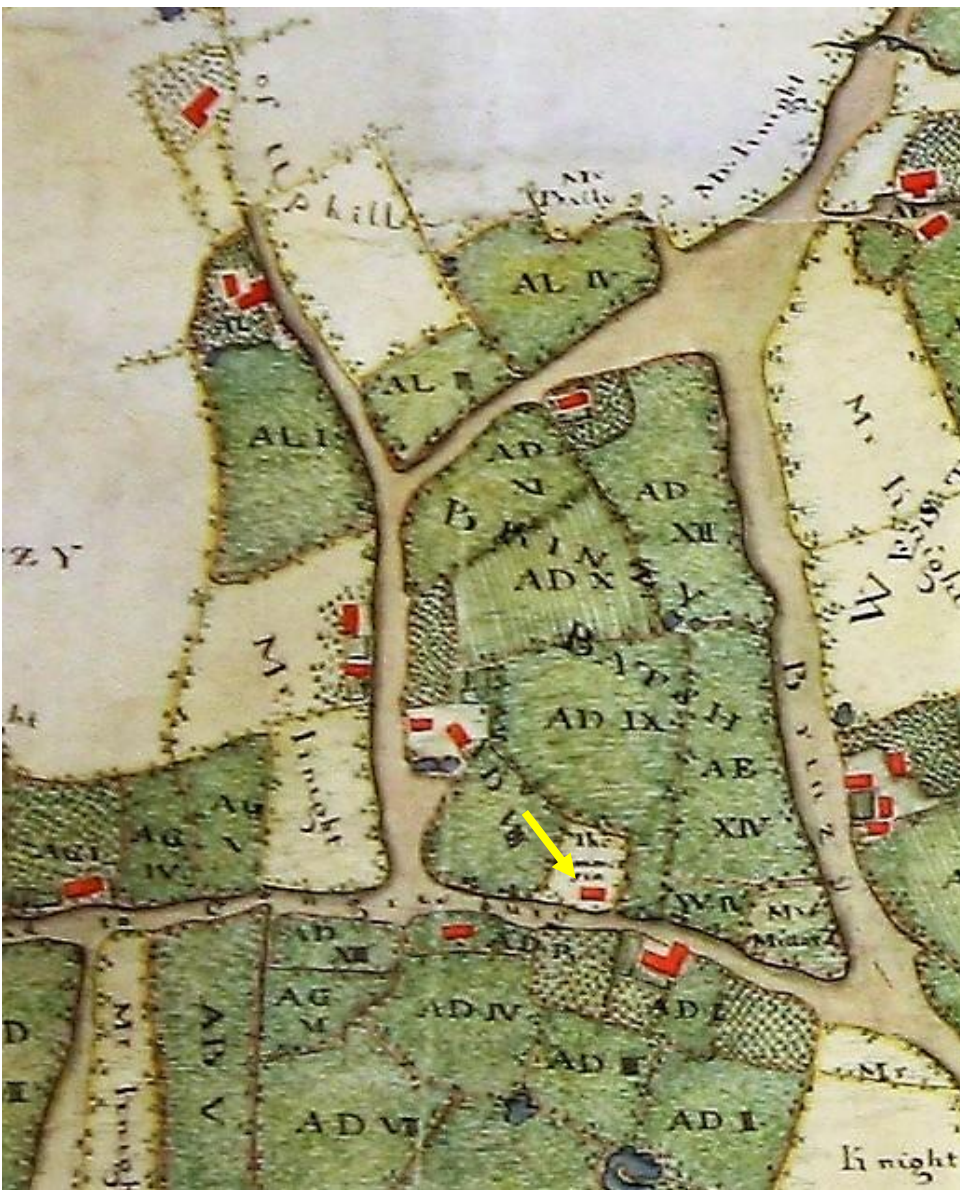


Growing up in the 1930s, 40's and 50's by Mrs Jean Darby

Brinsea Cottage

My father purchased Brinsea Cottage in 1926 for £700 and moved in after he and my mother were married in the July of that year. From what they told me it was kennels before they bought it and when cleaning the floor of the larder found a doormat buried in the dogs' mess.

