

Chapter 3.

THE SERVICES

LOCAL WATER COMPANY: - Gas Supplier – Electricity - Company – Cooking – Water Heating – Lighting – Living -Standards – Wage Levels – Public Health – The Welfare State – Church and State.

When the local council were asked to submit schemes for land development in the late 1800s they considered the supply of water. These concerns were passed onto the Coln Valley Water Company who undertook to supply the necessary piped water as early as 1884. Ten years later the then local authority had installed a new sewage system. The house building schemes thirty years later gratefully used these provisions, altering the gauge and pipe material whilst retaining the essential main service.

As the dwellings were being designed and built provision had to be made for recreation and open spaces to give health and a green environment for its inhabitants. This was first investigated at the time of The Great Exhibition. By 1910, a Local Board of Health committee of the Harrow Urban District Council gave consideration for recreation grounds for Harrow and Roxeth. By 1925 Headstone Park was acquired, then Pinner Park in 1930. In 1938 Harrow reserved 962 acres for a green belt. The 1894 Harrow sewage farms were turned into Kenton's recreation ground after a larger site found. West Harrow Park and Streamside Walk joined the others as the building estates grew.

Property speculators and house buyers could obtain a mortgage with an interest rate of 4.25 per cent. These Building Societies did not require large deposits. Abbey National, then called Abbey Road, registered a seven-hundred per cent increase in borrowers, in the ten years, 1926 – 1936. This allowed most of the lower middle class and better off working class the

opportunity to buy to live. The interest rate was set at this low point to stimulate the market which is what it did. The population of Harrow Weald rose from fifteen hundred to eleven thousand and that of Pinner three thousand to twenty-three. North Harrow was prior to 1919 free of houses. Twenty years later all the land was built upon – the one-time farmland disappeared.

GAS SUPPLIER

Due north of Harrow, lies the village of Stanmore. The gas-works were opened there in 1859, supplying Harrow through a private contractor named John Chapman - whose business was called Stanmore Gas Company. In 1894, it was joined with Harrow District Gas Company – the two becoming Harrow and Stanmore Gas Company, the gas holders were sited at South Harrow. This company was later taken over by Brentford Gas Company in 1924 - formed part of the Gas Light and Coke Company - two years later.

ELECTRICITY COMPANY

This growth coming from these new enterprises entailed electricity, in one form or another. The development of the electricity supply was the most important industrial event of that period. Legislation was required to carry forward a bill that became the Electricity Supply Act of 1925. This created the Central Electricity Board formed at the time of the General Strike – in 1926. The Boards task was to rationalize the myriad local power stations into larger units – to build a new generation

of power stations, all connected to a national grid - of high-power transmission lines. By 1933 this goal was almost complete. It was a world-wide first - having the most advanced system of electrical supply available produced by coal fired power stations.

Prior to The First World War, the use of electricity was for the very few. In 1920 there being almost three-quarters of a million users rising to nine million by 1939. In 1927 one house in seventeen, using electricity... by 1930 one house in three rises to two out of three, by 1939.

It is difficult to imagine the difference having electricity made to the population, particularly to those living in the country. Before electricity, illumination was by gas, commonly used by the time of The Great Exhibition in 1851. Gradually, by the turn of the twentieth-century, in the country cottage, candle power gave way to oil, then oil to gas. It took until the nineteen thirties for all homes to be lit by electricity. At my grandmothers cottage in Somerset I went to bed, in the 1940s, by candle light, leaving the family below playing cards by the light of an oil lamp. The radio was powered by an accumulator and the milk was kept in the stream.

After all wars there is a surge of new inventions and discoveries... brought onto the market. The First World War was no different. In the nineteen-twenties electricity and gas appliance started to appear. Cookers, refrigerators, water heaters and all sorts of household gadgets including vacuum cleaners, radio sets, record players and toasters appeared first in advertising then in the shops.

