

STATION ROAD, CONGRESBURY by Arthur Westcott. (Written about 1965?)

The Station Road about two fifths of a mile long is a section of the Bristol main road. It flanks the north side of the village and for the whole of its length runs alongside the River Yeo. For the first half at the Bristol end it leaves a sufficient margin between it and the river bank to carry a few shops, old cottages and modern bungalows. The latter half closes in to the foot of the river bank until it leaves the main road for the last 200 yards or so to end in the Station Goods Yard.

The Railway Station

No doubt the road acquired its name soon after the coming of the Cheddar Valley Line in 1869 when the station was built. From then until the end of the First World War it became a much more important road for the village as everyone using the railway had to traverse the whole or part of its length to get to the station. In that period its importance to the village, although no greater than today, was more apparent and probably through the winter months at any rate it carried more village than through traffic. All commodities used in the village would have passed over it, to or from the railway station. This would include the corn and meal traffic for the two local mills, the flour and yeast supplying the village bakeries, the bars of iron for the local blacksmiths for their horse shoes; all the coal for the village, and building materials. All the farmers in the area used it daily to take their milk to the station by horse and milk float and at that time transported in tall 17 gallon churns which mostly went to Bristol, London and South Wales dairies.



*Congresbury railway station.
Early 20th century.*

The newspapers no doubt arrived by the first train from Bristol each morning and the local shop keepers made regular visits to pick up supplies of groceries including sugar and rice in large 1 & 2 cwt hessian sacks (unpacked), sides of bacon in hessian wrappers, butter in bulk in 1/4 cwt boxes, while various seasonal traffic was taken to the station for dispatch. This would include hay sold by the farmers to Bristol firms to feed their huge teams of dray horses and for the pit ponies in the South Wales collieries. Occasional surplus fruit including blackberries which were sent away in large quantities - these were picked by the villagers and their children as from one shilling and four pence to eleven shillings and seven pence per lb. Then

there were the passengers. People finding work in Bristol, walked, cycled or obtained lifts in the farmers' milk floats to and from the station each morning and evening.

On Thursday many farmers went by train on cheap market tickets to Bristol. This group could always be identified by their breeches and highly polished black or brown leather leggings neatly tailored to the calves of their legs. Commercial travellers with their 'skips' of samples came to and from Bristol soliciting orders from the shopkeepers.

Then there were the excursions to London on special occasions, Sunday school outings, late night Pantomime excursions in the winter and then for the football fans to Bristol in Saturday afternoons and these no doubt caused quite large numbers of villagers of all classes to walk the Station Road on these occasions.

The station was closed for passenger traffic when the C.V. Branch services were withdrawn on 7 Sept 1963 and goods traffic ceased to pass in July 1964.

It is probable that the name "Station Road" will provide in years to come the only evidence that the village was at one time rail connected.



The station. Date unknown.



Above: Demolition

*Left: Arthur Westcott, the
last station master, standing
on the remains of the
platform. 1986*



Mr 'Pussy' Allen's Shop

In the road from about 1900 lived one local baker Mr Allen. His was the first house on the riverside at the Bristol end. His bake house behind the shop was recently demolished. - the iron ring to which he tethered his pony which he loaded his quaint covered two -wheel van with his bread and cakes may still be seen in the wall of the shop, which in recent years was changed into a news agency and stationers business. In the paving near the shop door is a piece of stone with as fragment of an inscription which may have been from one of the stones placed on the river bank behind, marking a length and showing who was responsible for the upkeep of their position of the river.

This shop will no doubt be shortly demolished as a new one is in course of erection near by but further back from the road. No doubt this will prove an opportunity for a road improvement to meet the needs of modern through traffic.



Mr Allen's shop

For many years at this end of the road stood a parish street lamp - lit by acetylene gas. Mr Tucker who still lives in the Station Road was the village lamplighter and was paid a small weekly sum out of parish funds for the service.

In recent years this end of the road has been altered considerably - the wide sweep of its curve was narrowed and two illuminated bollards and a tall beacon light have been erected to mark the turning into Brinsea Road.

Next to the newsagent are three old cottages adjoining, the middle one of which has served in its time as a 'sweet' shop kept by two old elderly ladies then for many

years as a cobblers shop run by one Mr English (hand made boots and leggings to order) and probably repairs to harnesses for the farmers. It is now a private residence.



