
THE WAY THINGS WERE: GORING DAYS

The holidays I spent in Goring on Thames as a young boy in the late 1930s probably led to my later interest in town planning, the creation of place. In town planning terms the Goring location was possessed of the essential elements required to establish human settlement. Set in an attractive valley, enclosed by wooded hills with a navigable river replete with a good supply of fish, crossed initially by ferry and later in 1837 by the first bridge, this was always going to be a place where people would want to live. As an eight year old boy staying on my own with elderly grandparents and left largely to my own devices, my principal activity was one of exploration.

The village was of a size and scale that allowed one to appreciate its overall form. A simple pattern of streets falling gently down towards the river, the latter controlled by an assembly of lock, weir, and bridge, critical engineering works providing the foundation for successful development. Set within the village were the homes and business premises of my two sets of grandparents. My father's father, Harry Hague, was the village blacksmith and Leonard Penny, my mother's father, ran three shops together with a small farm holding on Springhill Road. I became, as a consequence, not only aware of the physical form of the place and the whereabouts of my grandparents' various premises but also gained some appreciation of their place within the community and the contribution they made to local life.

often tell me of incidents with customers that had amused him during the course of the day and was prone to bouts of giggling. He had a rather unique style in this. He would dissolve into a sequence of wheezy breaths when short gulps of air were drawn to the back of his throat and immediately forced out again, until his mirth had subsided when he would take out a large handkerchief from his overall pocket, dry off his moustache and wipe the laughter tears from pink rimmed eyes. He would invariably have to break away to attend to the needs of a customer, leaving me free to wander off into the darker inner depths of the shop.

The handsome mahogany counter served to separate customers from the proprietor and his assistants and apart from the actual displays most of the goods for sale were stored on a continuous bank of shelving running along the back wall or were placed under the counter itself. Below the shelves there was a row of rectangular metal bins within which commodities like raisins, lentils, rice and so on were stored in bulk. They had to be shovelled up with galvanised metal scoops, packed into stiff blue paper bags, weighed, and their tops subsequently sealed by a careful folding and tucking technique. There was no self-service. Each customer had to ask for what they wanted, it was then fetched and wrapped and the price written down on a bill pad, the various amounts to be totalled up at the end of the transaction. It was a very slow, labour intensive and personal process. A black telephone rested on one of the shelves and a great many orders from the larger houses that ringed the village came in via the phone to be packed up and delivered later in the day.

Although the shop did not sell fresh meat, you had to go to the butchers for that, it did sell bacon and ham and the cured sides were suspended from metal rails fixed above the counter, to be taken down and sliced up as and when required. The splendid slicer had a bright red cast iron base and a large diameter circular steel blade and flywheel which glided smoothly back and forth on the heavy base emitting a metallic hissing noise as it cut through the joints of meat. Because much of the produce was stored in bulk and the bacon and ham sliced up in the open the whole of the shop was full of the smells of these various items, together creating a delicious aroma that made you feel hungry as soon as you came through the door.

Adjoining the main shop there was a second unit fitted out as a greengrocers, which for much of its life had been the responsibility of Leonard's younger son Bernard. Bernard who was born and grew up in the village had been working for his father for two or three years when the First World War broke out in Europe and in 1916 when he was but seventeen, he volunteered to join the Army, prompted by patriotic zeal and a desire to seek some form of adventure that would take him away from sleepy old Goring. He had taken up horse riding and for some years had been competing at local gymkhanas and horse shows. He planned to join a cavalry regiment. In the event he was eventually drafted into the Yorkshire Regiment where the only thing he ever got to ride was an Army issue pedal cycle.

He was sent out to France and was taken prisoner the following year [in May 1918] outside the town of Soissons. For the remainder of the war he was subjected to the cruel regime

A 76593

PENNY B.C.

Yorkshire Rgt., 35614, H.Q.
Coy., Snipers Sect., Missing
27.5.18. (France).

