

CHAPTER VI.

Water Lake - The ford – The bridge - Perry Street - The Butter Factory – South Chard – Chard Junction - The Hardware Store – Shopping - The river bank – Cottage gardens – Village & Family Life – Kitchen garden – Chickens – Bread and Jam for tea.

Harry Collins was lucky in his choice of home. Others had to go to the village pump or collect rainwater.

Rosalie Cottage had an abundant supply of clean sparkling water that never dried up even in the hottest summer. The new family had their first child Foster Fred a year after they moved in, in 1892. Thereafter they were blessed by the birth of fourteen more children, two being twins, over the next twenty-four years. Eight eventually married and six died whilst still young.

The cottage was of later build than their neighbour's thatched homes, with a tiled roof, occupying a triangle of land between stream and road ringed on two sides by a low stall. The remaining side an eight-foot high grassy bank peppered with an abundance of meadow flowers and fern, which when young has bright green fronds. At its foot runs a deep but narrow, gravel-bottomed, fast flowing brook - fed by numerous springs. This also drains the water running off Storridge Hill – the highest point around, and Monkham Down. Close to the cottage, the brook's edge was lined with large stone blocks prevents the water overflowing when in flood. Just over the small lane at the bottom

of the garden was Mr Jaco Parriss' flint sided, tile-roofed cottage - put shape to the corner with Perry Street, built directly opposite the school, on the corner of St Margaret's Lane.

The brook, called 'Water Lake,' not a lake at all but a slow stream, provided clear, sparkling water, with its shoals of minnows and, lower down, watercress beds; gave fresh water for the household...whilst being a convenient refrigerator for milk and butter in the summer. Its waters irrigated the kitchen garden, filled the chicken's bowls and flushed the privies. Its rushing waters were slowed, lower down its course, by widening out to give space for untamed horseradish, brooklime, marsh marigold and crowsfoot. Its waters and wetland harvest explains why the cottage might have been built there in the first place.

While our family were on holiday we boys, up early - when excitement refused to allow us to linger in a warm bed, were out in the garden drawn by the temptations of the stream. The early morning sun's rays caused the rounded pebbles laying at the bottom to shimmer... the stream with its crystal clear water appeared like cut-glass, so sharp the shapes. The water, corralled by the edging stones on one side and the bank on the other, passes the backs of the cottages to enter a large pipe - that takes the water under the road bridge, and onwards towards Axminster. This convenient water had another use; carts for farm and home use had wooden wheels, even though having iron tyres fitted. One of the purposes for village ponds was to keep the wooden wheels from becoming too dry – shrinking.

By turning left out of the front gate, you could follow the course of the stream under the road bridge – a ford when the road flooded. The fording place at the foot of the rise in Perry Street was wide and a water splash for the passage of carts. Above, the stone arched bridge, its parapets polished by the sleeves of countless travellers - carries the road that grandfather and his two sons took each evening... that led to the Poppe Inn. The water flows out of the pipe and swirls about creating a spreading pool - before the water - penned in once again, conforms to the line of the bank to continue its chuckling way towards the coombe.

Milk was always in plentiful supply; when my brother and I knew granddad he worked at the Wilts, United Dairies, butter factory, as did his son Hector, and had 'an arrangement' with the dairy.

Anything extra came from relatives who worked on the land or neighbours whose gardens produce a surplus. The dairy farm milked its own cows; filling the sterilized milk churns with fresh milk, to be delivered to each house in the village. The gaily-painted horse-drawn milk float – a two-wheeled cart open at the back with a step, for the driver holding the reins. It held a number of churns; the largest had a tap from which the white coated milkman, in formal peaked cap, filled the offered jug. When delivering to the door he carried the milk in a bucket, which he ladled out in pint or half pint measures. The horse knew the route and each house on the round... the milkman walked behind...

The farm worker's lunch consisted of cheddar cheese and a large slice of bread and pickled onions - to be eaten in the field being worked on, or in the barn, first putting the nosebag on his horse... The milkman, usually in two-pound wedges, also delivered the cheese. The food was mainly homegrown and seasonal coming from Grandad's kitchen garden. The diet never changed from one year to the next. It was fine when picked early in the season but proved to be hard tack later on when the beans old and stringy. What wasn't eaten went into the chicken bucket; they did not seem to mind!

