

NEWSLETTER

Colwall Village Society

SEPTEMBER 2016

Revealing Our Heritage

World War One Postcard Pictures of Colwall



European War – South Wales Mounted Field Ambulance at Colwall – March 1915 © TILLEY, LEDBURY



European War – South Wales Mounted Field Ambulance at Colwall – March 1915 © TILLEY, LEDBURY



European War.—Wounded Soldiers at Brand Lodge Hospital, Nr. Malvern. Feb. 1915.

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Concluding Episode of REFLECTIONS by Lorna Cook

Indoors

The Back Kitchen

An area about six foot wide running the full length of the house was covered with a corrugated roof which ran all along the back of the house. Under this 'roof' you would find the imposing black, heavy latched back door. About six to eight yards outside, from this back door, was the substantially built 'earth toilet' with a plain wooden seat that I had to scrub every Saturday - on the back of the door hung by binder twine (a type of string commonly used on the farm) were neatly cut squares of newspaper for 'personal use'!

Before entering the house through the back door, on the left, was a large old fashioned pump, which took at least forty forceful pumps before getting a trickle of water. When it started, Dad had to continue the struggle until he had filled three enormous buckets. These had to be taken indoors and placed safely on a strong table, to last over twenty four hours. When water was scarce over summer time, one of my brothers would use a shoulder yoke to fetch two buckets full, sometimes more, from the pond up the lane, for my Mum to do the weekly wash.

To the right of the back door was a big strong box, storing dry firewood, twigs to light the fire and logs to keep it going. In winter, the box was topped up daily, as the open fire was our only means of cooking and heating. Nearby stood the mangle, which (if one of us was at home) we would turn the handle, while Mum fed the wet washing through to squeeze out a lot of the water. It was a very difficult job to do on your own. This half dry washing was rinsed and put through the mangle again. On a good blowing day, the washing would dance in the wind getting dry in time to be out back on the beds - if it was a wet miserable day, the washing was dried on the fire guard, in front of the ever present fire.

Lifting the latch of the back door, made heavy by the cast iron hinges, you would step onto the red flag stone floor of the back kitchen. On entering this long narrow room, you would be greeted by a bucket of grubby washing-up water saved for the pigs! A table, occasionally scrubbed, was next, holding the washing up bowl, which was also used for us to wash ourselves, our 'smalls', our vegetables, the dishes and whatever else needed washing!! On the window sill above the washing up bowl was a collection of face flannels, tooth brushes, sometimes paste (we often used salt instead), dishcloths, soap (sunlight or carbolic) - both very harsh on the face but we all surprisingly grew up with really good skin! We also washed our hair in those harsh soaps and were complimented on its shine, probably due to using rain water!!

Next were two big coal buckets - one filled with coal knobs, the other with slack (a fine coal powder that was put on the fire once the coal was red hot). This gave out a lot of heat that would keep the fire burning all night. Further along the kitchen was an original 'Bakers Oven' which we used once a year on Christmas Day. As that day dawned, there was great excitement - the oven was lit with great ceremony, just once a year, to cook the goose! This oven was meant for baking bread, but my Mum never used it for that purpose - it took too long and needed a lot of fuel, time and labour to produce a loaf. My brothers collected dry twigs and any small pieces of wood - getting the oven to light was not an easy task as a lot depended

on the way the wind blew over the chimney and if the boys had managed to get sufficient really dry wood. When hot the remaining coals were removed and the goose shoved into the deep oven with the aid of a long spade. Later, potatoes to roast, cakes and mince pies were added to bake. For us, children, it was an exciting day of celebration. It wasn't so for my Mum - she was exhausted after all the extra work she had to do in the days around Christmas time.

Next to the Bakers Oven was a small open fire that was lit in the winter to keep our old farm hand, Jimmy, warm. Often, bubbling there on a small fire was a big saucepan of small and misshapen potatoes, too small to bother peeling but excellent to give the poultry hot on cold winter days. We sometimes pinched a few as we thought they were quite tasty - maybe because they were forbidden!

I remember Jimmy as an old fellow in worn out cords and a shabby jacket! Jimmy slept in the Granary, which though part of the house, was a separate room, approached from the outside. He slept under empty hessian sacks that had originally been filled with animal feed or seed corn, and an old blanket. He was surrounded by sacks of corn and seeds, probably also in the company of mice!!

There were so many uses for those old empty hessian sacks - according to their weight, heavy ones became horse blankets, shoulder capes to protect the farmer from a downpour, or house rugs. Thinner ones could be used as rough hand towels or successfully made into rag rugs. Any old worn fabric was cut into narrow, short strips, hooked through the hessian, to make a rug to scatter on the cold tiles. These were welcomed as they kept our feet off the cold tiles!

Dad's shaving station was at the end of the Back Kitchen - his leather razor sharpening strop hung beside a mirror in the centre of the window sill, which gave the best natural light in the house. On the windowsill stood a shaving mug, complete with a very dangerous cut throat razor, a shaving brush and a special stick of shaving soap. This area was sacrosanct! I could never understand why Dad got so angry when I placed a jam jar of lovely bluebells on 'his' windowsill! The agony of 'the hair cut' was 'executed' (probably the right word!) in that area by Dad - Oh how I hated that experience, although I often got compliments on the results!