Reds Mr. M. Penny (father),
Myrtle House, Cleve,
Goring, Oxon, Eng.

Head P. A. 41107-23-1148
30-9-18
Penny Bernard C.
Pte. 55614. Yorks R. 24-2-18
Oxford. Taken 27-5-18 Caen
unwounded. Arrived from West
front at Langensalza

Prisoner of war card, showing that Bernard was held at Langensalza camp, which held 10,000 prisoners [Red Cross]

German ledger showing Bernard's entry. [Red Cross]

№	a) Familienname b) Vorname (mit dem Rufnamen) c) nur bei Kaffen Vorname des Daters	Dienst- grad	a) Geburts- tag b) Ort c) Stamm	a) Dienstgrad b) Dienstort c) vorhergehender Auf- enthaltort	a) Eintritts- tag und -ort b) Adresse des nächsten Verwandten
100	Penny	Snip.	27.5.18.
101	Bernard C.	Snip.	27.5.18.
102

of a German prisoner of war camp, living in a cold, damp, unhealthy shed with very little in the way of food. No Red Cross food parcels ever reached the camp or at least never reached the prisoners and yet many still managed to survive. He would recount how they would steal French loaves from the camp bakery, hiding them down the legs of their trousers. Any prisoner unlucky enough to get caught engaging in this kind of activity was summarily shot by the German guards. He was set to work building a railway line. The onerous nature of the work coupled with a lack of food all too quickly led to illness and the onset of dysentery and he was transferred to a makeshift hospital. As he lay in bed seeing many of his comrades slowly dying around him he forced himself to get up at least once each day and walk about. He reckoned that this enforced activity just about kept his body functioning and ultimately saved his life. [Inhabitants of the camp were repatriated in early 1919. Ed.]

Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
PENNY	Yorks R	PLT	35614
Bernard			
Medal	Date	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	11/10/18	1478	Class 2
BRITISH	as	as	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

Bernard Penny's World War I medal card [Ancestry]

His elder brother Reginald, although not taken prisoner suffered similar trauma. Recruited into the Royal Army Medical Corps he worked with field ambulances collecting the dead and dying from the killing fields of Normandy. Thankfully, the brothers survived the war to return home to Goring, emaciated and ill but thankful to be alive. My mother, who would have been 14 at the time must have been overjoyed although strangely she never spoke of it. It was to be many months before they were restored to full health and the memory of their dreadful experience stayed with them for the rest of their lives. As a thank-you

they were presented, in September 1919, with certificates signed by the then chairman of the Parish Council. Bernard's read:

"In grateful appreciation of the services rendered to his Country in the Great War by Bernard Penny." Signed Francis Wilton.

This was no doubt well meant but looking now at this modest piece of paper with its cartoon heraldry it is impossible not to be struck by its woeful inadequacy when compared to the self sacrifice and suffering endured by these men and many thousands like them.

Back home in Goring the two men set about helping their father run the three shops. Bernard took on the greengrocery. This entailed getting up early enough to be able to leave the village at around four in the morning and driving the small green van up to Covent Garden market, a journey of some 50 miles, which in those pre-motorway days must have taken all of two hours. The required produce would then have to be purchased and packed into the van for the return journey, the aim being to get back to Goring in time to open up for nine o'clock. Throughout the day the van would again have to be brought into use to deliver the orders that came in via the telephone. The shop closed for an hour at lunchtime but remained open until at least five in the afternoon. Then it was a case of grabbing a quick meal, possibly engaging in some form of social activity while at the same time being conscious of the need to retire to bed at a reasonable hour in order to be fit and ready to set off again before dawn the following day. All in all an onerous commitment, expensive in terms of fuel, man hours and wear and tear on the vehicle.