Potatoes were the staple fare hardly ever mashed or roasted and not often cut up. They were plonked onto your plate with a knob of butter and liberally, tapped, knife-full of salt. The rhubarb bed provided a continuous supple - like the potatoes, great taken early but a bit hard, course and stingy later on. Soon after the main crop of rhubarb, came the red and black currants or granddads prize gooseberries that seemed to last and last – gooseberry pie, tart, fool, pudding and jam. New french green beans, runners, peas and mange tout.

The mushrooms from the field over the bank, the blackberries from the straggly hedge by the bridge and the wild apple up the lane next to the stile. Each year they gave their crop for us children to pick grandma to cook. Whatever we brought home went into the pot. It was never wasted.

It was a regular meal, to have roast chicken, one of the flock, taken from the bottom of the garden. It hung outside the backdoor ready to be plucked. No one could strip a bird quite like grandma who had it done in a trice. When cooked my brother and I claimed a leg each and as a special treat the parsons nose.

The shelves in the lean-to kitchen were packed with kilner jars. Either empty ready for filling or bearing their contents like a chemists shop. Most would bare blanched plum, greengage or damson. The bead-fringed muslin lay over the sugar jar above the curly treacly-coloured flypaper swaying in the breeze from the open door. Bearing testify to their worth.

I close my eyes... imagine pressing the catch to the garden gate... start to walk up the brick path... Then, smelling the box hedge, step into the hall to be greeted by yet another smell - now what is it...? It is a comforting smell, perhaps of damp wood - slightly musty, could be old clothes. I go on... into the living room, now it's stronger, like a bonfire - of burnt wood and ash, with a hint of lamp-oil and tobacco...

There was no time to linger – to stand and stare. Grandma would not let you stand idle. There were the eggs to collect, the chickens to feed and the washing to put out. Have you cleaned your-shoes-put-your-pencils-away-hung-up-your-jacket-made-your-bed-and-emptied-the-pail... all said in a high-pitched cackle, with waved pointed finger like an orchestra conductor. There was no argument or discussion it was best to seek out grandpa in the shed and helps chop the wood.

Tatworth village shared shopping facilities with South Chard and Chard Junction. Boasting, amongst others, Stoneham's Store the newsagent, the fresh fish man came always on a Friday, and there was Bradford's warehouse, that sold all sorts of farm implements and an assortment of ironmongery... Fowlers animal feed... then, by turning right out of the garden gate... up the road... past the school on the left, to Lacombe's Store [*Ken Lacombe, a saw sharpener, was married to*

Ivy, mum's younger sister], close to the Baptist Chapel, where my brother and I bought our sweets – at a penny a bag! The days' choice selected from large colourful glass jars placed on numerous shelves, which ran round the inside of the shop – on all the walls... the better sweets, cost tuppence, weighed-out on antique brass scales, then, poured into cone shaped paper bags.

Further, up the road – over the bridge – lead to 'Crossways' – a name given to the meeting of several roads forming a five pointed star. In the centre of the road an imposing fir tree, similar to that planted in the churchyard, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Jubilee 1887. The doctor's house rested on one corner... a large imposing house, which was named after the place. The most frequented hospital was the local cottage hospital... Doctors were reluctant to send patients, not wishing share their fees. They were expected to set broken bones, attend to all minor operations, dispense and run a surgery. The Post Office and Wellington's Stores supported two further corners... whilst on another, an orchard - with delicious apples.

Two farms close by; both with their own dairy supplied the dairy produce to the village. Board & Son, the butcher, slaughtered their own pigs delivered meat by Hackney - pony, and smart high dogcart, taking orders twice a week. The baker baked their own bread which they too delivered by cart. Stan and I made our way to Lacombe's Store for our gob-stoppers, sherbet lemons and dabs, acid drops, icing sugar cigarettes and liquorish pipes. They were shaken from large glass bottles into the scales to be weighed out. Each of us had two ounces placed into cone shaped paper bags.

What motor cars there were in 1935 all had an interior of upholstered leather with carpeted floors; plaited silken hand straps, plated ashtrays and polished wood dashboards...? Many built with an open top, able to be covered with an erectable hood, with mica windows, called an open-top tourer. Although they had starter motors the battery was often too low on amps to turn over the engine, especially in cold, wet weather... thankfully all were provided with a starter-handles - tied up with a strap. When starting from cold the choke [butterfly valve in the carburettor used to stop the flow of air] had to be pulled out. Frequently this tended to return to the open position so had to be held out. This proved to be almost impossible if you were on your own and had to turn the engine over by hand... it was then a question of who could turn over the starting handle and race round the car before the choke went back. The battery was kept on the running board as was petrol can and a spare wheel. When travelling up a steep hill it was important not to stall the engine when changing gear for the hand brake was not strong enough to stop the car from rolling back. A block of wood in the back was kept handy for such occasions. As there were frequent fogs the windscreen was kept fully open to see the road ahead. This meant for a very cold journey.

