

MEMORIES OF CORSTON

Village Life Before World War II

Pearls from Mrs Jewell

"I remember that before school I had to go to Gullock's farm to get the milk night and morning. It was lovely to go into the dairy and watch the milk going through the separator. Sometimes Miss Millie would give you a glass to drink. Another job was to fetch the buckets of water. We had three taps for the village and someone would be up early enough to make sure they were unfrozen-by lighting papers under them."

"The Beer Shop was on the main Wells Road next to the Church and was kept by Mr and Mrs Luffman. On Friday nights, for a treat, we were sent down to get a pig's trotter for supper, which would have been cooked that day. Also Mrs Luffman made lovely faggots. You would take a bottle or jug for the beer."

"At Christmas time the children at school always went to the Peters' house (now St Theras's) and we were all given a shilling, an apple and an orange. We were also taken to Newton Park once a year to dance the Maypole dance on the big lawn in front of the house, and then have tea."

"Mr Fred Allen used to keep pigs in the Close at the back of the houses which is now Tanglewood. It was a busy night for the menfolk when a pig was going to be killed and everyone bought their piece of pork..."

~~Mrs Holloway~~ remembers.....

We had two village shops. Each had a bakery and there was also an off-licence. Chappells of Keynsham took orders and delivered once a week. Mr Skuse the oil man came from Keynsham once a week with his horse and cart bringing paraffin and candles, starch, powder and washing blue. It was often dark when he came. He had a big area to cover. From us he would go on to Marksbury and Compton Dando before returning to his home in Keynsham, often in the dark when he would be the only one on the road.

There was one day -MONDAY- for doing the weekly wash. All water had to be fetched from down the road and heated in a coal-fired boiler. All the rubbish was used to keep the fire going. Only soap was used-that's all there was ! We didn't waste water in those days. It was hard work fetching it and often in winter the first person had to light sheets of newspaper to thaw it.

We had gas lights and small oil-filled Kelly lamps or candles for the bedroom. No water or electricity bills !

Mrs Pomeroy relives the Thirties

A Mr Skuse came round the village one evening a week with a horse and cart selling paraffin, candles, soap and such like. He had a huge tank of paraffin at the back of the cart with a top. When it got dark he used to light the candles in the lanterns each side of the cart. He always had a large bag of currant buns for us children who helped him, but they always tasted of paraffin !

There were tea gardens on the main A.4 at number 34, called "Avon Wood Tea Gardens." A Mr and Mrs Pearce kept them. There was a large sign depicting a spinning bicycle wheel to advertise the fact that cyclists were specially catered for. People walking round the river bank would come up for tea at weekends and would then walk back to the Globe Inn to catch the tram into Bath. My sister and I helped to serve at the Gardens and were kept very busy. We also helped to pick flowers, fruit and vegetables which were sold from there.

In the summer after school we had to take Dad's tea to the fields where he was working -haymaking or harvesting -sometimes as far as Ashton Hill Crossroads. Occasionally we took his breakfast as well and we would stay and have some with him.

Once a week we would walk to Marksbury to visit our grandparents -even when we were toddlers. Mother would let us ride in turn for a short way on the step of our younger brother's or sister's pushchair, but after the age of five we had to walk the whole way.

On Sunday afternoons the Salvation Army Band played on the village green. Also on Sunday the Walls Icecream tricycle cart stopped there with its "Stop Me And Buy One" sign on the refrigerator box. I'm afraid we seldom had one, though.

We often waited under the little window of the Bakehouse by the green as Mr Bennett sometimes used to bake very tiny loaves if there was dough left over and we ate them hot when he passed them out.

When the hanging tree was there the village lads used the large roots that extended into the road as a table and played cards on it. We all used to hide in the tree when it was time to go home to bed, when our elder brothers or Dad would come looking for us.

Mrs Shepherd recollects with a smile.....

"My Gran Smith's name is perpetuated with the apples but it should be tea. Everyone who called had to have tea whether they wanted it or not. I was even called upon to take a cup of tea to a lady she had seen tending a grave in the churchyard. Gran used to be a seamstress for Lady Temple. She used to make and embroider her beautiful petticoats, so we were told."