Deeds for Brinsea Cottage date back to 1763 but I have always understood that the original cottage, one up and one down was much earlier than that and was built as a Cob Cottage. This I believe is a dwelling built over night to establish the rights to the land which is seven eighths of an acre. I have also heard that the vicar around the 1760's called in all the deeds of the properties in the village and had a bonfire – how true that is I do not know.



*1736-9 Congresbury de Wilstar map. Courtesy of Bristol Record Office.
Brinsea Cottage is indicated by the yellow arrow.*

When decorating our family home we have found various interesting features – the main being an inglenook which had been plastered over and three fireplaces had been built within it. I think there had been a bread oven there originally. Another is in the centre wall of the lounge there is a window with the glass still intact and a wall built the other side which is now the wall of the dining room. This was bricked over as we didn't have the money then to make it a feature. In the bedrooms you can see where the roof was raised at some time and on the landing the shelf which runs the whole width of the house is where the original back roof was.

Downstairs seemed to be open plan, as you came straight into the kitchen from the back door and had a larder or cold room the other side with the stairs which were to the right-hand side of the door. They put a long settle by the back door making a passage and also to help keep some heat from the range in. There were two rooms in the front, one the front door opened into it, so my father put a tongued and grooved partition up, making a hallway. The front two rooms are the same to-day.

Upstairs were two bedrooms in the front, again they are the same to-day and the two at the back could not be used as bedrooms as the ceilings were very low. The room over the kitchen had a ham smoking cupboard which when I stood in it having the smoking door shut, I could see the sky. All along the back wall was glassed in, and this helped to keep the cold out.

A pump was situated against the back wall. This had a pipe leading down to the well which was in the garden. That was all the water we had for drinking, washing etc.

The toilets were up the garden, a long wooden seat with two large holes and a small one over a ditch. Newspaper was cut up and hung in bundles on the door as there was no toilet paper then. Each side of the path were high privet hedges so no one could see where you were going. At night we had chamber pots under the bed.

I think it was sometime in 1936 that mains water came to our area. We had it put in the dairy as with plans for altering the house it seemed a waste of money to try and get it into the kitchen.

In 1936 my father had the back pulled down and a kitchen and dining room downstairs and a double and single bedroom and bathroom built upstairs at a cost of £300. We also had a door built between the kitchen and the lean to where the copper was and where the safe (a large mesh box on legs) was, (now it would be a fridge). This held the meat, butter, milk etc. This was an area in two sections, the first where the copper and mangle were and the second one was where the butter was made up into half and one pound packs. Near Christmas we had various poultry stored there which my father had to draw and prepare for sale to the shops in Bristol.

I was born in 1930, the local lady who helped then was Mrs Jones, she came and helped my Mother for about 3 weeks after I was born. I was christened in St Andrew's Church with an **uncle** (my father's brother who was curate at Langport) assisting the vicar. My first memories are when I was about 3 years old, I was pushed down to the corner of the Batch for Miss Hilda Stuckey to take me to the Methodist Sunday School, my mother was a Methodist and my father Anglican, but as the Anglicans had no Sunday School I was sent to the Methodist. I loved it when it was my turn to stand out the front to take the collection, the other children marching round to drop their pennies in the plate I held.

A typical week

Monday was always washing day. My father would get up early to fill the copper with rain water (when there was enough in the water butt) or otherwise use water from the well which was just outside the door to the lean to. You always had to prime the pump to get water running so had to keep some water ready to pour down the well to get it to work. I'm not sure how that worked but

I can remember having to fill up this jug of water each evening. My father then lit the fire under the copper so that by the time he had gone to work the water was hot enough for my mother to start washing, the whites first then the coloured clothes. After a light lunch the clothes were ready to be mangled before hanging out to dry. Before I started school and if it was fine. I was given a tub of water on a stool with the handkerchiefs in to wash which kept me quiet. Our evening meal was cold meat and bubble & squeak with chutney or mustard.