Shopping for household items: clothing, materials, furniture and kitchen utensils meant a trip into Chard by horse and carriage, later there was a bus service, which allowed small items to be carried.

The roads and lanes were ditched regularly to drain the fields... many having their own spring and watercourse, to carry away the water to brook... stream and river. Most of the vehicles passing over the bridge travelled at the pace of the horse and cart.

In the meadows, further down-stream – towards the Coombses – where the sheep graze as they will in the hollows on the hill-side, the spring waters irrigate withy and osier-beds - the produce of pollard willow trees that provided the village with materials for green and brown – with or without bark, wand, switch, rods, poles and stave.

The edges of the bank are not clearly defined, the verdant growth of rich tufted grass soften the edges and provide a haven for the dragonfly. Here and there, is stunted and broken willow leaning over the water trailing their slender arms that causes the water to divert and reform? Rushes grow in clumps, which give colour, and diversity separates the decayed branches from weed and lily. The chaffinches and sparrows abound for they perch in their dozens chattering away giving a sharper top register to the drone of bee and click of the cricket. The ducks dabbled... to suddenly

plunge tails-up to feed from the weed... or stood, on one leg, to appear asleep... made soporific by the sun.

The willow provides the villager with osier and withy but the field and roadside hedges contributed most for hedging stakes, fence poles and hurdles. The rich crowns of chestnut, hazel, ash and willow in the lanes tell of past harvests by itinerant Gypsies, bodgers, basket makers and woodworkers... whilst the stick maker eyes the furze, debating its worth. Each piece of woodland known locally for its special use. Birch twigs as strainers, split Beech for tent and clothes pegs and cut for chair seats, Larch for ladder poles, Oak for staves, Ash for hurdles, Hazel for wattle, Ash and Elm for wheels... all known - where grown and how accessible. Further away - behind the hills and valleys, the fallow deer graze, their young calling to their mothers... sounding like the cry of gulls... their fathers - the stags, round up their hinds burping and grunting like pigs!

Over the bank, that bordered the stream... and into the field - abundant with wild flowers, the damp tufted grass wetted our knees and soaked our socks and shoes. There grazed the bull - its nose ring green and wet... guarding the tea-plate sized mushrooms ... that rewarded the brave early birds...!

During our summer holidays, my brother and I would go mushrooming with either Aunts Ivy or Florence [*Florence was grandmother's sister married to Uncle Wilfred in 1945... the same year Ivy married Ken Larcombe*] Ivy and Ken lived over the road in White Cottage, next to the school... their daughter was tragically killed in a cycling accident, when a teenager.

At the cottage mother would be helping grandma with the preparations for breakfast. The results of our gathering were taken from the trug to be eaten.

Cottages in 1935 had no cookers, as we know them today, fridges, washing machines, lights or electric heaters. There was no indoor sanitation, main drains, bathrooms or toilets; no tissue paper, gas or telephones, few cars... no aeroplanes flew overhead and no plastic, building blocks, composition wood and no masonry drills.

. Later, mother would take us gleaning - corn for the hens; picking damsons, blackberries and apples from the hedgerows for grandma to cook for dinner; then later on in the year cob nuts were collected to be dried ready for cracking at Christmas. We always had a slice of bread and butter with the pudding instead of custard or cream. In some instances, the tart was eaten before the main course to dull our appetites.

The garden, corralled within the four-foot, knapped flint wall – that flanked the road... gave space for three plots - one for each of the cottages. All held neatly grown vegetables, and flowers for the house... the varieties always are the same: larkspur, pinks, sweet-williams, wallflowers, hollyhocks, London pride and lilies. It was the wife's preservers to look after and plant the flowers for cutting.

The cottage gardens, at the turn of the twentieth century - in all country villages, did not boast a lawn, for the inhabitants had to make maximum use of the ground they had. Mowers were after all too expensive and considered a luxury. Perhaps there may have been a patch of grass, cut by a scythe or grass-hook that graced below the washing line, a play area for the children - where mother parked the pram, with the sleeping child...

