

## Memories of My Kempley Childhood

Edited from the written notes of the late Dolly Jones (1918 – 2015)

I drew my first breath in the bedroom on the left (see sketch below) at 8.30 am on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1918. My mother was Sarah (Lol) Clinton, a Great War widow with two small boys – Tom (8 years) and Len (6½ years). She met my father, Edwin (Ted) Clinton while nursing her sister Zula Poyner at Tedgewood Cottage, 2 miles from Kempley on the Jay's Green road. I was my parents' only daughter and was made much of.



By the time I started going to school at Much Marcle my brothers were almost of leaving age. It was a 2½ miles walk to school and I remember my brother Len tipping me out of the pushchair and skinning my knees. Later my mother took me on the carrier of her bicycle and at 4 years I had a bike of my own. The boys had hoops, made by the village blacksmith with a rod attached, and they used to run along the road. Girls had wooden ones, which we hit with a stick. We had seasons for 'Tops', another for skipping; and sliding in the winter. We wore boots with metal studs in the soles and a U-shaped metal rim on the heel, which we used to strike sparks with on the stones in the road.

A roadman named Brooks used to give me wrinkly apples, violet scented they were and I never knew why. He broke up the stones with a large hammer then the steamroller used to come along and flatten the stones. The village blacksmith (George Smallman) was also the barber. The men and boys would go to his 'pent house', where the horses stood to be shod, to get their hair cut and they used to gamble in there as well, much to the disapproval of the wives and mothers. Sometimes, when the 'Bobby' from Dymock would ride his bike around the village, they used to fasten the doors from the inside.

Gypsies used to camp by the side of the road to Marcle. They lived in tents made of long sticks cut from the hedge and bent over in a circle tied at the top, then a sheet or sacks were thrown over them. They used to be having their breakfast when I went by on my way to school every morning and always shouted, "What's the time m'dear?".

When I was small, an old Peddler man used to call on us from time to time with a case full of cottons, laces, buttons, ribbons, elastic, pins, needles, tapes, press studs, hooks and eyes and many other things which the housewives would need. One day when the Peddler man called on Mum I ran to meet him and fell down. He helped me up and our dog, Spot, bit him in the leg so Mum had to put some iodine on it and bandage it, but he wasn't angry. He said, "The dog was only protecting her".

Because there were no motorcars and only one carrier in the village, my Aunt Ada used to drive the horse and trap to Ledbury and Ross markets. The housewives would send their eggs and dressed poultry with her and she would sell them and bring the money back. She would also do any shopping for them.

Mum did the washing in the back kitchen in a tin bath. She used Sunlight Soap and soda (no washing powder in those days) and the clothes were pressed using flat irons that sat on a trivet hung on the back of the fire range. They used to get black smuts on them that used to come off on the shirt collars, where they would show, of course. She tested if they were hot by spitting on them in a very genteel manner.

Kempley brook ran at the bottom of our garden and when it flooded in the winter it used to come very near to the house but never quite in it. Mum used the brook water for washing and washing up, but as we had no well we had to carry our drinking and cooking water from across two fields. It was a very hard way to live. Dad and the boys mostly collected it but sometimes when they were busy haymaking or at harvest time Mum and I had to do it.

My Grandmother lived in the house opposite the blacksmith's shop with my Aunt Maggie. As a young woman one of her legs was amputated and she used crutches to get around. She walked with them to church every Sunday and that was over a mile each way. She was the village dressmaker and had a daughter called Joan. I had three more Aunts living in the village – Dorothy, Ada and Ginnie. Just before Christmas every year my grandmother Clinton and the Aunts used to gather in a large shed at the back of Aunt Ada's house to pluck poultry for the Christmas market. I loved going to watch them; the feathers flew everywhere and as they went home they left a trail of fluff in the air behind them. My Aunt Ginnie used to give a party for all her nieces and nephews at Christmas. She had two girls herself, Lilly and Violet, though they were older than me. In those days we had little candles on the tree and of course I was the one who set her paper hat alight, but Aunt Ginnie put it out quickly.

I used to spend a great deal of my time with Dad up at the farm. I learnt how to milk cows and harness horses into carts and drive them. When I was about 15 or 16 I took Flower, one of my favourites, to the Blacksmith to be shod. I was so pleased to be trusted to do it. When I went to work on the land in wartime it came in handy to know how to do these things and I especially enjoyed not having to be told how to do things because they came naturally.

Now, going back to my childhood, another event I enjoyed was watching the sheep being dipped in the dam on the brook. Several farmers would bring their flocks for this purpose. One man stood on the far bank in the pen and put the sheep in the water. Two men stood on the wall with poles and ducked and scrubbed the sheep as they swam through and emerged on the near bank and went to find their lambs.

I attended church and Sunday School regularly. We had a Christmas party in the Church Hall. A lovely big tree, all decorated; and we had sweets and an orange, we played games and had a good tea with crackers. In the summer we were all taken for our annual outing to Malvern Wells. We climbed the British Camp and Worcestershire Beacon and generally had a super day. My parents told me never to run down the hills, as it was difficult to stop. It was a great treat for us because, of course, we had no cars to go any distance, so we had to walk or push bike everywhere. Most people used to walk. There were a few buses on the Main Road to Ross and Newent but even to get there was a walk of 2½ miles through the Queen's Woods to Jay's Green. We used to leave our bikes or pushchairs on the side of the road to catch the bus and they never got stolen, like they would today.

