

The History of Bradfield

The name of the village of Bradfield simply means 'Broad Field' and indicates that its origin must have been linked with agriculture in some way. Bradfield is still a rural settlement about 60 km west of London. The modern settlement is made up of two communities: Bradfield, the original village site around the mill and River Pang and Southend Bradfield which developed along the ridge forming a direct communication link to the west.

The village of Bradfield is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as follows:-
William also holds

- BRADFIELD. Horling held it from King Edward.
- Then it answered for 9 hides now for 6 hides
- Land for 30 ploughs
- In Lordship 2 ploughs
- 20 villagers and 31 smallholders with 18 ploughs
- 9 slaves; 3 mills at 53s; meadow, 20 acres;
- Woodland at 100 pigs.
- Value before 1066 and later £24; now £16

The information in Domesday, when decoded, can provide us with a reasonably accurate idea of the size and population of the village at that time:-

- We can work out that Horling was the Lord of the manor during the reign of King Edward. The Norman did not recognise Harold as ever having been king.
- A 'Hide' was reckoned to be the area of land that could support a peasant and his family. In this area of the country, a Hide was thought to be around 120 acres, which seems quite a lot for one family. By the time of Domesday the Hide had become a unit of taxation, therefore the area had a rateable value of 6 hides.
- Land for 30 ploughs means that there was enough arable land to warrant the use of 30 plough teams in one year. (A plough team consisted of 8 oxen. The Lord of the Manor had two plough teams for his own use. This does not mean that there were 240 oxen in the village, simply that there was enough land to keep that number gainfully employed.
- It was usual for the Domesday Commissioners only to record male members of the community so in order to get a more accurate picture of the size of Bradfield's population, we multiply the figures by 4.5. Therefore by doing the arithmetic we can state that the total population was in the region of 270. $(20+31+9 \times 4.5 = 270)$
- The 20 acres of meadow shows how good the land in the vicinity was. Meadow land was a very valuable commodity and it usually bordered a stream or river, in this case the Pang, and was very useful for growing hay and grazing land.
- 3 mills at 53s simply means that the tax value of the Mills was 53 shillings. Remember these would all have been water mills. Windmills were not seen in England until around the end of the 12th Century.
- The simple statement 'Woodland at 100 pigs' provides us with a number of details. The Manor obviously had an area of woodland, in this case oak trees. We can assume this because Pigs fed on acorns. For the privilege of allowing these pigs to graze in the woods the Lord had to pay a tax called 'Pannage'. This was usually levied at 10%. In Bradfield the tax was 100 pigs so we know that there were at least 1000 pigs foraging in the area.

Although no mention is made of a church in Domesday, it does not mean there wasn't one in the village. One can assume, that with a population of 270, there had to have been some sort of religious input and pastoral care. However, we are certain that a church of

some kind has stood on the present site of St Andrew's in Bradfield since the 12th Century. The present building having been extended in 1848, in memory of his parents, by the Rev. Thomas Stevens, who was both Rector and Lord of the Manor, with his friend Sir Gilbert Scott. He found it difficult to fill all the pews in the large church so St Andrews (now Bradfield) College was established in 1850 to provide the choir and a bigger congregation. The flint for the church walls was dug from a local site, which has now become a Greek Theatre in the grounds of the College.

In the very early part of the Victorian period the local parson, or rector, was an important person in the village and was often the second son of the local gentry. Together with the local squire and major landowners he looked after the pastoral needs of the village. Bradfield has a continuous line of Rectors going back to 1304 but not all of them were popular. Some owned a great deal of land and had large estates employing many people, until the advent of machinery took over some of their jobs and forced many to seek employment elsewhere. Some were JPs who sat in judgement in the courts in Reading and Newbury, often handing down sentences to their own parishioners! And some used their position of power to impose local laws to suit their own ends. As the Victorian age continued the power the church had over the parish declined. Many people still continued to attend church on Festival days but regular weekly attendance was not what it was. The clergy could no longer take for granted the respect of the villagers....they now had to earn it.

A dip into Census records will show that, not surprisingly, Bradfield has relied heavily on agriculture for its income and employment, both directly and indirectly. In 1891 there were 18 farmers and 3 Farm Bailiffs and 14% of the population were recorded as being labourers or agricultural labourers as well as those in the more skilled farming occupations.

