

# CHRISTINE'S CHILDHOOD MELKSHAM MEMORIES



I was brought up at "Landhayes" 8, West End, Melksham. My father Richard (Dick) Legg was Chief Clerk for A.G. Smith & Son Solicitors Melksham, and also Clerk to Melksham County Court and to Melksham Without Parish Council, Secretary to the New Hall Melksham Trustees, correspondant for the managers of Lowbourne Schools, and treasurer of Melksham Parish Church Choir, which he also sang in. My mother before she married worked at the Avon India Rubber Company in the offices. I can just about remember my grandfather (fathers side) who had been the Head Gardener at Melksham House and although retired still lived in the Garden Cottage, Melksham House Grounds.



West End was a cul-de-sac, infact still is. We knew all our neighbours and it was a friendly place to live. I can remember the following people that lived in West End; Mr & Mrs Francis Day who lived in the big detached house in the

corner, Mr & Mrs Scott who lived next door, Barbara & Alan Shepherd with their 2 children Judy & Jane, the Branson Family (Bransons Motor Works), Mr & Mrs Jack Fricker, Mrs Worth & Letitia, Mr & Mrs Candy, Mr & Mrs Shave, Mr Park (Butcher in Town), Mr & Mrs Snook, Terry Sleightholme, Mr & Mrs Barnett, Mr & Mrs Wootten, Mr & Mrs John Barrington and Mr & Mrs Pearce. The last two had the allotments next to our house, later on a bungalow was built on this land. At the far end of West End was Richards Scrapyard, where us children used to climb over the wall to gain entry, it was an exciting place to explore, even though we were forbidden to do this. My younger sister Rachel was always falling off the wall when we climbed over!

I can also remember Mr. Tilly delivering the the milk in churns by horse and cart, he ladled it out using a long handled silver cup. My father also used to get me to go down the street with a bucket and spade to collect the horse droppings to use for his roses; he was a keen gardener taking after his father. Another memory is a man coming round on his bicycle to sharpen knives and also the chimney sweep would be on a bicycle carrying all his brushed etc.

Just down past the house in the corner was Perfex Photographic run by Mr Hughes. Each November 5th we had a street firework party, which was held in the photo yard, on one occasion a catherine wheel spun into the large box of fireworks and blew the lot up in one go, there was a great exit by all the residents. Mr. Hughes owned a large car with running boards and sometimes he would let us stand on these and drive us down the street for a fun ride. Most of the staff at Perfex were girls who would cycle or walk en mass past our house each morning and evening. Have since found out that Perfex was once called "Greystones", and was a boy's high school in the late 1800's.

Later on (about 1939) the Catholic Church St. Anthony's was erected opposite our house. As young children, we had great fun watching this being built and putting items in the crevices between the bricks, wonder if these will ever be revealed in the future!

We also used loved roller-skating around the streets; I was a demon on roller skates! Sometimes being really naughty, we used to wait on the main road for a lorry and hang onto the back of it going up the main road! There wasn't so much traffic in those days.

Crossing over Semington Road opposite the police station it was all fields' right down to the river, Western Way By-Pass was built later and many houses on this land. Some fields were owned by Farmer Guley and the first field had a few hollowed out willow trees, where us children would make ourselves dens and would sometimes spend all day playing games and having picnics etc. These times there was no fear for our parents and we could roam free and have fun, which we made ourselves, but we always had to be home by a certain time otherwise there would be trouble! There was one incident when we were playing Cowboy and Indians. We decided to light a little fire in the base of the willow tree on a cold day, it inevitably caught fire to the tree and soon flames and smoke took over and Farmer Guley came running across the field red faced and arms waving, followed by a policeman from across the road and of course a fire engine. We ran away petrified but of course were caught and a stormy time followed with our families and the authorities, apologies, and kept in for a week with no playing. The fire was put out ok, but left a tree with a blackened inside. Farmer Guley did not prosecute us, but we did have to beg for forgiveness and never again to play Cowboys & Indians in the willow trees!!