Mangle c 1934

I can remember one Monday the washing finished and my mother went to feed the hens – we had one sitting on a clutch of eggs which had started hatching and she found two little chicks cold and stiff. She brought them in and threw them into the fire under the copper which had been cleaned out but was still warm. Later in the evening we heard chirping sounds and the two chicks had revived because of the warmth and were running about in the fire grate.

Tuesday was when she did the ironing, having to heat the irons on the range, then putting them in a shield before ironing the clothes. Together with some cleaning this took up most of the day.

Wednesday she spent some time making butter which had arrived in 56 lb packs. This had to be kneaded until soft enough to handle which her brother, my Uncle George helped with, then put into cups which had a leaf pattern in the base, then put out on squares of greaseproof paper and packed into boxes specially made to take 14 lbs ready to sell in the shops. There were also pound

packs which were made into oblong blocks also put on greaseproof paper and packed into 14 lbs boxes. Butter pats were used to make the oblongs, something I never mastered.

Thursday was the day she spent at her mother's who lived at Redcliffe House cleaning her place and getting a cooked lunch for her and Uncle George and also doing some washing for them. My Grandfather had died in 1933 so I cannot remember him.

Friday she spent cleaning our own place which included black leading the range which was a dirty job. The floors in the back were flagstones and needed washing so it was on your hands and knees for that.

Saturday my father spent doing gardening or in the winter doing repair jobs around the house. He had learnt woodwork at Wake & Dean's at Yatton when he left school and was very handy at DIY.

My mother did a lot of cooking, making cakes and fruit pies for the coming week. In the afternoon the copper was filled with water ready for baths in front of the range in the evening. A large tin bath was brought in (it usually hung near the copper) and the water was brought into the kitchen in buckets to fill the bath. I was the first, then my father put me to bed while my Mother had hers then my Father had his. After he emptied the bath down the drain, or if it was summer and it had been dry weather it was kept for watering the garden.



Jean with her mother and father

Sundays my Father usually went to St Andrews in the morning while my Mother cooked a roast dinner for us, then I went to Sunday School and when I got home in the summer we would go for a picnic – Burrington Combe or Goblin Combe and sometimes Clevedon. Writing this now I feel it must have been a hard life, but it was the same for most families. We were fortunate as we had a car, a Morris, I think. It had a bench seat in the front which had a canvas hood which you could put up when it rained and a 'dicky seat at the back which was open to the elements and was

where I rode unless it rained and I squeezed into the front. Once a month we used to go to Bruton where my Mother's family came from and see her brothers and sister, they were all married so that was three different homes. I often fell asleep on the way home.

Education

I started school in the January of 1936 – I was 5 years old. My father had taken me into school the first morning and arranged for me to eat my sandwiches in with the caretaker's wife who had about eight or ten of us that lived a long way from the school sit around her dining table and for a penny she would give us a hot cup of cocoa. We then went out in the playground to play until the afternoon session started. By this time I had had enough of school and decided to walk home. However, when the afternoon classes assembled it was found I was missing and they sent a teacher out to look for me and take me back to school, no doubt crying my eyes out. My father had taught Uncle George how to drive the car so he fetched me most days.



Congresbury school.

Standing from left to right are, Miss Smallwood, student teacher, Charlie Clarke, John Gosling, Ruth Clarke, ?, ?, Ruth Phippen, Rosemary?, Alfred ?, Peter Palmer, Greta Sparey, Myself (Jean Darby), Tony Sims, Amy Bailey.

