

Growing up in Stoneleigh in the 1950s

First a bit of background

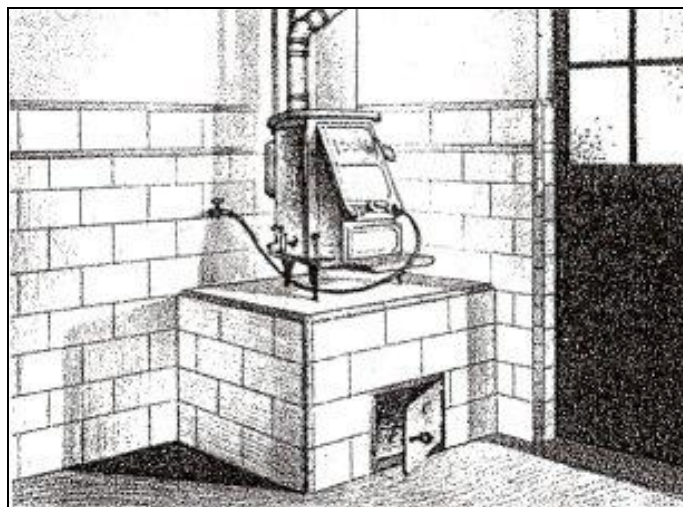
Our family lived on a small estate completed in 1948 so all the residents were new to the area and their neighbours. These new council houses had been designed before the war but building was postponed till afterwards. Each three bedroom house had a through lounge-dining room.

The kitchen had a concrete floor and both a built-in larder (with a large concrete slab to keep food cool) and broom cupboard. The separate bathroom and toilet were upstairs. There was a garden both at the back and the front of the house.

Most of the ground floor was covered in a black bitumen material, which was curved at the edges to meet the plaster of the walls. The houses were generally well built with good quality materials but some of the electrical cables were laid under the bitumen flooring. This was fine at the start but caused problems for some families, a few years on, as the insulation broke down causing the fuses to blow and needing the bitumen to be chipped out to replace the cables.

Originally the rear garden backed on to a wood with a lake formed in a disused clay pit. There was a brick works at some distance from the houses and the trees kept the noise and dust of industry away from the homes. In the late 1950s / early 1960s, the brickfield was built on and the demolition of the kiln chimney caused great excitement.

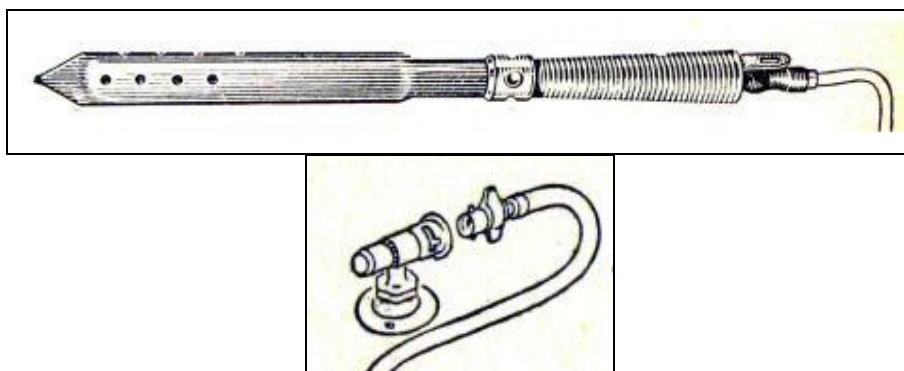
At the start of the decade our family consisted of father, mother, son and daughter. A second son was born in 1952. Dad worked in London 'in the print' but although many in printing were supposed to be well paid, his job was not. Mum had a heart condition and had enough on her hands with two children and running the house to be able to work.



*An Ideal boiler with a gas poker in place.
(Ours was on the floor and not on a coal store as in this picture)*

Some things were undertaken daily. The first job every day was to attend to the fire in the kitchen 'Ideal' boiler. If you were lucky, the ash just needed to be raked out and more coke added. If the fire had gone out during the night though, you had to relight it, which was done with a fearsome gas poker.