Going down King Street from West End, some of the shops I remember were Mrs. Bewleys who had a small general shop and on the opposite side of road was a Blacksmiths, which I remember was very fascinating watching the horses being shod and the nice friendly ferrier. The next shop down was run by a Mrs. Jarvis which I often went into with my mum for general shopping and sweet treats; she always had a good display of these in her front windows. Next door was a vegetable shop run by a Mr. Dix (Dicks)? I got my first second hand bicycle next door, a shop run by the Cleverley brothers. Next to Cleverleys was Mr. Haigh the Fishmonger.

Also in King Street opposite West End was a large hut where Italian prisoners of war were kept for a while. They would melt down pieces of metal and make rings for us children. I remember they were very friendly.

Melksham Market Place I cannot remember too much about, there was the International Stores where I went with my mother to do the shopping and also the town water pump which was demolished in 1947. On Boxing Day the Hunt would meet in the Market Place, a very popular and colourful event, but this moved to Lacock. On the opposite side of the road at the start of King Street was Eastmans, they just sold bacon, sliced off large sides of bacon; there was sawdust on the floor of this shop.

I remember there used to have a lot of flooding in the Bath Road area, we used to have to get on a lorry to go through that part of the town on a regular basis.

My mother and I usually went each week to the pictures, Maxime cinema was quite a grand place actually, with a large foyer and a Commissionaire and an usherette serving ice-cream. Every Saturday morning they ran childrens films and we often went to local bakery nearby (West's or Webbs?) to buy a newly baked loaf of bread and chew our way through this whilst watching such films as Roy Rogers, Flash Gordon etc. It was a great way of spending Saturday mornings. The shop next door was run by Mr & Mrs Sawyer and later by their son; they sold sweets and other goodies to take to the cinema.

I remember a large shop called called "Strattons" which sold different coffees etc. Above the large counter was a set of wiring where shop assistants would put your purchase money into a container and send it along the wires to the cashier for payment and whizz it back with any change in for the customer. At a later date Woolworths was situated on this site.

Going on down the town opposite Union Street was Stainers the Coal Merchants, where we ordered our bags of coal to be delivered. Other shops I remember were Mrs Hills clothing shop, Gowens Clothing and Haberdashery, W.H. Smith which then became Hyams and now Kingstones, Clarks Shoe Shop, and in Bath Road Ventons Bicycle Shop and Maddox the Chemist.



My Grandmother (always known as Granny Coombes) lived at No.2 Union Street; in her younger days she was a Milliner and well known for her hats. She also produced lethal homemade wines. I often had to trample across the fields to gather ingredients for the winemaking. I frequently used to sample the finished product until my mother put a stop to this; because I had to ride my bicycle home.

The photograph shows the hats she made for a family wedding, all of them in fact. Although she was in the photograph, not sure which one she was, my cousin who lives in America and very keen on Genealogy and our family history thinks she is front row left – the one with a salad on her hat!!

Like my brother Tim and later my younger sister Rachel, I used to go to Lowbourne School. The headmaster was a Mr Jack Linley, a tough disciplinarian but also very fair, even though we were in awe of him he was quite jolly. Sometimes if we deserved it he would use a small cane across the palm of your hand, it didn't harm us in any way. I did have to enter his office one day with a couple of other school mates; we were summoned for punishment because we had locked out English & Poetry teacher, Mr Cheedle, a quiet and timid man, in a big cupboard in our classroom! We never knew how he got out and discovered the culprits. We stood shaking outside Mr Linleys office and went in one by one for our caning, which I recall didn't hurt too much.



(I was first left on the second row)

Another well know teacher was Miss Windsor, who taught sewing as one subject, she was strict but again fair, she would send pupils outside the classroom if they misbehaved! She also taught my older brother and told me many times that he was the quiet one. Miss Windsor was still teaching when my eldest daughter Linda started at George Ward School. I also enjoyed singing in the Lowbourne School Choir and it was a very good one.

Another shop I remember was opposite the Avon Rubber Company, just past The City, it was a little sweet shop owned by Mrs Lemay and it was demolished when the by-pass built. We used to have a good selection of shops in Melksham years in those days, unfortunately not so much variety these days.



My Wedding 2nd February 1957 at St.Michaels Church.