Kneeling down – Gerald Hutchings, Jean Bateman, ?, Margaret Richards, Margaret Sparey, John Palmer, ?, Esme Atwell, ?, John ?, Pricilla Parsons, Ruth Stuckey and Henry Bailey.

I had Mrs Farr as my teacher, she was the Headmaster's wife and taught us our letters and numbers, many of which I already knew. We had drawing and also had mats to roll out as we had a half an hour's sleep in the afternoon. School was tiring work !!!

Mr Farr was taken ill and died in my second year so often Mrs Farr would go up to the grave to put flowers on the grave and some of us children asked if we could go with her. We fetched water and helped arrange the flowers in the vase, then she would send us back to school so that she could have a quiet time on her own at the grave side.



Congresbury school football team 1924/5 with Mr Farr (right)

Isolation

In 1937 I had scarlet fever and was in Shute Shelve Isolation hospital for 6 weeks. I was very poorly to start with but by the second week I was taking notice of what went on. I knew on a Wednesday my father went to Bridgewater Market to meet farmers who would bring their eggs for him to buy, so around 9.15am I used to go out on the veranda of the ward and wave like mad when I saw the van going down Shute Shelve. Often my mother went with him as they called in at the hospital to visit me on their way home. They also came on Sunday afternoons which was all the time my father could spare which coincided with visiting hours.

Holidays

The only time the family had a few days holiday was over the August Bank Holiday when we went to Brea and stayed with a friend of my mother's. We would arrive late on the Friday evening have Saturday, Sunday and return home Monday evening and nearly always it was in a thunder storm as the week-end had been so hot. I can remember being there in 1939 and seeing a Zeppelin go over. It was like a large oblong balloon and scores of people were out watching it.

Other times I was taken either to an aunt's at Shirehampton or Bruton to another aunt for a week. At Shirehampton I would be taken on long walks sometimes to the docks where my uncle worked unloading the banana boats or down by the river Avon and sometimes going on the ferry to Pill or the train into Bristol. At a week-end my cousin would take me to Blaise Castle and we caught the bus home. At Bruton I would be staying in a newsagent's shop which also sold sweets and I would follow my aunt into the shop in the hope of getting a sweet. I would also be taken by another aunt to a swimming pool at the Kings School which the school opened to all children in the holidays. A

friend of my mother's would collect me on a Sunday and take me to Sunday School, she lived in the Sexey's Almshouses which are on the High Street.

When I was at home I would have a friend up for the day and we would go mushrooming towards the end of August. If we went in the morning we would go down to the railway line to wait for the goods train to Wrington as the train driver would stop the train, give us a few coppers for the mushrooms and then open the fire door, put bacon eggs and the mushrooms on the shovel and cook their breakfast. I would also pick some and my father would take them to the Bristol shops and sell them for me for my pocket money. If it was hay making time we would play in the piles of hay waiting to be picked up. I guess the farmer got fed up with shouting at us when he was picking up the hay as I can see now it could have been really dangerous. The gate to the field was near our entrance (it's gone now as its too dangerous coming out of the field that way to-day as the traffic has increased so) and once loaded with hay the horse would gallop down to the gate and straight out into the road. Fortunately there were not many cars around only horses and carts and people walking.

Shopping

There were a number of trades people who called at the house. The baker was Pussy Allen in his horse and cart, his son delivered the papers and would chuck them over the wall, rain or shine. When the bakery closed we had a baker from Wrington who came in a van. Tutt's Stores from Yatton would call in for your grocery order and deliver later in the week. When they sold out to International the same thing happened until the early 70's. To begin with we collected milk from Mr Grace, walking across the road each morning with our milk can and getting it straight from the milking pail. When regulations came into force and it had to be pasteurised we had Joe Cox from the Weston Road in his horse and cart call with milk each day. One day he said he would give me a penny if I could say the alphabet backwards (not really expecting me to as I was only 5 or 6) and I did, so I got my penny. My father would get meat from Arthur Edwards of Yatton as my father went to school with him. There was also Avery's van selling paraffin and household goods which called once a week. Paraffin was used for cooking in the summer and lamps in the winter. The lamps had to be filled and wicks trimmed each day for the best light. We also had hurricane lanterns which my father used to lock up the hen houses when it was dark or any other outside job.

