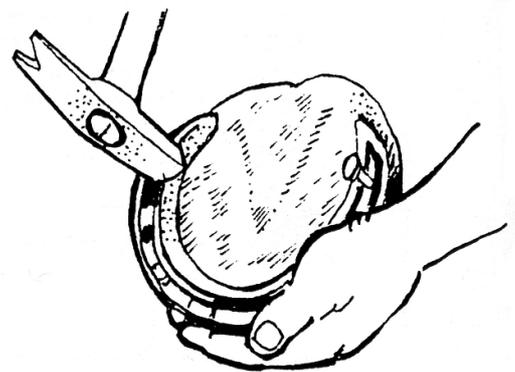


# Earning a Living

Mortimer has been called a commuters' village, which is true today when most residents have to seek employment in towns. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, there were no trains or buses to take workers from the village to factories in Reading or Basingstoke, and Mortimer was almost as self-supporting in 1800 as it had been in 1600. Even by 1854 the directories list the following trades in the village: tailors, dressmakers, coal merchants, blacksmiths, grocers, butchers, wheelwrights, turners, bakers, carpenters, shoemakers, saddlers and a tinman & brazier. The local carrier, Mosdell, who was an amateur poet, also mentions builder, sanitary engineer, painter, plumber, glazier, decorator, turners and rakemaker in his 1891 poem. It seems that Mortimer could still be fairly self-sufficient at that time, with a surplus of goods for sale, even though the population was less than one-quarter of that of today.

## Blacksmith, Wheelwright and Saddler

The most important craftsman in the village was the blacksmith. Before the days of factory production he could make the tools required by all other craftsmen, farmers and workers. Nicholas Bayley is the first Mortimer blacksmith whose name is known. He occupied '*le forgehouse*' in The Street according to a survey of manorial lands in 1652. By 1714 he had been replaced by James Davis and there was another James Davis there in 1840. At that time there was also a blacksmith at West End, and by 1870 there was a forge on the common and another in Wokefield. Demand continued into the 1930s when Fred Ham had a corrugated iron smithy in St. John's Road.



*The blacksmith shapes the shoe, then leaves it hot to burn an impression on the horny hoof to make an exact fit.*

Next-door to the Fox and Horn, Daniel Holloway had a wheelwright's shop in 1840. Before the coming of the railway the wheelwright and the blacksmith were responsible for the horse transport which kept the rural economy going.

Saddlery and harness-making was an important trade in the days of horse transport. Richard Long employed twenty-four men and fourteen apprentices at his saddlery at the bottom of The Street. The house is still called 'Saddlers'. Granny Long provided public houses with ginger beer which she made from the spring in Spring Lane. In 1887 both Richard Long and Alfred Waight were saddlers. Alfred's nephew 'Toppo' supplied leather goods to the Army Remount Depot at Arborfield; he was also a pall-bearer for Bert Spratley's funeral business.

## **Grinding the Corn**

Too little is known of the intermittent history of milling in Mortimer since the medieval mill fell into ruin. Manorial leases show that the watermill at Pond Farm, West End, was working between 1600 and 1700; the wheelpit can be traced but all buildings have gone. At Wokefield the large Millbarn Pond must once have powered millstones but no mill survives and no history has been discovered. A corrugated iron shed on the West End Brook at Lovegroves Farm at West End was marked on the 1913 Ordnance Survey map as a '*corn mill*' but it was last used as a saw mill in 1924.

Mortimer's windmill had a short life. In 1800 a plot of land on the common was leased by the vicar, Reverend James Morgan, who arranged for the windmill to be erected and a house built for the miller. Four years later when the common was enclosed the surrounding land was planted with pine trees which by 1832 had grown tall enough to keep the wind from the sails. It was probably a small wooden post mill which left no trace when removed in 1837. The miller's house became three cottages when the mill failed, and is still there, once more a single dwelling.

## **Woodland Trades**

During the 19th century there was a large woodland industry centred in and around Tadley and this extended into Mortimer. Trees felled in Mortimer were taken to Ford's timber yard and sawmill in Soke Road. Gangs of men cut down the trees and attached them to a timber bob for the horses to drag from the woods. Among their many skills was stripping bark from the oak trees for the tanning. Sometimes the charcoal burners arrived creating fogs of smoke near Rampton's Lane.

Mortimer Common had several businesses based on coppicing. Before the First World War, Arthur Taylor had a steaming room at the Victoria Arms where he was landlord. Here handles were shaped or straightened for brooms, mops and scythes. He obtained wood from his brother Alfred's turnery behind the Turner's Arms. Ernest Taylor worked at the brick kiln but he also bought wood from his brother so that he could make rakes in his spare time. His little daughter helped cut the rake-pegs.

George Bowman had a wood yard in Spring Lane in 1860. When his son Mark took over he sold thatching spars, hurdles, fencing, bean poles and firewood. Mark's young son George delivered in his horse-drawn cart.

## **Brick-making**

Old field names, such as Kiln Plat at Great Park Farm, reflect the on-site rural brick-making of bygone days. Since then Mortimer has had several brick kilns and many clay pits. There were kilns at West End and Butlers Lands Farms and the large four-kiln complex at Kiln

Farm itself. There were several other small pits supplying clay or hand-made bricks, among them one at the foot of Catherine's Hill worked by 'two old boys'. Mosdell & Lovell's brick kiln which closed soon after the Second World War provided work for four men at the bottom of Kiln Lane. Many thousands of wire-cut bricks were made from the high-quality clay.

## Brewing and Catering

Barnard's Brewery started operating in 1821. Beer was sold to callers with their own stone jars for 8d per gallon and the horse-drawn brewer's dray delivered to local houses. It ceased operating after the First World War.



*Mortimer Brewery in 1921*

The Temperance Hotel catered for more delicate tastes; called *The British Workman*, it was opened by Sir Paul Hunter in 1876. Conveniently situated on the site of what is now Badgers Croft it provided tea or coffee in the afternoon and evening, entertainments in the large coffee room and occasional *beanfeasts* for about eighty people. These took place on the lawn and wagonettes came with customers from as far as Reading.

The much advertised healthy pine-laden atmosphere of Mortimer attracted daytrippers up to 1939. Teas were provided by Mrs Salt, the grocer's wife, at St. John's Cottage. The garden had 'cosy nooks' to attract customers. Visitors could hire pushchairs and bathchairs locally.



The Mortimer Tea Gardens,  
NEXT TO ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.  
Beautifully situated near the Pines.

Fruit, Sweets, Mineral Waters, and  
Ices.

PARTIES of any size CATERED FOR.

Mrs. SALT, Proprietress.