Given the nature of the set up it was not surprising that the business got into difficulty with the onset of the thirties depression when customers made fewer purchases and in many instances bills remained unpaid. Eventually things got so bad that they had to close down completely and Bernard, who by this time was married and had two young children, had to rent out his bungalow and move back into Myrtle House, the family home, to live again with his father. Although they opened up again a few months later the grocery business never really recovered from this set back and in 1931 Bernard took a job as a travelling salesman for the Kemps Biscuit company and moved with his family to Ipswich. He was never to return to work for his father.



Myrtle House
[GGLHS]

The third shop alongside the other two but occupying a separate building, housed the electrical and hardware business run by the elder son Reginald. It suffered similarly during the depression years and although full of stock on the occasion of my visits, never seemed to be open for business and closed altogether a few years later with Reg going to work for the local brewery. Reg was the only one of the three children to remain in the village. Together with his wife Maud and their daughter Ann he lived in a modern bungalow built on land owned by my grandfather on the north side of Springhill Road opposite the family home. My mother always said that it was her father's intention to provide her with a similar dwelling once she was wed but in the event she came to marry Clement Hague, son of the village blacksmith, very much against her father's wishes and for some years he refused to have anything to do with her. As a consequence she began her married life without any kind of support from her parents, her mother having died a few years earlier.

Henry Hague

When I tired of exploring the various premises operated by the Penny family I had the option of making my way down Station Road, past the village school, to spend time with my other grandfather, Harry Hague the blacksmith, who worked out of a small workshop alongside the Catherine Wheel pub. Again it was a single storey building with walls constructed in knapped flint, framed at door and window by serrated red brick quoins. As with the grocery shop the building had a steep pitched tiled roof, the angles set with 'bonnet' hips. There were two spaces. The workshop itself kitted out with a water trough and a clutter of anvils and in the far corner the glowing forge. Above the fire there was a large set of leather bellows hand pumped by means of a long carved wooden handle that resembled the shaft of a cart.



The smithy, on the left, Station Road, Goring c. 1900 [GGLHS]

Alongside there was a small yard where horses were tethered and where the shoeing took place. My grandfather would cycle down from his home in Milldown Road, restart the fire and work a long day, shoeing horses, repairing farm implements and from time to time forging the wrought iron gates that came to adorn the entrances of many of the large houses dotted about in the surrounding countryside.

Like many blacksmiths he had a great love of cricket and was a member of the village team. Not a fast bowler but a canny spinner of the ball who encouraged me to develop my own bowling skills, something for which I will always be grateful. He also played the violin and persuaded his children to take up an instrument. My father learnt to play the cornet, as did his younger brother, Henry, the middle son Harold mastered the trombone while daughter Mary played piano. Thus, at a time before the curse of television had



THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

Harry Hague was a spin bowler of some repute. The locals all knew him as their Village Blacksmith, for his forge was situated next door to Goring's oldest public house, 'The Catherine Wheel'. The forge has since been a Southerngas Showroom, a Hairdressing establishment and is at present the local Firemen's Social Club.

A tribute to Harry Hague in Goring Cricket Club's 1976 centenary booklet [GGLHS]

descended on an unsuspecting world, they were able to provide their own musical entertainment. All three boys were founder members of the Goring brass band as was Bernard Penny. When Harry Hague died in 1967 the following obituary appeared in a local newspaper:-

'One of Goring's oldest and best known residents, Mr Henry Arthur Sidney Hague of Milldown Road died at his home last week aged ninety three.

Moving to Goring in 1912 'Harry Hague' was for 40 years the village blacksmith earning

renown for his skilful craftsmanship and artistry in wrought iron, many examples of which may be seen in the neighbourhood. Born in Gloucestershire of a cricket playing father who relished the memory of bowling out WG Grace on more than one occasion, he grew up with a great love of the game which he played with much enjoyment until well into his sixties. He subsequently took up the more sedate pastime of bowls again with considerable enthusiasm. He had also a great love of music and his merry fiddle enlivened many social occasions. Before settling in Goring he had worked in the engineering industry in the West Country, the Midlands and in Scotland. He was employed on Clydeside at the time the ill-fated *Lusitania* was being built. He is survived by his wife, three sons and a daughter.'