The kitchen garden plots, for this was really what they were, became very fertile, through much labour over many years, plus: an annual dressing of swept chimney soot, a frequent scattering of road and field manure and applications of well-composted kitchen and garden waste... the result being 'finely textured and black'.

Many of the village cottagers were farm labourers earning perhaps £1.50 per week. It was almost impossible to maintain a family on such a low sum. That is why these gardens had to be productive - only had narrow cinder paths flanked by brick or tile. The man of the house worked the productive side of the garden and it was his job to see that a further crop - ensuring correct

composting - allowed this to happen, followed on the produce harvested. Most of the villagers were in competition with each other to see whose plot was the most productive... this did not prevent seeds being exchanged or given away and cuttings passed on. Digging and sowing went on late into the evening making use of every moment...

In unison, the runner beans canes were formed 'in line', the onion sets proudly flew their flags of browning leaves and the earthed-up potatoes - perched on top of pin-neat banked rows, again, marching in serried ranks, just behind bushes of red and black current, gooseberry and wired raspberry canes. All these dietary delights were hemmed in, by a neatly cut, eighteen inches high box hedge. Even today, I cannot pass box without that scent reminding me of granddad's garden - a picture of neatness and colour... Although the family had very little money, the garden landscape and ordered existence, declared continuity, rustic comfort and bucolic charm.

The possession and upkeep of a good vegetable plot - that produced vegetables all the year round, made good economic sense... that it will also form a creative pastime, an essential part of rural life. Necessary digging and planting regulated every month of the year - Seeds had to be ordered and the ground prepared. Every part of the country, county and town had its own special produce - those things that grow best. You have only to look around at neighbouring plots and hedgerow to see what flourished. It is far better to ask established gardeners what fruits best, and when to plant out. Eventually you too will be an expert - on your particular plot. Do not forget, the greenhouse and cold frame are necessary adjuncts to any vegetable garden... for it saves money, labour and time to prepare your own seedlings... At the end of each growing cycle, a selection of each vegetable should be set aside - to provide seeds for the following year... cutting, dividing and layering would also multiply your stock. This sound advice was followed and advocated by my granddad... one of his daily topics of conversation; the only other, was a comment on the weather that, whatever the barometer declared, 'Was detrimental to good health and sound crops...'

Looking out of the front door - to the right, just behind the privy, lies a small orchard - bearing desert apple, pear and plum... each contributing their own delicate blossoms in late spring - before the bulk of the flowers display their blooms - each to their part in the flowering season. Up against the garden wall, hidden by the trees, the compost rots... those parts the chickens fail to peck... The garden provides vegetables and fruit for the whole year... augmented by the fruits of the hedge.

Chicken runs take up the bottom of each plot, fenced off with wire - the nesting boxes built-up to form a backdrop to each garden end backing onto the stone boundary wall, which separated the street and side lane, from the garden.

Most people in the country kept chickens. Special containers were kept in the kitchen, or just outside, for the hen food. They were fed twice a day once with corn and once with all the meal leftovers. The grit, to keep the yolks and shells strong, was to be found by the hens from the ground. The eggs were collected in a bucket from the straw filled nesting boxes each morning. Fresh straw lined the boxes to keep the eggs from breaking and to give the hens a nesting bed. Most popular breeds were White Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds. A cock bird was in charge of the flock otherwise the eggs would not be fertile. All the other cocks would be penned up and fattened for eating.

Sharing the chicken run was a duck. It made no difference to the chickens who continued to cluck and scratch around in their dust holes. The duck, which happened to fly down one day and liked what he saw, waddled about seemingly unaffected by a different breed. He washed in the chicken's water bowl and ate the same meal. Eventually, I am sure, he thought he was a chicken... stayed there for as long as I can remember.

Rosalie Cottage had the largest share of the garden for it was the end cottage and the boundary wall circled around the line of privies - one for each property - all faced south. Each privy

had a wide, scrubbed, wooden seat on top of the box, with the closet running to a cesspit. The latched, ledged and braced, door was short at the top and bottom to aid ventilation and the interior walls were lime washed. Strung on string were neatly torn leaves of newspaper - to act as toilet paper. High up in the corners were large cobwebs that were home to, what seemed to my childish imagination, enormous hairy spiders. Bricks had been laid on compacted bare earth, which, over the years moss had grown in the joints, made the floor soft to walk on. A bucket was kept handy to pour down the hole - each user had to fill the bucket from the stream for the next person. In the winter, a hurricane lamp was kept by the backdoor for lighting the way. Outside the privy grew an elder to help keep the flies away... a sprig of elder was also used for horses, for the same reason, and kept under the horses' bridle.

