

Flooding Bugbrooke

This article consists of information handed down from elders that I had interviewed, and from personal experience of witnessing such events of flooding in Bugbrooke.

We have recently seen on television the terrible flooding of villages, and the results of the aftermath from such events, within the towns in the North of our country.

In my youth one could guarantee that the brook that runs through Bugbrooke would break its banks four to five times every year, flooding the lower parts of the village up to an average depth of three to four feet and at times deeper. This was until the stream had been given a complete overhaul by dredging and widening certain lengths of it, along with clearing and altering the bridge holes during the 1970s.

There was one terrible food in the 1800s that they spoke about, and it was recorded and marked on a wall to the height it reached, on a corner house wall in Church Lane Kislingbury.

Mr Steve Billingham who at one time managed Bugbrooke Coop, was born in 1911, in the row of Sandstone cottages that run parallel with the stream in The West End of Bugbrooke, he told me that his father had a place in the wall that faces the brook, where he regularly removed the bricks from out from it when the house got flooded, this was not only to help the water drain away, but so he could sweep and wash the muddy flood water from out of the house. Steve said where he had swept the water through this hole it had worn the flooring away slightly, this was due to the flooring consisting of a mixture of blue clay and Ox Blood, he said the whole row of cottages had the same flooring throughout. He said up one corner where the dog always slept there was a groove in the floor where the dog was always licking this type of flooring. He also remarked about cats sniffing about and licking it as well, due to what it was made up from, also the doorways to these type of houses had a threshold board that was lifted in or out of place during bad weather, due to having no doorstep. Only a large slab of sorts was within the doorway that would get worn down thus leaving a large gap under the door, where a rolled up sack would be placed to keep out the draught.



Floods in Great Lane 1947—photo D Hewit

He said that this type of flooring was very popular at one time for when dry it could be polished up to look like dark marble, due to the many slaughter houses within the village there was no shortage of Ox Blood, which they mixed preferably with blue brick clay, such as what came from out of Kiln Yard Pit. The mixture was about an average of a bucket full of clay to one pint of Ox Blood, of what was thoroughly puddled together before tamping it flat across the floor of any such room or work shop, for when dry it became very hard and produced no dust, hence it being popular for Blacksmiths and workshop flooring etc.

He said when getting flooded out there was no drinking water available, as the flood water got into all the wells that were the only source of drinking water, along with no proper toilet facilities until the water drained away, as they only had bucket or century Box Toilets at the time, that one moved from hole to hole across the garden when the hole was full.

He also said that every house in the West End of the village would get flooded, there was no escape from it, even the houses in the yard where Father was born, at the bottom of Post Office Lane (Great Lane) next to Shitten Ally.

Mr Tibbs, Rex's father, told me that they had not long been married, and were living in one of the cottages down the West End of the village, when his wife woke him up one night thinking that they had burglars, as she could hear a lot of noise coming from downstairs, he said that he rushed downstairs from out of his bed to find the house had over three feet of water in it, with everything that could float doing so, along with furniture lifting and tipping over, he spoke of the dirt and grime that it left when the water subsided as well as the horrible smell.

Like everyone else they were confronted with getting fresh clean water for drinking, not counting the problem getting rid of human waste due to all the toilets being under water.

Mr Mowey Nightingale who lived in the cottage nearest the roadway, had his Bee Hives up on tall stilts out of the way of any flooding, and he was not to be on his own by taking the valuable pig upstairs for safety sake along with chickens and other livestock, so they did not get drowned. All the houses in the lower parts of the village suffered the same once the brook broke its banks.

In my youth it would reach several times a year up to the second bar of the Iron Gate into Captains Close and into the grounds of the Grange.

Down Little lane (Ace Lane) there was a concrete post set next to the pathway of the last house on the right next to Kiln Yard, where it regularly reached, us young lads would ride our bicycles through these

floods to see if we could reach the end of the Grange Garden wall, for after this point it got too deep to go any further, the upright stones set into the top of the retaining wall of the Church Yard next to the Gateway off the lane would be just peeping up through the waters many a time.

Even the house in Bugbrooke High Street where I was born, due to most of them being built upon sand, during very wet periods, the water would come up through the joints of the large slabs that covered the floor and run out the doorway and down the path, like most houses in the village it had no doorstep only threshold boards that could be put into place mainly to keep water out.

During my youth I have seen many elders worse off for drink go flying after tripping over such boards.

I have witnessed during my early youth many a time when the flood waters reached the doorway that leads into the garden of The Byre and to the corner of the wall where the one time Church Lane widening schema came to a halt.

When the water reached this far up the road, it flooded out Mrs Pool and Loo Meads homes, as well as Orchard House to a great depth, also the Sunday School and buildings; I have seen the flood water above the ground floor window sills, and the same for the cottages of the Ward family of ladder makers and undertakers, the flood waters would rush along past the retaining wall of the church yard, and out of Little Lane (Ace Lane) to cross the road and past the rear of these cottages and workshop of Wards at such a torrent.

I was told that when the canal broke its banks in Weedon during the early years of the Second World War, the brook flowed in the opposite direction before it started to subside leaving such a mess, I was told that it even flooded out some of the houses to the rear of Bugbrooke Bake House and of Gilkes Yard.

I was to build myself a Flood Bike so I could go back and forth from home to the workshop on it saving my feet and legs from getting wet, and the same for my brother Malcolm when he came to work alongside of me, it was with these Flood Bikes that we were in such demand to be filmed by many television companies, but that is another story.

Stanley Joseph Clark

*Stan's flood bike in 1973—photo A
Finley*