In the winter the fire in the lounge usually had to be laid with plenty of scrunched up old newspaper, and topped with small sticks of wood and then coal; later a 'smokeless' alternative was used. After lighting with a match you had to carefully adjust the vents in the grate to make sure that the coal got hot enough to burn. In some weather conditions the fire would not light properly and to make it 'draw', you had to temporarily block off the opening above the grate with newspaper. The hot air above the small fire could then only rise up the chimney causing a partial vacuum to develop, the oxygen for the fire was then sucked (or drawn) up through the coals that were resting in the slatted metal fire bed. With the increased supply of air, the fire became hot enough to continue on its own. Holding a sheet of newspaper in front of an open flame was a very hazardous procedure that only grownups were allowed to perform.



A gas poker and the gas tap it connected to

Equally, the last job of the day was to bank up the boiler and the fire with the hopes that they would last till morning.

Around the living room fire a close mesh fireguard was put in place to prevent coals falling out and setting the house on fire, as well as to prevent the children falling on the fire or having their clothes set on fire through getting too close to the fire. In winter everyone wanted to get close to the fire, so the settee was moved very close to the fire with Dad's chair on the left of the fire.

Breakfast was cooked – cereals such as cornflakes were expensive so not often eaten, but porridge was. We often had bacon although sometimes there was sausage or egg instead. Cod liver oil capsules and sometimes 'Robeline' was given to us kids as Mum, a former nurse, was very conscious of the need to keep us healthy. Robeline was a brown malted yeast concoction which had the consistency of thick syrup. We would put the spoon in our mouths and then draw it out so that a thin string of the Robeline would hang between mouth and spoon. Great fun, but sometimes the strands broke and we had it on our faces and hands, but if it got on our clothes we were in deep trouble.

Lunches varied, often depending on what was left over, but were often linked to the work of the day for Mum. Lunch was the main meal of the day, as we would go to bed soon after tea, which might be bread, butter and jam. Butter or hard margarine would sometimes melt in summer and would be rock hard in winter.



A typical 1950s fireplace

Mum believed it very important to have a walk everyday, if possible, so she went out most days and if we were on holiday, we would go with her.

The kitchen was the heart of a home and it is worth setting the scene. There was a table behind the door as you entered the kitchen from the living room, which was used both for everyday eating and food preparation. Then came the built-in broom cupboard. Next came a door through to the hall and to the right of this, the built-in larder. Another door lead out to the side of the house and above the kitchen door was a clothes-drying rack that was lowered by a pulley and rope. To the right of the door there was a drop down table next to the wooden draining board of a large Belfast sink. When we were young we had our baths in this; it was certainly big enough, was more economical than using the bath and meant Mum did not have to bend over especially when she was pregnant. The gas cooker and the boiler completed the fixtures.

Monday

Monday was washing day and what a performance – initially all washing was done by hand. In the early fifties a copper was used, not one in an outhouse but a gas heated one that was manhandled from the brick shed into the kitchen. This looked like a large metal drum that was filled with cold water via a rubber hose pushed onto the kitchen tap. If the hose were accidentally knocked, water would either flood onto the floor or hit the bottom of the sink and spray up showering anyone close by. A flexible tube leading from the base of the drum was inserted into the gas point and the heating element was lit and the water heated up. Large amounts of steam soon filled the kitchen. Persil soap powder was added and mixed in. The washing had to be sorted into whites, coloureds, and woollens etc. before being added to the boiler and churned round and round with a stick.



The Hoover Model 0307 Washing Machine.

Some years later, a 'Hoover' washing machine was bought. A hose fitted to the kitchen tap was used to fill up the machine, which churned the washing. To empty it there was a hose at the side, which either had to be pointed out of the kitchen door or into a bucket that then had to be emptied, refilled and emptied. There was an integral hand operated mangle. It was a help but there was still much lifting, mangling etc. to do. One day, when I was about 5 and trying to help, I took the emptying hose and stuck it in the bucket, but my little thumb would not fit over the hole to stop the water and the kitchen was flooded. Amazingly Mum did not yell at me – I must have looked so comical standing in a pool of water and looking so upset.

(A video of a model 0307 Hoover washing machine in action can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYw_GqcU8KA&feature=player_detailpage)

Whether washed in the copper or in the washing machine, the bed linen from three and then four beds had to be washed first. After being washed in the soapy water, the wet items had to be wrung out using the mangle, then rinsed and rung out three more times before a final pass through the mangle. The two large rollers of the mangle squashed water out of the clothes but you had to watch that your fingers did not get nipped or part of your own clothing got caught in the rollers. The sequence was then tablecloths, shirts and blouses (these were then usually starched using Robin starch) then underclothes. Stockings and woollens were washed separately by hand using 'Lux' soap flakes.

