

SCHOOLDAYS IN THORPE IN THE 1930's

I and my two sisters lived in Thorpe, were born there, in a terrace house opposite the 'Council Houses' — these were different, our father being an owner—occupier, though having to work all hours to pay his mortgage — nevertheless we were inclined to think of ourselves as 'different'. Granny and Granddad lived next door — they had a big notice over the front room window "Read & Sons, Builders" and all Granddad's relations — originally from Blofield way — were in the building trade, some of them having a workshop a few houses away from us where certain stores were kept and carpentry done, such as coffins. On Saturdays we would go down the lane — at the back of the terrace - to this workshop to collect small pieces of scrap wood and shavings for mother's fire — there was a stair—case, with open treads — fine for going up but coming down was on our bottoms because we could see dizzily down.

There was a meadow beyond the railway which ran alongside the terrace and back lane and many a game was played among the buttercups and daisies — there was an oak tree which my younger sister regularly climbed and one day got stuck up there when the cows came out and refused to move from the base of the tree.

The back lane continued into Common Lane for about a half a mile and friends of the family, the Dales lived the other end of this lane; after one merry evening at the Red Lion, my father was seen home via this lane by his pal, who was himself then seen home by father — and so on — both parting some time and arriving home in the early hours. One day this friend's wife had reason to complain to the Police about the late hours kept at this particular 'local' - conditions then improved, mainly due to the fact that one of the culprits in the late card game was the local police sergeant!

Granddad worked at the Asylum, one of the first plumbers in the locality with a 'Certificate', duly framed and hung in the living room, by the pipe rack, & the large clock always a quarter of an hour fast. There were always peppermints and gingernuts. Now Granny had the Forkes' local baked bread and mother had Co—op. Sister no. one, the eldest and fastest, nipped round Granny's for the new crust, still warm and covered with butter — if lucky Sister no. two would get the other end (usually after some noise and tears). No. three had to wait her turn or get crafty and wait for the baker the next day. Granny also had her milk delivered in a big churn on a barrow, pushed the two miles from the City daily. Her full jug was brought in and covered with muslin cloth with beads all round to hold it. In hot weather it was boiled first

We all went to the Church School, School Lane, a mile away — which meant a four mile walk every day. Usually, though we had a ride home lunch time. Bainbridge ran a small coach and for a penny we got a ticket from his board of many— coloured for the individual prices — and punched at the appropriate place or fare stop. On Thursdays much to our delight we had a "double -decker" — the E. Counties bus, as the coach did not run that day. We walked all weathers, and mother would wrap a scarf around and cross and tie at the back with a safety pin to keep us warm. If wet on arrival at school, coats would be hung around the fireguard, a large 3 foot high affair, and steam until dry.

My first days at school were a problem — I did not say a word for 3 weeks, but on answering a teacher with a 'yes' one day, got a halfpenny for my trouble. Now school was a building with a large room, with dividing screens, for the infants, another large room which could be divided into two and a central room for the elder juniors. The scholarship class was taken in a corrugated hut in the playground by an uncertificated but very good teacher, Mr. Sturman, or "Buttons" The playground was rough stony earth, around which all marched on Empire Day, 24th May, each year and saluted the Union Jack. Cuts and grazes were abundant and the toilets left a certain amount to be desired, but were on mains water. I remember the mains water being laid on in the village, before which we had wooden seats with a large bucket underneath - a cupboard door at the

side was used weekly when the man came to empty

Water closets were installed and I remember my Granny saying that it was a shame to throw away a good wooden seat —whereupon Granddad said that he would 'save her the hole'. I remember little of interest in my school days – I loved sums and writing and was a good scholar. The desks were long and attached to the form seats, about four or five could sit at one desk which led to a certain amount of disturbance if one naughty child had to be hauled out to the front of the class - these same desks had been used by my father and his mother before him — in fact we have a photo of my father's sister at one of the desks, in her pinafore, a must for all girls in those days.

Quite a crush occurred in the morning first thing when all assembled in one room for prayers — these being taken one day a week by the rector. Miss Leamon was headteacher of the junior school, and following progress via the tin hut pupils reached senior school, where Mr. Rudling was headmaster and lived in the adjoining house. We had a variety of teachers —nice curly haired Miss Kendrick, strict Miss Newby, quiet Miss Newell and tall impressive Miss O'Connor — all good people pushing the three R's into us with monotonous regularity.