In Fishpool there was Forty's bakery and shop; also the blacksmith – Mr Smallman - sometimes I would ask if I could blow the bellows. There was also a small shop and post office on Kempley Green run by Edgar Powell. He was a big, stout man and she was a dainty little person with very white frizzy hair. Of course they sold everything from paraffin to mothballs, gob stoppers, sherbet fountains, pear drops and toffee apples. I had a penny a week pocket money. You could buy quite a selection of sweets if you spread it out.

Of course, like most village children we lived quite close to Nature. One of my favourite things was to go off alone to study the birds and animals along the streams and meadows. I also used to go all the way to the Coleborough Woods and spent hours just mooching around. Mum and I used to go there to pick Blackberries, which she sold to a man who came around to buy them. I realise now how fortunate we were: we could wander off and roam at will as long as we came home for meals in perfect safety.

At school and at home we were taught to be a friend of our country: always to stand up for the National Anthem and at school on Empire Day we paid homage to The Flag in the playground. Also we had hymns and prayers at Assembly every morning and a prayer at home time. I never remember any bullying, but we had separate playgrounds and porches for the boys and girls, so maybe the boys had disagreements in their area. But the playing field, called "The Bartons", was open to us all. I wonder if today's children play any of the games we used to play such as "Oranges and Lemons", "Wolf and Sheep"? I also remember us counting out rhymes from Gibberish such as "Meany Macanara, Eka Pecka, Do Dee Eka, Im Pin Tosh". Of course, skipping was always in season. Looking back, some of the sequences were quite complicated. We also played Tag and Hide and Seek. We used to find lots of different ways to bounce a tennis ball against the wall, like behind the back, under the leg, etc. It sounds funny but we took it quite seriously.

I really liked school and would have wished to stay for a little longer but I was not good enough at maths to pass for grammar school – in fact it was the one lesson that I dreaded. I still don't care much for figures! English, Geography, History, Poetry and Art were my favourites – they still are. But they were Happy Days.

There were two hop fields in Upton Bishop: one was at Upton Court and the other at Pugh's. My Grandmother and Aunts used to go to Upton Court and one of my first memories was riding in the wagon from Kempley to get there. My Mother never went 'hopping' so I went several times with Grandma and my Aunts. The farmer had a boiler in a shed at the top of the field and at 10 o'clock one of the workmen would shout "HOT WATER" and we would all rush with kettles and cans to make cups of tea. It was very welcome, believe me, because some of the mornings it was cold and wet with fog. We still call September mornings 'Hop picking mornings' and know that summer is over.

I knew when summer was over: Marcle School used to have 6 weeks holiday in September, not in summer, because all the children had to go 'hopping' with their mothers. Most would have a tin or something to pick into. Children had to work in those days, every penny counted, so that parents could buy shoes and clothes with the extra money. It was the same at Daffodil time – we all had to help.

I was quite a 'tom boy' as a child having older brothers. I used to copy them and make things to play with. Tommy Powell, the son of a farmer would come down and

we would make bows and arrows, and paint our faces with my water paints and go stalking imaginary animals. We also used to dam the brook to see how deep it would get. We would climb trees to take an egg from a bird's nest and we caught Bullheads in the brook, always putting them back, just to see how many we could get. I remember once carrying a trough out of the meadow to sail on the brook but it sprang a leak and Dad made us carry it all the way back uphill! I suppose we could have drowned as it was quite deep water but we were by the bank luckily. I tried to make a kite a few times but I could never get it to fly. My brothers would take Moorhen eggs out of the nest in the middle of the stream. They would tie a tablespoon onto a stick and angle the egg out; sometimes it would fall off. They also used to set nightlines for eels so when they went to work I took over and did the same. Sometimes the eel would get all twisted up in the line. They also taught me how to skin them so I used to get up early and go to see if I had a catch, when I would take it home and skin it. Mum would cook it for breakfast. Same with rabbits: Mum taught me how to skin, pouch, joint and truss them; and, of course, to cook them. "My goodness" she used to make a very tasty rabbit stew. I've never been able to quite match it but of course we do not have wild rabbits now, perhaps that is the reason. My oldest brother, Tom, used to lay traps and catch moles, skin them and pin the skins on the shed door to make a bit more money. He was a shepherd and it was very poorly paid then, like all farm work.

We had an old wind up gramophone using small needles in the sound box. I used to get these from Tom Taylor at Dymock – he used to mend bikes and kept fishing hooks, etc and wet batteries for people with radios. When I was school age, of course, I had to help my Mother – she used to go out into the fields hoeing roots (mangolds) for the cattle and fodder beet for the sheep; turnips were grown as well. In season the seedlings had to be spaced with the hoe and a single plant left. It was quite difficult when they were thickly planted so I had to go along behind and pull out the ones that were left up to the main one – it was back breaking work and when I had my children they did the same for me. Also, when my husband (Reuben) and I were mangold pulling and sugar beet pulling at the end of the day the roots had to be tumped up and covered with leaves to protect them. Pat, Chic and Bill, my children, used to come home from school, have their tea and then help us. We used to give them a penny each for each tump they made - they were good kids. They also used to pick Daffodils in the spring, make bunches and put them on their bikes and ride down to the main Ross to Ledbury road and sell them to people in cars. Today that would be unthinkable but it gave them a sense of the value of money and taught them to stand on their own two feet and use their initiative. I suppose they were the last generation to enjoy such freedom.



Dolly Jones in 2006