If the weather was dry, the clothes would go out to dry on the washing line and thank goodness if it was a good drying day. It was terrible if something

was blown off the line, or horror of horrors if the line broke and the whole lot had to be washed again.



*A ceiling mounted clothes airer
Image courtesy of Shelia Maid®*

If the weather was wet, the wooden airer would be lowered from the kitchen ceiling and the washing draped on it or a wooden clotheshorse. It might take days for the clothes to dry indoors and would make the kitchen so damp. Washing was very labour intensive and was hard manual work so it was no wonder that Mum's mood became worse if things went wrong or it was a bad drying day.

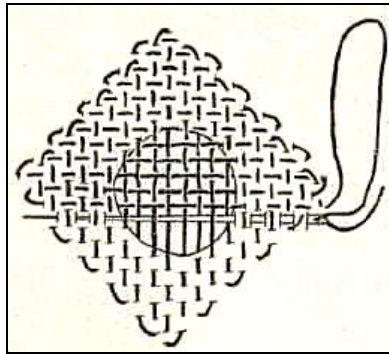
Lunch would be simple: either cold meat from the Sunday roast with salad and chips, or mince made with vegetables and boiled potatoes or stovies. Stovies were a favourite dish for most of the family. Stovies is a Scottish dish made of left over meat, sliced potatoes, onions, fried in dripping to which some stock and seasoning was added – because it was cooked in one pot it was an easy dish to make on a busy day. We might be lucky and have a steam pudding put on top.



*Stovies
Image courtesy of <http://www.stovies.com>*

A rest after lunch was much needed. If the clothes were dry and time permitted, ironing would be done in the afternoon and, as you can imagine, seemed to go on forever.

Tea would follow while the family would listen to the radio before the children were packed off to bed. Mum would listen to the radio, read, chat to Dad and often knit, darn or sew.



Darning

Darning was a way of repairing a tear in a piece of material, or more often in a sock. It involves running stitches back and forth on the cloth and then up and down. Money was tight and so darning, homemade clothes and knitted jumpers and cardigans were cheaper than shop made ones. Old bed sheets, which were wearing thin in the middle, would be cut in two and the old outside edges sewn together to get a few more months use out of them. Mum was an excellent knitter and darner, and although she made clothes, it was not her favourite task.

A 1953 advertisement for a 12-inch Black and White Television from Puratone Rental Service. The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a vintage television set. The screen displays the text "In your home for only £6 down!" and "NO EXTRA FOR AERIAL." Below the photograph, there is a block of text describing the "2-year Plan" and the "Puratone Plan". At the bottom, the company name "PURATONE RENTAL SERVICE" is prominently displayed, along with the address "64, FIFE RD., KINGSTON-ON-THAMES." and the phone number "KINGston 6407".

In your home for only £6 down!
NO EXTRA FOR AERIAL.

Our new 2-year Plan brings you television the easy trouble-free way. For two years you get full service and absolutely free replacements of tubes, valves, etc. Cut out this advertisement and send it with your name and address for details of the 2-year Puratone Plan, or better still, call and let us tell you all about it and demonstrate this fine set with its 12-in. tube picture.

PURATONE RENTAL SERVICE
64, FIFE RD., KINGSTON-ON-THAMES. KINGston 6407

*A 1953 Advert for a 12inch Black and White Television,
Our first set was rented from Puratone but was a different model.*

Why not watch television? Well, because the family could not afford one until about 1958. Occasionally we children would visit richer neighbours to watch something on their tiny screened sets. The first television programme many saw was the 1953 Coronation. The reception was not always great and to have two families trying to see the same small TV meant a bit of a crush, with children sitting on the floor and the adults having the chairs.

Tuesday

What happened on Tuesdays depended on how things went on Monday. If the washing had dried well on Monday the ironing would be started that afternoon/evening otherwise it had to be ironed on Tuesday or Wednesday.

After this Mum would go down to the shops in Station Approach Stoneleigh, where there was a grocers, a green grocer, a chemists (Evan's), a hairdressers (Balaams) and a sweet shop (Bedfords). She would order from the grocers and green grocers and the goods would be delivered by a lad on a bicycle which had a large rack on the front into which fitted a wicker basket to hold the goods to be delivered. She might also pop into the Chemists. Then she would go across the station steps to the Broadway.



