

# HOLCOMBE JOTTINGS

Produced by Bryan Weston & published by Holcombe Residents Association

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## Don't complain about the problems of life – it could be worse.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, one took a bath in a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies had their turn. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying..... "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water...."

Carol Ross

## My (not so) Secret Garden

A few days ago I went into our study to catch up with some paperwork and, when it was completed, I just sat and looked into the garden. I remember thinking that it was really very scruffy since I had not been able to mow the lawn for a couple of weeks. After looking for quite some time I suddenly realized what was happening all over the garden. In other words I was now really seeing the garden. A mass of bees and all sorts of other insects were going from flower to flower and from the clover on the lawn to the fuchsias, to the honeysuckle and the berberis.

As well as all this insect activity it was being visited by half a dozen house sparrows, a pair of blackbirds, a thrush, lots of blue tits, a pair of coal tits, a greenfinch and our regular wood pigeon of course. I have realized that the absence of cats in this area has made this a safe haven for all wildlife.

I have also found that our rockery has new inhabitants, which matched a picture in one of my animal books absolutely perfectly, and told me that it was a wood mouse, which I must admit I had never heard of before. This is the first time that I have found an exact match by looking in a book.

Just as a matter of interest I now find that at least a badger and even more recently a young deer has recently visited one garden in Brook Close. On Holcombe Road I also saw a young hare, which appeared to be lost, but it was the first of its kind that I had seen on this side of the main road. I did, however, see an otter on the opposite side of the main road in the first field along Windward Lane.

Gerry Chambers

## Killed off after one hundred years

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Holcombe did not have a Post Office (or shop). Dawlish provided a post delivery service and one letter box in the wall behind the present bus stop. Local agitation for a better service resulted in a minor battle between Teignmouth and Dawlish for the privilege of serving the village – Dawlish won by improving the service to make 3 deliveries a day and suggesting a sub-post office for the village.

In 1907 a village girl, 17 year old Miss Mary Jarman (later Mrs Marlow), opened a post office and shop in the end cottage opposite the Church. In a small 4 room cottage, the parlour was converted for the business. The

shop stocked a little of everything, finding space to sell sweets to vegetables to darning wool (does anyone still darn?) –and ice cream made outside in the alleyway! A very large lady, Mrs Marlow was at the centre of village life (and gossip) and had a dominant, outspoken personality. She knew all the business of the village. Everyone knew what she thought of them. She was the verger for many years – one villager once told me “you could hear her corsets creak as she tolled the bell”. The only remaining trace of the original post office today is the step seen in the photograph from the 1920’s



In 1934, Mrs M. had a house built higher up the hill (now called “Sorrento”) again using the front room for the post office and shop. One resident told me of her introduction to it and the story says a lot about the village and its people 50 years ago. She had moved here in April 1954 and needed some provisions. She went to the shop to buy some groceries and was surprised not to pass a soul on the road. Opening the door to the jangling of the bell, she found no one there. Waiting hopefully, a voice said, *“What do ‘ee want?”* *“I’d like some tea, sugar, matches, vinegar if you have them, please”.* *“Just take what you want”,* it continued. *“But I don’t know where to find them”.* A sigh, and the voice said *“Oh! better come round ‘ere then”.* Following the voice round behind the counter, through a passage to a room opposite there sat a very large seated lady nursing a baby on her lap. She spoke, *“‘Tis the funeral of our Vicar, Rev. Guy. Everybody’s at*

*church, and my grand daughter is there too, so I offered to look after her baby and the shop. Best you take baby, while I get your shopping; just call out to me what ‘tis you want. Sit you here and hold baby”.* She was left, literally holding the baby, while the redoubtable Mrs. Marlow went out to gather her groceries, as she shouted the required articles from the back room”. Visions of Alice in Wonderland floated through her mind.

She continued until 1964 and was awarded the British Empire Medal for her long post office service. She was succeeded by her daughter Peggy, who in practice had done much of the work for some time. She retired in 1984, succeeded by Jacqui Price and then Fred and Carol until their retirement. Now the village has reverted back just over 100 years to having no post office? Progress? I think not.

Bryan Weston

### A tale of one garden

On our return from holiday in May, as is our normal practice we first unpacked our cases and put dirty washing in the machine and then walked round the garden to check progress, particularly our newly planted roses. We had expected to see plump buds ready to burst into flower: instead we found them bare of any shoots or leaves. Had we been sold poor plants? We could not understand what was wrong, but after some thought it occurred to us the culprits were rabbits. We had seen the odd one before, but it seemed that the whole family had used our absence to strip them.

What to do? We didn’t want to harm them or cause danger to other wild life – or our cat. Fencing seemed the solution, so off we went to Jack’s Patch to buy some mesh and ground supports to surround the beds. The result was not pretty but it did the job of keeping the little blighters out. The roses recovered quite fast and now we are enjoying the sight and scent of a fine display though later than had

expected. But we seem to have more rabbits than ever. Does anyone know of a humane way of ridding our garden of the little pests?

We also have had an assortment of more welcome visitors. Birds seen include blackbird, sparrow, dunnock, wren, green woodpecker, robins greenfinch, chaffinch, tits (cole, blue, great and green), swift, magpie and too many collared doves (though numbers now are rather smaller thanks to Humphrey Clemens). Sadly, we have not seen one thrush. Most enjoyable was the sight of six young greenfinches being encouraged – very noisily – to fly by their parents. When the fledglings eventually flew away, so did the adults and we have not seen a greenfinch since. Can anyone add to this list?

