their deliveries they would have to weigh all the goods out, with, for example, sugar, cheese and bacon individually wrapped to meet the specific needs of their various customers.

Like Donkey Spalding, Alice Creasey remembers that the delivery men often had to complete their rounds in bad weather conditions, with the vans sometimes stuck in snow, as they tried to deliver essential bread and groceries to isolated households, who did not have the modern conveniences of freezers to store food. In severe weather conditions the deliveries would have therefore to be completed on foot, so that their customers received the bread that had been baked overnight and other essential provisions.

Ultimately, however, the effect of motorised transport and the rise of the multinational, mass production of goods, meant that the basis on which village trade depended was slowly being eroded, as industrial goods replaced traditional craftsmanship and villagers could travel easily by car, or bus, to purchase their goods in Lincoln and beyond.

Kelly's directory of tradesmen in 1937 consequently records the demise of the following occupations in the village; brewer, boot and shoe makers, carrier, drapers and saddlers and harness makers. Whilst the Pearson family still maintained their blacksmith and wheelwright

businesses, the appearance of a motor omnibus proprietor in Mr Gelsthorpe and Forman Bros Ltd as Haulage contractors, highlighted the new trade direction of Branston. Branston like other villages losing its distinctive and individual trade patterns to become part of a more bland, global economy.



Mr Ernie Kingswood and Forman Bros Lorries, c1930

Forman Bros lorry transporting for Ruston, Lincoln



THE LESLIE-MELVILLES

Although residents of Branston Hall for only a century, the Leslie Melville family captured the hearts of Branston people beyond the traditional feudal relationship of 'Lord of the Manor'. Consider, for example, the funeral report of Mr Alexander Samuel Leslie Melville in the Lincoln Gazette of 1 February 1919:-

"Snow lay on the ground, the air was very cold and the considerate announcement was made in church that owing to the inclement weather no one who had the least doubt about the wisdom of doing so should accompany the funeral cortege to the cemetery. However, there was a very long procession following the hand-bier down the village street, and the cemetery path from the vault in the further corner was filled almost to the entrance gate as the last rites were intoned."

Aristocratic Role

The respect and affection that the Leslie Melville family engendered may have its roots in its distinctive Scottish lineage of Lesley or Leslie and Melville, which encompass many tales of colourful and romantic characters particularly in times of civil war and internal division. In the 1600s, for instance, General Alexander Leslie, who was created the first Earl of Leven, led the Scottish army in 1640 to invade England, defeating a party of the King's troops and taking possession of Newcastle.

When the Hon Alexander Leslie Melville, youngest son of the seventh Earl of Leven and Melville hence came to reside at Branston Hall, after taking up his partnership in the Smith Ellison Bank in 1830, his role was to reflect not just his duties as a banker, but the wider aristocratic responsibilities to society that the Leslie Melville family had created through times of danger and honour. He was consequently foreman of the grand jury of the county in 1846; active in promoting railway construction and Chairman from 1836-70 of the Lincoln Poor Law Union.

As the Melville family settled into life at Branston Hall, their upholding of civic duties and support of various 'good causes' provided an

important source of patronage in the Victorian and early twentieth century era, particularly in an age without a comprehensive welfare state. The Melvilles being responsible for the building of a number of central features of village life, such as the Forge, the Nurses's Cottage and the Parkside Infant School.



Alexander Leslie Melville seated with his son Alexander Samuel and grandson Alexander Broderick, 1880

Charity

Whilst Alexander Samuel Leslie Melville succeeded his father in public life as a JP and High Sheriff of Lincolnshire, the Melville women spent their considerable leisure time in 'charitable' pursuits and were renowned for a 'life rich in good works and deeds of mercy.' Hence the Lincoln Gazette's funeral report for Emily Leslie Melville, daughter of the Hon Alexander Leslie Melville in 1912, is more a eulogy, than an account:

"Full of good works and alms deeds that she did, was said of one in the early days of Christianity, and might well be said of Emily Leslie Melville. "Always tell me please if I can do anything" was the sort of thing she said and her whole life was a seeking in her own, unobtrusive, quiet, half-shy way, opportunities of doing something to lighten burdens..."

For poorer Branston residents the Melvilles were often essential benefactors, the Hon Mrs A S Leslie Melville, for instance, providing a complete set of baby things, to any pregnant woman who could not afford to buy baby clothes and accessories for herself. They also hosted a special 'Feast' for the village children, which was a kind of sports day, together with a variety of annual and specific treats for schoolchildren, based upon having a special tea, games and songs and perhaps 'cinematographic entertainment.' In times of crisis, such as the First World War, they organised parcels of food and clothing to be sent to the armed forces, with each Branston man who left to fight being given personal presents from the Melvilles

Servants

Despite the acts of piety and charity the Leslie Melville family remained Branston's most elite and wealthy family, with girls having to curtsy and boys having to doff their caps when they appeared in the village. As a further reflection of their position in society, Alexander Samuel Leslie Melville had the 'new' and present Branston Hall built in 1886, the old Hall built originally for the Bertie family in 1735, being burnt down in 1903 as the annual Goose Supper for local tradesmen proceeded in its successor.



Efforts were made to save the old hall, as seen in the above photograph, but as Branston Rural Council would not subscribe to the Lincoln Fire Brigade, Lincoln would only send a manual fire engine to assist. Lord Londesborough of Blankney having acquired a new steam fire engine valiantly set off immediately for Branston with a team of men on board the engine, driving the horses himself. Despite the recorded lively competition between the two teams of firemen the Hall could not be saved, but the firemen were at least rewarded with the remnants of the Goose Supper that had been so hastily abandoned!

Branston New Hall



The new hall was described in an article in 'The Builder' of 1899 as being a 'gentleman's moderate-sized county house', but had 38 bedrooms and all the accompaniments of Victorian aristocratic life, including the employment of a number of servants. Indeed, the census of 1881 records the diverse role of domestic employees in the Melville household during this period:-

Harriet Hutton - Servant/Cook/Housekeeper - from Dorset
 Betsy Codling (28) - Servant/Ladies' Maid - from Saxilby
 Elizabeth Sands (27) - Laundress from South Somercotes
 Elizabeth Dishmans (25) - Laundress from Metheringham
 Eliza Hackney (29) - Housemaid from Essex
 Mary Harwood (20) - Housemaid from Willingham
 Ada Plaskett (19) - Kitchenmaid from Lincoln
 Ann Bingham (22) - Dairymaid from Nottingham
 John Kay (30) - Footman from North Muskham (Nottinghamshire)

The Melvilles are nevertheless recorded by their servants as being people they were 'proud' to work for, as related by the late Edith Speed, whose mother, Alice Espin, answered an advertisement in a London newspaper of the early 1900s to be head laundry maid:

"Jobs were very precious. We were very proud to be connected with the Melvilles. They were generous and I remember they provided piped gas from the Hall to the parish church..My mother loved them all and often spoke of the nice feeling of attending church in one of the taffeta dresses provided as uniform."

Indeed, they provided Alice Espin with three taffeta dresses in blue, green and purple, which she loved to rustle with pride, as she walked down the aisle of the church. As head laundry maid, Alice was constantly occupied, for Edith records that younger members of the Melville family would, for example, merely use a towel to dry their hands once, before flinging it on the floor! Such behaviour was accepted, for as Edith relates even clearing up provided work and benevolent patronage, at a time of widespread poverty and harsh living conditions.

The Claricoates family at Parkside cottage, similarly were recipients of the Melvilles' generosity, George Claricoates being one of two coachmen

then employed in the Meville household. At Christmas, for example, Mrs Meville's maid would be sent to ask Ellen Claricoates what she wanted for a gift, sometimes it would be cotton print for her daughters' dresses, or flannel for making shirts. The three girls, Rose, Kate and Edith would also receive a lovely velvet cape trimmed with black braid, whilst the sons, Albert and Fred would usually be given navy blue jerseys. One year a member of the Melville family sent a doll in a carriage.

Occasions

In an age without television, with only limited external communication the Melvilles must have generally appeared to Branston residents as colourful and glamorous figures in an often drab, Victorian world. It is therefore not surprising that the village was encompassed in their celebrations, providing days of excitement and rest from school and work.

The celebrations for the Golden Wedding of Mr and the Hon Mrs Alexander Samuel Leslie Melville on September 30 1908 was an occasion of particular splendour for Branston's residents, with the school closed for 2 days on September 30 and October 1.



Alexander Samuel and Albina Leslie Melville

Most of the village proceeded to the thanksgiving service in the church at 11.30am, of which there is the following account:-



"We were all gathered together to celebrate the Golden Wedding of Mr and the Hon Mrs S Leslie Melville. May it truly be said that never was the weather of September 30th more congenial and in harmony with the event....

A rustle at the back of the church signalled the entrance of the venerable couple who were the central figures in the service.

Their hearts, attuned to the highest pitch of gratitude, must have been touched at the homage the people of Branston paid to them as they entered. But it was merely indicative of the esteem in which they both were held."

The Hon Mrs A S Leslie Melville died in March 1918, six months before the diamond wedding would have been celebrated. The Lincoln Gazette in its funeral tribute offered "utmost sympathy" to Mr Leslie Melville, "for a more devoted couple could not have been found." Less than a year later in February 1919, his remains were to be laid in Branston Cemetery "besides those of his beloved wife."