Sunday school

I regularly went to Sunday School each Sunday and have several prizes for good attendance. We had a Christmas Party each year with Father Christmas in attendance giving each of us a present. In the summer we had an outing, often in Mr Gills bus, this had wooden seats which were hard if it was a long journey, and we went to Burnham-on-Sea. They would hire the Methodist Hall and take bread cakes etc. and the teachers would go in after lunch and prepare our tea before we did the journey home tired but happy that we had had a day on the sands. There was also the Sunday School Anniversary when we would sing songs, recite poetry and do sketches. My uncle often helped out in the Primary department and would write songs for the occasion. I remember one he wrote about the garden flowers and I was picked to be the Sunflower, holding a long stick with a sunflower's head drawn by one of the teachers. When I was 8 years old I was transferred to the big school.

War time

In September 1939 war was declared and the following day we had evacuees from Poplar, Mrs Sams and Winnie who was 3 and wet the bed every night. I had a job to understand them but was often put in charge of Winnie when I was at home. They stayed for 3 weeks but as nothing had happened in London they decided it was safe to go home and told my Mother it was the best

holiday they had ever had. We had to go to the Post Office and fill in a form to get a new mattress for the bed and got seven shillings and six pence.

At that time there were some extra children attending school but most of them returned home after a short while and for the first year those of us in the country didn't feel much effect from being at war, at least we children didn't.

I think it was in 1940 food began to get short and rationing was brought in. My father had joined with 4 other men who collected eggs around the district and they formed a company called The Cheddar Valley Egg Distributors. My parents gave up making butter and just concentrated on eggs. These too were rationed – one a week per person. The small eggs were exempt from rationing so you could barter 5 dozen for some butter, tea or whatever you were short of. We also sold dried egg which you could use for cooking and scrambled egg.

Petrol was also rationed – we had to get coupons from Walter's Mill (they were the ones in charge for vehicles in this area) so those private cars that had been around were stored away and it was mostly business people with vans or lorries that used the road as well as horses and carts. Farmers moved their cattle or sheep from field to field driving them along the road having to have three men at least, as one went ahead of their animals while another would be shutting gates or standing in the driveways so that the animals would not stray while the other brought up the rear.

More evacuees arrived from Hastings, we had Nana, her daughter with a baby and the other three children slept at the farm across the road and they came over for meals. They were very helpful as we all shared the rations and sometimes my mother cooked and then the next day Mrs Williams did allowing my mother to do other things like the washing helping her mother or whatever.



This photo of the evacuees was taken after they returned to Hastings. It shows Mr & Mrs Williams, Nana (I cannot remember her surname) with Marjory and Rose. Mr Williams didn't come to Congresbury with them. He stayed in Hastings as he was working.

With the extra children schooling became a problem as our village school wasn't large enough to take them all. The Methodist Sunday School was rented to the Education Authority and used for a further class room. As the teacher was a Roman Catholic (Mr Regan) he was not allowed to teach us Religious Education so three mornings a week we had to march from the Methodist School to the village school for religious lessons. This arrangement lasted for a number of years as some of the people from Hastings liked the area and decided to stay.

When I went back to the main school and in Mrs Mitton's class we had instructions on what to do if there was an air raid – put all the desks together and get underneath them. I don't think it would have been very safe if there had been a raid. The Post Master would come to the school if he had a message saying there was a raid on and the headmaster would raise the Union Jack on the flag pole in the play ground so that anyone walking or in cars or vans would know of the danger.