COOKING, WATER HEATING & LIGHTING

Prior to The First World War cooking and water heating achieved on a kitchen range, with an open fire next to a bread oven. The fuel would have been wood and coal. Many outhouses were built or converted to kitchen use using paraffin. Similarly lighting was by candle and oil. Gas was being used extensively for street lighting. By the middle of the nineteenth century domestic lighting and heating was a matter of fact. However, this relied upon the nearness of the gas line and gas holder - for continuous pressure. When the Garden Suburbs were being planned and executed gas was laid on and customers could have a choice of which power to use - Coal, Gas or Electricity - for water and space heating, and cooking.

LIVING STANDARDS

The growth of the British economy kept pace with the population. There was a baby boom in the twenties which is not surprising. At the other end of the age scale the advances in medicines - sulphur drugs and penicillin, and the treatment of patients - experience gained from war casualties, raised life expectancy levels. This rise in the working population added over three and a quarter million to the workforce. This did not just improve production but also raised demand.

The increase in working population now includes a much larger share for women. Even though returning men from the war eased women out of jobs more associated with 'men's work' the role of women would never return to those of pre-war. A far greater number of women were independent, earning their own living. Professions and occupations previously closed to women now received a number of applicants granted inclusion.

Reading certain history books - giving a social history of Britain, you might be lead to believe that by 1929 the mass of the population were leading a life different from that lived ten years before. It is not so. Some men had not worked continuously since returning home from the war. Others engaged one job at a time - competing for vacancies every morning. In the early thirties the newspapers were filled with stories of the nation's economic troubles. There were millions unemployed and stories of unrest among the workers. There was real human suffering and the picture from the north of England was bad. The mills were silent, groups of idle workers on every

street corner. Clogs were worn and echoed on the cobbles. Scores of children were undernourished. In many towns factories were being torn down for the bricks to be sold on as seconds.

WAGE LEVELS

1931 saw the faint glimmer of hope. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, was a skilled financier; he had already made a name for himself for being an excellent administrator when Minister of Health, now he was to show his skill attending to the nation's money. His plan was to save by introducing cuts in wages and salary of all people not just the lower paid. In a series of stringent budgets he presided over a policy of protectionism, great saving were made by converting two thousand million pounds of the five per cent War Loan to three and a half. By this time the schemes for house building had begun and more of the money saved went on rearming the nation. In 1937 the fifteen to sixty-four age group represented nearly seventy per cent of the working population. This added three-quarters of a million to the workforce over a period of thirteen years. The increase, in birth rate, life expectancy, and the resultant consumer spending generated by both, increased national output. These five key decisions: protectionism, reduced wages, realigned interest rate, stimulated house building and rearmament saw the nation slowly begin its recovery - begin a ten year cycle of improvement. This programme was mainly directed towards the industrial sector of society. Light engineering, the new sources of power, and the service industries, were never as seriously affected by the depression.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The period 1929 – 1939, saw a general improvement in the public's standards of health. As well as a reduction in the death rate there was an improvement in a child's life expectancy - deaths dropping by ten per cent. The normal teenager's death rates, from scarlet fever, diphtheria, whooping cough and measles, improved greatly – doubling in twenty years. There was a steady improvement in adult height and weight. The 1937 Survey of the Social Structure of England and Wales considered that it was the improvement in housing, water provision, sanitation, hygiene and the advances in medical skill. This was common practice services engage in throughout England. All covered by the 1936 Public Health Act, extended later to include the Food and Drugs Act. Piped water was provided to my grandmother's cottage in Somerset in 1935.

The new housing estates, the local planning authorities concern for recreational space, the nations completed sewer system, improved, nutritional diets, and greater health provision - through local cottage hospitals, maternity units and nursing and auxiliary services, all contributed to improved standards in public health. In 1934, an act was passed empowering local authorities to make free or subsidized milk available to schoolchildren. This was distributed in third of a pint bottles by classroom monitors providing a straw for each child. Three years later over three million children had the opportunity to drink milk. By 1935, the year of my birth, there were two thousand three hundred doctors and five thousand three hundred nurses engaged in servicing the school's medical services. In 1936, local authorities had to provide trained midwives. By 1939, all schools in Harrow and District provided subsidized school meals, a percentage free for the needy.