Golden Wedding Group Family Photograph

Departure

When the Melvilles left Branston Hall for it to be first a Sanatorium in 1924 and now a hotel, there must have initially been a void in Branston's public life, as they lost figures of glamour, respect and patronage. But a new age was soon to begin, with a welfare state, more even distribution of wealth and multi-media communication, where the parochial role of the 'Lord of the Manor' as central to the community, was to be greatly diminished. Branston Cemetery nevertheless testifies to the Melvilles' continuing belief in public service with the gravestone to Alexander Ronald Leslie Melville who "died for his country a pilot of the air transport auxiliary on June 12 1942." The spirit of General Alexander Leslie obviously continuing in such colourful and publicly willed descendants.

THE ABEL-SMITHS

Although seemingly in the shadow of the magnificence of the Melville family, the Abel-Smiths were nevertheless important figures in Branston's society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As original founders of the Smith Ellison Bank in Lincoln in 1775 and

connected to the Melvilles through banking and marriage partnerships, the Abel-Smiths were a family of significance when they came to reside in 1878 at the former Curtois residence of Longhills, 'an elegant and spacious stone mansion'.



Wedding Group at Longhills Hall



Branston Remembered

Like the Melvilles the staffing at Longhills was considerable, as recalled by Mr Leigh, who was born to one of the gardening staff:

"I was born at Longhills in 1908 in the back Lodge, my Dad was one of the gardeners. The Abel-Smiths had a big staff, gardeners, house staff, butlers and footmen. Johnny Galsthorp was a chauffeur up there... Burton was a footman. Blundle was Head Gardener, then there were two young gardeners in the part of the back Lodge, a part called the Bothy, my mother used to look after them, do their meals and that.

Every Bank Holiday on the recreation field there was a grand cricket match between Longhills staff and Branston Hall staff. They used to have a meal all laid out."



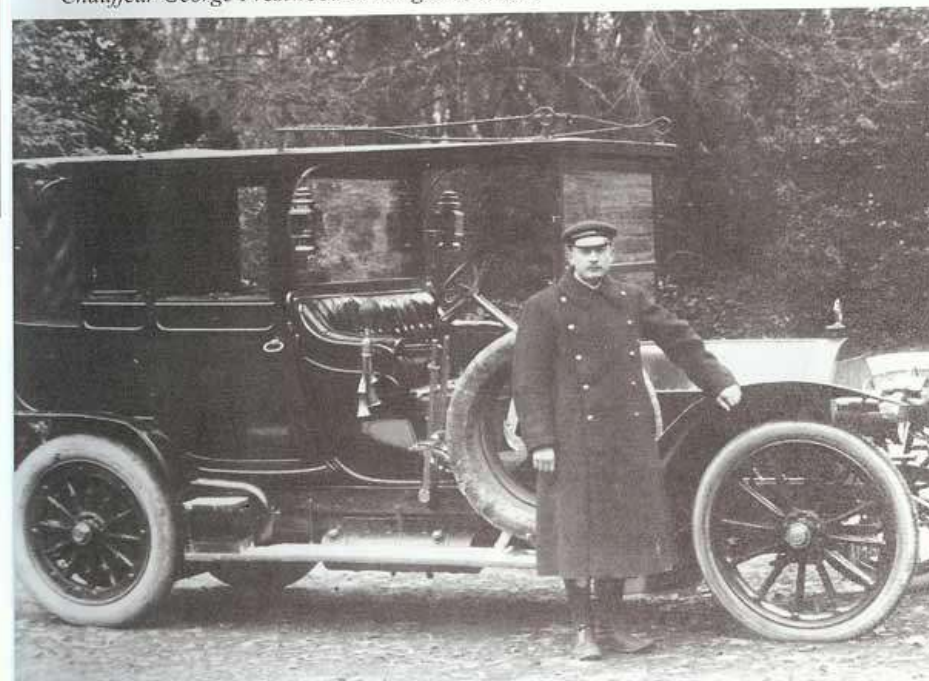
Maypole dancing at Longhills, c1920

Other residents, such as Edith Speed have recorded how the village benefited from the support of the Abel-Smiths. She particularly recalls how Eustace Abel-Smith used to throw 6d to children as he passed in his carriage, with Edith being one of the children to quickly pick them up! One of the Abel-Smiths' many acts of benevolence to the village was the donation of land for use as a cemetery, with iron railings around a portion reserved for their sole family use. A marble angel was also designed for the family monument, with marble brought to England from Italy, by being towed behind a ship. Sadly, the monumental angel vanished, as did the Abel-Smiths from Branston life, with Longhills being requisitioned for military use in the Second World War.



Servants at Longhills Hall, c1912

Chauffeur George Prestwood at Longhills, c1909



SCHOOLDAYS

Early History

Like most rural areas Branston had no 'school' until the early nineteenth century. Indeed, in 1830 the only reference to formal education in Branston is the attendance of 25 poor boys at Heighington Free School, which Thomas Garratt had provided for in his will of 1620, for the education of boys from Heighington, Washingborough and Branston.

Hence for most Branston children Sunday School provided the only means of 'education', at a time when there was no free, universal state education system and children were needed as essential workers in the home and on the land. Moreover, it was the church that built the first 'school' accommodation for the village, the present Choir Vestry of All Saints' Church originally being built by Rector Peregrine Curtois in 1836, to serve as a school for boys and girls.

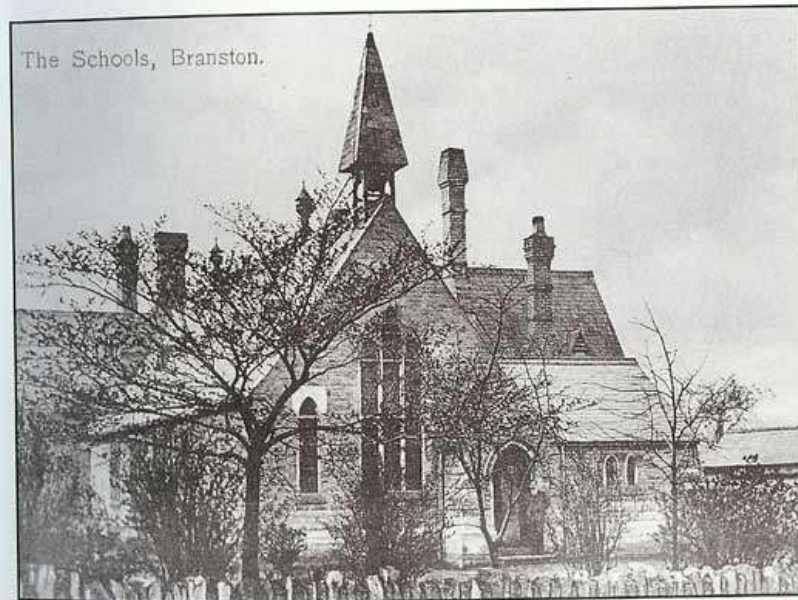
In 1837 Branston also benefitted from the patronage of the Melvilles of Branston Hall, with the Hon Alexander Leslie Melville establishing the Parkside school for infants in Hall Lane.

Infant School, with Miss Panton (left) and Miss Brown (right), c1895



The school was attended by about 70 children, who each paid a penny or twopence a week. Many families would, however, be unable to afford this, whilst others would be unwilling to forego the few pence that the child could earn during the week.

The 1870 Education Act nevertheless meant that Branston's piecemeal approach to education had to be rationalised, to provide a more universal and satisfactory education for the poor. A parish meeting was consequently called to examine how a new school could be established, with the result that 'Branston National School', photographed below, was opened in 1873 for children of all ages.



The new school and school house was sited on land given by the Curtois family on the High Street. This building was to remain the nucleus of the main 'Village School', until the opening of the new Primary School on Station Road in 1970. The Melville's Infant School in Hall Lane being closed in 1901, as the financial burden of maintaining both schools became too great. Both of these former schools are now private residences.

Log Books

Education in Branston in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century nevertheless remained subordinate to the needs of agriculture and the economic necessities of the family, with the log books of Mr Melville's Infant school and the National School constantly recording the absences of children who were usually working for farmers:

October 8 1873	Only 76 children present owing to the time of picking potatoes.
August 9 1875	Attendance very bad, harvest having begun.
October 11 1895	Potato picking is in full swing, the regular absentees are again away.

Teachers do record persistent attempts to reprimand "regular absentees", but the poverty of most Branston residents and the farmers' willingness to ignore teacher's pleas not to employ under-age children, meant that poorer children continued to give work on the fields their priority, rather than schooling:

May 22 1885	Five children to my knowledge are illegally employed at work this week. Farmers are not particular in the least that children whom they employ should have certificates.
October 15 1894	The attendance in the fourth and fifth standard has been very poor all the year...These boys can earn as much as 2/- a week; they shift about working odd weeks for anyone who may happen to want them for a short time.

Child labour in farming, not only meant large amounts of absenteeism at certain times in the year, but also determined the school's calendar, with the summer break around August being primarily for the children to help get in the harvest, and consequently known as the 'harvest', rather than summer holiday. Similarly, a 'holiday' would be given in October for potato picking. The schools could also be summarily closed or opened, to meet the requirements of the farmers:

October 25 1907

School was closed one day for potato picking, as last week was very wet.