As with the grocery shop the first things one became aware of upon entering the smithy was the smell. A heady cocktail of iron, rust, smoke, coal dust and horse manure hung in the air and to this was added from time to time the unique aroma of burning hoof as a near red hot shoe was pressed into place on the foot of a horse for the first fitting. I was intrigued by the process of shoeing horses, particularly the big cart horses who were frequent visitors to the workshop. The relationship between the smith and the customer differed from that which one had observed at the grocers. Here there was no subservience, no cap doffing, no "will that be all for today, Mrs Hillerby?" The men who came with the horses met with the smith as equal partners in a common cause and they spoke quietly to one another in friendly tones.

Once a horse was tethered and his nosebag replenished my grandfather would press his back against the flank of the animal, pull its shaggy foot up between his legs and proceed to clean out the centre of the hoof with a metal scraper and take the measurements required to decide upon a shoe size and shape. Sometimes the horse would resist and use its great strength to pull grandfather to and fro while he pushed back shouting at the

animal while the handler attempted to restrain it by hanging tightly onto the brass buckled reins. Eventually things would calm down and he would proceed to select a suitable length of iron bar and thrust it into the furnace. The pumping of the huge bellows would cause the iron to glow red hot and with a pair of very large pliers he would transfer it to the anvil to be hammered into shape, sparks and lumps of hot metal spewing away from the fierce blows and flying out across the workshop. Surprisingly by today's standards, apart from a long leather apron, he wore little in the way of protective clothing and never appeared to be unduly concerned with regard to my safety apart from an occasional muttered instruction to "stand back a bit".

There was such an intrinsic honesty about the art of shoeing horses. There was no advertising, no sales talk, no spin. The smith simply looked at the customer, sized up his or her requirements, selected the required material and by fire and force forged an item that was in itself an objet d'art. What the smith did and how he set about the task was there on public view for all to see.

With the death of Harry Hague Goring ceased to have a village blacksmith and the forge was initially converted into office space for the Gas Board. Subsequently the shoeing area alongside was enclosed to provide a direct link into the pub next door and thereby the forge became 'The Forge Bar' of the Catherine Wheel.

John Hague

Background Notes

Below I have added some further interesting information from my own files. [Ed.]

The Penny family

The name Penny lives on in Goring in the modern housing development on Cleeve Road called Penny Piece. The story behind the name is well known – Leonard Penny in his later years kept ducks and some cows. Each morning he would take the ducks from his house on Springhill Road to forage in the field where Penny Piece now stands. Sometimes he also took the cows to graze. This was a common sight in the 1950s when there was much less traffic than there is today. Apparently the animals never came to any harm!

Jasper Penny, the founder of the Goring family, came to Goring from Somerset in the 1870s. He was a carpenter and joiner and may have been attracted by the work available in the village in the late 19c building boom. He and his wife Jane had nine known children, of whom Thomas Herbert Leonard, John Hague's grandfather, was the seventh, born in Cheriton in 1879. According to the 1881 and 1891 censuses Jasper and Jane and some of their children were living at Cleeve near to the mill. Son Henry was also a carpenter and no doubt worked for his father. The carpentry business must have gone well because by 1901 the family home was Myrtle House at Cleeve where Westway stands today, and Jasper was working on his own account. In 1911, at the age of 76, he described himself as a market gardener. He owned over 2 acres of land, including an orchard with 140 trees which was situated opposite to Myrtle House on Springhill Road. Jasper died in 1920 at the age of 86.