On a Friday we had cookery classes for girls, having to take our own ingredients as there was still rationing. Calor gas cookers were placed in the hall for us to use and we took home what we cooked. The first thing I made was custard, and then we moved on to cakes, fruit pies and finally spam fritters. The boys had gardening and were allowed to take home some of the things they grew. On a Friday afternoon in the summer the girls were taught tennis and in the winter folk dancing – the boys joined us in that but did cricket in the summer.

Mrs Mitton was the only teacher that ever took us on an outing. One Saturday we had to meet at Congresbury station and get a ticket to Winscombe. We then walked to the top of Crooks Peak, had our picnic lunch, played games before walking back to the station and getting the train home. We left about 10am arriving back about 5pm.



Congresbury station c1959

Work experience

When I was 12 years old I moved into the top class. During the summer we had either a morning or afternoon off school when we could go to Griffin's Nursery to pick tomatoes. In the morning we had to go to school, then after the register had been called cycle to Wrington Road for 9.30am and work until one o'clock when I came down Iwood Lane home for lunch and back to school for 2pm. If I was doing the afternoon shift I would come home for lunch then cycle via Iwood Lane to the Nursery for 2pm and we didn't leave until 5.30pm. For this we were paid 6d a day, so we could get 2/6d a week pocket money. That would pay for a return ticket by bus to Weston and to see a film at the Odeon.

Real work

I had no idea what I wanted to do for work when I left school, but unknown to me Mr Cornish, the postmaster came to see the Headmaster to see if there were any one leaving school that was good at figures. He was obviously told I was and Mr Cornish came to see my parents and I finished school in December, had the Christmas at home then started work at the Post Office on the 2nd January, cycling to work each morning. The Post Office then was where Robb & Co have their offices now.



The post office in Station Road

We didn't have a grill like they do now to protect us, I guess people could be trusted in those days. They also sold tobacco and stationary, money for that had to be kept separately. We also date stamped the mail before putting it into sacks ready for the postman to collect and take to the sorting office. Telegrams came through from Bristol and had to be delivered, mainly Mr Cornish did that. It was either VE day or VJ day that the Post Office had to be open from 10-0'clock until 12 noon and being the last employee to be taken on, I was the one on duty. A telegram came through for Mr & Mrs J England – he was the local policeman saying his son had been released

from the prison camp (having been a prisoner for several years) and would be home soon. Mr Cornish was out, so I phoned the police station which was in Glen Yeo Terrace and told Mr England, so he said he would come and get the telegram. He came in, opened the yellow envelope and tears were running down his face – he got on his bike, went back home waving this yellow envelope in the air.

I too felt very emotional – that was certainly an answer to prayer.

I only stayed at the Post Office for 9 months as my father couldn't get any staff for the office at Mark, so I started working for The Cheddar Valley Egg Distributors. Most days I was able to go with my father, but on the odd days when he wasn't going to Mark I cycled which took about an hour and got a lift home with one of the men who worked from Brinsea. They had been out selling eggs during the day but came back to Mark to pay in their money. I can remember being with my father on the day it was announced that the King had died – we had gone to Lloyds Bank at Axbridge to bank some money and the staff told my father about the King – no wonder it had been very quiet in the Square which was unusual.

Coronation

We only got mains electric in the Brinsea area at the beginning of 1953 and my father was able to arrange for a new 12 inch black and white television to be installed in time for us to watch the coronation. People in the village without a set were able to go to the Memorial Hall as a larger screen was set up and they could go in free of charge to watch for as long as they liked.

Organist

By this time I was learning to play the organ at the Methodist Church – paying Mrs Halliday 1/6d for half an hour and a 1/- an hour for the electric which included lessons and practice time. I didn't want to play for services but was fascinated by the feet movements. I was in the choir by this time and we did anthems for special occasions and usually put on a concert in the summer. I was also playing the piano for the Sunday School which met in the afternoons. I guess I was only 15 when I was asked to become a Sunday School teacher, taking the younger ones in the big school – children of 8 upwards. This was quite a challenge, but the children were not so mature then as they are to-day.



