

1925 Rating and Valuation Act (a modern Domesday)

Ever since William the Conqueror instigated the Great Survey, which resulted in the Domesday Book, governments have needed to carry out surveys to assess the populace for tax purposes.

In 1925 it was decided to rationalise the rating system and have one tax to replace the poor rates, borough rates and general district rates. This came into force on 1 April 1927 and surveys were carried out to establish the value of each property in the country.

A valuation officer visited each property and recorded his findings in a Field Book. The one for Clophill is kept at the Bedford & Luton Archives & Record Service along with a map which shows the location of each property. This record tells us a lot about living conditions at the time.

In 1927 there were 209 residential houses, the majority (135) having two bedrooms and being either semi-detached or terraced. They were of the 'two up, two down' format with a kitchen and living room downstairs. Outside there was an earth closet and, sometimes, a washhouse with the water being obtained from a well. The quality of the housing varied enormously; some were purpose-built, such as the Forester's Cottages (9, 11 & 15 Back Street) which bear the plaque AOF 1882, while many were in very poor condition. 75% of houses were rented.

The valuation officer, as well as recording the details and making valuations, also recorded personal comments. Some houses he liked - for Holly Cottage he said "Nice garden. Very nice." A lot he didn't like. About April Cottage he said "*Ought to be destroyed. Disgraceful. Should be condemned.*" Some cottages, mostly thatched, he described as 'weekend type'. Of Woodside, 7 Back Street, he says "*Tenant comes from Finchley. Has been stung for the rent. Compares it with London prices and is satisfied.*" He was impressed by a tenant in Jacques Lane who had been there for 90 years - her mother having lived there before for over 90 years.

Twenty two houses only had one bedroom while thirty two had four. The larger houses, with four five or six bedrooms, had piped water and flushing toilets to a cesspit. Though some still had not got basic services such as Clophill Barns (London House) where the valuation was reduced by 33% "*for no lighting or heating, no railway handy & general inconvenience.*"

Although there was the Water Works at the east end of the High Street, only 8 houses were recorded as being connected. Drawing water from a well was the norm. Likewise only 4 houses were recorded as having electricity and three had a telephone.

There were 34 premises described as 'Farm Buildings' which usually consisted of barns, sheds, henhouses and pigsties. The High Street, before the recent infilling, was much more open with 24 of these groups of farm buildings along the street with surrounding field being used for agriculture. The use of working horses is indicated by the presence of chaffhouses, food mixing buildings mealhouses and stables. Some had mechanised as there is mention of a 4 h.p. Petrol Engine & Meal Crusher and a Bentall Grinder with Massey Harris 4.5 h.p. engine used for preparing feedstuff for animals. There were also 9 allotments with large ones (20 acres) at Furze Hill Back Street, Pine Hill Shefford Road and Jacques Lane.

As for the pubs, the Flying horse was described as "*Gets main road traffic. Has good yard. Gets Charabanc parties. Mainly weekend trade. Best pub in village. Take visitors. Caution. Question of takings? Not so good a house as it used to be.*" The remark about the takings is because the quantities of draught beer, bottled beer and spirits seemed on the low side.

The Green Man was said to "*Get Luton Police & Stati Fair once a year.*" It sold 1½ barrels of beer, 1 gallon of spirits and 1½ doz. bottles of beer a week. This is similar to what the other pubs claimed but the valuation officer was obviously suspicious. At the Compasses he was told "*Takings never reckoned up*" and at the Rising Sun "*Takings unknown*". The Stone Jug land lord claimed he had "*No idea of takings*" and the valuation officer noted "*Trade is probably incorrect. Tenant keeps no books.*"

The valuation officer wrote of the Stone Jug “*The House very damp. Living room floor gone. (Dry rot- no ventilation) Trade is probably incorrect.*”

Buildings that have since disappeared include the Church Room, High Street, (opposite the church) which was used for all parish meetings and for Church of England purposes, the Reading Room (next to the church) which housed Clophill Men's Club and the National school. The school was opened in 1872 for 233 pupils but had an average attendance in 1926 of 142. It was demolished after St Mary's school was built in 1973.

So the survey, like the Domesday Book, gives a picture of how things were in the past.