

The Woodturners & Carvers of Kings Cliffe Past

13 July

The last visit of the day was to the village of Kings Cliffe with a talk on the *Woodturners and Carvers of Kings Cliffe Past* presented by Sue Trow-Smith of the local heritage society. This community, known as the 'Spoon Village' with about 1400 inhabitants a few miles north east of Corby, has a unique history in the production of treen and wooden domestic items. Early wills and probate records suggest that treen was being made there from as early as 1600. The variety was extensive, ranging from wooden spoons, small bowls, beakers, butter dishes, egg cups, nutcrackers, needle cases, dice shakers, and many other useful items. How the trade became centred on the village is unclear, but the proximity of Rockingham Forest nearby, with extensive tracts of woodland, would have provided the necessary raw material. It was a poor community and spoon-making was probably carried out alongside another job to provide sufficient income.

Turned items were first made on pole lathes and later on treadle lathes, with turners working from home in small workshops. In 1851 there were 32 turners and four spoon

makers. Eventually production was centred in small factory units set up both for turned and carved treen work. Production peaked between 1850 and 1900. One early turner, William Bailey, had a workshop behind the Turner's Arms in West Street, the firm later trading locally as 'J Bailey & Sons Wholesale Turners and Carvers'; as late as 1895 students were being taught by Bailey. William Bollans also set up a steam factory in the village, where according to a report in the *Stamford Mercury* (25 June 1875) Levi Dixon (jnr) turned 415 egg cups in under eight hours. One of the last treen workers was John Ventross Green, a carver and toy dealer working before the first world war. Treen production later declined in the face of mass production elsewhere and imports from abroad.

We enjoyed tea and delicious home-made cakes while we listened to this fascinating talk; many thanks to our hosts.

David Bryant

Kings Cliffe spoons



Butter mould, corn stook & leaf design, J Bailey & Sons



Wood carving class, 1894-5 at Old School Room, Bridge St: do any of the items shown here still exist?