Methodist chapel. Early 20th century.

One day Mrs Halliday asked me if I would play the organ for her son's wedding – I practised the Wedding March and although not 100% perfect managed it on the day. I guess that was the beginning of my service to God and the Church. Mrs Halliday was taken ill with cancer and I did 6 months playing the organ. She returned for about 2 years then went into hospital again but didn't recover. I started playing regularly on my 21st Birthday in 1951. During that time the Sunday School went from afternoon to morning Sunday School and I was asked to play for the Men's Hour in the Church which I did.



C1967. Remembrance Parade outside Memorial Hall.

Driving experience

It was on my 21st birthday that my parents gave me their old car, a Standard 9, as my father had bought a more modern one for himself. I was delighted as I had learnt to drive and passed my test at 19. I didn't pass my test first time as I nearly killed the instructor – we were approaching 6 Ways in Cotham and he said go straight across so I did and cars were going every where. The second time I took it in Weston and we were going along the front when the instructor said, "reverse into that hotel driveway". The hotel had been bombed during the war and rubble was everywhere. Unknown to me there was a heap just inside the gate and that's where I landed. The instructor was very good and said, "you didn't know it was there so go out and do it again," which I did and he passed me.

This meant I was able to drive the small 5cwt van and often on a Friday morning I would have to collect the eggs from the Brinsea and Langford area before going to Mark. One morning I went to Bernard Charles in Churchill, he was a poultry farmer near the church, and picked up probably 8 cases (30 dozen in each case) of eggs. I then went to Churchill Batch and I was told to walk up as the road wasn't made up. Like all young people I thought it would be safe to drive up, but I hadn't shut the rear door properly, so as I went up the hill the door came open and a case of eggs flew out – the Batch looked as though a large can of peaches was sliding down the hill – I had the cost of 30 dozen eggs to pay for !!! I didn't do that again. I was also sent to Bristol with this small van if anyone went sick. The driver of the small van knew all the rounds and he would take the larger van and I would be sent to the shops in East Street to deliver their orders.

There was the Christian Endeavour Group of young people which met each week one evening, I ran the Junior Endeavour and was a member of the Senior Group. We were connected with the Weston-super-Mare Federation and often joined the other groups for meetings and social gatherings. Mrs Martin and I ran the Sunday School choir and would put on concerts for parents and friends each year as well have a christmas party at Mrs Martin's home.

Sometimes I would ask my father to let me have the 5 ton van of an evening. I would brush it out and take the cushions from the chairs at home. I would put egg boxes around the back with the cushions on them, then pick up the children from the Christian Endeavour and take them to Shute Shelfe for games and squash and crisps.

As a church we were encouraged to help out the smaller churches and Palmers Elm was one whose members were getting older and not enough people to run the Church. Miss King used to go down alternate weeks to play the harmonium and Ruth & Bert Knott took charge of the Sunday School. When I was asked to help they had a Service one week and Sunday School on the alternate week. I was playing the harmonium by then and eventually took over the Sunday School until it closed.

One Sunday morning I was playing the organ and towards the end of the service there was a terrific explosion which turned out to be a gas explosion just outside the grocer's shop in Station Road killing a customer and the shop owner's wife I think. The road was closed for hours and I remember having to go across the moor from Sandford to Puxton to get to Palmers Elm.



23 December 1967. The aftermath of the gas explosion on Station Road.

Finally

After the war was over it took quite a while before rationing ended, but once it did the Cheddar Valley expanded and we opened an office and store in Barton St, Bristol, I was in charge of the office and after the men who worked in Bristol had paid in their money I would cash up and put it in the night safe at Lloyds Bank before coming home. When my Father retired in 1963 the Company was sold to SUPREMA and they continued from their shop in Blackboy Hill so our depot was closed and sold.