# Back In The Days Of Gaslights

In my childhood after the first world war all the streets in Bacup that were lit were illuminated by gas lights which were lit each night and put out at daylight by a man called a "Lamplighter", who carried a shrouded light on a long pole which also had a hook on the end to turn the tap on and off. Although these lamps had mantles, and glass shades, not many were broken by vandals as the penalties for vandalism were severe, borstal or the birch rod. The latter was doled out in terms of one, two or three strokes, and any of these amounts was enough to deter anyone for appearing in court more than once. Most houses were illuminated by gas, as were workshops and places of entertainment. Some had the type which used mantles and gave a decent light, others by what was called a burner which gave off a naked flame and thus some illumination. It was the habit of the working class to go upstairs to bed by candle-light, a candle in a special holder being used. Some houses, especially isolated ones such as farms, used paraffin lamps, in some of which a mantle was incorporated and gave a good light When a section of road was dug up it was always the custom to have a night watchman on duty to see that none of the paraffin lamps "which showed a red light and were round the edge of the excavation) went out. He was installed in a portable wooden hut about 6' high, 3' wide and 3' deep, and incorporated was a bench seat.

### IRON BAR BRAZIER

He used to sit in the hut and to keep himself warm always had a brazier (a contraption made of iron bars which was made to hold about 3 bucketsful of coke and stood on legs 2' tall, much like an egg cup with leg~ instead, of its normal .shape), round which the youngsters used to stand (and did we keep warm) or sit on upturned buckets or boxes talking to the night watchman. The trouble with sitting on an upturned bucket for an hour or two was that you had a circle imprinted on your backside for a week. If anyone stayed late and a bobby (policeman) came by, he would bundle you off home.

## TRAFFIC NOISES

The clatter of horses hooves and the iron rimmed wheels of the carts they pulled was our traffic noise, with occasional petrol-driven vehicles interceding; life was much slower but, I feel, enjoyed much more. Aeroplanes were a rarity and people ran into the street to watch one slowly fly over in the early 1920s. In these days many people could not afford horse drawn vehicles for funerals, and it was not uncommon to see a horse drawn hearse followed by the mourners on foot walking from Bacup to the Cemetery at Stacksteads. Many types of motor cars were to be seen, mostly chain driven but all had blown up tyres as we used to describe them. Rovers, Rileys, Fords, Arrol Johnston, Napier, Morris, Austin, Daimler, Crossley, just to recall a few, and each make could be identified by its exhaust note. Motor cycles~ too, were to be seen driven by the local lads. Makes such as Rudge Multi, Royal Enfield, Calthorpe, A.J.S., B.S.A., Omega, Scott. Most of all were belt driven, which meant when it rained progress up hills was unpredictable on account of slipping belts. Some had sidecars made of wicker work like baskets and the occupant was exposed to the elements. All pushbikes for general use had sit-up-and-beg type handle bars with 26" frames and 28" wheels with single gear and back pedal brake. Some of the young chaps had racing bikes with bamboo wheel rims and calliper brakes, so named because they gripped the edges of the rim when applied. The Sturmey Archer and B.S.A. 3 speed hubs were introduced in my early days and they were a boon after the previous fixed gear.

### **CYCLING HABITS**

It was the habit, if one had a lightweight or racing bike, to put it away all greased for winter and bring it out again for Easter. Hendrick (flat sided rims) became popular around the mid 1920s. This enabled the calliper brakes to have a :flat surface to rub on when applied. The youngsters used to have a Shaycycle'which had a wooden platform with 4" iron wheels at each end and a steering column, the idea being to place one foot on the platform and propel yourself along with the other foot, or on a downhill sit on the platform and slur your feet. Later came the first miniature 2 wheel cycle called "Fairy Cycles".Kite flying was a popular pastime during the midsummer holidays. Some were bought models, others home made. When one of the supporting sticks broke, it was a case of down to Sutcliffe's joiners at the beginning of Newchurch Road for a pennyworth of kite sticks. You usually got enough to cover plenty of breakages. We kids from Underbank used to go to Angel Meadows (behind Holmes Barn) where the wickets can still be seen where ParishChurch and Zion Baptists used to play cricket to fly our kites, 'and if the wind was in the right direction and we had enough string, our kites would be over the centre of Bacup.

## **SWIMMING ALL DAY**

Swimming was a sport very popular and for 1d you could stay in the pool at Maden baths all day. We often stayed in all afternoon and played follow the leader and in those days there was no diving board, so we used to go in the gallery and climb on the protective rails and dive from there, but if the Baths Manager, caught you, he sent you to your cabin to dress. My hero was Billy Foster who twice swam for England and was champion of Bacup for goodness knows how many years. He taught me to swim as my father, James Read, was a schoolboy pal of his. In my early days galas took place at Maden Lodges, which were situated to the north of Lodge Meadows Estate and west of Warcock Farm, now a playing field. Many a local citizen and unlucky youngster ended their days here.