



History of Business in Thorner 1900-2000

The town of Thorner is an idyllic little town less than ten miles away from Leeds which is steeped in history. First mentioned in the Domesday book, Thorner has grown slowly, preferring to stay as a small rural community and avoiding the population expansion that seemed to plague lots of smaller towns during and after the Industrial Revolution. It has always been in part farming community, with other industries making an appearance over time such as cotton, flax and limestone quarrying just to mention a few. However, Thorner was always a relatively self-sufficient town, its inhabitants performing all of the jobs necessary for a town to run effectively with butchers, doctors, shopkeepers, and bakers merging with the resident farmers to mean that Thorner was, to a large degree, self-sufficient. However, as with all things, as time progressed and as technologies came about and prices for transport fell, the self-sufficiency of Thorner began to wane as more and more people flocked towards the larger population centres. This trend continued until we arrived where we are today, with picturesque towns like Thorner becoming transformed into commuter towns for people who wished to live outside the cities, but not so far enough away as to make it unfeasible for them to travel to these cities to work each day.

However, even with the small towns like Thorner, the issue of just what has gone before is one which can sometimes be difficult to address. The history of such towns is at times sparse due to their small nature. However, Thorner is unlike many other smaller towns due to T.W Brown's book 'The Making of a Yorkshire Village'. This book was written about Thorner and extensively analyses its history, the trends that have been evident therein and the ways in which the community and the town have slowly changed as we have moved through time from Thorner's first mentioning to the present day. From the displaced children from London who were sent to Thorner during the World Wars to the rise of the supermarket and the effect that it had on the village as both a town and as community, the book does a very good job of covering Thorner's history. However, the book, while effective in some areas, lacked in others and as such we were given the task of looking at Thorner and examining the businesses that existed in the village between 1900 and the beginning of the new millennium in 2000. We will aim to do this by examining the period in three main sections: 1900 to 1925, 1925 to 1950 and finally 1950 to the end of our period of study in 2000. In each time period we will aim to examine the trends that are seen in terms of the businesses present in Thorner, as well as the effects and changes that they experienced during the time period that is being examined. By doing this we will aim to be able to create a clearer picture of the types of businesses present in Thorner over the time period in question as well as the changes and overall trends which are also present during the period of our study.

The Rise and Decline of Businesses in Thorner 1900-1925

Thorner at the beginning of the twentieth century was a traditional Yorkshire village; almost all of its income was brought in from within the village and while there were several examples of more industrial business conducted, the vast majority of work in the village could be found on the farms. The village was also still almost entirely self-contained when considering produce, almost all of the village's food as well as other necessities such as clothing and tools were still produced within the village.

In 1900 the so-called 'Golden Age' of Thorner's land was brought to an end as the depression that had started in the late 1870s was still in continuance up until 1914. The chronic weather of the 1870s had reduced crop yields and spread disease amongst many of the farm animals, both of which affected the success and prosperity of the local farms and other businesses; this is illustrated in the following citation.

Landowners, farmers and agriculture workers were first affected but with money short blacksmiths, saddlers, wheelwrights, maltsters, and village tradesmen found their work curtailed. (Brown, 1991, p.135).

Thorner's agriculture was in recession from the 1890's and saw little sign of recovery in its figures until 1911. For example, local farms corn production had fallen from 45% in 1870 to 34% in 1911 and grassland on farms had risen from 41% in 1870 to 51% in 1911. This also affected the numbers of animals that farm owners kept and Brown reports that 'the number of sheep halved from 1891 to 1911' (Brown, 1991, p.136). By this year Thorner had thirty-six farms yet only 5% of agriculture land was owned by its farmers (Brown, 1991, p.136) and the larger tenant farms were owned by Lord Mexborough who dominated Thorner's agriculture; as many as twenty farms were Mexborough farms and very few smallholdings survived as independent units in the village (Brown 1991, p.169).

The agriculture recession had an impact on other businesses, which in a small village often depended on each other's success as portrayed in the following extract taken from Browns book.