Also some of the larger houses provided domestic employment for those not connected to, or seeking a change from farming. We know that Frederick Lewendon was a gardener 'in the big house' and that the family of Bradfield Hall comprised of Ann Connop, her daughter, her two sons and four servants – cook, parlour-maid, housemaid and coachman. At Bradfield Lodge, Thomas Osborne lived with his wife, three daughters, son, sister, nephew and niece. They were looked after by a Governess, Nurse, Parlour-maid, Cook, Housemaid, under-housemaid, and coachman. All the servants, except the coachman lived in the house.

Like many other villages Bradfield had its own state school, as well as Bradfield College which was private and fee paying. It was first established near the church but moved to its present site in Southend Bradfield in September 1886. When the school opened there were a head teacher, three staff and 95 children. The school retained its strong links with the church as a Church of England School. The village school was very important because for many children it provided the only formal education they would receive. Under the Education Act of 1870 all children between the ages of 5 and 12 had to be provided with an education. However, in areas like Bradfield many children had other jobs and preferred not to attend school, especially during pressure times on the farms such as harvests. So, in 1880, an Act was passed that made it compulsory for all children from the ages of 5-10 to attend school. If children were caught missing their parents were fined. Those pupils who did attend were regularly rewarded with prizes. However, the school governors of Bradfield realised that it was unrealistic to expect full attendance so they often allowed children to take time off to collect acorns and help with the harvest:-

- '1884 . 26 June The haymaking having commenced several children were absent this week'.

Many children especially from the isolated farms had to travel as much as 8 kms often over muddy fields and tracks to get to school. As a result there was a serious decline in attendance during bad weather.

- '1883. 5-7 March. Attendance much smaller than usual this week owing to very cold weather.

- 1887. 15 March Deep Snow. Poor Attendance’

Until very recently Bradfield had one of the few examples of a Victorian workhouse left in the country....(now Waylands). All that is left today is the Administration block, which is a private house, and the paupers’ graveyard. The other buildings were knocked down and a modern housing development has been built on the site. In Victorian Times people who could not work, could not pay their rent, perhaps widowed, orphaned or too old, or, even as late as the 1930s, having illegitimate children could end up in the workhouse. The Bradfield workhouse opened in 1835 and cost £4,500. They were all built to a similar style; brick buildings with high walls and small windows, which gave them the look of a prison. Sometimes, as at Bradfield, they were placed on a hill which made them even more uninviting. Nobody wanted to go to the workhouse, but there was no social care as such and if people were starving or desperate they had no other choice. The workhouse was paid for by the parish and controlled by a group of ‘overseers’.

Families were split up when entering the workhouse. The building was divided into three sections for Men, Women and Children. Babies over the age of 1 were taken from their mothers and looked after in the children’s area. In some workhouses even the Chapel had separate areas and even separate entrances. But in Bradfield there was no segregation in the Chapel. The young children were given lessons for part of the day either in the workhouse itself or as in Bradfield in the village school:-

- ‘1886. 11 March. Mr Perrin visited today to make enquiries about the attendance of the Union children.
- 1886. 29 October. Admitted Alice Myles from the Union.’

Those children who were old enough were sent to local farms in the area as cheap labour and some from the Bradfield Workhouse even went abroad.

- ‘1887. 5 September. 13 of the Union Children have been sent out by the Guardians to Ottawa in North America’.

Workhouses closed in the 1930s and at one time the Bradfield workhouse became a home for people with learning difficulties and was renamed Wayland Hospital. This closed in 1991 and was redeveloped for housing.

It is worth remembering that until the turn of the 20th Century, few villagers would have ventured beyond Bradfield unless it affected them directly or they had been told about it by travellers. This situation would have remained the same until the advent of good communications and the easier transfer of news and events. So, like many villages of its kind, Bradfield was very self-sufficient. The 1891 Census shows Bradfield has having a population of 1036, 145 were classed as labourers, 48 were servants and 177 were listed as Scholars or children of school age. Over 100 people relied on the big houses for their employment. Others provided the trade and services required by the general population, including four grocers, four bakers three people who were both grocers and bakers, two tailors but surprisingly no butcher. There were also some unexpected ones such as ‘A Fly Owner’ who owned a small one-horse-drawn carriage that could be hired as a taxi, and who also had another job as mineral waterman and soda-water bottler!

Although retaining its original character, Bradfield has changed its role in the past years. Its proximity to the motorway and the advent of better communications has meant that it has become more of a dormitory village with people commuting to Reading, Newbury, London and further afield. As people now have easier access to super-markets the local shops and services have declined considerably and the Post Office-cum-shop is the only retail source now left. As its popularity as a rural settlement has increased so too have the house prices which now reach figures far beyond those affordable by people who were perhaps born in the village and wish to return, or indeed simply remain here.

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