Country sanitary arrangements included at that time using pail-closets, ash-boxes, ashbins, midden-privies and wet and dry middens. It was not until the 1950s that all these simple arrangements began to be replaced with flushed closets.

The lichen and moss pointed brick path from the front-gate continues right round the house, past the wide, solid front door and the espalier trained pear-tree, to a door in a lean-to workshop and wood-store. On the other side of which, separated by a wall, is the kitchen.

In the lean-to was to be found all the necessary garden tools, baskets, bicycles, stacks of firewood and in pride of place my granddad's military helmet. The shed held Harry's grandfather Phillip's shoe mending, iron-trees, embedded in large tree stumps... and still used, and the winter fruit store with boxes of newspaper wrapped apples.

In the autumn, the outhouse was cleaned and the pickling jars washed and sterilised. Eggs, put-down in Isinglass, walnuts hotted, dried and stored, apples and pears wrapped in newspaper, root-vegetables stacked and covered with straw and beans placed in salt. Herbs dried, soft fruit made into jam, tomatoes pickled and plums made into chutney.

Attached, to the side of the lean-to, was the greenhouse, which displayed a line of dried out tomato plants and my grandfather's rocking chair. Cobwebs abounded in every corner displaying numerous skeletons of flies. I do not think the potted tomato plants were meant to be particularly productive...the greenhouse was my grandfather's funk hole - to get away from the family - it was either this or 'the club'. The water butt stood outside the greenhouse and quite often, this water was used to rinse hair after washing because it was so soft.

The kitchen 'out back' was accessed from the parlour with its own backdoor, [with tiny single pane window], leading to the garden and the brook. Hung on a hook is a dull green length of seaweed - to tell the weather.

Of no more than eight feet by seven, with a sloping roof and brick floor, the kitchen catered for many; at its back room provided for the clothes washing copper boiler raised up on a brick plinth.

The cooking was done on individual paraffin burners - any baking the parlour range was used. The butler sink had a wooden draining board and the waste ran to a cesspit. The rest of the room was taken up by hanging pots and pans arraigned around the walls. It was all rather primitive but the cooked results, although simple fare - eaten with relish.

The Sunday joint would yield a bowl of dripping to use on toast or bread, instead of butter, chunks were put round the next joint to be cooked, or used for pastry or dumplings. Dripping was never wasted. As there were no refrigerators, food had to be cooked almost at once and in hot weather the milk boiled. There was no farm collection of milk in the twenties and no pasteurising so it was literally from cow to customer transported in a churn from the dairy and ladled out... bottled milk was available but by ladle was cheaper.

Boxes of Sunlight soap kept on a shelf together with bluebags and starch; black-lead with brushes for the range and a whitening stone for the front door step. From this shelf hung the

cooking utensils - the blackened frying pans and battered saucepans... there, too, hung the battered, steep sided pan that held simmering milk, the skimmed surface curds, removed - to make the clotted cream.

All the preserves were homemade using the fruit and vegetables from the garden. The meat from the butcher; the milk delivered straight from the dairy, as was the butter and the cheese. During the war granny, mixed margarine and butter together with wooden butter knives... shaping the patted result into a roll. This was to save money and eek out the ration coupons.

In one corner of the outhouse was a round boiler, on which, large wash pans or coppers were heated once a week to do the washing; extra soiled washing soaked overnight, and scrubbed, before putting into the boiler... to be pummelled with the dolly. After boiling the clothes taken out of the pan with a wooden spoon and put into a bucket of rinsing water... After the first rinse the clothes wrung out and rinsed again, and perhaps, even for a third time with a cube or little cotton bag of Ricketts blue dye dissolved in it - to whiten the washing. Back into the mangle for a final pressing then hung to dry. The washing line, stretched from the house corner to the nearest corner of the privy. It was a belief that a bluebag held against a wasp or bee sting would take any pain. The coloured articles went through the same process using a cooler water temperature. The mangle with its large wooden rollers was kept next to the greenhouse door.

When the clothes dry, they were collected from the washing line sorted and ironed on a stout linen cloth, laid on the living room table. There was a selection of flat irons for different purposes, in the main though; it was a favourite pair that was placed on the hinged plate over the fire. These were used alternately. Gophering irons for rounded pleats went out of use in the twenties although still used to curl hair. The irons were left on the hearth to cool before being put back into the scullery.