*A postcard view of Stoneleigh Broadway c1950s
Image courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum*

Next to the station entrance on the Broadway side of the railway line was a blue police box (of Dr Who fame). There was a small hinged door that opened to reveal a telephone that was connected directly to the police station. The public could use the phone in an emergency otherwise it was used by the beat officer to report in. If the police station wanted to contact the beat officer a blue light on the top of the box flashed to alert him. The box was entered through a bigger door. You rarely saw inside but I recall seeing a stool, a writing shelf with drawers below, a first aid kit, a fire extinguisher, and a small electric heater. The interior was lit by a low wattage bulb. It must have been

cramped inside but would offer the patrolling police officer some degree of shelter on a wet or freezing night. Near the police box was an air raid siren that was mounted on a very tall pole.

The shops nearest the station on the north side had not been built then. There were a variety of shops: the Co-op, Neats an outfitter for men and boys, a post office (where it is now [2010] but then it was only a post office), a grocers, a green grocers, a shoe shop, Woolworths, a chemist, a fishmongers and a fish & chip shop which had a place where you could eat at the back. Mum would buy fish for lunch, but if we were on school holidays we might get a rare treat of a fish and chip lunch. There was also a bank.

If there was no need to go to the Broadway, Mum might take us across to Nonsuch Park. This seemed not such a long way in those days, as there was a set of steps across the railway at the top of Stoneleigh Park Road, close to where it became Ardrossan Garden, which meant we could get there in perhaps 20 minutes. We might have a picnic or just a walk.

In the afternoon Mum might have tea with a friend, clean the spoons etc. The tea and evening were much the same every weekday.

Wednesday

Was a day for cleaning, sweeping and brushing until a 'Hoover Junior' vacuum cleaner was bought. The kitchen floor was washed and the furniture polished with a solid wax polish from the Kleeneze man. If the tin of polish was old or the lid left off, it would dry out and if dropped, the contents would then break into several small lumps. This made polishing very difficult as the wax would not spread evenly on the surface and you had to put extra 'elbow grease' into getting the perfect shine. Dad would gently heat the tin of wax lumps to melt them so that they turned back into one piece. Most of our furniture in the 1950s was utility furniture as it was the only type available to buy during and just after the war.



A Utility Dressing Table c1945 and a can of polish

Windows would be cleaned, the painted woodwork (e.g. doors) to be wiped down. Sometimes the bitumen floor would receive a coat of a special polish and the kitchen floor painted with special red 'Cardinal' floor paint (this had to be done in the evening otherwise we children would get stuck to the wet paint – this did happen occasionally).

Thursday

Mum would often bake on a Thursday and this might include tray bakes, cakes, pies or what is now called quiche Lorraine (it was relatively a cheap dish, using odds and ends up such as a couple of rashers of bacon – we usually had streaky bacon as it was cheaper). Mum was a good cook and of course we loved to lick the spoon of any cake mixture. She made smashing steamed syrup puddings – not with suet, but lighter more like a Victoria sponge mixture if she had enough sugar as, for part of the time, rationing was in place. We also used to 'help' and Dad had to eat jam tarts, which, by the time we had finished making them, were misshaped pieces of grey pastry with jam on it. How he managed to eat them I do not know.

A big event for Mum occurred every other week when she went to the hairdressers. Mum never had a perm but I still remember the smell of the perm chemicals in the hairdresser's. There were cubicles and clients were given a flannel to hold over their face to prevent soap getting in their eyes, because to have your hair washed in those days you had to lean forward over the sink. If it was not hairdressing day she might visit friends or friends might come in to have tea.



*1950s style hair driers
Source not known*

Mum was often on call in a local emergency, such as when a neighbour's kitchen curtains caught fire, because she had been a nurse before becoming ill and had a lot of practical common sense.

Friday

Friday was the huge event of the weekly shop. Mum would walk to Worcester Park, a walk of about 20 minutes through the cattle arch at the bottom of Ardrossan Gardens. We would buy crusty loaves or rolls from Morleys the bakers and meat from a nearby butcher. She might shop at Greggs, but the shop I mainly remember was Caters on the right hand side of Central Road when heading for North Cheam.



