

TALES FROM THE VILLAGE SHOP in SLAUGHAM

By Mrs Ethel Margaret "Meg". Carter (née Kensett) (1898-1951)

One of our shop boys left us and went to work in the gardens of a house in Haywards Heath. After a few weeks he wrote so very proudly to father telling him that he had helped the gardener to take a car engine to pieces. My brother very scornfully remarked "He doesn't say if they put it together again."

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My mother and father baked the village bread in an old brick oven. After the bread was taken out, mother baked any pies and cakes that the villagers brought. She always enquired what the pie filling was, to ensure the right oven temperature and the correct baking time. We possessed an orchard at the top of the Green, out of sight of our house and the apples had a way of disappearing. We had our suspicions. These were verified one day when a small girl brought a pie to bake that her mother had made. "Well, T-----" my mother asked "What is it made of?" Quick came the reply "My Mum said that I wasn't to tell you."

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My brother was fond of all outdoor games and was a ringleader in the sports among the small boys. He wouldn't tolerate any interference from the female population of the place. Once he was given a man-size football for his birthday and whilst the lads were playing one of them shot it up near the shop door. My mother promptly kicked it back. Up came Jim with his face red with rage, and exploded "Tain't a gel's game".

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We had some funny boys and girls at times helping in the shop and house. One, Kitty, got into the habit of arriving late tho' she only lived two doors away. My mother got tired of reprimanding her and of her promises to do better.

One morning when she was even later than usual mother met her with the remark "You might as well stay at home altogether, Kitty."

"All right" was the answer and Kitty turned, went out of the door and never came again, either late or early.

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One boy, when on the rounds with Dad, drew his attention to a fine growth of ivy on an oak tree. He said "Wish I'd got all that; could make a lot of money."

"What d'you mean?" asked Dad, and pat came the terse answer, "Ivory. Billiard balls."

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One girl was sent up the Green with a basket of eggs.

My mother watching her saw her swing the basket round and round in an extremely care-free fashion.

Before she could stop her a good few eggs had "Gone west."

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My father went his round with a horse and cart. The horse was generally a jog-trot variety, used to standing. He had to be because at some of the houses the mother never saw another person outside her own family all the rest of the week, and Dad was often Guide, Comforter, and Friend to such customers.

Our delight on Saturdays and holidays was to be allowed to go on his rounds with him. Small cottage loaves were baked for us. We pulled the top from the bottom and inserted a nice lump of butter. As this was done whilst the loaf was hot you can think how the butter penetrated through the little loaf.

Then, on very lucky days we had a nice finger of Round Dutch cheese as well. This with biscuits and a bottle of ginger beer each kept us fortified during the day. Often we would start before ten in the morning and not arrive home until after six at night.

We were ready for the lovely hot meal always waiting for us. One day it was not. We found mother sitting shivering over the kitchen fire quite unable to move. It was the commencement of a long and serious illness. I never wanted to go on that particular journey again, tho' I never lost my seat for the rides.

It seems that it was always summer. The explanation must be that we never went in the winter. Father generally called for us from school on Wednesdays. It was a Red Letter day indeed when he happened to be a bit early and we were called out of class and allowed to go home without the close of school exercises. It was a well-worn joke that the old horse always trotted home quicker than he set out and I do believe that from a certain point he would have gravely taken himself home without any guidance.

The goods cart was long and in proportion rather narrow. We nicknamed it the "coffin cart". There was, too, a small back-to-back Rectory cart used for lighter journeys and for the trip to Horsham on Sundays. I remember that the seats had to be shifted about in order to keep a balance whenever the load differed.

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We kept pigs and they were killed at home at the bottom of the garden, then scalded and scraped on a bench near the back door. The village expert then hung the carcase up and dissected it. I was given my first physiology lesson after one pig killing. Every bit of the animal seemed to be useful, and for days one thing after another was evolved from it. Chitterlings were cleaned and filled, lard was made from the flead, scrap pie from the flead scraps left mixed with apples and currants, and the melting deliciousness of absolutely fresh pig's fry is something to wonder about now.

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At stocktaking time in the shop the proceedings finished by the whole family being weighed. To cause amusement my father and uncle then balanced each other one on each side of the weighing machine. Once, when I was about three, uncle weighed dad down. I suppose this wasn't quite to my liking so I went with a small weight and put it on to Dad's side of the scale.

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