

Rod Mattock

There is not very much of great interest during my period living in Butleigh, I was seven years old when we moved to Higher Hill Farm in late 1945, my Dad Tom working for Jack Whitehead, who lived at Lower Hill Farm. The farm had housed evacuees [see "Somerset Voices" 2010 Ann Heeley and others, for pictures of Butleigh evacuees] during the war and was in a pretty bad state - no electric, one cold water tap and an outside toilet (a wooden seat with a bucket below). Food rationing did not really affect us as we had plenty of garden veg. our own milking cow and pigs. We used to churn our own butter from clotted cream and, when there was surplus milk, make cheese. Dad had been a cheese maker in his previous job. Monday was always wash day when Mum would light up the copper to heat the water and in the evening it was bath time in a tin tub in front of the fire, my brother first then myself, Mum next and Dad last. He used to top up with hot water in between each person so Dad had the most water but it was becoming a bit murky by then.

Cooking was done on a huge black range that used fill the house with smoke when the wind was in the wrong direction. We used to have a butcher (Mr. Otton), a baker and fishmonger call on us. The local Co-op would collect a shopping list and deliver the goods a few days later.

Pocket money in the summer was made in the fields stooking corn and in the autumn picking up apples for cider making at six old [pence] a sack full.

Jack Whitehead was very much a gentleman farmer (ref. British Legion picture in 'Picture Gallery') who spent most days being chauffeured to local markets cattle dealing. The names of workers on the farm in the 50s who's names I remember are, brothers Charlie and Bill Pope (Charlie was married to Dads sister Gladys and their son Gordon lives in the village High Street), Joe Small, Harry Pike, Joe Lang, Eddie Davis, "Starkey" Knight, Len Higgins, Alfie Higgins and George Davey.

I started school in the old infants school, now converted, in October 1945, before moving to the present building under tuition of Miss Barker, a spinster who lived in the school house with her mother. Standard of education was pretty poor, come eleven plus exams I didn't have a clue how to do fractions or decimal points! At age eleven you were bussed to either Street Secondary Modern or, if you had passed the 'eleven plus', Elmhurst Grammar School.

Winter evenings were spent reading or listening to the radio, Dick Barton was a favourite. Having no electric the radio had a heavy accumulator which needed regular charging. This was done by Mr. Curtis who ran the village garage. I spent a few years in the Church choir with the Rev Rosser Jones who liked his tippie, I was also a bell ringer under guidance of Eddie Davis who worked at Higher Farm.

Christmas was always a happy time at Higher Farm. We held a family party every year. My mother Daisy Thyer was one of twelve children and dad was one of five, so there were was a lot of us, but we always had a great time with party games and songs around the piano. The men would go off to play cards in another room, sometimes they were still playing when I arose the next morning.

I left school at fifteen and worked for C&J Clark. Sadly Mum died in October 1956 and in December I was called up for National Service in the Somerset Light Infantry. During my two years away Jack Whitehead died and the two farms were sold as separate entities. Dad had moved to Kingweston working for Alfred Sherrin, brother of Ned, and was re-married to Jack's Housekeeper.