October 10 - 16 1918

Re-opened Wednesday morning, but closed again with permission of the Education Committee on the request of the farmers on account of the recent bad weather and the difficulty of gathering the crops.



Branston National School, 1910



Branston National School, 1910

Bad weather not only affected the pattern of school attendance through farming, but equally it prevented the 'distant children', as they were termed, from attending school, when to walk two or three miles, often over fields to school, was made impossible by severe weather conditions:

February 3 1873	A very small attendance, owing to there being a a severe snowstorm.
January 21 1902	The week has been very cold and stormy. The distant children could not attend.



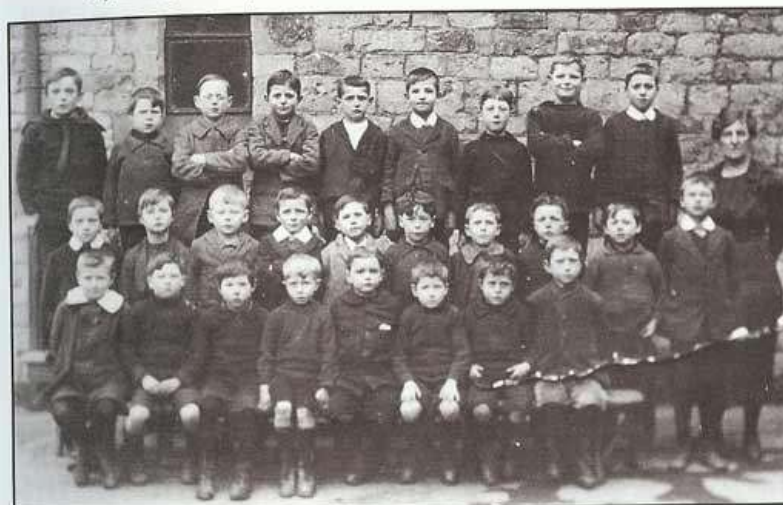
Branston National School with Miss Archer, c1911

For those few children who managed to achieve regular attendance there were monetary benefits, with each child who made 250 attendances a year being returned 1d per week of the 3d weekly charge for his education. A shilling was further given to each child who attended 300 times with a further 1/- given by a friend of the school if 400 was reached. The Melvilles would also give "useful prizes" to those who had "attended regularly" and children would be treated to something like a magic lantern show.

Given the problems of absenteeism and the reliance of the schools on the patronage of the church and the local elite, it is not surprising that the school's curriculum and activities centred as much around singing, bible studies and needlework, as it did reading, writing and arithmetic. Praise

and criticism in school inspection reports reflecting a very different emphasis to schooling, as related in the following Diocesan Inspector's Report of the Infant school on June 4 1890:

"This is a good little school. The children showed careful teaching; they answered the Bible questions very well and said their portion of the catechism very nicely. The repetition of Collects, Hymns and prayers was good, and their singing of hymns pleasing."



Class of boys with Mrs Breeze, Branston National School 1921

The children were therefore generally prepared for their lives in service, or on the land, with a rudimentary knowledge of elementary subjects and the world around them. Their childhood and school days being very different from the relatively carefree lives of present Branston children, with only occasional treats, such as the Branston Feast, or the annual visit to Branston Hall for tea and games.

Childrens' lives without the protection of modern immunisation, sanitation and medical practices were also overshadowed by life-threatening diseases that we have almost eradicated such as, Diphtheria, Scarlatina, Measles and Croup. In 1896 and 1897, for example, the National School faced a serious epidemic of both Measles and Diphtheria:

November 16 1896	Reopened school. Hannah and Eliza Wilson both died of Diphtheria and E Taylor of Measles.
February 19 1897	Louisa Toyne died this morning of Diphtheria. She was at school on Tuesday afternoon

In this respect, the 1890 portrait photograph of Rebecca Staples, daughter of a stonemason who worked on the building of Branston Hall and the rebuilding of the church spire, tells its own tragic tale. For on 11 May 1895 she was to die at the young age of 14, only five years after this picture was taken.



Overall the intriguing old photographs of Branston's schoolchildren speak to us of a 'childhood' and an education system, that was much harsher and limited than that of the present day.

Reminiscences of Mis-spent Youth!

Whilst children of more recent years have had easier childhoods than their Victorian and Edwardian predecessors, their school lives have not been without odd 'hardships' and quirks, particularly related to toilet facilities! Susan Scouller, a pupil of Branston Primary

School on the High Street in the early 1950s, for example, recalls how the school remained unmodernised, with no central form of heating and outside toilets, that were still earth closets with wooden seats, which provided certain means of amusement and escape as she describes:

"One could, if bored or desperate to avoid some imminent mental arithmetic test put up one's hand and ask to be excused

Just open the wooden door and choose one (toilet) to suit your size, low rectangular box for the young ones or the deluxe high one with the step up for the older children with longer legs. Remove the round wooden lid and do not contemplate about the plumbing arrangements. Plenty of fresh air wafted through and newspaper took care of the hygienic side of things.

The other occasion for use was more sociable. This was at playtime which meant forward planning as there would always be a queue winding out into the playground at one end, with the head of the queue finishing cosily next to the person sitting down. This arrangement was really useful because it enabled all conversation to continue uninterrupted except from a call from the back to "hurry-up".

For John Barker and his friends the toilets meant even more fun, for they gathered long stinging nettles, which they pushed underneath the girls' toilet block in attempts to sting them as they sat on the toilet! As Susan Scouller therefore records the eventual building of a pristine, white, new sanitary toilet block, complete with washbasins and a drinking fountain meant that "hygiene and Airwick had arrived, fun and character had left flushed away." Presumably, there was also no more stung bottoms to account for!



School Nativity in Church, c1950

BRANSTON'S WATER SUPPLY

To have running water within each household is now an accepted essential in our standard of living. It is therefore sometimes difficult to comprehend that only seventy years ago the people of Branston, except for its more wealthy citizens, did not possess a water supply that was either clean, or easy to obtain. Instead they were still dependent on the many wells that had been sunk in the 1700s, a number of which had been later equipped with hand pumps to facilitate easier access to the water source.

Granny Hackney

Older Branston residents can still recall using the wells around the village and the village pump which was installed in 1891 by public subscription on Lincoln Road near the old coffee shop. Raymond Graves who was born in a cottage near the pump can, for instance, remember that his first chore in the morning as a boy of six was to go to the pump and take two buckets of water



Granny Hackney

to old Granny Hackney who lived in a tiny cottage behind the Reading Room.

The first few buckets to be drawn were he recalls usually very murky and on occasion would have a tadpole or caddis fly larvae, which had to be thrown away. Eventually he would get two cleaner buckets of water and take them to Granny Hackney. As she was a poor widow and had no money to reward him with, she always gave him a striped peppermint sweet. Although he did not like the sweet he would put it in his mouth, and then take it out and place in his handkerchief, to swap with one of his pals for a marble or cigarette card!



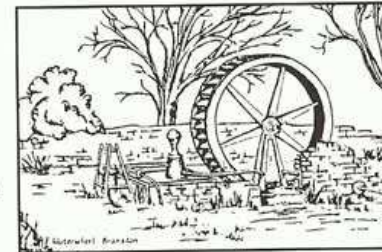
Village Pump

Fortunately Granny Hackney survived the impurities and inconvenience of her water supply to live to her late eighties. For her more richer neighbours, the Leslie Melvilles at Branston Hall and his partner Eustace Abel Smith, resident at Longhills, a more radical solution to the water problem was sought, as even by 1870 the water from their wells was proving inadequate for their expanding households. Using the expertise of the Ancholme foundry in Brigg, a waterwheel and pumping apparatus was installed by Branston's beck, in the now appropriately named 'Waterwheel Lane'.

Water Wheel

Whilst the supply line of water to Branston Hall was direct, getting water from the waterwheel to Longhills was more difficult, with the supply line running through land owned by Henry Grimes at Springfield, across to the windmill

owned by Charles Dickenson and finally crossing the Sleaford Road to Longhills. A complex agreement had therefore to be drawn up between Alexander Leslie Melville, Henry Grimes, Charles Dickenson and Eustace Abel Smith which gave permission for Grimes and Dickenson to have access to the water, in return for ensuring the good maintenance and care of the pipelines.



Branston barn, with the gas works and equipment in situ, 1920s



This water supply was successfully operated from 1879 to 1897, when the ever increasing need for water resulted in the decision to install a more powerful pump to replace the water driven wheel. As the new pump was to be gas powered, a steel pipeline was laid from the pump to the Gasworks in Rectory Lane, which had been established in the 1870s by Alexander Leslie Melville to supply the Hall and other premises in the village.

“Water” Debates in Parish Council

By 1928 continued concerns about the purity of the water from Branston’s wells and its availability, particularly as new housing being built meant further demand, intensified an already contentious debate within the Parish Council and the village itself, as to whether Branston should adopt a “water scheme”. A parish meeting held in the village hall in October 1928 illustrates the divergent voices of the village:

“Mr Carter said he was practically acquainted with 30 wells in which the water was good and thought there was not much to complain of generally as regards the purity of the water.

