

Thursday 8th November 2007

***Twenty-four Square Miles* – Graham Nottingham**

This film, made in 1946, is about the parishes between Banbury and Chipping Norton. It was intended to mirror rural life in Britain generally during the early forties. The necessary survey work was carried out by the Agricultural Economic Unit of Oxford University and was also recorded in a substantial book entitled *Country Planning*.

‘Twenty-four Square Miles’ reveals a way of life that has vanished from our land due especially to the almost total mechanisation of farm labour symbolised here by the replacement of the horse by the tractor and the huge growth of car ownership.

Apart from the film’s commentary, delivered by a young John Arlott, Graham Nottingham added his own observations based especially on an upbringing in the rural environs of the Welsh Border country. Perhaps his most telling remark was that community spirit was so much stronger in villages of the 1940s than it is today. In his view it did not help that so many larger villages have taken on marked urban characteristics. During the course of the film presentation he was able to identify various locations. One of these was South Newington and it is good to record that in the audience was Janet Thomas, who appears briefly as a little girl at the local school accompanied by her teacher Miss Upton. Another point of contact was provided by Prudence Cooper whose letter was read out and whose moment in the film was when she dashed across North Newington school playground to reach outside toilets.

The film has so many nostalgic moments, especially a short clip of people dancing to the popular Sid Austin Band, some reflections on farming problems by John Woolgrove of Barford, and a sequence inside a cottage that revealed all the problems associated with very basic activities when you have no running water, a range for cooking and rely on oil lamps and candles for illumination.

The evening ended with three short films made as sequels to ‘Twenty-four Square Miles’. Enjoyment of the whole visual presentation owed much to the technical skill of Colin Cohen and the enthusiastic comments of Graham Nottingham, both of which ensured that this was an evening to remember.

Early Work Experience

Early work experience from school is nothing new. From the Log Book of the British School in Crouch Street, Banbury, comes the following:

1875 June 11th.

Mr Hardy of the Firm of Samuelson & Co. called, requesting us to send them an Advanced pupil to assist for Six Weeks in their office.

The log book of the Banbury British School(s), Boys, 1862-1889, is at the Oxfordshire Record Office, ref. BB/XI/viii/2. It is not very long, and its analysis could make an excellent subject for a short project or article.