A postcard image of Central Road Worcester Park c1955

Caters was another favourite shop because there were counters for cooked meats, bacon, ham etc., cheese, eggs on one side and on the other there were counters for tea, sugar, coffee, and large open tins of biscuits. You paid for your goods at each counter and the cooked meat was sliced to your preferred thickness on a big red slicing machine. The slices coming from the rotary blade were caught in a thin greaseproof paper, and then wrapped in a couple of pieces of white (chip shop) paper. Mum would always ask for the bacon and ham to be thinly sliced, as it would go further that way. Cheese was usually cheddar, which was very versatile, but sometimes she bought some Danish blue. The cheese was always cut with a thin wire attached to a large wooden cheese board, and the pieces then weighed and wrapped. There was no plastic wrapping or cling film in those days and the variety of cheeses available was not as extensive. Butter was pre wrapped in greaseproof paper, this was particularly necessary in hot weather when it often melted. We had no refrigerator till the late fifties and then it was gas powered; I think it was called an 'Electrolux Gascold' and was bought on a hire purchase agreement from the Gas Board.



A display case for loose biscuits.

Several large tins would be on each shelf. The tins were open to display the biscuits but the box like shelves had a hinged glass lid to deter pilfering.

On the dry goods counter the biscuits caught our attention. Again not pre wrapped, but in big tins so e.g. jammy dodgers would be in one tin and digestive biscuits in another and these had to be weighed out and tipped into paper bags. There was always one box of broken biscuits, which were sold off cheaply. Sometimes the ladies behind this counter would give us a broken biscuit to eat whilst the loose goods were weighed out.

Sugar came in bags not dissimilar to those sold today. Tea was sold in paper packets. Mum bought the yellowish packets of Horniman Dividend tea, perhaps because the label carried a dividend stamp that could be torn out and stuck to a stamp card. When filled up the stamp card was taken back to the shop and exchanged for goods. Like other varieties of teas each packet also contained a small picture card that the children of the family collected and swapped with their friends.

Dried fruits were also bought and towards Christmas Mum would buy muscovado sugar (rich, dark brown and tasting slightly treacly). Occasionally Mum would buy condensed milk with which she would make tablet – a Scottish sweet. It was a great treat, very rich and poor Mum used to have to beat it hard. We always wanted to scrape out the pan and lick the spoon once both were cold enough.



Tablet

Image by Seraphim Whipp source Wikipedia

The worst part of the Friday shop was the haul up the long hill from Worcester Park. Wheeled baskets were not readily available so for a time the pram was used as both child and shopping carrier. Later Mum had wheeled wicker work basket, this was made from course split canes so was quite scratchy if you happened to bump against it. It was a roundish shape so it did not make for easy packing and unpacking. The handle was just thick piece of sapling that was curved at the top just like an umbrella handle, this mean that you could drag it with one hand but it was very difficult to push in front of you. I don't know how she coped with two and then three children and a heavy load of shopping.

When we got home it was not the end of the story because it all had to be put away and then lunch to be prepared. For quickness and ease this often was some of the fresh bread rolls filled with the cheese we had just bought.

Friday afternoon, subsequently evening, we went to the library. Our library changed over time. Initially it was in Shadbolt House, then Ewell Court and finally Stoneleigh Broadway when the new shops were built. Mum and Dad were great readers and encouraged us to read, do our homework and did spelling bees [tests]. Reading to us was great. When we went to bed Mum would sing to us e.g. Golden Slumbers.

Saturday

Milk was delivered daily by Job's Dairy and Saturday was the day we paid him. In summer the milk would go off quickly if left in the sun on the doorstep, and in winter it would freeze with the cream pushing off the tin foil top and poking up. Another problem with doorstep milk deliveries was that the blue tits had learned to peck through the milk bottle top to get to the inch or so of cream. Milk came in 3 varieties: silver top = full fat, gold top = extra creamy, red top, which I think, = homogenized.

We did a variety of things on Saturday e.g. go for a walk, go into Epsom, or play outside if dry, inside if not. Dad would repair shoes (he had a metal block with all different sizes and would glue on new soles etc.), decorate, do gardening or all those other things needed doing around the house. Mum loved her garden and worked hard to convert the heavy clay into productive soil, but had to give up any idea of growing vegetables. One year her father and mother came to stay and Grandad said he would dig it over for us; he had kept a large garden in Scotland and thought he would quickly whip it into shape. He stopped after an hour!!!