Land (circled) belonging to Jasper Penny in Cleeve in 1910 [Inland Revenue Valuation Survey, TNA]

Leonard started his career as a grocer in Goring, as in 1891 he was living above the shop at Cocks's Stores in the High Street as a grocer's assistant. In 1895 he married Mary Parker and they had two sons, Reginald Leonard born in 1896 and Bernard Clifford born in 1899. Daughter Dorothy Sabina (John Hague's mother) did not come along until 1905. In 1901 Leonard was still a grocer's assistant, although his employer is not known. By 1911 he was a grocer's manager but in 1910 Mr Cocks owned the four-bedroom house in Springhill Road where the family lived, so perhaps Leonard still worked for him. Alternatively he might have been employed by Richard Patey who, in 1911 and 1913 trade directories, is listed as the grocer at the Station Road premises which Leonard came to own. One source says that Leonard had the shop from 1918 and in 1920 L Penny and Sons were the proprietors according to *Kelly's Directory*. Perhaps some money inherited from Jasper Penny helped to fund the purchase? Leonard moved into Myrtle House after his father's death.

Leonard Penny died in St Mary's hospital at Wallingford in November 1962 at the age of 94, still living at Myrtle House. He left £4,401 17s.

Several of his siblings made their lives in Goring, including his youngest sister Lilian who remained unmarried and looked after Jasper when he was widowed in 1907. Another sister Angelina married George Fuller at St Thomas' in 1901. Robert, born in 1867 was working as a baker and confectioner in the village according to the 1901 census and Henry Jasper (born 1864), as already mentioned was a carpenter. He lived in Station Road opposite to the school with his wife Martha and it is likely that he worked for nearby Higgs the builders after Jasper retired. Henry and Martha's only son William seems to have had a local business as a photographer. There are a couple of photographs attributed to him in the History Society's collection.

All in all, the Penny family made a significant impact on Goring.

Sources

Census returns, Goring parish registers, National Probate Registry (www.ancestry.co.uk)

Kelly's Directories

Inland Revenue Valuation Survey 1910 maps and field book for Goring (TNA)

Henry Hague

Henry or Harry as he was always called, was born in Selsley near Stroud in Gloucestershire in 1874. He had four children with his first wife Frances, three of whom were born in Birmingham. He came to Goring from the Midlands in the early 1900s as blacksmith at the Saunders boatworks at Springfield, on the border with South Stoke. When this was sold off to Hobbs of Henley in 1910, he must have gone back to Gloucestershire to set up



Employees at Springfield Works c.1900. Harry Hague is circled and described as an 'engineering smith'. [GGLHS]

in business as in the 1911 census for Didmarton (near to Badminton) he describes himself as a 'shoeing and general smith' and an 'employer'. As noted in his newspaper obituary, he soon returned to Goring and is listed as a blacksmith in the 1913 *Kelly's Directory*. In directory entries up to 1939 he is 'Blacksmith, Station Road' – working in the smithy by the Catherine Wheel.

Harry Hague also operated at South Stoke, where he collaborated with the wheelwright, William Costiff. He worked in the village from 1920 to 1940 at the smithy down Ferry Lane. He was a farrier but excelled at ornamental iron work according to local opinion and came into South Stoke once or twice a week – whenever he was needed. Just as in Goring, Harry was remembered for playing his violin, which he kept in the smithy, when he felt like a break from work. He ceased to trade in South Stoke in 1940 and Kelly's the wheelwright's shop was demolished and the smithy converted into the garage of a bungalow built on the site. After that people had to go to Goring if they needed Harry's services.

Harry Hague's first wife died in the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading in April 1914 aged 38 and was taken back to his home parish of Selsley, Gloucestershire to be buried. With four young children to look after, in autumn 1916 Harry remarried to Frances' sister Rose Claridge who gave up her career as a schoolteacher in Gloucestershire to come and live in Goring. Rose Hague died in 1969, two years after Harry. She was 83 years old.

Sources

Census returns (www.ancestry.co.uk)

Kelly's Directories

South Stoke Trade & Traders. South Stoke Historical Society.