

Hoxne Slaughterhouse and the Low Street Butcher's Shop

On 21 June 2016 members of the Hoxne Heritage Group were permitted by Mrs Doreen Weller to visit the old slaughterhouse at Bridge Farm, Low Street, Hoxne. One member, Allen Burrige, had been employed there by Herbert Neve as a part-time butcher's boy, from the 1950's to the early 1960's, and so was able to tell us something of how it operated.

The Bridge Farm property had been part of the Oakley Park estate. When it was offered for sale in 1920, the butcher's shop, a carpenter's shop, cottages and the greater part of 23 acres of land were already occupied by Gordon E Witton, and he duly purchased them for £750. However 32 poles (roughly the area of Sandpit Meadow), with a ruined cottage and numerous old buildings, were still being offered for sale in 1921 and 1923. Witton, who lived in Bridge House, continued in business there until 1950 as a slaughterman and licensed dealer in wild rabbits and poultry. In 1950 he sold the butcher's shop to Cannell's of Mere Street in Diss. He also sold by auction 80 laying hens, with an incubator, brooder and battery cages, 3 heifers in calf, and an 8 year old horse suitable for harnessing to a van. Cannell's kept the shop as a branch of their Diss business until 1955 when it was sold to H W Neve.

Herbert Neve's property (whether owned or rented) included the butcher's shop on Low Street opposite the Swan; the slaughterhouse; the Bridge Farm buildings including a barn where Hegelisdun now stands; Sandpit Meadow; a stackyard containing 1 or 2 hay/straw stacks (between the farm buildings and Sandpit Meadow i.e. where the track to the pumping station now lies); and some arable land where he grew wheat and sugar beet. Allen remembers a steam engine thrashing the wheat there, and remembers cutting the tops off the sugar beet, which were then ploughed in. But, unlike Gordon Witton, Herbert Neve did not live in Hoxne.



Above is a view of the exterior of the slaughterhouse in the yard at Bridge Farm, showing the main doors. To the right, now completely overgrown with ivy, is a second small door, leading into an

ante-room. This small room extends to the right, beyond the modern wall on the right hand side of the photograph, as far as the original farmyard boundary wall. While employed there Allen only witnessed the slaughter of pigs, but cows, bullocks and other animals had been slaughtered there in the past. Pigs, 2 or 3 at a time, were herded through the small door into the ante-room, which was divided from the main slaughterhouse by a slatted gate. The pigs were then taken one by one into the main room for slaughter.

Below is the interior of the ante-room showing its entrance door. It was built mostly of rough



flint or stones, up against the wall bounding the farmyard, and once, Allen remembered,



it also had another door to the rear. Some timber uprights (below) with a diamond shaped profile above the opening into the main slaughter house may be reused window mullions.



Inside the main room, with its large double doors into the yard, there were still some signs of the activity which took place there.



By the 1950's a humane killer was used for slaughter, which fired a finger-thick bolt into the centre of the animal's forehead. Pigs then had their throats cut, and were bled. The blood ran into a drain in the middle of the floor, which was connected by an underground drain to a blood well, over 6' deep, in the nearby stackyard. The pig carcasses were then hung up, by a meat hook through the hind hock. The supports in the next photographs may be part of the mechanism used, but Allen remembers a large wheel about 4 foot diameter suspended higher in the roof, with a rope around it connecting to a pulley roller behind, that was used to raise the carcasses. The roller visible between and above the supports may be the original.





When the wheel was cranked a carcass could be raised over the top of, and lowered headfirst into, a great coopered tub. This tub had a diameter of 5 or 6 foot, and was 2 foot high, large enough to take a pig carcass lying curved within it.

Seen from the main doorway, in the back left hand corner of the building, was a copper for boiling water.



The brick surround and stoke hole can still be seen, and the copper bowl is still in situ though not visible in the photograph. Allen's first job each morning was to light the fire beneath the copper with paper and kindling, and he had to keep the fire going with wood and coal. The butcher could then bucket boiling water over a carcass in the tub to scald it, then scrape off the bristles with a metal scraper. After this the carcass was raised again and the pluck (the heart, liver, lungs and kidneys) was taken out and hung up. These items together with the sweetbreads (pancreas) were often sold as "pig's fry". The intestines were also washed out, to be used for sausage skins.

By the 1950's the sides of meat then went into a large walk-in refrigerator or coldstore in the adjacent farm building, but in earlier times ventilation was needed to keep a building cool. There are slatted louvres in the wall adjoining the building beyond.



Beside the main doors there is a very large square post; at its base is a ringle or ring bolt.



