

Interviews

10th June 1974

The first interview took place with Mr. Pragnell, a retired jeweller, aged 74. I asked him about his recollections of the Kettering Road.

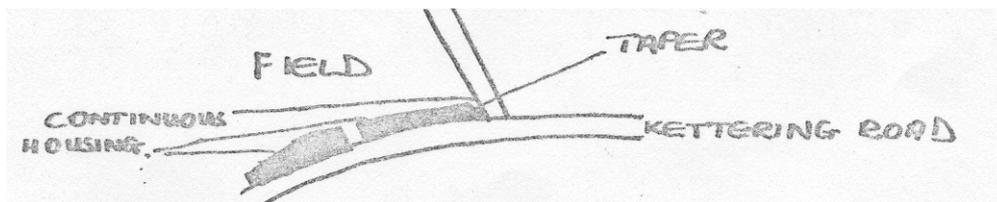
Basically the shape of the road has changed very little. Houses have been converted into shops. As a child Mr. Pragnell used to play in Dicken's Yard, then known as Butcher's Yard. I was unable to identify this yard on the 1851 census, but Mr Pragnell knew it at once. In the first decade of the 20th century at least, the yard was a courtyard surrounded by cottages. In the centre was a hand pump within a cobbled square. The rest of the courtyard was earth.

Further up the road today there is a shop called Butcher's Keys (no connection with the yard), this was originally a public house called the Nag's Head. It was of 'a low class'. At the rear were stables where the horses were tethered and the small alleyway leading to them is there today.

73 Kettering Road, where Mr. Pragnell lived as a child, is a very narrow shop. It was not always so. After the Pragnell family moved out the landlord wanted to expand no.75, so 73 was made smaller. That is why 75 has a double front. It was difficult to observe this from the outside since there are no party walls between properties from 71 to 77.

There is a post box on the Kettering Road outside Savages. It seemed unusual for this to be here, but Mr. Pragnell informed me that there used to be a gentleman's outfitter called Mortons which also had a post office on the premises. This was not mentioned in the street directories.

Raybould's shop was owned by a person named Slow in about 1910, who had the unfortunate initials I.P. This shop was built of sandstone and tapers away at one end. On the 1847 town map by Law, buildings are located in this approximate position and one is slightly tapered due to joining of two field boundaries.

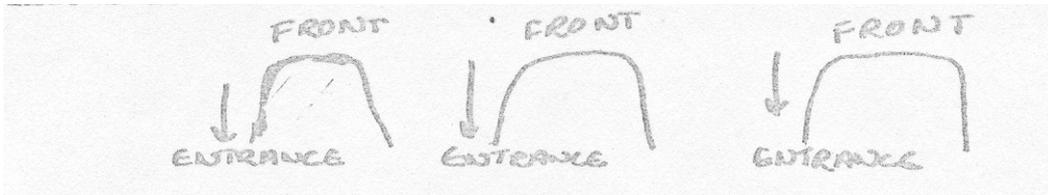


It is reasonable to assume that these houses are thus over 120 years old.

When I studied the 1851 census forms I suspected that certain houses had been pulled down and redeveloped. Mr. Pragnell confirms this with his own shop no.67. The cellar has a 2 feet thick wall of sandstone which had to be smoothed down before any cupboards could be put against it. The floor was also in a poor state, so it was dug up and resurfaced. Beneath was a rich crop of iron ore. Thus it is quite possible that the older buildings were constructed of this local stone, which lay near the surface.

No.73 also has a thick sandstone wall, as does 69. Therefore although the fronts are brick the backs still remain built of the original material which gives an indication of their age.

Originally Mr. Pragnell says that numbers 61 to 67 were owned by a landlord at Moulton. The house fronts look nothing like today's. They were, in fact, like old village shops with bay windows as shown below.



The Rendezvous café no. 69 belonged to a different owner and one can clearly see the division. Up until the First World War this building used to be a sweet factory owned by Kings. Today the name of Kings still exists but they are now sweet wholesaler in the town.

With regard to family sizes, Mr. Pragnell says that, in general, families were no larger than today, but it was common for three generations to live together. After the First World War, with the development of council estates, this ended. The Kettering Road, in the early part of the century, was mainly inhabited by young people, with the result that there were many children. Today there is an absence of children and few people actually live here now.

The graphs, I produced, showing shopping trends were shown to Mr. Pragnell and he made the following comments.

- There were no ladies hairdressers because women tended to have long hair, which they put in buns on top of their heads or curled their hair at home. There were many milliners since every woman wore a hat when she went out. Today the opposite tends to occur, thus there is a shortage of milliners. Men too had caps or even top hats when they went out.
- Socially, at the turn of the century, the Kettering Road was quite well to do. Saint Michael's Road and Raglan Street were "good households". Market Street, Dover Street and Brunswick Street were the worst and few people walked along them, as it was not unknown for the occupants to attack strangers. Mr Pragnell suggested a reason, namely these streets were not main thoroughfares and consequently the occupants resented strangers.
- The trade on the Kettering Road was never as good as that on the Wellingborough Road, because people living in the back streets could get into town via Overstone Road and Lady's Lane thus bypassing the shops on the Kettering Road. People living off the Wellingborough Road tended to walk down it into town. In general, the trade on the Kettering Road tended to come from the streets around.