On Saturday Dad enjoyed listening to cricket in Summer and Saturday evening was Dad's time for checking his football pools. He never won a great deal but he seemed to enjoy doing it.

Sunday

We did not go to church because something in the churches triggered asthma attacks. Mum would be busy getting ready for Sunday lunch – usually roast beef because Dad did not like most other meats. There might be an apple pie or baked apples for pudding. Coffee finished off the meal for Mum and Dad. Dad bought the coffee in London and brewed it in the percolator and the smell was fantastic.

Afterwards we would listen to the radio: Billy Cotton Band Show, Educating Archie Tony Hancock etc. and often we would then go and visit the grandparents in West Ewell. Sometimes we walked – it seemed a long way. Sometimes we went by train – I hated the steps at West Ewell because you could see through them and they made me feel as though I might fall through them – silly but true. Once we had the car it made it much quicker and easier.

Granny and Grandpa and an aunt rented a three bedroom semi detached house and shared it with a varying number of cats: sometimes one,

sometimes two. The smell of the fish for the cats always struck me as we arrived. Granny had been a dressmaker and was always busy with her pedal sewing machine or a needle. Grandpa told wonderful stories. Our aunt was glamorous and made us laugh. Dad would play their piano (we could not afford one), above which there was a picture of what I assumed was a harem and there were two large coloured china or pottery figures. Tea was an event during which Granny could use her very ornate, wide mouthed cups and saucers, which meant the tea was always cold. Unfortunately, because the cats triggered my asthma, we often had to leave promptly.

Miscellaneous memories.

Christmas



*A British Railways Scammell Scarab Delivery Lorry
Image by Don O'Brien, Source Flickr via Wikipedia*

Just before Christmas Mum would get a large parcel from her parents in Scotland. Occasionally this was sent by train and was delivered by an articulated railway lorry with a three wheeled cab section. The parcel might contain a fresh turkey or large chicken, and some eggs from Granny and Grandpa's own chickens (Granny always had some chicks just hatched when we arrived in Scotland for our holidays). Also there were sometimes jars of homemade jam that had jewel-like colours, along with perhaps some wool or enough cloth to make a skirt. It also had toys for us kids, so its arrival caused great excitement.

Christmas morning we would wake to pillowcases at the foot of the bed with a clementine, a nut and a 6-penny piece (2½ new pence) and our presents. We would drag them into the parents and, all sitting in their bed, open them. Mum would cook the lunch, getting redder and redder in the steamy kitchen and especially after a wee dram (we only had alcohol at special events such as Christmas and weddings). The local aunts and uncle and grandparents would arrive and after listening to the Queen's speech, would open the presents they brought. Mum would then produce tea for 13 or 14. I always missed the later stages and ended up in bed with an asthma attack.

The telephone

During the late fifties we acquired a telephone mainly so that Mum could talk to her Scottish family. Telephone lines were in short supply and, if you were lucky enough to get one, you had to share it with a neighbour on what was called a party line.



*A 1950s GPO Telephone with a call exchange button
Image courtesy of [The Telephone Box](#)*

To make a call out you lifted the handset and listen to see if the neighbour was using the line, in which case you quickly replaced the receiver and tried again a few minutes later. If the line was not in use you had to press a button on the top of the phone before you could dial the number. The phone also had a little drawer on the front that contained a hinged clear plastic sleeve could contain a piece of card on which you could write all your favourite numbers.

If you wanted to make a long distance call you had to dial the local operator and ask for 'Trunks', the Trunks operator would then route your call through the long distance lines of the trunk network and ask the operator at the final exchange to connect you.

If for some reason your neighbour had not replaced their handset properly, you could not get a line out, so you had to dash round to their house to ask them to replace it properly. Mum or Dad were not happy if it was raining or if the neighbours were out and you were denied the use of the phone for hours, or even days.