"On Good Friday Mrs Hanham would get out her huge twin pram, seat Bette in one end and me in the other and push us both nearly into Marksbury to a place well known at that time for primroses. We would come back overflowing with bunches of them to trim the Church. In latter years she became everyone's Gran and although she wasn't as nifty at getting about as in her younger days her hands were never idle. Such was her popularity that one had almost to join a queue to visit her. Always as one left there was another waiting to visit. There was something very special about her that I discovered at a very early age."

Betty Parfrey remembers work and hard times.....

Industry, before the Second World War, was mostly farming and market gardens. The men were mostly employed in agriculture but with a number employed by the big houses.

The market gardens lay in that part of the village running down the lane and along the A.4. I remember the large crops of daffodils, plums and apples.

During the war years especially "The Tea Gardens" run by Mrs Pearce was a popular venue for people from the towns wanting a day out.

Many people remember the 1926 strike when there was a great deal of hardship and work on the land became even more important.

Hard times

The 'Thirties in Corston were for many people a time of hardship. It was common for children to be without shoes and food was sometimes in short supply for some families.

The gentry were often to be found giving food to the poorer inhabitants and tales are told of Mrs Peters sending gruel and soup to mothers during the days following confinement. Mrs Tunwell, the Rector's wife, ran a clothing club where mothers could save a small amount weekly for their childrens' clothes.

Houses in the village were, except for the wealthy, without electricity or water and this persisted in some cases until the 1950's.

Laundry took place in an outside wash-house with a copper heated by a coal fire. After the wash laundry was put through large "mangles" to press out the excess water. It was always washing on Mondays-not on other days. I wonder if this was because the clothes were all changed for Sunday ?

5

Church and Chapel pre-war

Mrs Jewell

On Rogation Sunday we used to have a big procession in the village with a band and the choir, headed by the banner. The procession started on the Green, then went to the bottom of Ashton Hill before finishing at the Village Hall.

The Wesleyan Chapel was in the Barton. Mrs Wright kept it clean and it was a very homely place. Mr Shore from Newton St Loe and Mr Pointing used to take it in turns every Sunday morning to take the Sunday School, which a small number of children attended. We used to have visiting speakers to take the evening service. It was lovely at Harvest Festival

times. We always sang "All Things Bright & Beautiful"-which it was as everyone brought the very best of their garden produce. It was piled high around the altar steps. Then on Monday evenings it was all laid out on trestle tables in the adjoining room and was auctioned to help the Church funds.

All very friendly. It was sad when it closed and was turned into a furniture showroom.

Mrs Shepherd

Rogation Sunday would have us beating the bounds. The choir procession would leave the Church and stop for a little service at four boundary stops. Of course we didn't have to run the gauntlet with the traffic then.

One side of the Church was always referred to as "the Poor People's Side" but Mr Tunwell (the rector) would have none of that and from then on it became the North Aisle.

Harvest Festival brought out the fruit and veg in abundance. Harrils & Bannets both gave very artistic loaves which went to hospitals although some of the grapes went to the sick and elderly in the village. Gran one year had some grapes brought her after which she remarked: "Them gooseberries were lovely !" Grapes were a luxury we never had in our house.

The Sunday School treat to the sea was also a highlight in our lives. It was the only time many of us ever saw the sea - which was either Weston or Burnham, via Cheddar. We travelled in a huge dark green charabanc with the hood down - so if it started to rain we had to stop and have the hood pulled over - like a pram hood. When we reached the top of the Gorge we all had to get out and run behind the coach and resume our seats at the bottom.

I had only ever seen that muddy Bristol Channel and thought all the sea was the same. So when on my seventeenth birthday I was taken to Weymouth and had my first sight of the blue water - which I will never forget - I just didn't want to move away to see anything else. I was absolutely mesmerised and would quite happily have stayed looking at it all day. I've since travelled to many beautiful places but that first sight of the Oh so Blue water at Weymouth is the most memorable.