Right to left: Mr Allen's bakehouse (now demolished), Allens shop (Now a piano shop) and the three old cottages.

The Post Office

Then comes the village post office - it has served as such since the early years of the century - prior to this it was the residence of a local builder Mr Pitts.

Mr Cornish who served as postmaster and postman for over thirty years, gave me some interesting details of the postal arrangements in earlier days prior to the "motor age". Mails for Congresbury and several neighbouring villages arrived by train at Yatton. They were thrown out of fast non-stopping mail trains, into special nets alongside the railway well away from the station, and outwards mails were also picked up from the same site while the train ran through at 60-70 miles per hour. The mails were then taken to and from Yatton by a special carrier man contract? in a one horse covered two wheeled vehicle (letters inside - parcels on top)

From Congresbury one postman took mails to Sandford (on foot) then on to Winscombe with their mails and then on to Shipham where he sorted them and performed the local deliveries - afterwards returning to Congresbury via the same route picking up the outwards mails - this was of course an all day effort. Later, as mails began to increase this was curtailed to Sandford and a bicycle was provided. Winscombe and Shipham became the responsibility of Weston Super Mare Post Office.

From Wroughton nightly one Mr Ferris walked to Congresbury collecting mail direct from houses, attracting householders attention by means of a whistle, - he invariably returned to Wroughton by a short cut along the river banks.



The post office about 1911

Mr Cornish told me that his first wife started work as a girl on the Post Office working from 8am to 8pm for two shillings per week.

The work included the taking and sending of telegrams by means of the "Morse key", for delivery over a wide area - in the Weston direction as far as Doubleton House over 4 miles distant and also in Rolstone. There were three postal deliveries in Congresbury 7.30am. 2. 15 and 6.15 pm in those days and one on Sundays. The last outward mail left at 8.45 from Congresbury station.

Mr Cornish also recalled that in his early days Mr Price moved from Bristol to Congresbury with his family, coming here on promotion as Head Postman at 19 shillings per week. One of his sons, the local undertaker, now resides in Station Road.

The Post Office prior to its being a builders business served as a public house and butchers shop and there is evidence of all three trades in and about the house today,

Harold Allen's Cycle Shop

Next stands the house a Radio and Motor repair shop where Mr Bowen now carries on the business. This has grown from a cycle repair shop where Mr Harold Allen commenced business prior to the first World War. He was the son of Allen the baker previously mentioned, but the business has since evolved to meet more modern requirements.



The cycle shop. Early 1900s



Harold Allen's shop in 1936.

Prior to this it was occupied by Mr King a chimney sweep - he travelled around in a small pony cart and was known to all and sundry as 'Sooty King' and his appearance on his rounds certainly deserves the appellation. It is said that he gained a certain notoriety on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee by painting the whole of the house exterior a vivid red, white and blue. Incidentally I am informed that the ancient deeds of these premises carried a clause in which special authority was granted to stable elephants. It is thought that this had something to do with the 'wintering' of circus elephants.

The Old Smithy

Adjoining the radio shop is the old smithy now out of use but still containing the blacksmith's forge anvil and in the house nearby lives Mr A Light the blacksmith now in retirement.



2006

Further along are two modern bungalow and then two semi - detached cottages. Forty or fifty years ago one of them was occupied by Mr Blackmore a mason and plumber who worked in Congresbury and neighbouring villages carrying the tools of his trade on a hand cart.

The road now closes in to the river bank which for several yards is supported by a thick stone wall to overcome flooding difficulties when the river runs high.

On the village side of the road at the Bristol end is an open space where monthly cattle markets were held and which was the centre of the annual fair next to which are a pair of semi detached houses and a grocer's shop- on the site of these used to stand the vicarage stables.



View from the church tower in 1956, showing the open space.