Mr Williams said he was not so optimistic. There was little rain until November 11 of last year. Since then there had been 30 cases of slight sickness and diarrhoea.. Infants were sickly and attendance at school on this account was unsatisfactory.

Mr Parsons stated that “Up to date methods were wanted” and he thought it was wrong for women to fetch water any considerable distance.

Mr Ward said at least 30 women fetched water from the gas yard and that in some cases they could not do it under 1/4 hour.”

A subsequent survey resulting from the meeting, which asked each householder about the accessibility and purity of their water supply, elicited the same mixed response, with only 44 households out of 229 in “favour of a water scheme.”:

Householders in favour of a water scheme	44
Householders against	48
Householders who had no ‘opinion’ to express	79
Householders who gave no answer to the question	45
Householders who returned, but did not fill in papers	13
Total	229

For most villagers, it was not that they did not want immediate access to an uncontaminated water supply, but that they were fearful of the cost to them in terms of increased rates, hence they continued for another few years with problems of supply, particularly as the parish records highlight how 1929 was a year of water shortage caused by a lack of rain:

“The Rector raised the question of water scarcity. It was thought that the recent rains had somewhat relieved the position. Meanwhile Mr Vickers was supplying water at a small charge and Mr Ward said he would provide a water cart and people could help themselves.”

Despite these difficulties, the villagers still rejected the opportunity of adopting a “new water scheme” at a public meeting held on May 8 1930, with only 27 voting in favour and 200 against. Concerns about large rate rises and rejection of new technology prevailing over the advice of Dr Sharrard, from the Ministry of Health, who informed the meeting that only 25% of Branston’s water “might be found good” and that they “should not let money come before health”:

“Mr Horsewood thought the Parish council were trying to thrust the scheme on the village. The county was not in a fit state to pay more rates. It was only the thin edge of the wedge and would mean increased assessments.

Mr J Drayton Senior aged 93 said he had felt no ill effects from drinking Branston water and further Lindsey Sanatorium people were drinking it.”

By January 1932, however, the work of the more progressive parish councillors and the influence of the Rural District council resulted in the installation of a water scheme at Branston for the tendered cost of forty four thousand, seven hundred and ninety seven pounds. In 1933 mains were laid and water fountains installed throughout the village, most of which can still be seen. Eventually all houses were connected to the mains, hence reducing disease and allowing Branston’s residents to enjoy a necessity of life without having to worry about availability and the need to collect it in all weather conditions.



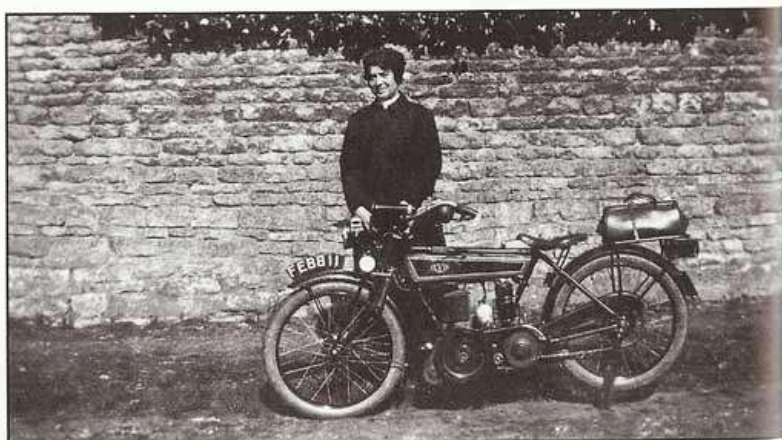
NURSING WELFARE

Before the advent of the free, national health service, Branston's health needs were primarily met by the Branston Nursing Association, who employed the District Nurse. Given the general poverty of the times when it was formed in 1899, payment for annual membership of the Association was graded, as follows:

- Class A - Labourers - 4s 4d
- Class B - Trades persons - 6s 0d
- Class C - Farmers (farming more than 50 acres) - 7s 6d
- Old age pensioners/Widows - 2s 0d
- Poor Relief Recipients - No Charge

The nurses' midwifery skills were also available for additional charges and would be often required in a period where families were usually large in numbers.

The District Nurse covered a comparatively large area to attend patients, beginning the day in and around the village, she would then go to Mere and Branston Booths, before visiting in the fens. To enable the nurse to go about her duties more quickly, a bicycle was consequently purchased in October 1909 from Binks in Lincoln, at a cost of 3s 6d. Given the amount of miles the bike had to travel, it lasted only four years, by which time the replacement cost in Spring 1913 had risen to two pounds and ten shillings. By 1935 the photograph of Nurse Manning indicates that the nurse had had enough resources for a motorbike!



Branston Remembered

The nurse was obviously an important and central figure in Branston lives, who came at times of joy, crises and pain in peoples' lives. Frank Harrison, for example, recalls Nurse Jessop who took over the District Nurse duties in 1901:

"I can see the district nurse now with her little black bag strapped onto the back of her bicycle on a carrier. The nurse in my time was called Nurse Jessop, a very homely lady."

Nurse Jessop being not only provided with a bike to get easily around but also a cottage near the church by Alexander Samuel Leslie Melville, the foundation stone of which was laid by him, as seen in the photograph, in honour of his Golden Wedding celebrations in September 1908.

At the nurse's cottage residents could leave messages asking for the services of the nurse when she was out visiting patients. Nurse Jessop was to remain the district nurse until 1924, when her annual salary was fifty seven pounds. Branston Nursing Association being finally taken over in July 1948 by the Ministry of Health, after a period of 52 years caring for Branston's residents.



Branston Remembered

REMEMBRANCES OF WAR

War Memorial

Branston War Memorial was financed through public subscription and placed at the crossroads of the village on land donated by Captain Leslie-Melville. It is similar in style to the Cross of Sacrifice designed by Architect Sir Reginald Blomfield for the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission cemeteries throughout the world. It was carved from Portland stone by Messrs H T Jenkins & Son Ltd., Marble Merchants, Torquay, and erected by them in February 1921. The Memorial was transported from Torquay in sections by rail to Branston Station and from there by road to the site which had been prepared by Branston builders Cook & Canham.



After a well attended service in All Saints' Church on Sunday 20th March 1921 a large procession, including the choir with the girls wearing black and snow white hoods, made its way through the village to the memorial. Major A B Johnson DSO of the Lincolnshire Regiment unveiled the memorial and the dedication was by Reverend Canon J O

Johnson, Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral. Amongst the many in attendance were Mr A H Leslie Melville JP, Captain A B Leslie Melville, Mr Eustace Abel Smith JP and Mr & Mrs Claude Pym, together with family mourners, ex-servicemen and villagers.

Memorial Inscription

This cross of peace is set up by the people of Branston in loving remembrance of those men from this parish who gave their lives in the Great War and in devout thankfulness for the 130 men who were spared to come back. Lest we forget. Peace.

Private J Craggs 8th February 1915	Private F G Denton 17th May 1915	Private W Cram 18th June 1915
Lieutenant J H R Hanning 26th September 1915	Corporal J Kitchen 26th September 1915	Private J Redford 26th September 1915
Private R C Redford 26th September 1915	L/C A H Humberstone 1st July 1916	Farrier Serg. H G Dowman 16th October 1916
L/C S Allen 22nd October 1916	Private F Chilton 10th December 1916	Private C Wilkinson 11 February 1917
AB RN W Loversedge 18th March 1917	Private G W Nixon 11 April 1917	Private A Ash 15th April 1917
Private G Coupland 28th April 1917	Corporal W Blissett 28th April 1917	Private T Harrison 19 May 1917
Private J W Smith 31st July 1917	Private C Brown 11th August 1917	Private T Overton 16th August 1917
Private C H Creasey 22 August 1917	Private A East 22 August 1917	Private F J Pearson 25th November 1917
Sergeant R Newton 27th November 1917	Private P Espin 28th November 1917	Private A Sharp 21st March 1918
L/C A Clarricoates 15th April 1918	1st Class A/M J R Canham 27th April 1918	Corporal H M Waltham 9th May 1918
Private T Taylor 23rd May 1918	Private F H Baker 16th July 1918	L/Cpl J Dowman 5th August 1918

Private R A Burchnall
2nd September 1918

Fitter W Baker
28th September 1918

Private J S Smith
7th October 1918

Sergeant J Wilkinson
3rd May 1919

To the praise and honour of god and in glorious remembrance of the men of Branston who fighting for their king and country in the war for the world's freedom passed to the life beyond 1914 - 1919.
Their name liveth for evermore.

After the Second World War a further eight names were added to the 37 killed in the First World War:

V S Plumtree R.C.S.

E Moulding R.A.F.

H Horner R.N.

R E Ablesmith G.G.

J J Smith R.A.F.

E Shackley R.A.F.

W G Cooper R.A.F.

R Denton R.A.

A Welcome Home Dinner was held in the Village Hall on 27th September 1946 to honour those who had died and all who had served in the Second World War.

During the 1960's the memorial was cleaned, but the dates of death were not re-inscribed, possibly because they had worn and could not be read. However during 1999 the whole site has been re-designed as part of the newly created Community Gardens, with the memorial restored complete with dates. A service to re-dedicate the Memorial taking place with the official opening of the gardens on 26 September 1999.