The telephone itself did not have push button numbers but a rotary dial with the numbers below the dial and holes corresponding to the numbers. To dial

'Nine' you would put your finger in the hole corresponding to the nine and drag the dial all the way back to a rest that prevented the dial going further – it seemed to take ages. Number one being much nearer the rest only took a short time to dial. There was a clicking sound when you dialled - difficult to describe but clearly remembered. The clicks occurred because the dial mechanism sent an electrical pulse (not the high speed tones used in modern phones) to the equipment in the exchange as the dial returned to its normal position. One pulse was sent if you dialled number 1, two pulses for number 2 and so on. Clever multi-level, electro-mechanical switches at the exchange interpreted the pulses and pauses and made the connection

Summer

In summer, when the weather was hot, we spent a lot of time in the garden. Mum would arrange one travelling rug on the grass and suspend another from the clothes' line with the edge dangling to the ground weighted with bricks to create a sort of one sided tent. This would give us shade and we would have a tea party with some of the neighbouring children; Linda and Susie, Brian and Heather. The tea party might be real with sandwiches and milk or might be imaginary, but was fun. It also prevented us from getting too sunburnt – there were no sun creams in those days. We had a rocking elephant on which, when we were young we would sit and rock back and forth – it had red runners and of course a grey body and white tusks.

Mum would get us playing some of the games she played as a girl: 'What's the time Mister Wolf?' where we would creep up on one child who was the wolf chanting 'What's the time Mister Wolf? One o'clock, two o'clock etc'. Suddenly the wolf would turn round and chase us trying to catch us calling 'Time to gobble you up'. Others were 'In and out the dusky bluebells', 'Oranges and Lemons', 'Ring-a-ring-a- roses'.

One year we decided we would dig to Australia – we dug and we dug and we dug, but we did not get very far – perhaps two feet. It was such hard going because of the clay. We covered it over in the evening with bits of old wood and some leafy branches. Poor Mum only discovered it later that evening when she fell into the hole – we were not popular and the next day we had to fill it in!

Regular callers

Because of the lack of cars there were plenty of regular and irregular callers to the house. The milkman dropped off milk everyday but collected his money on Saturday. On Tuesday and Saturday the baker called – we called him Fred the Bread. The rent man called to collect the rent and mark the rent book every Wednesday. Mum paid the two 2 insurance men who called perhaps once a month as did the Kleeneze man.

In the Summer the ice cream van could be heard and, if we were lucky, we might have a cone or the man would fill a jug with ice cream that we had with our desert. We discovered that the ice cream man came from an Italian family called Polosis (?) and they also had a shop in Scotland close to Mum's family home so we always got a full measure of his delicious Italian ice cream.

About once a week in later years, a Lemonade man called and we would have a bottle of Tizer. The postman called twice a day Monday to Saturday and Mum was always looking forward to letters from her family.



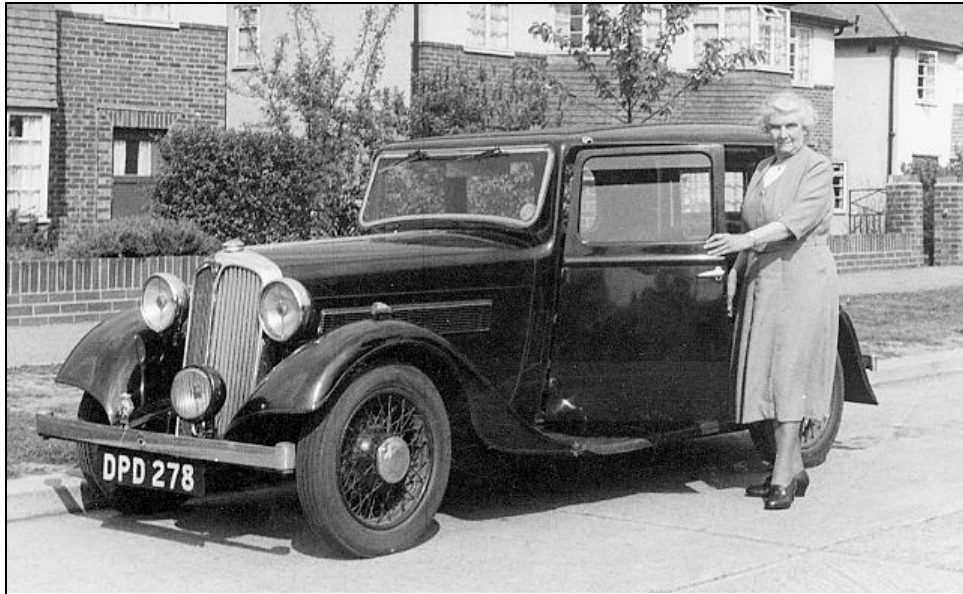
*A Dustcart of the type used in the 1950s
Image courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum*

The poor dustbin men had no wheelie bins to ease their burden. A metal dustbin with a metal lid had to be picked up from beside the house and balanced on their shoulder and the contents dumped into the yellow rubbish truck that had a roll top lid. The road sweeper and drain clearer called less frequently than now. A big event was the coal man. The Charrington's lorry would turn up with sacks of coal, anthracite etc stacked on the back. The men wore black hats with a flap at the back and hoisted the sacks onto their shoulders. We always had to count the sacks in to make sure the correct number of sacks were delivered.