The National Insurance Act 1912, applied to nearly twelve million workers... by 1921, fifteen million, and finally twenty million by 1938. The scheme provided a free doctor service. For families

of insured workers – included most of the middle classes, reliance placed on private schemes and sick clubs. Other health services had to be paid for. Payment for a visit to the hospital in 1928 was a two tier arrangement split between local authorities and voluntary hospitals. Only the very poor had free treatment.

As can be imagined death rates occurred higher in poor areas of the country. Harrow was considered to be the best place to receive medical treatment and your chances of survival from treatment far greater. In 1930 the BMA suggested a system of health insurance for practically all adults and their dependants. This would include dentists, maternity and ophthalmology. It took over fifteen years for the National Health Service to be fully operational – after The Second World War.

WASTE COLLECTION

The dust cart came round once a week – on a Wednesday. The lorry was painted green and the collection was tipped into domed compartments covered by bowed sliding doors. Anything which could not be placed in the back of the cart was put on the roof. Every house had its own metal bin. I do not remember any complaint about having too much rubbish or throwing away an awkward shape or extra heavy item. Everything was taken away without question by the dustmen.

THE WELFARE STATE

As unemployment rose, after The General Strike, into the thirties, a series of Government Acts were passed to provide extra levels of benefit. It was soon transparent that there were gaps in the payments, benefits and contributions. Many of the poor still had to apply to the Poor Law, and after 1929, to the Public Assistance Committees, of the local authorities. The government soon recognised the gaps - especially the exceptional diversity of employment. The Unemployment Assistance Board Acts of 1934/5 still didn't seal the gaps and a further series of acts were needed. It took until 1937 for the majority of the unemployed that received assistance under the Public Assistance Committees of the local authority transferred to the Unemployment Assistance Board.

By the early 20s the Family Endowment Society was advising a national family allowance system, providing 12s. 6d. per week for mothers, 5s. 0d. for the first child and 3s. 6d. for each subsequent child. This suggestion never got off the ground it was considered by the government that this would destroy work incentives and reduce the mobility of labour. In 1931/2 Chamberlain took the issue out of the local authority hands and set up the Unemployment Assistance Board in 1934. It took until 1939/40 when the government give way but not for the original social reasons but to suppress wage claims, labour disputes, and therefore, to control inflation. But the wedge was in...! The Beveridge Report 1942, made family allowance a cornerstone of social insurance.

CHURCH AND STATE

It is perfectly understandable to find, in census figures, that congregations shrunk after each war, and did so throughout the passing centuries. The First World War had a profound affect on a society staggering from the unsettling results of a shifting population, buffeted, and confused, by industrialization. These uncertainties took their toll. Increasingly, in the twenties, Nonconformist, made inroads upon the established church. It was not because they required less commitment, but less ridged, and prescribed behaviour. Their services: complimented by, song, colourful-tracts, and religious-leaflets, drew-in their congregations - giving them a sense of belonging.

Although the graph for York shows that Anglican attendees continued to dominate until after the Second World War, the Nonconformist were waiting to take up the reins soon after that. The

figures for Catholicism, on the other hand, show a steady rise throughout the whole period. This is born out by what was happening in North Harrow.

Between the wars the attendance figures for Baptists, Wesleyan, Methodists, United Free Church and Congregationalists showed little change. Their attendance figures, reflected the strength of the connection to the youth association, adopted by the church or chapel - a strong Boys Brigade Company saw a strong congregation. Similarly, Scout Group, or Church Lads movement. For well established churches, and chapels, that catered for the full range of young people, the attendances were higher still. As with all institutions, if they are run by a team of dedicated officers over a long period, and if the takeover after they retire is sound, church attendance figures stayed consistent...

Although church attendances steadily declined, from the early, strict Victorian period, throughout all social classes, society continued to adhere to the churches principles and teachings. From the end of the thirties, into war years and beyond those principles and teachings has been undermined, disregarded, and in some cases, abandoned. Nevertheless, the values influencing the new culture were Christian.