By 1901 ten years since the recession had begun the tailors, wheelwrights, rope maker, miller, flax spinner, linen weaver, and cooper of 1881 had all gone. (Brown, 1991, p.146)

The lack of money entering the village had caused these businesses to close and by 1911 there several other small businesses faced closure to. To counteract this in Was little improvement as 1911 the last maltster and numerous masons and masonry workers were represented by a single building firm (Brown, 1991, p.146) in order to increase their chances of survival as a business. Fitting with the small village unity other businesses made other alterations to help with the it chances such as changing their shop's purpose to fit with the changing times. Thorner's shoemaker did this by becoming a shoe repair shop instead of a shoemaker as footwear was beginning to become mass produced elsewhere anyway (Brown, 1991, p.146). Nevertheless, some new businesses were still set up such as 'The Thorner and Scarcroft Nursing Association' and according to Brown it made an outstanding contribution to public health in the community particularly midwifery. However, in 1949 it joined the National Health Services and left the village district (Brown, 1991, p.177).

The period of 1900 to 1911 saw several businesses die out, diminish drastically, or be transformed into other businesses that were better suited to the village. Directories have continued to record trades and crafts in Thorner up until the early twentieth century but are less complete than previous directories. I found Terrence Brown to list a more comprehensive and detailed list of shops and services that he could remember in different areas of Thorner during 1920 as illustrated in the following citation:

Sandhills; Sweetshop and Cattle dealer

St John's Avenue; Doctors (Dr H Tempest).

High Garth; Dressmakers, Sweetshop and Fish and Chip's

Scott Hill; Mole catcher, Doctors, and Blacksmiths

Church View; Wheelwright

Main Street; Greengrocer, sweetshop, painters and decorators, picture framer, drapers and jewellers, baker and confectioner, saddler, shoe and clog maker, general store, plumber and engineer, post office with stationers and printer wine merchant, butcher, sheep and cattle dealer, undertaker and joiner, tinsmith, barber, another shoe shop, repair shop, another fish and chip shop, farrier carrier and a coal merchant. (Brown, 1991, p.181).

This list of businesses includes all the trades and crafts that the village could survive off and many of the villagers felt little need to ever leave the village. It seems the village was still self-sufficient

in 1920 as it had every shop that one would need to buy their day-to-day groceries as well as other necessities like shoes and clothing. Thorner also had many small businesses to help to improve the average resident's day to day experience in the village like the plumbers, painter, and decorators and even a barber as well as having two local doctors. The number of businesses Thorner had for such a small population illustrates how well the village economy used to be as well as how dependent on them the villagers were; in 1901 the population was a mere 916 people rising to 1096 people in 1911 and by 1921 the population had fallen to 1017 individuals (Brown, 1991 p.171).

In 1919 new taxi business was opened by Mr Charlie Maltby who ran taxis from Thorner to the surrounding areas from his home, Pear Tree Cottage. Furthermore in 1922 he decided to begin another transport related business, a bus service which he set up from the yard of The Fox pub. The new was one of the first in the area. This was of course the village's first bus service and for one shilling return passengers could go between Thorner and Leeds (Brown, 1991, p.182) However the new bus service encouraged the local villagers to shop in town where they had the choice of bigger, better shops and so some of the villages shops began to slowly close down as a consequence (Brown 1991, p.182).

Brown reports that 1924 was perhaps the birth date of the social village at Thorner as from that year increasing traffic on the roads made it difficult for children to play' (Brown, 1991, p.171). He also states that this change to some extent begun during World War One as during that period many new inhabitants moved to the village to live rural lives yet commute to work or else retire to the country (Brown, 1991, p.171). Most significantly in August 1924 the last ever 'annual agricultural show' was held, perhaps marking the end of Thorner's once booming agriculture.

Thorner, 1925 -1950

The town of Thorner, a little village situated in between Seacroft and Wetherby and just outside of the expanding city of greater Leeds, is somewhat like most villages unseen but this is why it has become such an historic landmark. It has a wealth of history that dates back to the early 19th century. The settlement has thriving community, all of whom have an abundance of unique yet completely inquisitive stories to tell of the past. Archival records, written histories, and feedback from current local residents of Thorner will be most helpful in writing this story and putting a case forward of how businesses within the town have affected its past and current history. In this section will be examining the period of 1925 to 1950, with aims of looking at the trends that were prevalent during this time in terms of the businesses present and their natures.

