



## REMINISCENCES OF MRS B PEACOCK & MRS C FAUSSET

### *Reminiscences of Epsom by Mrs B Peacock of Westcott, Surrey*

I was born in June 1914 in Epsom, Surrey, the youngest of four children. Of the war years I have scant recollection, beyond once crying when my sisters went to school and I was too young to join them. There were no nursery schools in those days.

We lived in a three storey Victorian house, which had four bedrooms and a bathroom. Only cold water was installed to the bathroom, so when baths were taken large cans of boiling water had to be carried from the kitchen up two flights of stairs. In each bedroom there was a washstand topped by a wash basin and ewer full of cold water, a soap dish, and mugs for tooth brushes etc. So each morning hot water had to be fetched, or delivered if one was lucky, to the bedroom door for necessary ablutions. The house had no central heating so our bedrooms and the bathroom were warmed in winter by oil-filled standard lamps, which stood about 3-4 feet from the floor, made of brass with pale pink glass globes. These gave out a comforting warmth, enhanced by the glow from the pink shades.

Gas was the main source of lighting, but we children went to bed by candlelight. The candles were set in decorative holders and we each had our own. Gas was of course used in the main living rooms but the staircases were again lit by oil lamps which stood on brackets in a suitable niche of the staircase.

The living rooms were splendidly heated by open coal fires. In the kitchen was a coal fired kitchen range, which consisted of an oven, which was excellent for slow long cooking and for heating bricks, which were wrapped in woollen covers and put in our beds on winter nights, or used to 'air'

unused beds. We also had a gas cooker where the main cooking took place.

Traditionally Monday was washing day when the family laundry was washed by hand in a deep stone sink in the kitchen. The larger white linen items such as sheets, pillow slips, etc were then immersed in a copper of very hot water and soap flakes and brought to the boil. The copper was heated by coal and had to be lit very early in the morning. The ironing of the laundry took place on a flat kitchen table, which in turn was covered by a large folded blanket topped with a white sheet which formed an agreeable base on which to press, smooth and iron out creases. When I was very young the heavy black irons were heated on top of the kitchen range.

When I was about ten years of age, 1924, (I can't profess accuracy) my parents had the whole house wired for electricity. This eased the domestic burden considerably. A small electric fire was used on cool days when a coal fire was not necessary. Two or three years after this we had our first radio set.

In these early years all the services to the home were horse-drawn transport. The baker with a big cane basket would call daily with fresh baked bread, the milkman called twice a day with a large pail full of creamy milk from the local farm and with one pint and half pint ladles would pour our order into the family jugs. The postman carried the mail in satchels and delivered to the house twice daily. Parcel mail arrived in a hand pushed covered cart. Before winter set in at least one ton of coal was delivered by coalmen with one hundred weight sacks on their backs. They were taken from the coal cart which was drawn by one or maybe two strong patient horses. With several fires to feed this coal delivery was ordered again in late winter. Gradually the horse drawn traffic largely vanished and the private and commercial life was taken over by the motor car, lorries, and vans.



*Bertha Woodhouse (Mrs Peacock)  
aged 5 or 6 in about 1920*



Our trips to London or the coast were by steam trains which we loved. During my school days a second station was built in Epsom, known to us locally as the Waterloo line. The electric train had arrived.

I do not recollect any further great changes in the way of life until I married in 1937. My husband and I had a house built within a few hundred yards of Epsom Downs. It was semi-detached with an integral garage and two excellent brick built fuel sheds. These could be approached from the back door of the house via a covered porchway. At the rear of the house we had a 300 ft. garden, with views on a clear day to far away London. In another direction the river at Windsor would gleam in the setting sun. The pleasures and comforts in this new house were enormous. The engine room of the house - the kitchen - was not large but light and with adequate space for a small table and chairs where we would eat breakfast enjoying the warmth from the Ideal boiler, which heated the water for the bathroom and the partial central heating. One radiator in the hall and a hot towel rail in the bathroom. The floors of the hall, dining room and sitting room were of oak wood parquet and added a considerable attraction to the rooms when polished and enhanced by colourful Indian carpets and rugs. Above stairs were 3 bedrooms, a bathroom and airing cupboard.

For those interested in the change in commercial values, in 1937 this well built house cost 940 pounds (in old money). Around 1989 when property prices soared a similar neighbouring house was sold for 130,000 pounds.

On a personal theme I vividly recollect being very ill with diphtheria when I was about nine years old. The doctor was called and together with my older sister (who had a sore throat and was the 'carrier of the illness') we were taken to the Epsom isolation hospital in a horse drawn ambulance. Nancy was allowed home after two weeks but I was there at least a month. I cried when the nurse injected serum into my bottom and only gave me barley water to drink on Christmas day.