It was during the war years that there was an acute shortage of boys, so Mr Tunwell the Rector at the time started to recruit girls to the choir. We wore our ordinary clothes - our voices were deemed to be the most important... I sang in so many church weddings that I knew the marriage service off by heart, consequently when I got married I didn't want to repeat each part after the Rector. I just started to ramble on, whereupon John Willie (as he was affectionally known by us younger set) placed his hand on my arm and said: 'Wait a minute, our Peg.'

We had a delightful little lad named Charles Lax who came to sing in the choir almost as soon as he could read and when payday came round he was handed half a crown, whereupon he promptly burst into tears, saying: "I don't want to be paid for singing in God's house." I wonder what happened to him? There was a man of the Church in the making!

To grow up in Mr Tunwell's time... Well, he was a father figure. He had a great talent which came to the fore when we put on plays and musicals in the church hall. With deftness of hand he painted all the changes of scenery. One in particular was a lovely woodland scene. He loved to see the ladies wearing new hats in church. It must have been a disappointment to him when that particular rule was waved

aside during the war.

I well remember him coming out of the church one Sunday and the three evacuees who were billeted at the rectory came running towards him, each one swamping him in their arms. How lucky they were to have been given a home there. I'm sure he and his wife enriched those three girls' lives -as the girls did theirs.

Nurse Monk-the District Nurse- was also our Sunday School teacher. As I struggled to learn the books of the Bible her one saying stuck in my mind: "If ever in doubt, just say to yourself - 'What would Jesus do ?' Yes - a good thought: but it didn't always come up with the answer !

Gladys Churchill was my son's Sunday teacher. I liked it when he used to come home and say "Gladness said this or Gladness said that." A most apt name for a Sunday School teacher, I thought !

We had weekly meetings in the parish room in the rectory of a little group called the King's Messengers. We knitted, sewed and made things to send to missions abroad. We would sometimes sing this little ditty -

Over the sea there are little brown children
Fathers and mothers and babies dear.
They have not heard of dear Lord Jesus:
No one has told them that He is near.
Swift let the message go over the water
Telling the children that God is near.

I thought of this a short while ago in Bath, where a gospel group was singing away trying hard to convert the white populace. So I guess we've gone vfull circle !

Betty Parfrey

Sunday was a day of rest when you were expected to attend Church or Chapel if you valued your good name in the village. You would be dressed in your Sunday Best and would normally attend not only Sunday School but Church as well.

8

The Village School

Mrs Jewell

I remember when I first went to Corston School. We had two teachers and about 54 children. Mrs Oakey was head mistress. We called her "Governess". Teacher Rosie had the Infants' class.

We started each day with hands together and eyes closed for prayers; then the register was called, after which it was hard work. Some of the boys who didn't behave would often get the cane. Mr Parker, the Rector, used to come on Friday mornings to take the scripture lesson.

We had great respect for our Governess. We used to have a garden and allotment show in the village and we all had to enter our writing, paintings and needlework and if your stitches weren't to her liking you would have to unpick the lot and start again.

In the summer our playtimes were spent in the recreation ground opposite the school. In the gate down Farm Lane there was a lovely big old tree with a seat around it. We were happy to play roly-poly down the slope. Then we could have a swing that had a lovely squeak.

Mrs Pomeroy

We had a school teacher who was very frightened of thunder. If we were in class and there was a storm she would pretend to turn out the cupboard, pulling the doors behind her to close them. But even when she was in the cupboard she still knew which one of us was talking or not doing the things we should have been doing.

9
~~Mrs Holloway~~

Corston School, 1926

We had a marvellous Head Teacher: Mrs C.A. Oakey, known to us all as the Governess ! She insisted that we spoke correctly at all times and that the Rector was always addressed as "Sir". The boys always touched their caps when they met the Rector in the village. Church played a great part in our education. We all attended Sunday School and had to learn the collect for the day, and the boys also had to sing in the choir.

The Governess was very keen on music and entered the school each year in the Mid-Somerset Festival. We became famous ! We were the smallest school competing, yet we won the shield outright. So our choir went to Broadcasting House to take part in a programme called "In Town Tonight". It was wonderful just to be going to London, but to go to Broadcasting House and be on the air....!! Some people didn't have a wireless and those who hadn't made arrangements to listen in at a more fortunate neighbour's. There wasn't electricity so accumulator batteries were used.