In his own business Mr. Pragnell said that, before World War One, much of the business came from East Park Parade, Holly Road, Kingsley Road etc. suggesting that only the rich could afford watches and jewellery in those days. When war was declared trade dropped to nothing as people stocked up with food. Mr. Pragnell's father thought that they would become bankrupt.

However, the Welsh troops came to the town and either camped on the racecourse or were billeted around the town. There was a continual movement of troops and artillery along the road to the racecourse from Castle Station. Something like 20,000 troops were stationed in Northampton. As they left so people made souvenirs out of cap badges and buttons etc. They were brought to be plated gold or silver and fixed to a chain. Thus the jewellery business thrived during a time of war.

By contrast the racecourse was churned up by the wheels of the guns. The racecourse, at this time, was fenced all the way round. This was, a leftover from the days of horse racing when it was dangerous to have people straying onto the course.

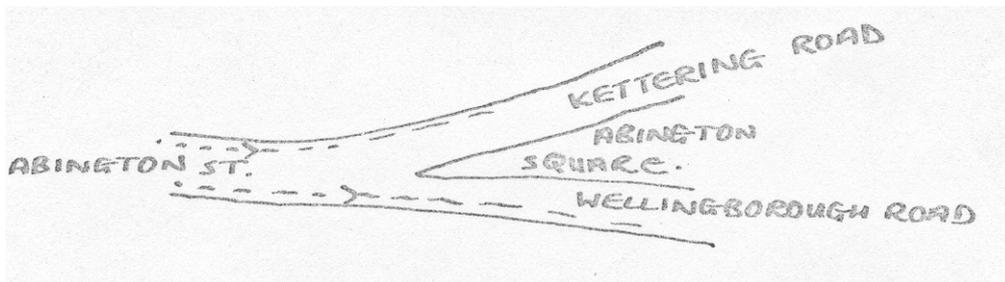
So we have Mr. Pragnell's recollections of the Kettering Road.

27th June 1974

I interviewed Mr. C. Atkins, a retired butcher, who owned 73 Kettering Road. The purpose of this particular interview was to discover the area served by his shop in the 1930s.

The butcher's delivery round covered all the streets within Saint Michael's Road, Overstone Road, Colwyn Road, Abington Avenue, Stimpson Avenue and the Wellingborough Road as one approaches the town. It also extended to the Billing Road between Palmerston Road and York Road. His passing trade came down the Kettering Road. Thus one can see that, although there were many butchers in 1936, people were selective and once they had chosen a butcher they tended to remain with him.

I did the Butcher's round in 1965 and, by comparison, the round was much less, but I travelled out to Weston Favell, Kingsley and Broadmead Avenue. The families I delivered to were the children, in many cases, of the original customers who lived nearby. There was, in fact, a continuation in the generations using this shop.



Comparing Mr. Pragnell's comments, concerning the trade on the Wellingborough and Kettering Roads, with those of Mr. Atkins is interesting. Mr. Atkins was of the opinion that the majority of the people used Grove Road as an access to the Kettering Road and town. He, personally, was not affected by any trade which went via Overstone Road and Lady's Lane into town.

It is also interesting to note that both Mr. Atkins and Mr. Pragnell believed that the North side of the Kettering Road is better for trade than the South side. This assumption is made because of the division of footpaths at the Abington Square. It is felt that people leaving the town select, in town, which pavement they are going to walk along according to whether they are going up the Wellingborough or Kettering Roads.

It is less likely for people to walk up the South side of Abington Street if they were going up the Kettering Road, for they would have to cross at the Abington Square, which can prove somewhat dangerous!

Business hours were mentioned and Mr. Atkins says that in the 1930s shops never seemed to shut. He himself worked 6 days a week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., sometimes later. The shops, with the exception of one or two people, were lock up shops even before the Second World War.

I asked about family sizes and Mr Atkins said that they were much the same as today.

A discrepancy was found in the 1936 street directory. 174b was a butcher's shop and still is today, although owned by different people. Lucas, the druggist, which is recorded was on the other corner of Talbot Road. Mr. Atkins recalls it well, as there were always the old style chemist's bottles in the window. In fact the building is actually called the Medical School.

With regard to gentlemen's outfitters, in 1936, they were generally catering for the working class, although Slinn did have accounts with well to do people. Mr. Atkins says that all the good cloths were kept under the counter and only brought out on request.

So I have an account of the Kettering Road through the eyes of Mr. Atkins. Many of the points he raised were the same as those made by Mr. Pragnell, but a major contrast was that concerning the customers. This difference most likely arose because of the nature of their respective businesses. So many lived in the area at that time, that Mr. Atkins would not have noticed a drop in trade had people used an alternative route into town. Mr. Pragnell, by contrast, was in a specialist business and any loss of trade would have been noticed.