On the shelf above the windowsill was a big block of salt - small blocks were not sufficient. Housewives used lots of salt in their cooking as well as for preserving meat and vegetables. Nestling next to the salt was a jumble of packets and bottles and potions for sick animals. At the end of the kitchen was where Mum feathered chickens and skinned rabbits - near Christmastime, she also dressed geese and ducks. She was well known for her expertise in this area, although I know she disliked doing it but knew it was a helpful form of income at that time of the year. We children had to then lug these geese, chickens or ducks, across the fields or along the country roads to deliver them. We didn't mind though, as it was a treat to go into these warm, beautifully decorated houses and we got sweets or chocolates for our trouble! In spite of all Mum's money problems, she managed somehow to put a tangerine, some nuts and golden wrapped chocolate coins in our stockings that we had placed expectantly on the landing...

In the back kitchen behind a mysteriously curtained door was a cellar full (at least it seemed to me!) of enormous cider barrels! One or two were for common consumption, a weaker one for the kids and less favoured visitors and another to impress important guests! The cured sides of bacon hung from the ceiling in the kitchen. The hooks they hung from were especially fixed into the ceiling for that purpose, when the house was built many years before. The shorter hams hung in the living room, the room we always referred to as the kitchen.

The Dairy

Turning right from the back door, you entered the dairy, another long, narrow room about the same size as the back kitchen. Three lead shelves were along one side. The lead shelving kept the milk that stood there, cool. In two of these were large, shallow pans to which milk was added daily for a week. The cream always rose to the top - my Mum then skimmed it off with what looked like a saucer with holes in and a small handle. Later, we graduated to a separator which was a machine that separated the milk from the cream by centrifugal force - it was much quicker and more efficient. We used the skim for drinking and cooking. Mum gave up making butter after many years - it was hard, time consuming work and made very little profit. After that, we sold our milk to a large dairy - a lorry picked it up daily from the main road at the end of the lane. Each morning, my brothers took the milk in big metal milk churns, to the main road. It had to be there quite early so it meant getting up early to fetch in the cows and milking them. The milk churns were loaded onto a big lorry and clean churns were left. If we missed the lorry, the milk could go bad if it was a hot day, which would be another financial setback. In the third lead area in the dairy, many items were stored, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, milk and cream, which all needed to be in a cool place.

The Living Room

Now into the living room, where two or three hams hung on the large cast iron hooks and there was always a 'spare' hook reserved to hold our Christmas decoration - a large mistletoe bough! During the summer, as well as in winter, a fire burnt merrily in the open range, which was the only supply of heat for cooking - even when we were so hot, the fire had to stay alight! For meals, we always sat up to the large kitchen table, which was covered by patterned 'oil cloth' (similar to a plastic one today). An oblong striped coconut mat lay on the floor in front of the fire, allowing a carpet of dust to gather beneath.

Of course, with no electricity, there could be no vacuum cleaning! Sweeping with a hard brush was done only once a week - it was hard work and caused so much dust!

Sundays was the night for baths! The tin bath was filled with hot water every Sunday night! The water wasn't changed, just topped up with more hot water. Kettles and saucepans bubbled away on the hob ready to heat up the water as it cooled. Mum and Dad bathed and washed our hair and dried us in order - girl, boy, girl, boy, ending with my younger sister. I wondered how clean she ended up as she was always the last of five!! Bathing also involved 'singing'! Dad had a wonderful tenor voice - we all sang hymns until we had exhausted our repertoire! We then continued with songs well known at the time such as 'Loch Loman', 'Swanee River' and 'Down at the Old Bull and Bush'! Bathing in front of the fire accompanied by singing, gave Sunday nights a really special feeling.

The Parlour

We would need to search through several coats, cluttering the door, to get into a very small hall, from which rose steep stairs and a door to the 'parlour'. A harmonium stretched along one wall - it did squeak a little but we never managed to squeeze out a tune!! The round wooden table that tipped up straight, taking up very little space was a favourite of mine. A glass-fronted cabinet was full of knick-knacks, often small china mementoes brought back for my Granny from the seaside or other places visited by friends or relatives. Extra bits and pieces were strewn on the chest of drawers or on a hanging corner shelf!

Upstairs

Climbing the white wooden stairs, which I scrubbed each weekend, we arrived on the upstairs landing. There were five doors here - three bedrooms and two 'box' rooms! One of the bedrooms was the 'girl's bedroom' - the three of us slept in there together, the oldest in the single bed whilst my younger sister and myself shared a double bed. In winter, we had old coats on the beds as well as thin old blankets. House bricks warmed in the oven and wrapped in worn woollies, were put into our beds to keep us warm! The lucky one (my older sister!) had a stone hot water bottle which held the heat longer. With the cosiness of a feather mattress and snuggled up to my younger sister, I was never cold. In winter, the room would be freezing, the frost patterns on the window truly beautiful, but we dressed too quickly to admire them! There was a small fireplace in this room but this was only lit if someone was ill, otherwise a small smelly paraffin stove was used. It makes me feel embarrassed now when I think that we had to use a 'guzunda' (potty under the bed!) during the night, if we needed to, as none of us were prepared to go out across the yard to the toilet!

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

In my mind, I have ambled around my childhood, getting distracted, wandering hither and thither as something catches my eye, bringing back so many memories.

Looking through this tale, I realise you must be aghast at the mention of the poverty and the apparent dirty conditions that we lived in. I didn't notice this whilst writing as it was just 'normal' to us and the people that we knew - it was how we lived, unless you were rich. In spite of those conditions, interestingly enough we were seldom ill.

In 2010, my own daughter took me back to visit Hoe Farm, which I had left in 1947. Hoe Farm is now a beautiful country house...

Lorna Cook

Future Talks

19th September 2016

Edward Nash – 'Malvern Water Site Development'

23rd January 2017

Peter Sutton - 'William Langland; Poet of the Malvern Hills'

24th April 2017 [AGM]

Penny Platt – 'The History of Cider'

From the Editor

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Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are **CONTRIBUTIONS!**

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