Some years ago, we acquired some packets of seed through the Alpine Garden Society. One packet – labelled rather grandly as *Viola Labradorica* – produced a number of seedlings which helped fill a few spaces in our then new garden. In my ignorance, I did not know its habit of exploding seed pods, but I soon found out, finding new seedlings invading my lawn. I have tried digging them out (deep, fibrous roots and regrowing from the smallest fibre), cutting off the leaves (they like that) and cutting off the small flowers by hand (they seem to duck beneath the mower blades), but they are still spreading. No chemical touches them though I suppose Glycophosphate would kill them – and the grass too. I cannot think I am alone in having this pest. Any ideas?

Pat Weston

## Were those were the days?

A lady, born in the village well over 80 years ago, recalls her first paid job clearly.

“At about the age of seventeen, I started work as a ‘kitchen/tweeny’ maid at Oaklands Park (now Ratcliffe Special School). There I really had to start at the bottom – scrubbing floors,

doing the laundry, washing dishes and pans etc. There were no detergents then, just soap and soda and if cook found any smears on the crockery, then it had to be done all over again. In a manner of speaking, I learned my trade there but it was hard work – very hard. Then after about a year, I became cook for Mrs Harrison-Benn at Holcombe Hall. Though she was by then widowed, she maintained a staff of six or seven including a housekeeper, chauffeur (she ran two or three cars), head and under-gardeners and maids.”

“One of my jobs was to prepare menus for the day, or for the many parties and dinner parties she used to have for the local gentry in Dawlish, Teignmouth and London. She used to look at them and, if she thought it was not good enough, she would alter them. If I then told her that we hadn’t got this or that in the house, then she would tell me to ring up a local supplier. Another of my tasks was to ensure that the walk-in larder and the store cupboards were well stocked. There was of course a lot of waste of perishables as a result. Nearly everything had to be cooked in wine – including custards and bramble jellies. She was very extravagant.”

“We were mostly “below stairs” behind swing doors. All of the kitchen areas had black and white tiled floors that were scrubbed twice a day and Mrs HB would come down, with her stick, to make sure everywhere was spotless. We thought she looked like Queen Victoria. For doing all the cooking, ordering food etc., I was paid £15 per year. We were provided with a morning uniform (an old fashioned grey, belted dress with a white apron which had the straps crossed at the back like you sometimes see in TV period dramas), but we had to buy our own afternoon version. This had to be a black dress with a short white fancy apron. This was a bit pointless really to be dressed like this all the time for no one from outside ever saw most of us. The hours were long and we worked seven days a week,

though I was allowed half a day a week off and alternate Sunday mornings. Even then, woe betide us if we didn't go to Church on our Sunday off. We all had to live in and the light in your room had to be out by nine pm otherwise the housekeeper would knock on your bedroom door. It was a hard life, but "service" was about the only work available for girls and women, though I would have loved to have been a seamstress. Instead I became a farmer's wife."

As told to Bryan Weston

## 500 years ago

Cottage floors were beaten earth. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying "dirt poor". The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on they added more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. So a piece of wood was placed in the entranceway - hence the word "threshold".

Carol Ross

## It's a dog's life

Hello to all my four and two legged friends. When my Dad said the other day that it was time for me to write a piece for the Holcombe Jottings I have to admit I was not in the mood. Then, after a time, I thought well it's a chance to get some moans off my chest, so here goes.

It's written deep in dog lore that man is a dog's best friend. I am having some doubts about that because my Dad has, for some time, got into the habit of taking me out when it's not raining and then, would you believe it, 200 yards down the road it starts. Now lately some of this rain has been heavy and sometimes it gets windy. Now anyone with long hair like me gets uncomfortable when this happens. Problem is, in spite of me stopping and trying to pull him back home, he takes no

notice and carries on. To get my own back, as soon as we get inside the front door I do my best to shake off all the raindrops before he can get a towel on me. Then, of course, he moans at me. It is not my fault! All of us dogs do that.

My other moans are about what Dad calls thunder, shooting noises and fireworks. Like many of my friends I don't like these things, but don't know what to do except hide when they happen. It has surprised me how many four- and two legged friends have problems with such noises.

Anyone got any ideas other than taking tablets to help. I don't like taking tablets, but that's another story. Thanks for reading this, you know where I am if you want to talk.

Bella

## Those were the days

Ferris Brewery (now a restaurant) in Dawlish owned both the Castle and Smugglers Inns 100 years ago. The Brewery had a long running front page advert in the Gazette then offering to sell 8-year old whisky at 20 pence a bottle, beer at 5 to 6 pence a gallon (supplied in various cask sizes) and a dozen one pint bottles of ale or stout for 12½ pence - prices being unchanged for 10 years.

To put these prices into perspective, the Gazette also reported that the annual payment to the village lamplighter - who then lived in one of the then two Vine Cottages, now one building called the "Ropewalk")- was to be increased from £12 to £13 because of one months extra lighting and cleaning during the year.

If you have any contributions for future editions, please let Bryan Weston (865474) know