

The evolution of Barby, Crick and Kilsby, 1750-1900 (Part 1)

The Online Newspaper Archive (an Internet database) contains over 18 million pages from British newspapers, published between about 1750 and the early 1900s.

I spent two years exploring this database, and collected every available newspaper report for Barby, Crick and Kilsby. The result is a set of files that I can search through (you can download them from my history website at www.westnorthantshistory.co.uk), to examine the different ways in which these villages responded to change over almost 200 years, from the Industrial Revolution to relatively modern times.

In this and the following two issues, mostly using reports from newspapers of the times, I will examine some ways in which the three villages evolved, and the different influences that shaped their growth.

Differences in manorial lordships

Although I promised to use newspaper reports, my first illustration is based on a totally different factor, which goes back centuries before the invention of newspapers – the difference between manorial lordships in the three villages.

- Barby was a 'traditional' lordship, with a single family as lords of the manor and living locally. This produced a society in which things did not change easily or quickly.
- In Crick the lordship was split into two parts, the larger of which passed during the late 1500s to one of the Oxford colleges. This created an environment in which the lords of the manor were still very much in charge, but there was more scope for change – and one instance of this was the introduction of enclosed sheep pastures in the 1550s, which produced increased cash returns for the lords and also benefited their tenants.
- In Kilsby, the lordship was a church property, owned by Lincoln diocese until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s, when it became Crown property. In the early 1600s the Crown sold it on the open market, and it became just another piece of commercial property, passing through a succession of hands.

The untypical situation in Kilsby, in which there was no hereditary lord of the manor after the mid-1600s, allowed scope for individual opportunism, and the Cowley family was able to amass large amounts of Kilsby land and property during the period 1660-1900. This could not have happened to such a degree in either Barby or Crick.

Systems of transport

The single factor that most affected the development of these neighbouring villages was the three systems of transport introduced progressively between the early 1700s and the mid 1800s:

- **Turnpike (toll) roads, 1706 onward:**
Medieval roads were rough and unmaintained, full of huge holes and waterlogged bogs, and travel along them was hazardous. By the late 1600s it was obvious that something better was needed – and a series of Turnpike Trusts were created by act of parliament; the Trusts were responsible to maintain the roads, in return for which they could erect tollgates at regular intervals, at which to extract tolls from travellers.
- **Canals, 1790s onward:**
The first canals, in the English Midlands, were a response to the emerging need to carry heavy loads of coal from the mines to the new factories of the Industrial Revolution. By the 1780s there were dozens of applications for acts of parliament to sanction more and more canals, as their value and importance was appreciated – and the onset of Napoleonic War in the early 1790s only hastened the pressure to construct these new rapid-transit waterways.
- **Railways, 1830s onward:**
In 1821 an Act was passed for the Stockton and Darlington Railway. It was the distant tolling of a bell destined to ring in change throughout Britain – and nowhere was more

affected than Rugby and Kilsby. By 1831 plans were afoot to construct a railway from London to Birmingham.

The effect of turnpike roads

Crick lies on the Northampton-Dunchurch turnpike (enacted 1738) and Kilsby on the Banbury-Daventry-Lutterworth turnpike (enacted 1765). Barby is not on a turnpike road. This factor significantly affected the development of the villages.

In Crick and Kilsby, shops and pubs gathered alongside the turnpike roads – and in Kilsby this led to a change in layout of the village; the original focus for shops had been on the west of the village, where drove roads came together from Crick (modern Rugby Road) and Long Buckby (modern Main Road), which is why the Red Lion and the sheep-dip pond are on that side of the village. By the mid-1700s, due to the turnpike road, the focus for shops and alehouses had shifted to the east of the village. In Barby, by contrast, there was no turnpike road, and shops and alehouses were distributed much more randomly around the village.

Both Crick and Kilsby also derived significant income from passing drove transport of livestock. Barby managed to get a share of this income, however – because the area at Onley had been transformed into sheep-logistics pastures in the 1600s, and many drove routes led into Onley pastures via Barby.

Horse thieves at Barby

Barby's secluded location, well away from turnpike roads, led to it becoming the base of operations in the 1830s for a band of horse thieves, whose operations spanned a wide area, from Lincolnshire to London:

Northampton Mercury - 22 June 1833

Eleven horses have been stolen from Kilsby and the four surrounding villages in as many months. Some suspicious characters were at a beer shop in the village on Monday evening, and part of the gang was seen in the village on the night the horses were stolen.

Leicester Journal - 26 July 1833

Mr. D. Sharpley, near Lincoln, had a mare stolen on the 5th, and having got some handbills printed, proceeded to Rugby Fair, where he distributed them, then returned home. The mare was discovered at Barby the same evening, and a messenger dispatched to Lincoln requesting Mr. Sharpley to return, which he did, claimed the mare, and arrived home a second time on the 14th.

Stamford Mercury - 19 July 1833

The activity of Mr. Sharpley has not only restored his mare, but has routed a party of horse-stealers who have concentrated their villainy at Barby for a long time. From that village four persons have absconded. One of the four was mounted on Mr. Shaw's mare, and has escaped, but is sufficiently well known to be challenged wherever he may show his face. Two of the villains were seen at Lincoln and the neighbourhood, and were tracked through a long round of country. Farmers and others in every district are urged to form themselves into riding societies for mutual protection.

Northampton Mercury - 14 September 1833

Much excitement has for some time prevailed amongst farmers regarding the number of horses that have been stolen. There are regular depots for them, there is no doubt. Barby has had numerous visitors on the look out for their stray cattle. We advise those who are losers, to rigidly search the hills and the neighbourhood round.

Northampton Mercury - 16 November 1833

Samuel Daws, a horse-dealer, was charged with stealing a bay mare of John Smith of Mowsley, Leicestershire; and James Griffiths, a dealer in horses, of Paddington, was charged with receiving the mare knowing it to have been stolen. The officer handed a letter to the Magistrates, received from a friend at Barby near Daventry. The writer states that Daws was one of a gang of about sixteen horse-stealers who infested that part of the country, several of whom had since been transported. He says that Daws was involved in stealing horses belonging to Mr. Townsend of Hillmorton. Mr. Odey and Mr. Lee of Kilsby, Mr. Elkington of Willoughby, Mr. Brown of Braunston, Mr. Gilbee of

Barby, and many others. Both prisoners were committed for trial. John Daws, younger brother of the prisoner, was convicted of stealing two horses from Lutterworth, and sentenced to transportation for life. Since his conviction he confessed that he had stolen on average four or five horses weekly.

In the following issue, we will look at some of the ways in which our three local villages were affected by the next transport revolution – the arrival of the canals – and we will see that this was really the point at which social development in the villages began to take off.

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