Because of my asthma, during my first few years at infant school I only attended once in a while, and because of this, we were visited by, what in England was called the School Attendance Officer, but Mum used the Scottish term 'whipper in' to describe his visits. After the few visits they accepted that I was unable to attend school regularly and the visits stopped.

Our first car and holidays in Scotland

When we finally got a car a lot of time was spent repairing it. It was a black Rover 12 with running boards down the sides, and little semaphore turn indicators that popped out from the pillar between the front and back doors. There was no boot as such, just a space for the spare tyre and a chromed drop down luggage platform. It was over 20 years old when we got – but it was our pride and joy. With it we could go to places we would otherwise be unable to reach e.g. Polesden Lacey (access to the grounds were free at that time), or Neatly Heath. It also made it easier to visit our grandparents in West Ewell.



*The Rover 12 with my (West Ewell) grandmother.
Image courtesy of the Reed Family © 2011*

But it also meant that we could visit our grandparents in Aberdeenshire far more cheaply than by train (a sleeper where we always argued who was to have the top bunk and in the morning the conductor would bring us tea). This was very important to Mum. She only rarely got to see her family, and until we had a phone, contact was more difficult. It must have been difficult for her at times being so far away from her family.

Dad used to drive us the 600 miles and on the way we would stop with one aunt and uncle or another overnight before continuing on our way (Mum was one of 10 children and the family had spread out in Scotland with one in England). We had a primus stove kept in an old biscuit tin to protect it from the wind and Mum cooked us meals in lay-bys on the way. Once in a while we would stop at Carlisle where the lady in the Ladies would help Mum get us washed and changed after which we would have fish and chips. We played 'I spy' and looked for particular motorcars or AA men to wave to. If we saw a horse we had to hold our collar until we saw another one (I never knew why). Dad was always very tired by the time we arrived and so too was Mum trying to keep us occupied and happy. One year the car's radiator boiled and we had to wait until it cooled down before Dad could top up the water. There were also days when we were stuck behind huge lorries struggling to get up steep hills, or even worse cars with caravans, for what seemed like ages.

Whilst in Scotland all the other members of the family not based locally would try to make it there too. So you can imagine that the family gatherings were huge and often held in my grandparent's house called 'Ivydene'. It had a large kitchen where Granny used to cook us lovely food on the Aga (necessary up there where the winters were harsh). Sometimes the gatherings were held on a local beach where three or four families produced picnics for all. We would pick wild raspberries, which the mums would turn into jam. One year we were supposed to have made 100lbs of jam (1 pound (lb) is about half a kilo): well there were a lot of us to pick the berries.

Laughter prevailed with Aunt Anna having an extremely infectious laugh or someone would say something and the laughing would begin and continue it seemed for hours – how our ribs ached.

'Ivydene' adjoined the shop Grandpa owned. To get to the shop you walked through a tiny courtyard in which the family's meat safe was placed, as it was always shady. The shop was magical, seeming to sell everything from groceries to material, fruit and vegetables to sweets as well as some things used by the local farmers. At the back of the shop there was the loading bay, for up there [Scotland], food etc. had to be driven out to the outlying farms. At the same time eggs etc. would be collected, and be sold back in the shop. Payment by customers would often only be made once a quarter as many of them were only paid quarterly. Some customers seemed to think that Granny and Grandpa did not have to pay for things they used from the shop and thought they had a cushy life. Grandpa, apart from running the shop, grew vegetables for the family, ran an egg grading station for the local farmers and drove people to hospital, weddings, funerals etc. (Grandpa when young had been a master baker and had worked on ships).

Granny, apart from catering for the family and those working in the shop etc., wrote for the local newspaper, trained staff for the big houses near by and of course, sewed, knitted and preserved. A strict tea-totaller, she was very generous to visitors.

*This text was written by Patricia Reed
with help from her brother Peter ©2011*

---o0o---