One day, after a fit of the giggles, I was sent to the corner to do my knitting, sitting on the rush hamper wherein was kept the craft materials. Milk was provided for some, and in winter we had Horlicks, made by the older children from a big urn, and put in mugs with nursery rhymes on the side. All this I left just after the new school was built, I was one of the two last pupils to pass the scholarship and I only spent 6 weeks at Hillside Avenue before leaving to go to grammar school in the City.

The school still stands and is today used for adult education. The road, too, is not now the stony way it was and a garage has been built where the road was very narrow- it was known as "The Narrows" and many a time a bus or lorry would be almost stuck and could only inch along until free. The Doctor's house was demolished during the widening of this section - a kind gentleman who would go behind the curtain in his consulting room and mix us children a good cherry cough mixture — his waiting room had two beautifully carved chairs.

Opposite the School Lane was the King's Head, by the river, and next — to the East — was Foundry House, occupied by Fred Dale, a local farmer and uncle of a friend. Occasionally we would call in to see 'Auntie' and there was always milk and biscuits. Sometimes the milk cart came home to the stable there when deliveries of milk in large churns had been completed. There were three Dale brothers who farmed locally and delivered by horse and cart in the village.

If we came straight home from school, we would pass the 'High School' — the girls in their dark red uniform looking smart and naughty ones from the local school strutting behind them in mockery. Opposite was the horse—water, a gap to the river, previously used for horses. Wet feet from larking near the water did not go down very well with mother — though we could take off our socks and wave them dry until we got home. Continuing home we would pass the Church. Granddad would go to church every Sunday as he was Sidesman (followed by a visit to the Buck afterwards before Sunday lunch). We used to go to church occasionally, such as at Christmas or Palm Sunday (when we all had a palm leaf). Sunday school was more interesting, sometimes in the church or the church hall in Chapel Lane (it was previously a chapel) — attendance being popular and indeed urgent six weeks before the Christmas party or the summer outing.

The Buck Inn, next the church, was a favourite haunt of both my father and grandfather — and in later years of my husband. It was, and still is, a very old inn and the innkeeper, a friend of our family, and his father before him were coal merchants. Some of the older houses have made way for a modern car park, but I remember a pair of houses of mock—tudor style with balconies. A Mr.

Frost had a cycle shop there and later two petrol pumps were installed, one of which was knocked down by, I believe, my father—in-law.

The gate to the Thatch remains, leading to a bungalow high above the Inn. The roof to this bungalow caught fire one day during the last war and there was quite a race to put out this fire before black—out time. Next comes Idle Hour, a mock—tudor front to a large house, the older part stretching back up Chapel Lane.

Continuing home from school, with the river green on our right, we come to Chapel Lane — the old chapel used for all purposes, including village hall — ex-servicemen's parties, Sunday school, school plays etc. On Saturdays, for about 2 pence each we could see short films, Charlie Chaplin and cartoons — organised by a local photographer. This man was also a building, funeral director and local wedding photographer. He had taken over the business previously run by Granddad's relations.

After Chapel Lane came the shops, one a Post Office run by dapper little Mr. Parker - stripped pants and spats – and his two sisters, one tall and thin and the other short and plump who took it in turns to deliver the telegrams. Next came the 'haunted house' ~ empty, overgrown, with white pillared porch — uncanny to a child and we would run as fast as our little legs would go past this place. A block of flats stand there now, 1930s type architecture, and, here again, the road has been widened between The Dell and Thorpe Gardens.

Thorpe Gardens was not the smart restaurant it is now - but summer fetes were held there. I remember wild flower competitions for the children, baby shows, and once my mother won a beauty competition.

Harts' boatyard was across the river, hiring out rowing boats daily in the summer. Cruisers were then becoming popular on the river. The family went to Hickling once by houseboat + or cruiser as it is now — and the lady at the local pub killed a duck for our lunch — the duck I remember ran around headless before finally collapsing, to everybody's amusement.

Walking along by a high wall, past what now leads to the Oaklands Hotel (formerly the residence of Mrs. Scott of Lawrence & Scott, Electromotors), we came to a small terrace of three houses, the first occupied by the cobbler — mending shoes in what must have been the 'front room'. Great fun we had knocking on the other doors and running and hiding to see if anyone answered. We would then be by the shop selling sweets and tobacco, and past that the cottage where my Granny lived as a child. They came from London in the 1870s and her father was coachman to the Foster family in the big house beyond. Next door was the Old Rectory, a large house with a lawn and then a square grey house at the bottom of Thunder Lane

This house had a large holm oak tree at the corner, but the Thunder Lane junction became very dangerous and traffic lights installed — and eventually, following widening of the bottom of the lane and the Yarmouth Road, the tree had to be removed. There were certain complications as the tree was protected. The widening of the Lane meant the demolition of several cottages, in one of which lived the village constable, a stern and large individual who delivered many a clip of the ear to certain local lads.

