
The Village Shop

This was probably typical of village shops in general, but it was the only one we had so it was much visited. To anyone looking in from the outside it must have looked something like Aladdin's cave, stocking everything from foodstuffs, sweets, through hardware to paraffin, all stacked, and stored in what looked to us like total chaos. The owner had something of an off-putting manner, certainly when dealing with children, so after you had plucked up courage to enter, and asked for the article required he would go straight to it without hesitation, so there must have been, a master plan if only in his mind. On the rare occasions when the item was out of stock he would collect it from Thame or have one sent from the wholesaler in double quick time - it was not good business for him to lose a sale. He could also arrange the supply of such things as bicycles or other larger items.

I seem to remember that for a time the pub also had a small shop, and the post office also sold cigarettes and sweets.

You always knew when summer had begun as he (the shopkeeper), would always don a straw hat and a linen jacket.

Sometimes, on a Sunday, we would gather halfway down Brickwell Hill just to watch him drive his car down. This he always did out of gear and, as he was a creature of habit, for this piece of entertainment you always knew where and when. Incidentally there had been a brickyard there in some previous time, hence the name.

There were also several mobile shops that came from local larger villages, and as far away as Bicester, and Aylesbury, and I seem to remember one coming from as far as Woburn Sands in Bedfordshire, each week no doubt to provide added choice, or perhaps competition might sound better. These carried much the same as our local shop, plus some carried clothing or other items, much depending on their owner. They would all carry those things deemed to be necessary to maintain life, including a tank of paraffin, plus some luxuries such as toys.

How they found the whereabouts of the stock carried is a bigger mystery than that of the local shop, how they got it all on the vehicle is not easy to fathom either.

There was also a man with a tradesman's bicycle, who came from Waddesdon. He would detach the wicker basket from the bike and carry it from house to house, things like "Cherry Blossom" boot polish, reels of cotton, and clothes pegs would be his main wares.

He was always looking for things to buy. My best army uniform (in magnificent condition and complete with its two stripes) fetched a penny - an old penny at that.

Meat would come by either horse and cart or the more modern butcher would have a van. One with a horse and cart came from Brill, and would take the spare accumulators for charging by a local garage. These were essential to the running of

the radios of course and he would bring them back on his next visit. There were several others who came from different villages, and on different days.

Bread was brought in the same way, also on different days. Because of the frequency of their visits the question of keeping either in edible condition hardly ever arose.

The butcher and baker would most likely issue a calendar at Christmas to their regular customers, as would some of those other traders.

A Greengrocer came twice a week, from Chearsley, but of course most people in the village had large gardens, plus an allotments, so his value would lay in the fact that he brought produce not normally grown at home or when it was out of season. Oranges and bananas were favourite with the children but most household budgets didn't run to such things on a regular basis and of course during the War such things were in short supply, nevertheless he still kept coming regardless of the weather as did all of the regular Tradesmen. On the advent of winter he would bring fresh fish, boiled cod or haddock being a real treat.

He would call at the houses of his regular customers, chanting out in a very quick and loud voice a list of wares carried on that particular day. He normally used a Model "A" Ford van, which carried a set of scales, and its double rear doors could safely be left wide open while he delivered or canvassed for orders elsewhere. At sometime previously he had used a horse and cart, because I clearly remember him putting a nosebag on it when making a longer than usual stop, the "Pub" springs to mind. The Cart had four wooden wheels with iron-shod tyres and a roof, with open sides, which in those days would be perfectly safe, just like the van, pilfering not even being considered. I just seem to recall him using this method of propulsion at odd times during the War. He would always vault that previously mentioned barrier when not carrying his basket of goods; I feel that it was partly due to his influence that got us into similar bad ways.

At one time an Ice Cream Man on a motor cycle and sidecar used to pay us a visit, he came from Aylesbury. The ice cream would be kept in "Dry Ice" and some amusement came from the cloud of "steam" that would issue forth each time he took the lid off the box. We were warned not to stand

close to his exhaust pipe as the great blast and resultant heat could take your leg off.

Later a van also selling ice cream started to come on Sunday afternoons, this came from Oxford, and kept on coming for many years, even after the War.

Thursday night would be fish and chip night, the van with it's smoking chimney could be seen while still a long way off, this first sighting would soon bring everyone out, as sometimes he had very little left, and it really was first come first served.

We "kids" would end up with a halfpennyworth of "oddbits", this of course was the residue from the bottom of the fryer and consisted mainly of very well fried batter, but still, with some vinegar it made a welcome change.

These would always be served in cone shaped paper bags and we must have been some little "horrors ", as I well remember that we used to try, and keep the vinegar in the bag until the chips or whatever had gone, and then suck it through the bottom. The van might first stop some way out of the village to "fry up" ready for the rush, this could be good for some of the latecomers, as many of the busy people who were previously heading the queue would not have the time to wait. It was a busy life for some. I believe the "Fishman", came from Tingewick near Buckingham.

Coal also came by Lorry from railway stations in nearby villages, Quainton or Ludgershall, mostly bagged at the Railway Station before he brought it. As they came on Saturdays we might get a trip on the back of the lorry to and from the station, a real treat.

Some people would join together and have a railway truckload brought to the Wotton Station. This "Do it Yourself" system of course meant a horse and cart being borrowed from a friendly farmer and pressed into service to collect same from there.

First it had to be loaded and weighed, or measured in some form or other to ensure "Fair Play" between those participating. Next the horse/horses had to be persuaded to do their bit up the steep hill, before unloading could take place. The hill to "Lower End hill", known as "Church Hill", was very steep, so after climbing up from the station you had to go down and up again.

The path to the council houses was also very long, and in places quite steep, I remember carrying sacks of potatoes, explained later, along this path when I was about fifteen. This was doing it the hard way, and required "all hands to the pump" to complete. At sometime it would have to be transferred into sacks or wheelbarrows to enable it to be taken to the waiting bunker, no doubt at the end of the day it would be considered to be worth all of that effort.

Later on in the War trucks of "pig potatoes" would come the same way, these were dyed purple and declared unfit for human consumption. They were ready bagged, but much the same hard work was involved to get them home.

Once a week would come the Draper, and he could also supply suits made to measure back in his shop some five miles or so away at Waddesdon. If such an item was required, a trip on the bicycle for fitting was called for. I remember going for a new suit for that previously mentioned confirmation, oddly enough I also remember that this was the day that an R.A.F. funeral took place in Westcott churchyard, there being several New Zealand airmen buried there.

One day the drapers van decided to go home without him, suddenly running off down the steep road until it turned onto a high bank, ending up on it's side blocking the road. Not being very heavy it was only a matter of rounding up some willing helpers to put it back on it's wheels and all was restored to normal.

There were two other Tailors who were also Postmasters, one in Ludgershall and one in Waddesdon, they dealt in high class handmade suits, and each had their names engraved on the buttons used. These buttons were reputed to be guaranteed that they would not come off during the life of the garment, which in turn had a life that would see most of their owners "off". The purchase of one of these would

require several trips for fittings, and in those days they would be made to be worn with gaiters, the height of fashion indeed.