Congresbury Fair

In bygone days the highlight of the year for Congresbury folk and those of neighbouring villages was the annual fair. Station Road was the scene of great excitement and activity as the business side of the fair was centred in the open space opposite the post office and the whole road was blocked with livestock. The funfair was sited in a field near the river bridge, the ginger bread stalls etc. in Broad street. I am indebted to Mr Cornish for the information that the fair was originally held on 8th September, but the day was changed to the first Monday after the 8th for the following reason: Well over 110 years ago on the morning of the fair a wagon passed through the village conveying two men, each sat on a coffin. It was learned that its destination was on the Clevedon Road beyond Kenn where the two men were to be hanged for sheep stealing. This morbidly fascinating spectacle proved more attractive than the fair for so many people who left the fair followed the wagon to Kenn. For reasons not quite clear to me this incident was the reason for the change in the fair dates but Mr Cornish states that many years ago an old lady resident Mrs Rattle told him that her mother witnessed the incident and Mr Cornish has also read of it in a book in the Memorial Hall- but the book is now missing. Possibly the receipts of the fun fair and the side shows suffered through the counter attraction.

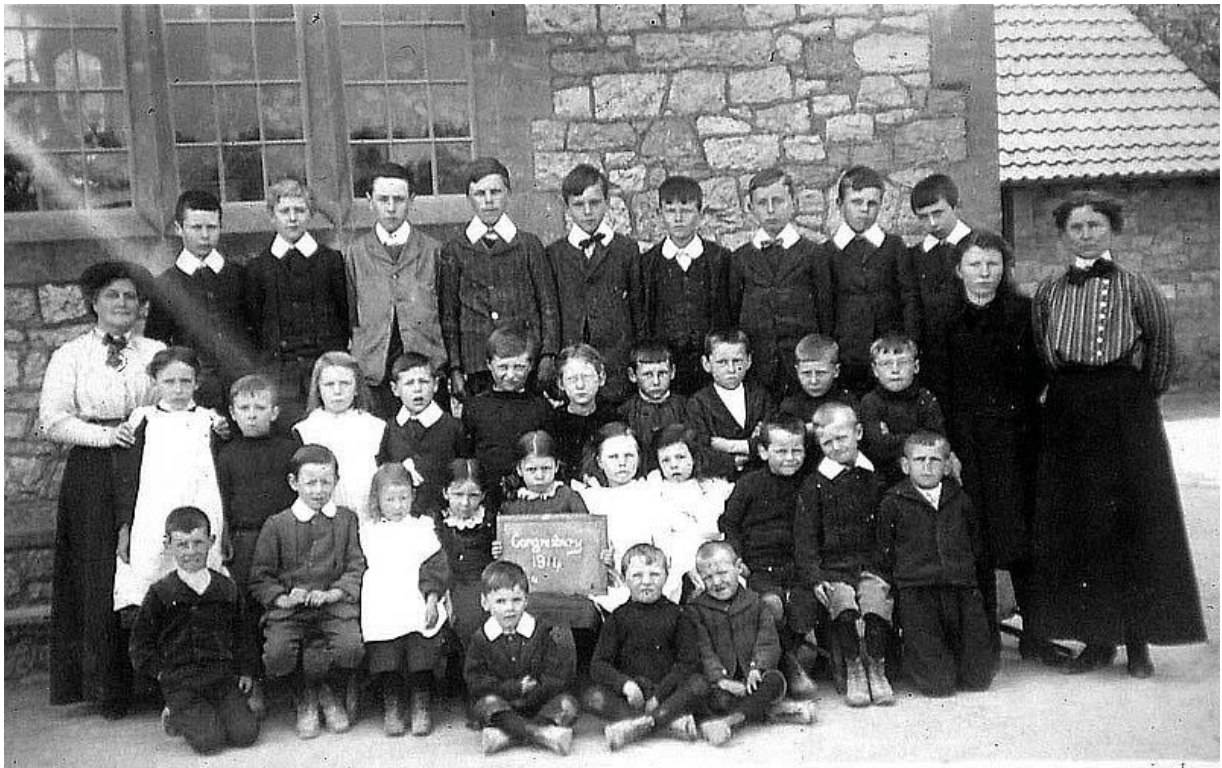
After the first World War the fair gradually declined and today it is marked only by a small sheep market in a field on the Brinsea Road.