When asking a local woman of what she remembers of Thorner, she provided us with a poem, stating 'how she could go on forever and ever, reminiscing and collating her thoughts, it reminds me we were so self-sufficient' (Poem). By divulging in the Archives, one can see that even in the early 20th century, most of the businesses within Thorner were privately owned and self-contained businesses (p. 939). When we asked, the local village committee, they commented saying, "even to this day, everything has always been and still is produced for local use ". Local tradesman and businesses in Thorner, through time, have gained what is needed to become highly self-reliant. Traditional methods used on the farms, such as the "horse and plough" were paramount up until 1939, when the new industrial machines were introduced (Brown, 1991 p.170). As 'Moorfield's farms first tractor was first used 1933' (Brown 1991, p.170). However even with the late arrival of these new machines, a local committee mentioned production was just as good then as it is now it has even seen local businessman, introduce initiatives within the village for no commercial benefit, As in 1922, as previously mentioned, Thorner introduced its own public transport, providing it with 'taxis and buses, long before any village near' (Poem). Thorner is a great example of a flourishing

village, but as a committee member stated, for "the village to keep on thriving, people have to keep contributing'.

The quaint village of Thorner although remaining self-sufficient, it has still managed to modernise through time and by doing this the village has seemed to of grown and grown. The village and locals have noticed and happily accepted certain changes to Thorner over time. With Electricity being added to the local church in 1926 and with heating installed in 1932', provided by the Yorkshire and Harrogate Gas Company from 1938, it has allowed Thorner to move into a much more modern era (Brown, 199, p.182). By modernising, Thorner has become a very social village. As early as 1924, it is recalled being the "birth date of the social village', as then in the 1920's the Victory Hall came to fame' (Brown, 1991, p.171) (Poem). The hall became a meeting place for all ages to socialise and convene with other residents of the village. It had many activities as you could play billiards, cards and dominoes, whist, and dance past eleven (Poem). With the Victory Hall, other institutions were established within the village, as Thorner had 'three pubs it proudly boasted, the Beehive, Mex and Fox' (Poem). This allowed further social integration and for the village to become a tight-knit community that we can still see to this day. When meeting up with the local committee in Thorner, I noticed how close all the members were and how they all knew each other, and although the village has moved on from the 1920's, by accepting change, the village itself has kept its traditional features but yet a is a thriving socially modern community.

Thorner has 'withstood being absorbed' by greater urban Leeds and other nearby cities (Leeds City Council, P. 1). It has been able to withstand, the approaches and advances over time, by industries and brand names that we see everywhere in urban cities around England. I think this is key to Thorner's sense of history and appeal to commuters as they pass through. It has still kept intact its traditional and unique character, which is incredibly rare in this modern and technologically advancing world today. Thorner has been able to resist the intrusion of commercial brands in their town, since becoming a conservation site, which has recently been renewed.

Becoming a conservation site has made it very difficult for brand names and other types of development to increase in Thorner as planning permission is hard to acquire. This has allowed small, local businesses to take over and become the main traders in the village. The poem provided, states the village had, 'four butchers, two bakers, a cobbler, a blacksmith's, a saddler, hardware clothing and Haberdashery° (Poem). When asked what a countryside village should have, images of 2 humble village, with traditional features, and an open community spirit come to mind, but more importantly a great village is one that makes you forget about the hustle and bustle of city life. This is what comes to mind, when you 90 to Thorner, as it is village that has not forgotten about its roots but at the same time has accepted change. It has always been traditional, right down to residential occupations as one local man recalls local businesses offering services such as knife sharpening and having the locally produced milk since the 1930's delivered straight to your doorstep (Committee Member). Mr Brown remembers cattle dealers and local coal merchants with 'The Plumbers, The Garage in the main street...people selling flowers from their garden...press makers, knitters there were many° (Poem).

One of the interesting things to note about Thorner in this period was the fact that during the Second World War it played host to many children Who had been moved out of the larger cities, especially London, in an effort for them to avoid danger. Thorner took in some of these refugees and housed them while the War went on. and while the impact of this may not be easily understood due to the lack of figures available to measure just what impact these new arrivals had, it would also be impossible to discount them. More mouths in the village would mean more sales, which could have had an impact on the businesses present in the town, even it is impossible to accurately measure what impact this may have been, if there was one at all.

The 1950s Onwards:

From the 1950s onwards business in Thorner entered a state of steady decline. With the advent of the affordable car the significance of Thorner changed with its self-sufficiency beginning to wane. Thorner village's location only 8 miles outside of Leeds meant that Thorner and businesses within it changed. Thorner changed from essentially providing for the community in the village and the surrounding parishes, to a village that supported a working population who travelled into larger business centres like Leeds. This section shall look not only at the various contributing factors to decline of business in Thorner from the 1950's onwards, but also the evolution of Thorner, from its state as a traditional Yorkshire's village in 1950 to its present-day significance as commuter village as well as heritage site.

