

Shops and farms that came and went by Peter Clarke

“Use ‘em or lose them” is the phrase often on our lips about our remaining Benson shops. So I thought to reminisce about some that have come and gone might interest readers. Especially in the light of the recent article about Toms shop, that became Barclays Bank, and is now simply a private house.

I thought of the idea when I spotted an old Frith’s postcard for sale in Wallingford. Whilst still in copyright, they have kindly agreed to me using it for this article. Here it is



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“Right, let’s get going” as they say about rail enquiries. Bottom right, to the left of the garage doors, you can see a shop window in what today is No. 20. Mrs. Wharton kept a sweet shop there, and is remembered for her direct manner of speaking, be you child or adult! Out of the picture, where Benson Garage now is was her husband’s garage .



Don Passey tells me when the Whartons left the village he was offered the garage for £3000, or if he wanted the adjacent cottage as well it would cost him £7000. Sadly, he couldn’t raise the capital!!

Also out of the picture on the left, at no. 11, Bob & Enid Brighting had their hardware and garden shop. Bob was a well-known and popular personality, PC chairman for many years, who rode everywhere on his tricycle. Not for nothing do old codgers like me sit nowadays at Bob’s Corner, his fitting memorial, and watch the world go by.

You can see the low wall in front of College farm House on the corner with Chapel Lane much is as it is today, then comes the first of the College Farm barns. For me, the loss of the farm in the centre of the village represents a seismic change in Benson's way of life. When replaced by the row of shops (so important to us today) Benson ceased to be a strictly rural community, and just became a large village convenient to so many of today's commuters. Down in Castle Square the same thing was happening as Bertie West's Castle Farm fields became Horseshoe Lane.



The old British School is clearly shown in the right background

Now look opposite College Farm at what is today the Co-op. A close up is here



The shop was then called Slaughter's and the manager was a well known village character called Bill Snugs - a bell ringer and loud member of St Helen's choir! Where large Co-op lorries back with such dexterity today you can see a large greenhouse, and on the far side of the large shop earlier Pengelly's shop



This was eventually replaced by Stan Blisset's barbers shop before he moved to Oxford Road. Finally, exactly as today, you can see in the postcard the village butcher's shop, and the former Post Office. Note also, rather less traffic!