Feeling wicked on certain occasions, we would go down Whitlingham Lane - there was a gas lamp halfway and by getting on the back of the sturdiest, one could pull the chain and light the gas lamp. Fun too, to go down to the bridge and watch the trains, steam engines, some with many trucks. With a little daring, more than often with wet feet, one could find a way across the marshes to Bungalow Lane and so home, again waving wet socks or stockings, sometimes wet up to our bottoms - and usually in to Granny's before seeing mother to get a scolding.

However, most of the time we went straight home, either by road or by Common Lane opposite the Red Lion — This was just past Roxley Hotel where a man was once drowned in the swimming pool — and past Dales Place, a collection of smallhouses, one a one—storey house of flint which still remains as a builder's yard. Down Common Lane we would go home by the back lane behind the terrace houses. At the bottom of Common Lane was another Dale, Robert of the farming family, and we would call in there to play with one of his daughters and on occasion stay for jelly and blancmange tea. This girl has now settled in Australia with my younger sister and they still visit each other, although hundreds of miles apart.

It was fun at the Dales — they had dogs, cats, chickens, pigs and ducks - a large hay shed to play in and a wooden bungalow where we played tea parties. A homeless family lived there at one time but I am sure this would not be allowed now. By going home the Back Lane way we could climb the back wall of the cemetery and return to the road, or vice versa. But usually it was past the Red Lion and the farm beside it. Land behind was arable until 1937 when the new school was built there. Stock was kept in sheds by the road — I can smell them now. When the farm went, a club house was built by the pub.

Having got this far we were nearly home, so we crossed the road and went past Howards and Forkes, two bakeries -the smell of fresh bread whetting the appetite — on past Whitakers, the butchers, now the Mews, on past Willow Terrace where the first house was a little gold mine of a village sweet shop - many a halfpennyworth of sweets have we had done up in a square of paper rolled into a cone with a twist at the bottom. The hallway and front room of this house was covered with packets of groceries, and they sold everything from sugar to socks, jellies to paraffin.

On past the Cemetery — Granny had a key to the gate and it was a routine regular visit to the graves of my two aunts on a Saturday — the little Chapel, used for funerals, has now gone — it was a pretty flintstone building like a fairy church. On past the allotments, across the road from which were two large houses standing back from the road — between them was a curved wall and this was very useful for occasionally on a Friday evening, or on a Saturday morning, herds of cattle were driven towards the City for the Cattle Market. As these creatures, large and fearsome if you are only 5 plus, came lumbering along, we would run behind this wall until they had passed by.

Then there was only Conoor — named by the resident, a retired Indian Army officer after the famous diamond – and we had reached the Council Houses again. Now home we were ready for that crust or Granny's shortcake - always better than mother's - or with a bit of luck we would have a halfpenny for cushies at the shop. There were two shops in Brooklyn Terrace, and a butchers — all still there. We were lucky, too, in having a street lamp — one of the old type - just outside our bedroom window.

There were ordinary days, playing in the lane or on the meadow — and there were other days. Days when the steam—roller came to mend the road, Armistice Sunday when the parade started from Pound Lane for the Church, Coronation Day and Jubilee Day when all children had a mug from Lady Morse, a local benefactress A time when father had completed a special job and we all had new navy overcoats and red berets — Mother nearly always dressed us three girls all alike, though sometimes things were handed down from one to another.

We had animals — the first an alsatian bitch, who would follow my young sister down the lane and pick up the wet pants she had discarded as uncomfortable, and take them back to her kennel. Mother would fie them out on wash day. Bath night was Saturday, and Sunday morning mother would have a line of small linen out, to the amusement or disgust of the neighbours. We had cats, but they usually got run over on the road or railway line. We had budgies, rabbits (they disappeared after keeping father awake at night), and fish. We had tadpoles, frogs and once a newt which was

kept in the water tank. One day younger sister tumbled head first, curiosity getting the better of her, into this water tank - we never found the newt. We were luckier than most as an Aunt would come from Devon and take one or two of us back with her for a few months each year — so we visited places the local children never did.

We eventually moved a few doors from the terrace, and mother still lives there — a bigger house for growing girls We left home, one to the Foreign Office, one to College and one to the Wrens and then Australia — we married and had children. I stayed in Thorpe, now Thorpe St. Andrew, and would not live anywhere else. It's a nice place to be.

Moirra Thirkettle (Cis) (1980's) nee Read