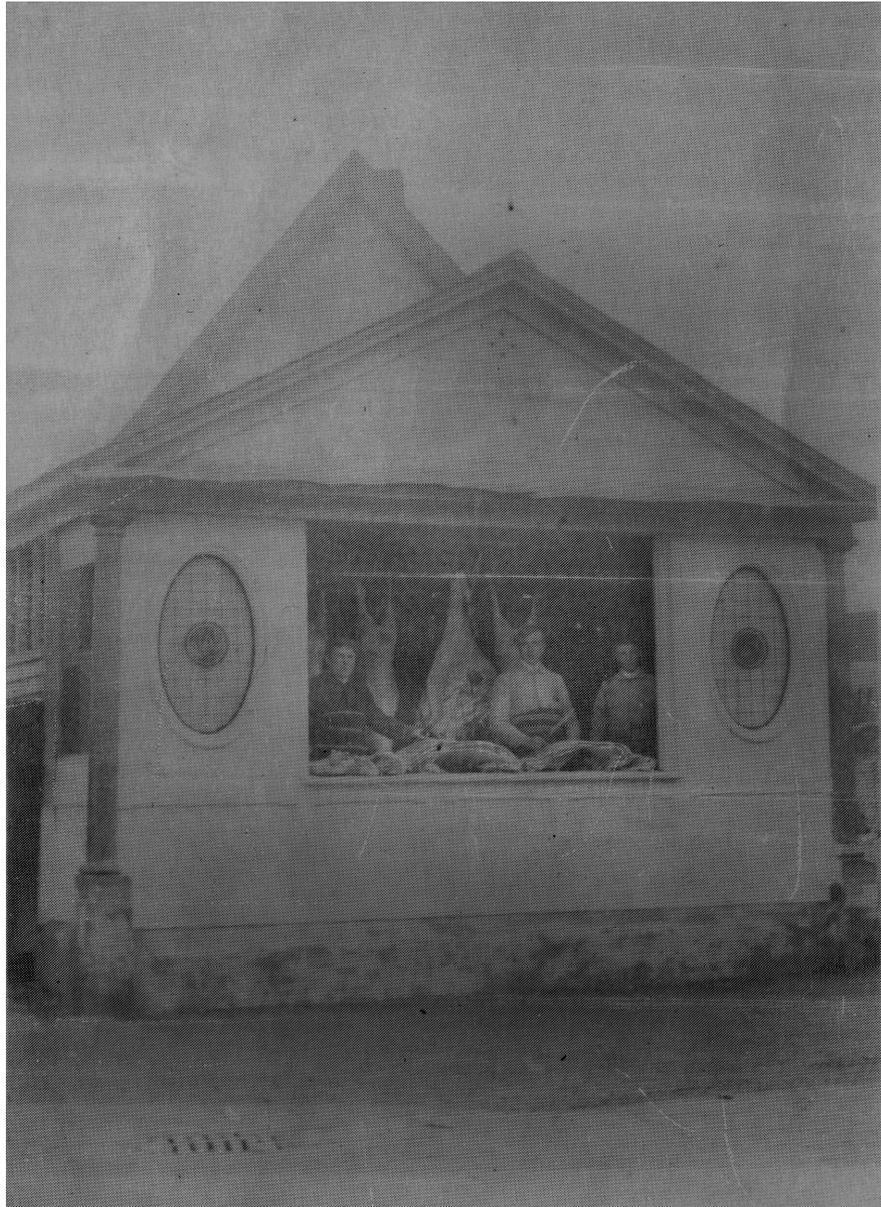
Cattle could be brought in through the main doors. Bulls and bullocks were fastened head down by the ring in their nose to this ring bolt, and cows were probably fastened to it in the same fashion by a halter. This put them into the position needed for them to be slaughtered by a poleaxe.

It is not yet known precisely when the slaughterhouse finally went out of use. The associated butcher's shop in Low Street closed about 1974 or 1975, but by that date the meat for sale was being brought by a van from elsewhere.

The following four photographs are reproduced by kind permission of Mrs Doreen Weller (the originals are in Hoxne Church).



The first is believed to be of the slaughterhouse in the 1920's, and the gentleman wearing the necktie is said to be a Mr Bryant of Heckfield Green.



The next, of the butcher's shop, is also thought to be from the 1920's, and has a caption "The shop front was put in at the turn of the century by a Mr Ward, who made a speciality of these fronts and probably worked on the Shambles in Diss."

Lastly there are 2 views of Low Street, probably taken in the 1800's, which show the shop before its present front was added. It had an open front porch, supported by two (?) wooden posts and possibly a low brick wall along the front. The second photograph clearly shows sides of meat hanging from the ceiling of this porch.