Research is still being carried out to find the final resting place of the men listed on the memorial and also their connection with Branston. This will probable be available as a separate leaflet when completed. During this research it has been found that Sergeant J Wilkinson actually died 3rd May 1917 and on the Commonwealth War Graves database is listed as Corporal and not Sergeant.

'An Unsung Village Hero'

Many residents of Branston pass by Archer Road on the Hillside Estate without realising who the street was named after, or why Frank Archer, after whom it is named, should be accorded such an honour. But Frank Archer was a hero of the First and Second World Wars, of whom Branston is rightly proud, receiving a Military Medal and two Military Crosses (the latter known as a Military Bar) in the First World War for his bravery.

*Frank Archer,
Commissioned in
1917*



Attached to the Lincolnshire Regiment in the Royal Fusiliers as a Private, Frank Archer found himself in January 1917 setting out across France's No Man's Land in heavy snow to attack the German lines. Having been issued with white overalls and tin hats painted white for camouflage and carrying short ladders as they knew that the German defences were deep, Frank remarked that they must have looked like a large gang of painters and decorators!

On reaching German lines they jumped into the trenches and threw Mills bombs into the dugouts to get the German soldiers out. Frank, however, did not hear the bugle sounding the retreat and found himself alone with an officer in the German lines. Frank was about to join the officer in a hasty retreat when he spotted a German looking out of a dugout and ordered the terrified German soldier and four of his compatriots to go back to English lines under heavy German artillery fire. They were met by a British officer challenging them with a revolver, as they thought it was a counter attack! For such bravery Frank was awarded the Military Medal in March 1917, with a temporary commission of 2nd Lieutenant given in November 1917.

At the end of the war Frank was to receive two Military Crosses, the first of which is recorded in the London Gazette of January 11 1919:

"When in command of a platoon during an advance on September 7 1918, his company was held up by intense machine gun fire. He worked his platoon round skilfully to a flank in spite of heavy casualties thus materially assisting the advance to be continued. He showed complete disregard for danger and his example and conspicuous courage imbued his men with confidence which ensured success".

Three weeks later he was awarded a further Military Cross, also recorded in the London Gazette of January 31 1919:

"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on 8 October near Wallincourt. When the two leading companies were held up by fire from the right flank he led forward two Lewis gun teams together with a captured enemy gun and drove the enemy down the road, at the end of which he captured two field guns and 44 prisoners. His determination and drive had an inspiring effect on all ranks."

In the Second World War he achieved the rank of Major having been attached to the Pioneer Corps, with some of his time being served in Egypt. On retirement he took an active part in village life, until his death in 1978 after a somewhat adventurous life.



Egypt, 1943

Second World War

The effect of the Second World War on Branston, as for the rest of Britain, was not only the real fears of losing life, or being injured, but also the social changes, as Branston residents entered the armed forces and left Branston perhaps for the first time, whilst men, women and children from other regions of Britain and indeed the world came to Branston as part of the services, the land army, or as evacuees.

Marie Bannister, for example, came to Branston from Manchester as a land army girl and recalls one of her first tasks being to look for 'fat hen'. As a city girl she had no idea of what she was looking for and hence she spent a considerable time searching the fields for chickens, before being informed that it was a weed, which was "growing, not crowing!" Despite the long 70 hour week and the hard work often in bleak and wet fields, the former land army girls reflect that they had a "good war", not least perhaps because it was "exciting to be away from home", with their pick of British and American servicemen and serenading Italian prisoners of war!



Land Girls c1940, with Marie Bannister on right

Other residents have memories of the Jewish child evacuees from Cowper Street in Leeds, who were attached to their family, or who had lessons with them in the Methodist Chapel Schoolroom. Some of the evacuees were apparently so misbehaved that they were sent back to Leeds, as was a particularly vindictive school teacher who came with them, who on one occasion split open a child's hand with the utilitarian metal rulers of wartime.

'Y Station' - Branston's Secret War

One of the least known parts of Branston's role in World War II, was the siting at Branston Mere of the Y Service telegraphy station. It was one of a number of British wireless intercept stations that were responsible for 24 hour continuous monitoring of German radio traffic. The coded signals and their sources were relayed by Branston operators, via Cheadle and Chicksands to Station X Bletchley Park, where ingenious translators and codebreakers worked to crack codes that had 6,000 million, million combinations.

Branston's wireless station's particular remit was to monitor German air to air and air to ground messages. The signals were enciphered by the Germans using Enigma machines, which the German High Command thought were invulnerable. By intercepting the signals and breaking the codes, the British were, however, able to determine troop movements, orders of battle, positions of formations and probable targets for attack.

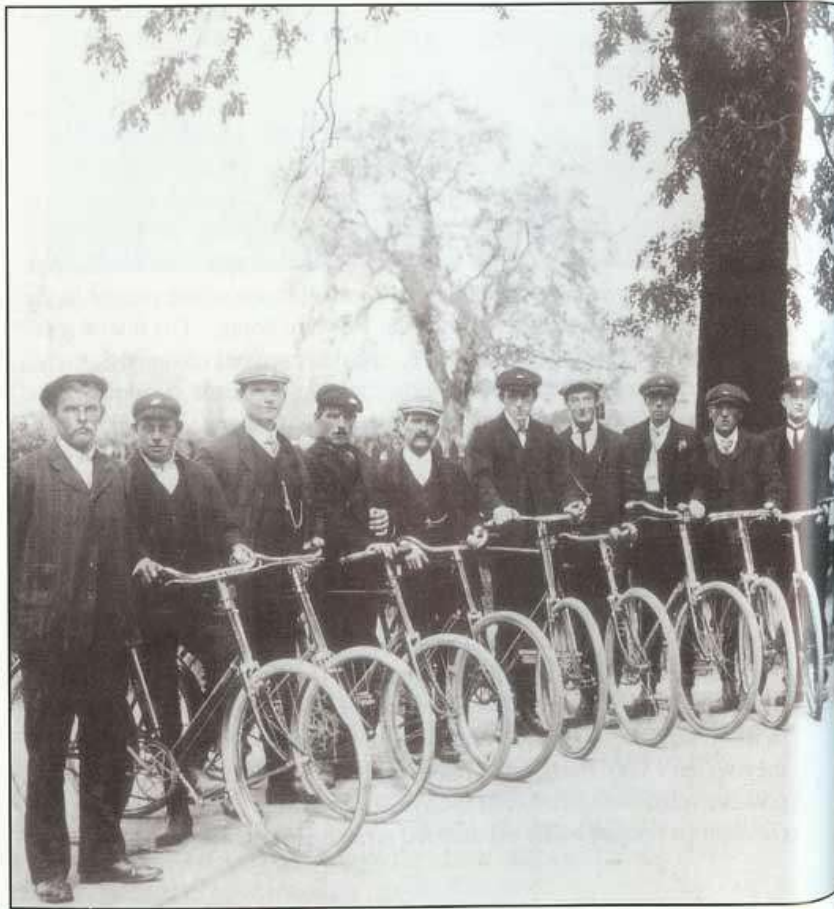
The work at Branston Mere's Y Station was nevertheless technically difficult for the operators, who had to work often long hours in hot and claustrophobic conditions underground. The Germans, for example, obscured the source of the radio messages by daily altering the call sign and the frequency used, these had then to be relocated at midnight by searching the entire frequency band.

Besides technical competence the operators had to maintain absolute secrecy about their work, as it was so vital that Germany remained unaware of how they intercepted vital intelligence messages. Hugh Burkhill, who worked at the Y Station and until recently attended 50 years of reunions at the Moor Lodge for the Mere operators recalls that, "at the time it was very secret indeed - in fact, none of the people in the village of Branston knew exactly what we were doing." The operators were monitored themselves by M18, and one member of the Y Station who talked too freely about his work, shortly afterwards disappeared to an uncertain fate. Indeed, it is only recently that veterans of Y service have been able to speak and write about their war time experience, or realise the significance of some of the codes, such as 'D2600' for Hitler's own aircraft.

As most of the operators were posted from other parts of Britain, together with a group of American GIs for a short time, there must have been a significant impact on Branston's tight-knit community, when they were billeted around the village. Ironically Hugh Burkhill's wife, Joan, who was a sergeant at the Y station recalls that secrecy was not confined to the Y service; "I thought that the village people were very secretive - they weren't very friendly." Other residents, however, recall a more positive relationship between the village and the Y Station, with friendships consequently established around Britain and the USA.

