

Newton St Cyres History Group October Meeting

Lynda Pearce has lived in the village for many years, and has made a large collection of postcards and other images of the village and the area. Our meeting on Thursday 17th was in the main hall where she showed us a selection of photos and talked us through some of the changes in the village during the last century. As she pointed out in her opening remarks, comparing the photos with the present is like the puzzles in magazines where two images are put side by side and you have to find the differences between the two. The more you look the more you see. Crops, cottages and buildings, street furniture, trees, all have slowly altered.



The earliest of the 175 pictures were from 1904, and we finished in the present year, starting mostly with postcards and then moving on to photographs, many personal, and also press cuttings and newspaper photographs, and the themes were the buildings and setting of the village, events that happened, including flood, fire and weather.

Some surprising facts emerged. Whilst many people know that the bridge over the main road behind Newton House was arched until the road traffic became too high, it is less known that the road surface has risen considerably. Photos of the cottages (the end one was once a stonemasons) between the Post Office and the road down to Sweetham, show that in 1907 they stood much higher above the road, and that the boundary stone which was clear then is now buried to the height of barely 3 inches. A picture from 1922 shows the road and houses looking muddy and neglected, probably because of the aftermath of the Great War, when labour for upkeep was scarce. By 1952 the road is smart and tarmacked but already the line of the new gas main show where it had been dug up.

In 1908 there was a bad fire at Laundry Cottages, even though they were not thatched, and they were rebuilt. An earlier fire in 1923 at the stonemasons resulted in the end cottage there being rebuilt and tiled. Again, most people know that Newton House burned down in 1906 and was rebuilt, though the most well-known fire was at the old Crown and Sceptre in 1962. Lynda had many images of the original pub. It was interesting to see that because the road through

the village was so narrow then, the pub had troughs of flowers outside which blocked the narrow cobbled pavement outside, and presumably were not just for decoration, but to keep the buses and traffic away from the entrance. Of course it was the rebuilding of the Crown and Sceptre that led to the building of Godolphin Close.

The narrowness of the road became an increasing problem after the Second World War, The original two lines of cottage were very attractive, but there was a great deal of concern about the traffic, and a press cutting from 1955 showed that opinion was overwhelming for the road to be widened. This was done in 1961, with the new cottages and the green built as we see it now.

Pictures of the church exterior and interior, the gardens at Sherwood House in 1961 and now, and a selection of ones from Sweetham showing the original use of some of the houses there, all demonstrated the changes that happen over time.

Everyone present enjoyed looking at the photos showing past events and people at, for instance, the opening of the Village Hall, charabancs going off on Sunday School trips, Carnival Floats and Fancy Dress competitions in the 1950s, Walking the Bounds, the new tennis courts and sports teams in the 1970s, Twinning trips, the Godolphin Close Street Party in 2012 and many other events.

Lynda has a fascinating record of the village and thanks go to her for her talk and to Malcolm Brooks for showing the photos. The overall message from Lynda, however, is that unless we photograph local events and organise them so that they are available, then future generations will not be able to enjoy similar events. The History Group is interested in looking at how we can collect and store images so that we have such a record.