The introduction of a car that is affordable to most members of the public is undoubtedly one of the key factors in the decline of the small-scale businesses in Thorner. Before to the introduction of the affordable car, many small-scale business's prospered within Thorner including two bakers, a hardware shop, and 17 different small-scale farms. The number of businesses currently in Thorner has significantly declined, leaving only two pubs (The Mexborough Arms and The Fox Inn) one restaurant, a post office, as well as small general shop. The car changed the nature of many rural villages like Thorner. The car allowed the average citizen to travel further in a shorter time period which then resulted in the rise of supermarkets, which in turn resulted in the decline of small local businesses. Currently there are two supermarkets just a short distance away from Thorner in either Wetherby or Seacroft. This is not to say that all small-scale locale businesses were ran out of business straight away many businesses managed to continue running, the co-operative opened in the 1920s was able to stay open until the 1970s, other businesses such as a lawnmower shop, and travelling businesses such as an onion salesman, and two different fish and chips vans have managed to make their mark in Thorner over the past fifty years, though few of them enjoyed lasting success.

When considering Thorner it is important to consider the railway system that travelled through Thorner. The railway system brought significant amounts of business to Thorner due to Thorner's position between Leeds and Wetherby. The railway station from the 1950s up until it's closing in 1963 brought a fair bit of business to Thorner, as well as providing a route through which Thorner's excess produce could be sold on to other communities. Jobs the station directly provided included working for the station itself, as well as business for two coal salesmen who started selling in the 1950's and continued to do so until the station was closed down in 1963. The station opened up the trade in Thorner allowing residents to sell on their excess produce, and during the time the station was open provided a brief window during which Thorner's produce was sold outside of Thorner's parish.

A major factor contributing to the lack of business in Thorner was, Thorner becoming a cultural heritage site in 1970. Under Thorner's new status no new buildings could be built in Thorner due to their potential desecration of Thorner's Natural beauty, as well as its significance as an example of Yorkshire's heritage. The reasons given for Thorner's status are that:

Thorner represents the small rural and previously industrial settlement which was once indicative of much of West Yorkshire. With early medieval origins and development into a much more gentrified location, Thorner still retains the feel of a village that is independent and now quite remarkable in Leeds.

(Leeds city Council, 2009 p.2)

While the initial zone given designated to contain Thorner only contained the village a recent alteration to the original zone now we extends to contain a far larger area. (See fig.1) Taking into

account this zone it is not hard to see why few businesses have attempted to build around Thorner especially considering the various other towns nearby that would not require extensive planning permission to build in. The recent expansion of the zone decreases the likelihood of businesses setting up even further since it includes areas well beyond Thorner village's boundaries. Thus, combining the decline of jobs due to the commuters, and the inability to create more than small scale shops in the area, Thorner's decline in local businesses seems logical.

Just as the car reduced the number of small businesses within Thorner, it also had an effect on the local population, over the past 50 years or so Thorner has become an increasingly popular location for commuter families. Physically Thorner is an appealing village surrounded by nature; it could be described as the image of a rural Yorkshire village. The buildings themselves are very traditional the church in particular is considered to be very beautiful and is referenced as such in almost all books that mention Thorner. (See fig. 2). Combined with Thorner's natural beauty is the relatively short distance of eight miles to Leeds, making Thorner an appealing commuter village. Of the current population many individuals have moved into the village in order to commute back into larger business areas such as Leeds, the distance is also significant because it leaves the village of Thorner within the pager radius of St. James hospital making it possible for doctors to live there and still get to work. Another contributing factor to Thorner's appeal to commuters is the local school which has ranked highly in the listings, described by the National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report as 'a good school with outstanding aspects ranging across its spiritual, moral, social and cultural life' (<http://www.natsoc.org.uk/schools/inspection/thornersiamarch06.pdf>) drawing even more young families to Thorner.