For my grandad's stiffly starched collars - used for best, the ironed result kept in a special round box kept on the top of his wardrobe. These collars were attached to the shirt by a small stud. There were no shirts with collars attached before the 1930s. Thereafter, the 'soft-collar' became available for casual wear but still needing a collar stud front and back. It was during the Second World War that attached collars came into being - normal dress for men, shortly afterwards, a permanent fashion.

For washing-up the crockery, an enamel bowl was used in the butler sink... soda, sprinkled into the water, helped dissipate any grease, there being no washing powder or liquid soap... perhaps a block of soap was pared down to help the process. All housework was done in strict routine. One of the weekly events was to sharpen and clean the knives. The knife blades were made of polished steel, not stainless, and had to be cleaned with emery cloth... if this was neglected the blades would rust. The range then treated with black-lead and the fender and fire irons cleaned - with wire wool. Brass doorknobs, fingerplates and lamp bowls cleaned weekly, so too the windows and pictures. Paraffin lamps filled daily, using a funnel, wicks trimmed, and the glass chimneys' washed. Although workers homes were poorly decorated and furnished, great pride was attached to cleanliness and neatness, no home was smarter than my grandmother's!

The imposing panelled front door was painted leaf-green, which set-off the brightly shone brass knob. Opening inwards - to the right, the door lay open, propped open with a large cast iron dog... Linger awhile... take a last glance at the flower beds on either side of the front door and there, beyond the large stone door step, neatly laid as a border, a small box-hedge. In the beds are sweet williams and marigolds, in February, snowdrops and crocus. Now... smell the air, it is filled with the unforgettable smell of box... the sweet william just distinguishable..., in the distance the ticking clock invites you in.

Before you do so, you observe... a small hallway, off which - on either side, further doors. The one on the right leads to the parlour, behind the open front door, and to the left the living

room. Straight ahead, leading upwards ranged the stairs, narrow and devoid of covering. They are scrubbed white, with stained brown edges.

Stepping inside a couple of paces, you mount the stairs, clasping tight to the banister... taking good care not to make too much noise on the uncarpeted boards. At the top, a small landing gives you access to three bedrooms... all with sash windows looking out onto the front garden.

All the bedrooms have brass bedsteads and knitted bed covers - in colourful squares. The mattresses were similar to the palliases I used when camping with the Boys Brigade - but stuffed with feathers not straw, which, as always, dipped in the middle... Over all, an eiderdown, made the coldest nights snug and warm. Each room had a washstand - bearing a large china bowl, jug and soap-dish - ranged on the top shelf. At either side, hang two pink towels on rails. On a lower shelf, two chamber pots - handles, pointed to the side, this completes the arrangement... The chamber pots, plus the water from the bowl, were emptied into a slop pail, hiding its contents beneath a wooden lid. This was done every morning by my grandmother - who cast their contents into the drain outside the back door. A small rug, with indiscriminate floral pattern, lay at the side of each bed. The wood floors - stained and polished, in keeping with popular fashion, were complimented by the small rose-printed wallpaper and painted skirting. The rooms were simplicity itself, in keeping with the rest of the house and inhabitants.

When the evening games were over there was a general movement around the table, as things were cleared away. The next day's breakfast was prepared and the fire set-up - to draw gently during the night. Both my uncles and grandfather home from the Poppe Inn enjoying their last smoke outside.

We boys, cajoled to drink our hot milk faster, tried to see the faces in the fire, as we watched the last soldiers - the burning soot, gradually retreat up the fire back. Meanwhile, the candles, in their brass holders, were being lit and the stone hot water bottles filled - to be buttoned up in their felt jackets... Then, up the creaking stairs... guided by the candle's flickering flame - caused by the guttering wax - we cast our own ghostly shadows on the walls. As a door slammed outside the wind whistled round the eaves... it was strange how suddenly the candle flame would almost go out as a hidden puff of wind blew! It needed no urging us to get into bed, as fast as we possibly could... to hide under the bedclothes. The overly soft mattress sagged in the middle rolled us into the middle, we turned away... the candle snuffed... the hurried prayer:

There are four corners to my bed,
There are four angels at its head,
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lay on.

Mum's footsteps faded - causing the stair treads to creak once more, gradually died away... the beds springs stilled, all was quiet...