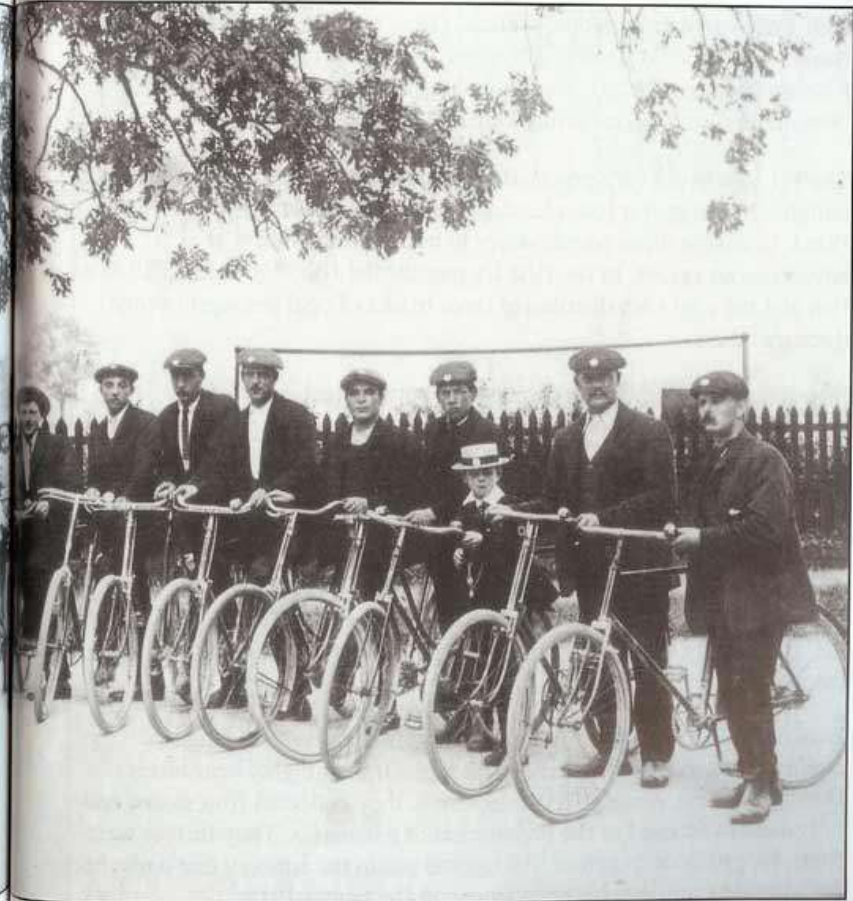
LEISURE AND SOCIETIES

Branston's sense of community has been fostered, as in other villages, by the founding of a number of societies and clubs, which have reflected the interests and needs of its members, at particular points in time. Whilst the Temperance Society and Cycling Club may have had an inevitable demise in modern times, other associations have been initiated to reflect new pastimes and increasing leisure for the majority of Branston residents in the twentieth century.



What, however, is of particular interest are those societies, such as the Women's Institute, that have continued to flourish and adapt to Branston's changing environment.

Branston Cycling Club, c1900



Branston WI 1917-2000

Although the Women's Institute may presently have a staid image, pin-up calendars excepted!, it was originally very radical for Branston women to attend the WI meetings, which began on November 28th 1917. For this was a time when women were still fighting for full political and social emancipation and it was considered daring to be a member of a Women's group. Indeed, many ladies had to ask their husbands for permission to attend.

Branston WI providing a forum for debate and education for women, with some early discussions, such as, "How to make a man happy at home" very much reflecting a bygone age, whilst other talks have a timeless theme, such as, "Wealth and the high prices of living", "Astronomy" and "Combating venereal diseases"!

The WI also had a very practical application to the needs of its members with the forming of a coal club and fish club at the latter end of World War I, to enable these commodities to be sold to members at advantageous prices. In the first six months the fish club sold 1,525 lb of fish and the coal club distributed three trucks of coal amongst twenty three members.

Instructive demonstrations on cookery, bottling and drying fruit, dressmaking and "how to put away a pig", were also popular, when such skills were essential to running an Edwardian household. Indeed Branston ladies became so skilful in killing their own pigs, that the fish club had to be suspended during December 1918, as obviously not so much fish was required! Bootmending classes were equally so successful that a sub-committee was formed to deal with the hiring out of bootmending tools and the sale of leather and balata. 2d was charged for the use of tools for 24hrs - with any lost or damaged to be replaced by the member using them.

Branston WI have also maintained a commitment to the village community and its wider society throughout their eighty year history. During the First World War, for example, they collected fruit stones and nut shells to be used in the preparation of gas masks. They further went from door to door to gather 951 eggs to put to the national egg collection for wounded soldiers, between June and December 1918.

NOVEMBER 26th.

Motto: "Windows opened more would keep Doctors from the door."

Address: The Education Act

Tea.

Hostesses: Miss Morris, Mrs. Pike, Mrs. Reid, Miss E. Sharpe.

Demonstration: Pastry Making.

Exchange of Cake Recipes.

Competition: Hat Trimming.

Exchange and Mart.

Entertainment: Chorus Singing by the Members.

Classes: Millinery Classes will be held during this month.

Practical Hint.—When making a Cake a little custard powder added to the ingredients gives it a nice flavour.

DECEMBER 16th.

Motto: "What we want to do for the World is just to make it the happiest place we can."

Entertainment for Returned Soldiers.

Hostesses: Mrs. Rowe, Miss M. Sharpe, Mrs. Spurr, Mrs. Stray.

Classes: Dressmaking.

Practical Hint.—He works best who plays best.

F. H. Lister, Printer, 21, Norman Street, London.

"for home and country."

BRANSTON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

1919

President—Miss ANN SMITH.

Vice-President—Miss SHARPE.

Treasurer—Miss V. CRAIG. Secretary—Miss BROWN.

Committee—

Miss APRILWHITE. Miss G. CLARKE. Miss JESSIE. Miss ROSE.
Miss ARCHER. Miss CRAIG. Miss ROBERTS.
Miss BLUNT. Miss HADGASTLE. Miss ROWE.
Miss CLAYTON. Miss HARRISON.

RULES.

Meetings will be held in the Old Hall at 7 p.m.

Members may bring babies but not older children to the Meetings.

Subscriptions (2- a year) may be paid yearly, half-yearly or quarterly, in advance, or monthly at the Meetings.

Girls from 14-16 are admitted as Associates and pay 1- a year.

Anyone may attend one Meeting before deciding to become a Member.

Members may bring a friend to any Meeting on payment of 6d.



Branston WI, 1958



Branston WI and children in fancy dress, c 1940

In more recent years one of the most significant communal projects was the designing and purchase of a village sign to celebrate the 70th birthday of Branston WI. Two scenes depicting Branston at the turn of the century were chosen, with Mr Carrell and Mr Caudwell commissioned to create the plaque and wrought iron stand. This sign which was unveiled on September 26th 1988, provides a colourful and attractive addition to the village's centre and demonstrates how the WI has continued to be an integral part of the village community.

Gardening Club

For an agricultural and rural area such as Branston, gardening has obviously been an integral leisure activity. Indeed, until the improved socio-economic conditions of the later twentieth century, the cultivation of allotments and vegetable plots and keeping of poultry would have been essential to supplement the average labourer's diet. It is therefore not surprising that a Gardening Club for Branston and Mere was formed in the early 1890s, with the first Branston and Mere Flower Show held on September 12th 1894 being a spectacular event. It was hosted by its President, A S Leslie Melville, in the park of Branston Hall, where in addition to the show itself, there was a programme of sports for all ages in the afternoon. A brass band was also in attendance, with the serving of teas and refreshments. As most people in the village had an allotment for producing vegetables, the main prize of ten shillings was for the best kept allotment in Branston Village, with a lesser seven shillings and sixpence prize for the 'best cultivated and cropped allotment in Branston Fen'.

Branston's annual Flower Show flourished like its produce, until affected by the two world wars, when most of the younger gardeners were away in the forces. Norman and Dick Creasey with Jack Pearson and Ted Warriner being the first people to revive the club's fortunes after the Second World War, whereupon the death of members of the committee, once again saw its demise.

Branston presently, however, has a thriving gardening society due to the actions of Sid Cousins and Gus Redshaw who re-established the club. Branston consequently still has a well supported annual show in

**BRANSTON & MERE
FLOWER SHOW.**

THE FIRST ANNUAL SHOW OF
WINDOW PLANTS, CUT FLOWERS, FRUIT, VEGETABLES, WILD
FLOWERS, BREAD, NEEDLEWORK, EGGS, AND POULTRY.
WILL BE HELD
On WEDNESDAY, September 12th, 1894
In the Park, near the Old Hall,
(By kind permission of A. R. LARLEY MELLOR, Esq.)

DURING THE AFTERNOON SPORTS WILL TAKE PLACE.
TEA & OTHER REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED.
A BAND will be in attendance.

Schedule of Prizes, Rules, &c.

Admission—From 1 to 4 o'clock 6d.; from 4 to 5 o'clock 3d.; each.
Children under 14 from 1 to 4 6d., 4 to 8 3d.

Charles W. GOSWELL, PRINTER, 212, BUCKINGHAM STREET, LONDON.

PROGRAMME OF SPORTS.

TO COMMENCE ABOUT 4.30.

OPEN TO PARISHIONERS.

The PRIZES will be of about the value of, First, 2s Second, 1s, in each event, excepting Nos. 8, 25 and 26.

- 1 Egg and Spoon Race, Women.
- 2 " " Girls under 16.
- 3 Throwing a Cricket Ball.
- 4 Flat Race, Handicap, Women over 50.
- 5 " " Women over 30 and under 50.
- 6 " " Young Women under 30.
- 7 " " Girls under 16.
- 8 Hitting the Bell, for Duck or Fowl.
- 9 Long Jump.
- 10 High Jump.
- 11 Potato Race, Women.
- 12 " " Girls.
- 13 Flat Race, Handicap, Men over 50.
- 14 " " Men over 30 and under 50.
- 15 " " Young Men under 30.
- 16 " " Boys under 16.
- 17 Sack Race, Men.
- 18 " " Boys.
- 19 Three Legged Race, Handicap, Men.
- 20 " " " Boys.
- 21 Bicycle Race, Handicap, (if six entries.)
- 22 " " Slow.
- 23 Hurdle Race.
- 24 Obstacle Race.
- 25 Tug of War, 10 Men a side.
- 26 " " 10 Women a side.