Congresbury fair in Station Road. C 1910

The school houses, school and playground adjoins this site next to which is the Church Drive which also serves as a footpath through the churchyard into the centre of the oldest part of the village- it is also the main entrance to the Vicarage and the ancient Refectory - the latter is designated as a fine sample of medieval domestic

architecture. It is now used for church meetings, wedding receptions etc. A bungalow now the residence of the organist stands opposite the Vicarage.



Above: The Old School Room 2006. Below: Schoolchildren 1914

The White Hut

A piece of ground next to the Church Drive is now known as St Andrews close since the recent erection of four houses or bungalows with a new side road to serve them.

Prior to this a large white hut and so named stood in the corner and until its demolition was a tea room and restaurant mainly patronised by cyclists and cycling clubs.



Station Road 1930s? The white hut sign on the right



The White Hut (right). Date unknown

Mr Coward's Cycle Shop

Glen Yeo Terrace comes next. This is a row of seven houses Victoria villa type -built about 1900 by Mr Pitts the builder mentioned previously. The first of these is now a ladies hairdressing establishment. In earlier years it was a cycle shop kept by Mr Coward and from this has developed The Central Garage nearby -an extensive car sales enterprise The cycle shop gave way to a sweet shop and oil and hardware store until the ladies hairdresser took over recently,



Mr Coward's cycle shop circa 1910

Between this and the Central Garage are two houses semi-detached (circa 1900} and a long old dwelling house named "Hope Lodge."

The last establishment on the main road is Church Farm with its yard and farm buildings and from there the road turns into the station approach - where stands the Station House built about 1930 as a residence for the local Station Master.

The road ends with the station and station yard - with its very substantial offices and goods shed. The building are of dressed stone with heavily wooded decorated gables - the interior waiting rooms carrying a row of fine decorative mouldings around the ceilings - altogether a fine example of the solid craftsmanship characteristic of the day and age of its erection.

Until about 1912 the main road consisted of base lime stone; very muddy in winter and very dusty in summer. Innumerable pot-holes were formed and these were

merely filled in by large loose stones by the road men - only to be washed out or forced out by cart and wagon wheels leaving loose stones strewn about the road. These were soon crushed and ground to dust which in dry weather made the hedges white and forced housewives to keep front doors and windows closed. The occasional motor car approached and passed almost unseen in a cloud of dust - but the innovation of the Macadam brought about a great improvement and even permitted country folk to use lighter footwear. Heavy hob-nailed boots for most countrymen and high boots for women gradually went out of fashion. A notable change gradually occurred about this time which one is more aware of in retrospect. Until the coming of the motor car the road was an all the year round play ground for the village children and the centre of the road could be used with little interruption for bowling hoops to and from school or upon errands (iron hoops for the boys, larger light wooden hoops for the girls). In the appointed "seasons" - tops were spun, marbles or "conkers" were played by the boys, while the girls "skipped or played "hop-scotch". In hard frosty weather the boys made wonderful slides wherever a smooth patch on the road could be found and "cultivated" by throwing water along it overnight - a surreptitious operation as dire warnings and threats came from "grown-tips" about horses slipping and breaking their legs. This was the nearest approach to skating as no boys could afford ice skates, All these pursuits could be followed in leisurely fashion as little or no interruption by traffic occurred - there was no need to hurry when the approaching vehicle was perhaps only a bicycle or pony cart and many a boy or girl managed to arrive in school, "just in time" by hanging on to the back of a milk float or farm cart.



Station Road early 20th century.

Then in summer time when farmhouse brakes or wagonettes clattered through to and from Weston the poorer children's main occupation in the holidays was to chase them (many barefoot) shouting for coppers and as a further inducement offering "red-hot -pokers" gathered from local reed beds - or branches of wild flowers.

The Station Road serves the village probably more so today than in the earlier period but the bus stops are used instead of the Railway Station.

Gone are the millers' four horse drays, the long heavy timber wagons, the butchers' and bakers' carts, the road stone putt, the itinerant hucksters pedlars and the hurdy gurdy men, the scissors grinders, performing bear, the circus processions sometimes with the elephants and smaller animals on foot - the flocks of sheep driven through the night from Bristol market. All have given place to motor vehicles and while the old Station Road may still reflect almost every phase of Congresbury's social and workaday life its characteristic as such is now lost, as the local traffic travelling swiftly along the road integrates with the constant stream of through vehicles and is no longer identifiable.

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