Waking - heralded, by cooing doves and crowing cockerel, my eyes focused on faded, flowered wallpaper, fluttering lace curtains and my ears detected the noise of grandma riddling the parlour fire. The poker dropped against the brass fender... it was time for getting up. It did not take us boys long to get down stairs... the stream beckoned attendance... we were never in mind to disappoint it... as we struggled into our still damp shoes - from the day before...

All country cottages had a constant fight against damp. It had no cellar nor was damp-proof course - the ground floor on a level with the outside garden. Other than the lean-to kitchen and scullery, whose floors were of sandstone brick laid on compacted soil, the rest of the ground floor rooms had flagstones. These were quite uneven and in some places loose. These were scrubbed and remained damp even on the warmest of days. There were no floor coverings except before the fire

and at the side of the beds. Because the banks of the stream was slightly higher than the floor level of the cottage, although several feet away, there was a permanent rising damp problem. Two cast-iron down pipes lead from the gutters to soak ways back from the house.

The parlour: leading off the tiny hall, was to the right of the front door. An eleven-foot square room furnished in an Edwardian style with lace and chintz. The curtains: masking the edges of the sash windows were partially pulled back leaving the room dark and intriguing. The carpet, somehow, never imprinted

its colour nor was design on my mind... hidden under many pieces of furniture of highly polished dark wood, which included a whatnot and other small tables draped with lace held in place by a highly glazed pot holding a fern and dried flowers. The walls hung with faded engraved prints of cattle and highland scenes framed in dark wood; a mirror framed in ornate gilt hung over the mantle piece. I do not remember the room ever being used...

The living room... onetime the kitchen too, was to the left of the front door and hallway. It was a large imposing room running from the front of the house to the back. It held an enormously heavy oaken table - which could be extended, perched on thick turned legs planted firmly on the stone slab floor. Over the table was spread a green-baize, fringed- tablecloth, which almost touched the floor. Single chairs, with their turned back posts and stretchers, darkened by frequent applications of beeswax and polished by much use, were tucked under the table. Behind four chairs, a line of coat hooks screwed into the sidewall. From these hooks hung all the family's jackets, coats and scarfs, all hidden by a heavy green curtain, which hung from a pole close to the ceiling to the floor. There must have been a love for green by my grandmother, much of the soft furnishing were that colour.

The large oil lamp, hung over the table, had its wick trimmed, bowl filled and glass chimney cleaned every morning. Its warm gentle light emitted a flickering glow in the evenings... whose beams, hardly touched the furthest extremes of the room; the spluttering wick drew a circle of soot on the ceiling and perfumed the whole house with its familiar burnt oil smell.

There was a small deep-set window in the front wall behind granddads chair, its curtains drawn back at the bottom. The ledge was always filled to overflowing with books and papers, which prevented the window ever opening... its intended task not given a chance even on the brightest of days!

The low ceiling and exposed beams were covered in various artefacts from: an ancient sword, drying mint, horseshoes, mousetrap hanging from a hook, and resting on a wooden shelf the stub of a candle.

Dominating the room, the great fireplace takes up the whole of the centre of the sidewall. The brick chimneybreast - forming the bulk of the cottage structure, supports the floor and joists. The range, probably a Bodley of Exeter of more recent times, is built into the back of the fireplace - its iron flue and canopy leads up into the chimney. Bread had been made in it and meat baked, both giving the room a homely smell... Above all, a large, champhered, and smoke darkened beam, supports the breast - from which a short curtain hangs... to prevent smoke billowing out into the room.

Above this ancient beam is a bracketed mantle-shelf, which carries an ancient French clock... It ticks away the hours... Behind the clock, a walnut framed mirror hangs reflecting the green curtained opposite wall. The remainder of the shelf houses the household's spare-change box, a couple of porcelain ornaments, granddads pipe and tobacco, fire lighting spills and a used candle in a brass holder. There on the shelf, prominent even to the casual observer, a special box marked, 'For the burial club', received its sixpence a week with a ritual nod of granddads head, in recognition that he had made another week to continue the fund...!

Emitting a plume of steam... a large blackened kettle sits on a hinged, fretted iron-plate - over the fire..., hissing gently. The kettle was there all the year round, day and night... filled always to the top ready for immediate use - for making tea or washing.

Logs, stacked on top of the side-ovens and either side of the hearth - dry off... a sweet pungent smell pervades the room...; a brass-studded bellows, hangs from a nail, and there, on the opposite side, the warming pan - its polish brass reflects the flickering fire. The objects have been there for years... lovingly polished and dusted... now having a right to their place.