When I was eleven and a half years old I developed fluid on the knee. It was so painful I could not even ride my bicycle to school. Our family doctor ordered rest and my leg was put in a splint and I was away from school for several months. Eventually and because the rest and splint treatment did not work I was referred to St Thomas's Hospital. The consultant surgeon decided an operation was necessary. I was a very terrified little girl when the anaesthetist covered my face with a mask and poured on the fluid which mercifully made me unconscious of the operation.

After a few days when I was allowed out of bed I had a 'peek' at the notes which were clipped to the foot of the bed. Among other things it said 'TB knee?'. The seriousness of this I understood and realized it accounted for the transfer of myself and another child to sleep at night on an outside balcony of the ward. We faced the Houses of Parliament and could hear the booming chimes of Big Ben. The murky river Thames flowed just beneath us and we breathed the cool / cold smoggy London air.

Fortunately I did not have TB. After a further incident, when I slipped and fell in the ward due to a highly polished floor, I was allowed home. I was treated with great kindness by the doctors and nurses in St Thomas's but visiting by parents and friends was Wednesday and Sunday afternoons only. Thank God times have changed and now young children have the comfort and reassurance of daily visits by parents.

### *Mrs Fausset's reminiscences of Ewell Village before 1914*

*During the search for information about Ewell shops, the Documentary Group came across a letter to Phyllis Davies, written by Mrs Cecilie Fausset, nee Willis, describing life in pre-1914 Ewell as she remembered it. At the time it was written, 1983, Mrs Fausset, who had been brought up at 9 High Street, Ewell was an old lady with very poor eyesight and the manuscript is not only difficult to read but shows little punctuation. It is nevertheless full of interest and it is now reproduced verbatim, but with a little added punctuation.*

After Mr Elliott's bakery - Mr Willis' yard up to the blacksmiths. This had a chalk floor and walls. The anvils and fire were in a large workshop. Beside it Mr W. Beams and his son rented the small sheds for his builders and decorators. The blacksmith was an old soldier and left to rejoin the army the day after war was declared and the farriers was closed for good. Mr Willis' ironmongers shop next: here every night the maid shut the shutters at the front selling room windows. Mr Lansbury lived next - he had the station cab and also hired his carriage and took you for drives. Mr Bardwick had the grocer's shop at the corner: here you could choose a ham and they would cook it and send it. Mr Scowen, the verger, lived next door.

Sir Gervas Glyn, the squire and owner of most of the village, lived at the Rectory, now Glyn House. His brother and heir, Arthur, lived opposite in the Well House with his sister, Margaret, who inherited the property from her mother. All the property was sold at her death and many tenants bought their



houses. My mother bought No.9 High Street and no deeds of the house could be found. Our family had rented the house, shop and yard for nearly 200 years and Sir Arthur considered us his oldest tenants.

Mr Frank Charman had a butchers in Church Street next to his sister's house. The old hand fire engine was kept in the little building with a grille in it. This was later and in my time replaced by a horse drawn engine. The horses were provided by the various shop keepers, their vans often left in the road until their horses were returned. A fire was a great excitement in our quiet village. The Lord Nelson Public House in the High Street had one and the whole village ran to see it. Unfortunately, there was a large hole in the hose and the onlookers were drenched. I don't know how the water eventually got to the fire. The men of the village were the firemen.

Mrs Perry had a greengrocers shop opposite Bardricks, later moved to higher up the High Street. Her shop became a chemists. Mr Cole, known as King Cole, kept the William IV, a fine man with red hair and a splendid beard. Vanderbilt's four horse stage coach on its way to Brighton changed horses there. This was a private coach owned by a rich American with his friends on board. The horn was sounded on entering and leaving the village.

Mr Pigden had his tailor's shop next to The International for a short time. Baldwyn's butchers, Shaplans bicycles, Jones drapers, The Cave tea rooms, Post Office and a garden with the Parochial Hall, Radford & Charles the grocer and wine merchant.

Dr Rycart - a large ivy covered house, owned by a Mr Wilkinson, a racehorse owner by repute. Opposite a German family lived with some bad tempered chows, the late Mr Martin, a gentleman farmer, and his daughter. The house, later the library, was owned by Mr Potts and his daughter. Sir David Evans lived in the house at the corner of Monger's Lane. Next to Martins, Dr Raynor, then the Star Public House at the corner.

Going up the High Street - Barclays Bank. You went down a step into this. Jack Perry's fruit and vegetables and flowers - he was very skilful with church flowers. The Congregational Hall then lying back, a row of small shops, drapers, sweets & cigarettes, shoe makers and fish shop. The last was Frank Crockford who married a Miss Perry and went to Australia. Next were a pair of tiny shops with bow windows, a watch and clock maker and a ladies' underwear and baby clothes kept by Miss Pritchard. Two cottages then Mr Hodges, linen drapers, and a baker's shop. A little covered passage between this and a fancy needlework and wool shop where the horse walked to his stable, a bicycle shop, some cottages with gardens in front.