There were two classrooms in the School. Miss Luffman (Teacher Rosie) taught 5-7 year olds whilst Governess Oakey looked after the 7-14's.

After school we would go to the Church Hall to do country dancing whilst the bigger boys did Morris dancing. They won shields in competitions. Their Sword Dance was quite spectacular.

From about 1930 children had to leave Corston School for their secondary education. After taking the 11 plus some went to secondary schools in Bath. They would go by tramcar. There were no school dinners in those days. Some children walked every day from Corston Fields. No transport for them but it didn't seem to bother them. The trams came as far as the Globe Inn.

In about 1935 Miss Greening came as Headmistress. She lived at Rose Cottage - an ever open door, especially to children. She was a first class teacher of great voice. Well, she was from WALES ! There are some who owe their success in life to her determination that only the best would do.

Wartime Corston

Betty Parfrey

I was at school during the War and life in Corston was very busy. We were either digging for victory, knitting comforts for the troops, saving salvage or collecting money for Spitfires.

Mrs Kenrick, who lived at Brookside, ran whist drives to raise money to buy wool for knitting socks and Balaclavas and these, with other small comforts, were sent to Corston's serving soldiers. It seemed to me that I spent night after night during the Blitzes knitting sea-boot stockings for the Arctic convoys. The wool was smelly and oily.

Every Saturday morning I was part of the salvage team run by Mrs Tunwell, the Rector's wife. We collected every item of paper that could be recycled (the origin of the Green Party ?) The depot was the Nissen hut which at that time ran alongside the Church Hall.

Rest centres were always in readiness in case of emergency and these were full during the great Bath Blitz. One was in the chapel, the other in the hall. It seemed as if no time was wasted during those years either by children or adults: no time in those troubled years for children to be bored. All through the war an army camp was situated at Ashton Hill and soldiers were a very familiar sight in the village. After the war many families lived in the ex-army accommodation because of the housing shortage.

11

Upstairs/Downstairs

Betty Parfrey

There was a strongly defined class structure before the Second World War -gentry, farmers, business people and the working class.

Hill House employed a number of people who were housed either around the house itself or in the Barton.

The Lodge, which is now St Theresa's, with the Peters family, had a large staff.

The Rectory would also have employed several staff..

All these families were much respected. A curtsy or bow would have been in order or, as the term was, "making your obedience."

The Peters' girls' weddings were real high spots. An awning was fixed from the Church gate to the Church door and many remember how all the pansies had to be picked so that they could be used to shower "Miss Pansy" on her wedding day.

Miss Holloway

Captain Ronald Wills lived at Hill House. He was a generous gentleman. He was very interested in the Scout Movement and Y.M.C.A. He played a big part in attracting the Scout Jamboree to Corston. This was attended by the Chief Scout, Lord Baden Powell and his wife, the Chief Guide.

In 1935, on the occasion of King George V's jubilee, Captain Wills paid for the entire village to have a meal, provided by Fortes of Bath. This was followed by a dance in the marquee.

Mr Ivo Peters made the lawns of Corston Lodge (now St Theresa's) available for the marquee. Every child received a souvenir. In 1937 it was King George VI's Coronation and the same generosity was enjoyed again by all the village. Very happy and memorable occasions for us all.

When school broke up for the Christmas holidays we went dressed in our best -very orderly- to Corston Lodge where we were invited into the Ballroom to see the decorated Christmas tree and receive a gift of sweets and fruit. It was a big treat -almost like going to Buckingham Palace to children who seldom left the village.

Mens Sana in Corston Sanitas !

~~Mrs Holloway~~

We had a wonderful District Nurse who did her rounds on a bicycle. Nurse Monk was our nurse for 27 years and she was welcomed as a member of the family at every home she visited. She would call in just to see if all was well with the elderly and children and give advice if she thought one ought to see a doctor. There was then no National Health Service and doctors had to be paid for ! Her district was Newton, Corston and Marksbury -quite a wide area to cover on a bike at all hours of the day and NIGHT in all weathers. It was agreed by all that she should have a car. An Austin Seven, registration number DYB 973 was bought by public subscription.