Numerous nails, some of enormous size, protrude from the fire surround... the family long since forgotten why they were put there. To the left side of the fireplace a shelf carries the ancient wireless worked from an accumulator, above, a bookshelf filled with novels of long past authors...

To the left of the fire, in front of the window, was a large rocking chair clothed in chequered knitted blanket and cushions of deep red...my grandfathers. To the right, 'a smoker's chair' - an oak wooden carver with curved horizontal arms, turned vertical rails and curved back. Colourful knitting and needles tucked down beside the arm; the whole, softened by a crocheted multi-coloured seat cushion... declared reservation - for my grandmother.

The back wall was almost totally taken up by a welsh-dresser, behind which the shove halfpenny board was kept. Plates lodged upon the shelves and cups hung from brass hooks. Its solid construction and much used appearance gave it a status undeserved by its value... upon its broad shelf resided the salt and knife box.

A hearthrug, framed one side behind the fender, and much pitted with scorch marks, set the two chairs apart. No one, other than granddad or grandmother, ever sat on those chairs!

It was quite impossible to read at night... the paraffin lamp, suspended from the ceiling, cast its wavering chequered light across the ceiling... its halo of light cast upon the table, leaving the outer extremities of the room in darkness. All those present, except my grandfather - who sat staring into the fire smoking his pipe, played whist, dominoes or shove-halfpenny?

Whatever the season the room was always dark and smelt of burnt wood and lamp oil... and depending on the time of day, smoke from grandfather's pipe. His habits were as ordered as the clicking clock. Every movement, action and breath tried before and found fitting. Nothing disturbed the ritual through the day. The clump of his boots on the stairs - both morning and night, gave voice to the time of day. I only ever saw him with a collar and that was in my parents wedding photograph. He was undoubtedly the king of all he surveyed - outside the home, his rule was law, inside however, my grandmother ruled the roost. It was a standard held firm in most country homes...

The living room had a comfortable feel - secure and warm with the ever-lighted fire flickering in the hearth. The front door and the two ground floor inner doors panelled to the same design, six-foot high, three feet wide and at least two and a half inches thick, sporting large brass doorknobs. Like the house and the people within built to last.

In the morning, those awake hear doves cooing to each other from the school roof... as the thin pale sun lights up the garden. The scent of lavender, box and honeysuckle begin to percolate the air whilst a spiral of smoke starts to trickle up into the sky. A blackbird sings and the cock crows... grandma rakes the fire and clatters the pots. All this heralds another day just like all the others...

Prior to the annual spring-clean, the village chimney sweep called to arrange a visit, that's if the previous year, arrangements had not been made. His cart outside the garden gate announced his presence... a time was set for the following Monday. The previous Sunday the fire was allowed to die out and the hearth cleaned, removing all the usual paraphernalia that littered the range and fireplace. The sweep appeared early the next morning his cart announcing his prescience as it was trundled to a noisy clattered outside the gate. All the furniture had dustsheets draped over them and

the most important sheet of all was arranged by the sweep before the fireplace. The round bristle broom was inserted and the process begun – as the sweep jerked the broom up and down gradually lengthening the handle as the upper reaches of the chimney was penetrated... At last, with a jerk, the passage of the brush became easy and the sweep rushed outside to check that the brush had reached the top and was sticking out of the chimney. It was then, as the brush lowered, that the main work was done. Gradually the brush lowered until with a thump, the range was covered with soot and the brush appeared. Now the remains of his labour were collected up in several bucket loads. The price for the job had included whether or not grandad was to receive the soot for the garden. Each bucket load was taken outside and several piles appeared on the vegetable plot to be scattered and dug in or retained to deter slugs. With a nod from grandma, the cleaning job done to her usual high standard and the sweep disappeared for another year. Now, the annual spring-cleaning could begin...

Rosalie Cottage, in company with all the other village houses, held its annual spring-clean. No family admitted that this celebration of the end of winter was not carried out. The rugs and carpets taken outside to be slung over the washing line to be beaten. Net and lace curtains washed and hung out... windows cleaned and woodwork painted. Floors polished and walls distempered. All the sweeping by broom and dustpan... the flagstone floors scrubbed on hands and knees. The feather beds hung out of the windows to air. All the work in the house was done in the mornings leaving the afternoons for preparing the evening meal, bottling, pickling, jam making, sewing, knitting, and socialising with neighbours and friends.