SCHEDULE OF PRIZES.

SECTION A. OPEN TO LABOURERS ONLY. ALLOTMENTS.

- CLASS.
- 1 For the best cultivated and cropped Allotment in Branston Village. 1st 10s, (4. 1st 5s 6d.) 2nd 10s, (4. 1st 5s 6d.) 3rd 5s 6d.
- 2 For the best cultivated and cropped Allotment in Branston Fen. 1st 7s 6d. 2nd 5s 6d. 3rd 4s 6d.

COTTAGE GARDENS.

- 3 Vegetables 7s 6d. 4s 6d. 2s 6d.
- 4 Flowers 4s 6d. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.

WINDOW PLANTS.

- 5 One White Geranium in flower. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.
- 6 One Scarlet Geranium in flower. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.
- 7 One Fuchsia in flower, any variety. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.
- 8 One Begonia, any variety. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.
- 9 One Pot of Musk, any variety. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.
- 10 One Hanging Basket Plant. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.
- 11 One Pelargonium. 2s 6d. 1s 6d.

VEGETABLES.

CLASS.	1st.	2nd.	3rd.
12 Two White Cabbages, not Drumhead	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
13 Two Red Cabbages	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
14 Two Sticks of Celery, red or white	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
15 Two Courgettes, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
16 Two Vegetable Marrows	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
17 Six Carrots, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
18 Twenty Pods of Peas, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	1s 0d.
19 Six Pods of Broad Beans	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	1s 0d.
20 Twelve Pods of Scarlet Runners	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
21 Six Kidney Potatoes	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	1s 0d.
22 Six Round Potatoes, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	1s 0d.
23 Six Onions, spring sown	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	1s 0d.
24 Twelve Escalots, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	1s 0d.
25 Three Sticks of Rhubarb	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	
26 Six Garden Turnips, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 6d.	1s 0d.
27 Best Basket of Parsley	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
28 Two Cauliflowers	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
29 Six Tomatoes	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	
30 Two Heads of Lettuce, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 0d.	

FRUIT.

31 Best Dish of Red Currants	2s 0d.	1s 0d.
32 Best Dish of White Currants	2s 0d.	1s 0d.
33 Twelve Gooseberries, green or red	2s 0d.	1s 0d.
34 Twelve Plums, cooking	2s 0d.	1s 0d.
35 Twelve Dessert Apples, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 0d.
36 Six kitchen Apples, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 0d.
37 Six Peas, any variety	2s 0d.	1s 0d.
38 Twelve Plums, dessert	2s 0d.	1s 0d.

September, with Branston's cottage gardens and allotments of necessity, generally replaced by gardens that we design, enhance and enjoy.



Lady Gardener's Club Outing, 1958

Friendship Club

When the Friendship Club was formed in 1956 to provide villagers over 60 with a place to meet friends, play cards and bingo and have a cup of tea and a sandwich, the annual subscription was 1 shilling and tea one old penny. As members were elderly, a number of them were given lifts to the meeting place of the Church Hall. One one occasion Mrs Blytham recalls waiting for a lady until she found a glass eye, as she always put it in place at the last minute! Nurse Chapman would then arrive at the end to help with the 'taxi' service home and would also report on anyone ill, so that Mrs Reynolds could visit and take flowers.



Friendship Club Christmas Party, 1970

In the new millennium the club still has a strong membership, with a coach now organised for members unable to walk to the Hall and the annual subscription increased to a substantial two pounds and twenty pence for tea!



Pensioners at Old Village hall

SPORT

As leisure time increased in the twentieth century, Branston, as other villages, developed a number of sports clubs and activities.

Football Club

A photograph of Branston Football club in 1910-11 reveals that they were obviously looking for funds, as a man in the back row holds a collecting box for them!





In 1932 Branston Football Club were winners of the Village Trophy, which must have pleased their trainer, F Hackney, who stands with a towel on his shoulder in the second row.

Cricket Club

Branston's original cricket field was on the Recreation Ground of Lincoln Road, with the players having to cut a pitch with the outfield still having long grass! It was not until 1994 that they moved to their more suitable ground on Moor Lane.

For many years the Club played only friendly matches and it was only in the early 1950s that they entered league and cup cricket. During the 1960s Branston Cricket Club was one of the best village sides in the area, winning the local league several times and the Village Trophy for the first seven years it was played. Two of the star players of this time were Wilf Kester and Brian Wilkinson who were both excellent all-rounders, inspired by Len Smith who was associated with the club as Groundsman, Secretary and Captain for more than forty years. After such a successful period the club began to decline in the 1970s, but has gradually recovered to have teams again in local leagues.



Branston Cricket Club, c1930

Bowls Club

Branston Bowls club was formed in the late 1920s with the first President being Eustace Abel Smith, who loaned money to the Club for the purchase of equipment and bowls. Members then purchased their bowls by paying 1 shilling (5p) per week for 21 weeks. Subscriptions were 5 shillings paid to the Sports Association and each section in the Sports Association was committed to hold one fund-raising event each year.

As in the case of the Cricket Club, the Bowls Club originally only played friendly matches, which took place on Saturdays. It was not until after the end of the Second World War in 1945 that the Club started playing in League competitions and joined the E.B.A. League in the early 1950s. Successes at this time included Arthur Kemp, who was a finalist in the All England E.B.A. singles and the Club were the County E.B.A. Champions in 1954.



Bowls Club Ladies Team

Ironically just as the Club had entered the League and started playing competitively membership started to dwindle, when previously there had been a thriving interest, including a Ladies' team. By the 1960s the Club was in danger of folding, but since then membership has gradually increased to around 60 members in 1998. In 1997 the Club had their first national champions, when Bob Paulger, Roy Elkington and Tony Sutton won the E.B.F. National Championship at Skegness. The Club is now playing in 6 Leagues, as well as several cup competitions.



EVENTS AND OCCASIONS

Branston throughout its history has witnessed a number of celebrations and events, that have both been part of wider national and regional occasions and particular to Branston's own community.

Village Entertainment

In the days without television and multi-media entertainment, the village community as the following photographs demonstrate created their own amusement with musical evenings, dances, concerts and plays.



Musical Evening - Village Hall, c1940



Concert Party, Mother's Union, c1940

Maypole Dancing at Longhills, c 1920



Rehearsal of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', 1920

Plough Play

The Plough Play was until the early twentieth century regularly performed in Branston, as it was in most eastern midlands counties. The play was performed from a fortnight before Christmas until 'Plough Monday', which was the first Monday following January 6th, the actors usually being local farm workers. Rehearsals for the play were held in the stables of Jubilee House from early December. Jubilee House, which features on the front cover of this book, was then a farm house to the fields on which the Valley Estate was built. The house was demolished to improve visibility at the Beech Road junction with Lincoln Road.

Branston Plough Play Team, 1901



The central characters of the play were the Recruiting Sergeant, the Fool, Dame Jane, the Doctor and Branston's slightly different characters of the Ribboner and King George. The particular plot Branston adopted is somewhat disjointed, but nevertheless entertaining, beginning with the appearance of the Recruiting Sergeant and the Lady's lament at her loved one's recruitment, upon which she flirts with the Ribboner, the Sergeant and the Fool. King George subsequently enters and challenges the Recruiting Sergeant to a fight, whereupon King George falls down dead with a prick of the Recruiting Sergeant's sword, but the Doctor brings him back to life! Dame Jane then appears with her 'bastard' claiming that the 'fool' is the father, for she has been told by the 'overseer of the parish' to 'go to the biggest fool I could find' to claim paternity! The play ends with their agreement to marriage.

The play provided entertainment for the village and the participating farm workers received food, drink, fuel and money from local landowners for their performance, at a time when the weather would often be at its most severe and work on the land scarce. Hence the lines at the end of the Plough Play:

"Remember us poor plough boys
Who ploughs the mud and mire
We thank you for a Christmas box
And a pitcher of your best beer"

Indeed, as many as eight or ten performances were given on some evenings, with takings consequently sometimes amounting to as much as seven pounds a night, which would be shared out.

Plough Monday was also very much a day of acceptable misrule, with plough boys allowed to indulge in rowdy behaviour. They could make fun of their employers and the local elite, mimicking their dress and actions, or criticising them in song. This was then followed by the Branston Feast until the Thursday of that week. In the twentieth century the decline of farm labour owing to mechanisation, world wars and changes in society saw the inevitable demise of the Plough Play. In this respect, the photograph we have of the Plough Play Team in 1901 has a particular poignancy, as Joe Redford who played the Lady and is third from the left in the photograph, was to be killed at the Battle of Loos.

Branston Home Guard Social Club does, however, still continue the tradition of celebrating Feast Week with a 'Stuffed Chine Night' taking place on the first Saturday after the New Year, with hopes to perhaps revive the Plough Play, as in other Lincolnshire villages.

