

John Lycett's blog – October, 2024

Shropshire

Shropshire is England's biggest inland county.

"Well Connie, we're going on a road trip today and we're starting on Lyth Hill looking across the Shropshire plain towards Ironbridge Gorge. To think that 30,000 years ago, this was just a lake of ice.

"Down in front of us is Condover Sandpit, where in 1986 they found the bones of a 12,700-year-old complete Woolley Mammoth.

"Looking to the left is Acton Burnell Hill, coming round is Wenlock Edge, then the Wrekin and, if you keep looking round, next is Haughmond Hill. Let's get onto the A49 and across the A5.

"Here we are at Meole Brace. We have just passed over the Moneybrook. This got its name because of a plague in Shrewsbury. The people of the town used to bring their money and throw it in the brook, while the people from the country brought their produce for the townspeople, took the money from the brook, which they thought had been cleansed, thereby avoiding the plague.

"As we go round this island, the farm, which was there, was called Moneybrook Farm, and farmed by a man called Harry Sambrook. Also, just here, when I was a bit younger than you are now Connie, during the war, there was a check point where everyone had to show their ID.

"We are now driving up the B4380, past the new football ground, the Percy Thrower Garden Centre, then along towards Atcham – the farm grew potatoes on some of those fields in the 1980s and 90s – then past Attingham Park, a National Trust property. Opposite there, more fields where the farm have in the past grown potatoes. Attingham Park, itself, during the war was a POW camp and the prisoners would be billeted out to work on the local farms. A farmer named Mac Walker farmed there at that time. Up that road lived another farmer we called Jones of Uppington, who had a brother George at Hordley.

"The sugar beet factory at Allscott was on the left. It closed about 20 years ago after British Sugar moved the growing of the crop over to the eastern counties. This affected farmers, hauliers, machinery dealers and contractors.

"We're now passing the Wrekin on the right. This used to have a flashing light on the top to warn planes of its height.

“Onto Wellington and then Shifnal; good land here! Interestingly, we’re just passing David Austin Roses, the very famous rose grower.

“Turning left onto the A41, we come to Lord Bradford’s Estate. Here they are on a regenerative farming journey, but Velcourt seem to have an input at the moment. Doug McGowen, a very able manager for the Scott family, made a good fist of managing it while he was there.

“Wow Connie, PDM, that is a statement sign! PDM grow a lot of lettuce and spinach. It is rumoured they are Europe’s biggest loose-leaf growers with 2,000,000 bags per day plus a large amount of lettuce. They also have a Wagyu beef herd. They need manure on this a land.



Above: Spinach packing



“You know this next farm Connie, Shropshire Petals. You visited it this summer and then went for lunch to the 100acre Burger Bar!

“Let’s leave the A41 for a while and go to Edgmond. Grandma and I used to live here when I was Farm Foreman at Harper Adam’s Agricultural College, when Reg Kenny was the Principal and Tom Fordham was the Farm Manager. The size of the campus has grown in size greatly since we were there. Now some of the cows are milked by robots and the rest are milked on a rotary parlour.

“We’re now back on the A41, going through Tern Hill, latterly the home of Greenvale, previously Dalgety and before that Ross Produce. Along that road is a farm belonging to Mr Birch, again where we grew more potatoes.

“On towards Prees now. Here is an interesting farm, the Twemlows. It is home to a stud and embryo transfer centre.

“Back down the A49 towards Wem now, where an annual sweet pea festival is held, in the memory of Henry Eckford, a famous Scottish horticulturalist and sweet pea breeder who located here.

“It is also the home of Wem Ales, Albert Isherwood, the timber merchant, and, of course, the treacle mines.



“Onto the village of Noneley, to see how Simon’s peat bog is progressing.

“Then, onto Myddle, Baschurch and back to Ruyton XI Towns past the toll house and over the river Perry at Platt Bridge and onward to the Cross, on which the names of the eleven townships are shown, Wykey being one.”

“Next time, Connie, we’ll go the other way, and take in the Devil’s Chair and Habberley Hole”



Connie

“Grandpa, I’m hungry. Let’s go to Café Eleven, see Ruth and get a snack!”