In Epsom Road two brothers had large houses. Mrs Radclyffe Walters lived at Persfield; Mr Melmoth Walters lived opposite. She had two sons. Clara Butt visited Mrs Radclyffe Walters and married a connection whose name escapes me. Sir Edward Coates of the cotton manufacturers lived next, Mr Jacombs next, then the Grove leading to West Street. At Miss Packman's dairy, milk was delivered twice a day from large churns and dipped out. Early milk was contained in small cans with the name of the dairy on a brass plate. Later it was Curtis' dairy. A shop next was taken by Mr Earle, who I believe has a supermarket. Some cottages with gardens were next, then Nelson Inn and cottages on to the pavement. The Working Men's Club, some Victorian villas - in one of them my old great aunt lived with her cat and housekeeper. There was a fine walnut tree in her garden. The Green Man is still in the same place - that part was called Green Man Street. Next to the villas, Grove by name, was Goodship and Saunders, the builders. They had a very clever carpenter and cabinet maker, Frank Weaver. Then the Westminster Bank, Stevens the grocer, George Savage, fishmonger, killed in 1914, the fire station and council office, Mr Powley, a very superior bootmaker. His sons were killed in the war - all three sang in the church choir. Then Williams, newsagent, sweets and fancy good, Coakes the grocer and Allder, butcher.

In West Street, the barber with his red and white pole - haircut for threepence. Mr Ayling, the cobbler and his son Roger, a great favourite of Sir Arthur - he entertained the district with comic songs. Mr Wilkins lived at the other corner - they were bakers. You went down a step into the shop. There was a slot in the counter to put your pennies into the till. Then came a private house, next Moger had a corn Chandler's shop and coal office. He had fine horses and as children we used to watch them go in and out from our window. They had a large red brick granary onto the street. Then there was a high wall behind which was a garden of a house in Spring Street. Mr Cracknell's butcher's shop ended the village.

The Spring Hotel, some gardens and church hall, a house, then Mill Lane. A large house occupied by Major Perkins, the recreation ground, with a fine row of elms bordering London Road, the Organ Inn, two wooden houses on a bank. The Stoneleigh estate - a large house owned by a Mrs Stevens was the first house to be pulled down. The rest of London Road consisted of Victorian and Edwardian villas. A farm called Sparrow Farm was on that side of the road. Just inside Nonsuch Park gates was Cherry Orchard Farm. Mark and Alfred Lester, the actors, lived in a bungalow in this road. Also Mr and Mrs Laird (the first to own a car in Ewell ?) then Woodgate, the old



toll. Fields where the new churchyard is now. Mr Green, our carrier, lived here. Also an old tarred wooden house in Church Street next to the Vicarage. Lovers Lane led up to the fields and kilns, now the London Brick Company, I think. Ewell Castle was occupied by a German, Captain Weiner, who made the beautiful gardens. Next came Ox Alley, so called because an ox was said to have escaped up it and when cornered could not be turned as it was too large for the narrow alley. Then Well House.

Lord Rosebery used to drive in his postillion carriage and most of the gentry had carriages. Sir Gervas Glyn was often seen and the Misses Pearce in their donkey cart. Most shops had delivery vans and delivery boys on bicycles. The large houses would employ 3 or 4 maids and a woman once or twice a week. Outside there would be a gardener and at least a garden boy. Many of the men had cottages provided. There was plenty of employment at the farms.

It was a very happy village. Our great day was the Flower Show in the Rectory grounds, with swings and races and the Ewell and Epsom Brass Band, with dancing in the evening. My mother got up some concerts and plays. There was the Guild of Arts and Crafts and the Girls Friendly Society, tennis club with a dancing class in winter. Earlier there was a

very good little dramatic club, people joining from Epsom. Every year Sangers' circus came to the Half Mile Bush, a field half way to Epsom. The elephants were brought down to our horse pond in the evening to wash and drink. There was a school outing to Littlehampton by train and Mrs Elliott gave a hay party. These sound simple but to the village it was exciting.

The old station opposite the Glyn Hotel in Cheam Road was the South Coast railway and ran from Victoria and London Bridge via Sutton to Brighton. From Ewell East you could go on Sunday afternoon to Brighton for 2/6 return run by the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon excursion. There were no houses between the station and Banstead Road - only large cornfields on either side. Reigate Road was also fields and farmland from the railway bridge to Tom Walls, the actor's house by the Drift Bridge. In the fields between Reigate and Cheam Roads were old railway carriages which housed the casual labourers for the farm. The road to West Ewell from the South Western Station was all farmland to the village of West Ewell which had a church but only one tiny shop. The fare from this S.W. station to Epsom was three halfpennies single, and 1/6 return to Waterloo. A workman's ticket to Waterloo by any train before 8 a.m. was 8d.

### **Epsom & Ewell History and Archaeology Society was formerly called Nonsuch Antiquarian Society.**