It is important to remember that while much of the business conducted in Thorner from the earlier parts of the twentieth century declined from the 1950s onwards, it did not disappear altogether. In the early 1950s and 1960s business's continued much as it had for the previous 50 years, with large numbers of farms several general stores on Main Street through Thorner. Much of this changed in the 1960s more specifically 1963 when Thorner's railway station closed down, this however did not put an immediate stop to most business's and indeed did not stop some businesses. at all. Thorner's Co-operative shop was closed down in the 1970s however other shops stayed open or even opened for the first time in the 1970s. Hardware shops specifically a shop selling lawnmowers opened in the 1970s while other businesses such as the Dairy stayed open until only 10 years ago. Indeed, in more recent years some new business has found its way to Thorner, as mentioned earlier fish and chip vans travel through Thorner every Wednesday and Friday. There are also the two pubs mentioned earlier that have maintained business, and still draw clients, and Thorner's village shop is still open for business and sells all the necessities for village life.

In conclusion it is fair to say that business in Thorner went through its greatest decline over the past 50 years when the advent of the affordable car, combined with the closing of Thorner's railway station resulted in Thorner shifting significance from a Yorkshire village whose business and produce was largely intended for locals, to a village renowned for its beauty and seclusion as well as its significance in Yorkshire heritage.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the histories of the businesses in Thorner are directly linked to the nature of Thorner as a town. From its self-sufficient times to the later period where the introduction of more affordable cars meant that people could move away from the village easily to shop or get jobs. The nature of Thorner changed between 1900 and 2000 and as a result the nature of number of the businesses which were present in the town changed along with it, and we have seen this in our analysis of the businesses. Whereas at the beginning of the Century we saw Thorner fighting the depression along with the rest of the country, as we move on, we slowly see businesses closing or

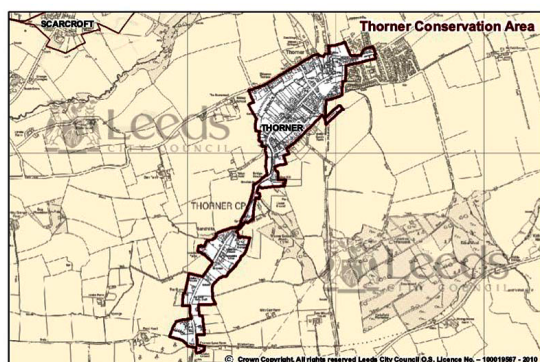
moving into the nearby city of Leeds in an effort to stay afloat. This is then followed by the growth of the 'superstore' and the slow decline of the smaller shops before Thorner finally became a heritage site. With Thorner becoming a heritage site, the town became much harder to expand or adapt for new businesses as well as the fact that the cost to gain planning permission sky-rocketed and as such those businesses which wished to move out to the more rural towns such as Thorner would be more inclined to go elsewhere in an effort to avoid the extra costs and hassle that would be associated with trying to move their business to Thorner. This is one of the more obvious reasons for the decline of businesses in Thorner, although it is not the only one as we have seen while examining this topic.

To conclude effectively we must also look at the types of businesses and the changes that occurred, such as the shift from Thorner being an agricultural and self-sufficient community to the later status that it held of a commuter village. From its days around the 1930's-1940's when it was very much self-contained; we saw both a growth in the population of the village as well as a decline in the number of businesses that were actually present within the town itself. Especially with the closing of the railway in 1964, Thorner witnessed a recession of sorts, falling victim to the growing consumer culture that was sweeping the nation. This, coupled with the increasingly easy nature of transport into the big cities meant that small towns such as Thorner began to lose business and transform into what they nowadays appear to be: commuter towns. This idyllic little village fought hard against the inevitable, with businesses such as the Co-operative staying open even after the closure of the railway station and Thorner becoming a heritage site, but even this was in vain with the Co-op closed a few short years later.

The sense of community remains almost intact, although the influx of new young families who are not native to the area has meant that at times local people who have lived there for their whole lives can feel as though these people are not really contributing to the town in any real way. Is this due to the fact that many of the local businesses closed down in the period we are examining or for other reasons? To be honest, it would be impossible to answer this, but it stands to reason that if there is nowhere for them to shop in the village, then this may well be the reason for their seeming lack of contribution.

Appendix:

Figure 1. An Image of Thorner's heritage site radius, Larger of two boxes depicts the 2009 alteration, smaller original 1970s



version: <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/leaslyploaesmaisal%620and%20management%20plan-pal>

Figure 2. An image of St. Peter's Church, Thorner:



Bibliography:

Leeds City Council (2009) Thorner Conservation area appraisal and management plan

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report (2000) Thorner Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Brown, T.W. (1991) Thorner: "The making of a village" & Thorner and District Historical Society.
Poem (?) Anonymous Thorner resident