Fund-raising

Entertainment for Branston residents has also often been combined with various fund-raising targets for the village, particularly in the form of the grand bazaar, or village fete.

In 1914, for example, a Bazaar was held in the grounds of Branston Hall to raise two hundred pounds towards the cost of repairs to All Saints' Church. There were Morris Dancers in the afternoon and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' performed in the garden of Hainton House in the evening. Four hundred pounds was, in fact, raised. More recently, there were 'Gay Days!' in 1966 and 1967 to raise money for a swimming pool at the Primary School on High Street, which was subsequently opened in 1968.



*Mrs Desmond Abel-Smith
opening village fete with
Rev Pells*

Royal Events

In the late nineteenth and twentieth century Branston has celebrated a number of festivities for the following royal occasions:

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee - 29th June 1897

Coronation of King George V - June 22nd 1911

Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation - 31st May - 6th June 1953

Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee - June 5th - 7th 1977

The programmes and photographs detailing these festivities are particularly interesting for they demonstrate a similar format for communal celebration, despite the different ages in time that they represent. Village sports, childrens' teas with the distribution of medals, coins or mugs to them, processions and parades, church services and bonfires being a constant theme.



Presentation of Coronation Mugs, 1953

Contrarily, they also indicate changes affecting Branston society, with, for example, the new influence of the television on the programme of events for the Coronation Day of Elizabeth II. Similarly, by the time of Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee the cult of the teenager with discos and barbecue had replaced the more sedate 'Younger Adults' Tea' of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee!



Youth Club on Recreation Ground, Coronation Day, 1953

Coronation Celebrations, children prepared for parade





Children's Silver Jubilee Tea Party, 1977

Jubilee Queen's Procession



Jubilee Dance

Whilst the patronage of the Leslie Melvilles is very evident in the festivities for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, highlighted by their bequeathing of the Recreation Ground as a central part of the celebrations, by the time of King George's coronation in 1911 they had been superseded by the ubiquitous 'Management Committee'! The increased leisure time of the twentieth century also meant that instead of the festivities lasting only one day, activities for Elizabeth II's Jubilee and Coronation were extended over several days.



Jubilee Dance

POSTSCRIPT - STORY OF THE BOOK

To publish a book on the history of a community at the start of the third millennium is particularly auspicious, as people reflect more than usual on the meaning of the past, in relation to the present and the future. In 1996, however, when Branston History Group first became an established group, a document for the millennium, seemed in retrospect a very distant target.

The group's initial objective was to collate as many memories and photographs of Branston as possible, given that as the older members of a village die and younger residents move away, community memories and mementos are permanently 'lost'. The group therefore started to gather accounts of village life from as many societies and individuals as it could and had several photographic days, when people could bring their precious old photographs to be copied for our 'archive'. In both the group's formation and the copying of the photographs we were fortunate to have the support of North Kesteven District Council's Heritage Officer, Kate Orr and Beth Davidson the Photography Development Officer. Beth not only taught some members of the group necessary photographic techniques, but also had the photographs catalogued and bound as part of the 'Branston Pastways Collection'.

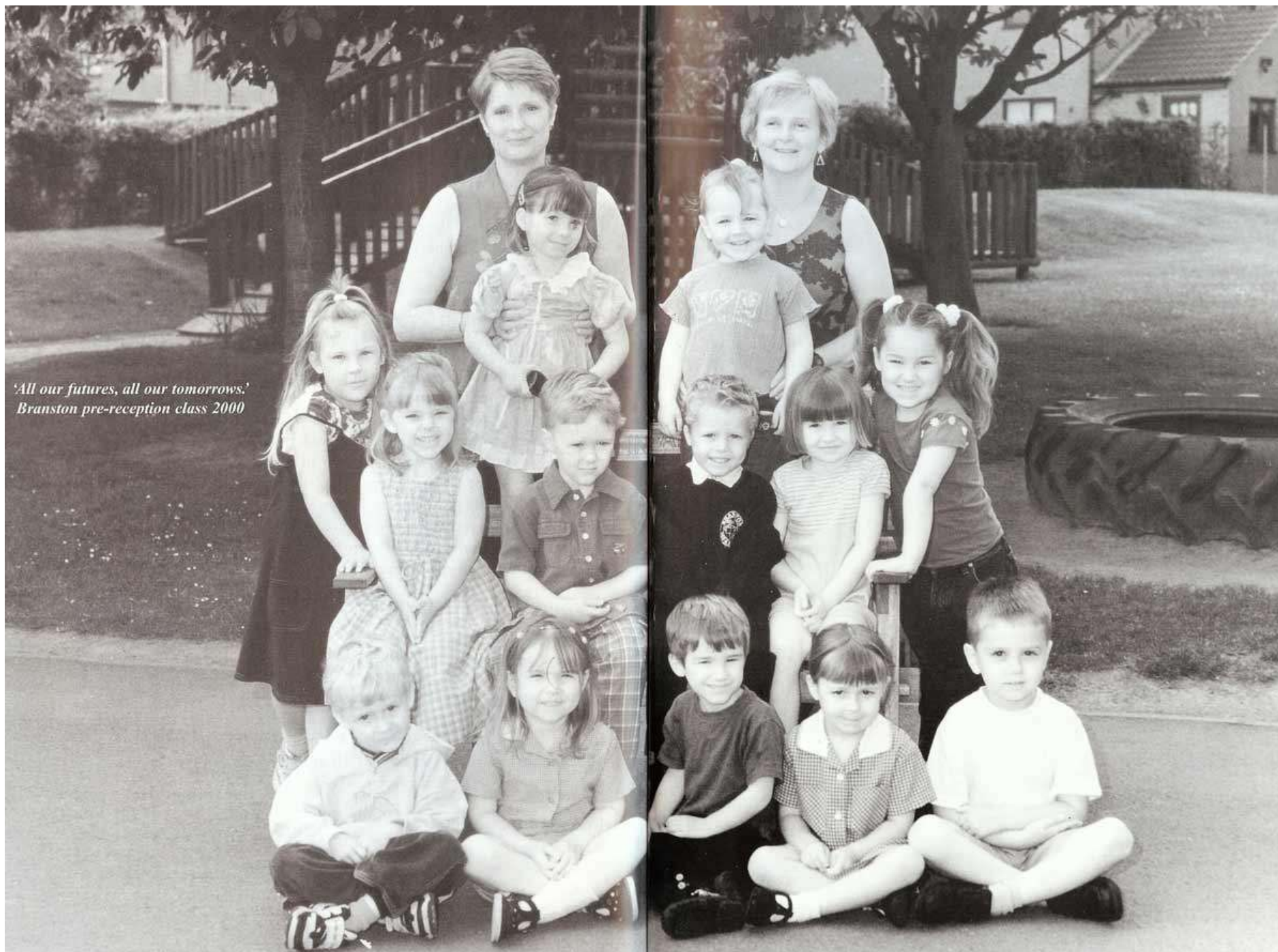
Branston History Group was also lucky in that a wealth of photographs and documents had already been collated by Mr Stead, the former Headteacher of the Junior School, to which he allowed the group unqualified access. Indeed, nearly two thirds of the photographs in the book are taken from his three volumes of Photographic Records of Branston from 1880-1980, recorded as part of the 'Branston Village Project' by De Montford University. The photographs with their accompanying detail of names, dates and events, meant that a pictorial framework of Branston's past already existed. Within the village were also local historians such as Dr Dennis Mills and Raymond Cucksey, who had already researched aspects of Branston's past, Dr Mills' 'Village Notes On Branston' particularly providing a comprehensive historical background.

As our 'archive' of memories and photographs hence grew in 1997 and 1998, the idea developed of producing a book for the millennium. Within the group, Hilary Hawkyard, Tony Hunt and Elaine Johnson had already been involved in the production of village walk leaflets, as part of the Branston Parish Walks Group, to which a book on Branston would be a natural development. There remained just one perennial problem, where could we get the money to finance a publication? We therefore applied for lottery funding at the beginning of 1999 and were subsequently granted an award in June 1999.

Having purchased the communal laptop in September 1999, Jennifer Jackson then began the main writing, editing and compiling of the book, using the group's collated 'archive' and research of original sources, such as school log books and Branston Parish Council Minutes. It was intended that the book would essentially be photograph centred, with captions and a brief commentary on each photograph. However, there were so many interesting tales to tell that we felt a wealth of information would be lost, if we did not make the book more narrative. Indeed, the problem was not what to write, but how to condense so much material. As the drafts of the chapters were completed, the group therefore gave from their differing perspectives suggestions and criticism to hopefully make the book as representative as possible. We also had amongst the group, Leslie Knowles, a former professional proofreader, who noted all the grammatical and spelling errors that the spellchecker did not!

In April 2000 the first draft of the book was finally ready for the printers, with John Skeet, Director of Wayzgoose Printers Ltd and himself a Branston resident undertaking the final skilful placing of the photographs in the text. We are nevertheless aware that the book contains as many omissions on Branston's history, as it does accounts. In this respect, we view the book as essentially a beginning, rather than an end, for hopefully it will provoke people to come forward with further photographs and memories of 'old' Branston, which can form the basis of future publications and communal debate.

Branston History Group
April 2000



'All our futures, all our tomorrows.'
Branston pre-reception class 2000

