

TINY'S STORY

Life at Splatt
&
A History of The West End Stores

As Narrated by
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to
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Tiny still working after fifty years at Kibby's

CHAPTER 1

MY EARLY LIFE

Before I was Born

The year 1919 was to prove to be an important turning point in the lives of my Devonian parents, and the decision they made was to ensure that I became a Spaxtonian. However, at this early date I was not yet born. Mother and Father hailed from Berrynarbor near Combe Martin where they both worked for a family of farmers, the Southcombes. My father worked on the farm and my mother in the house at Stowford Farm. World War I had just ended and like a lot of people the Southcombes were looking for a better life. They therefore upped house, lock, stock and barrel, and purchased Court Farm in Spaxton. My loyal parents moved with them into the tied cottage, which was to become the family home, number 96, Splatt Lane, and is now the home of Diane and Glyn Richards and their family.

The move must have been quite something, for the whole household and farm contents were transported by horse drawn carriages, wagons and carts: people, animals, furniture and farm implements. I know the last stage of the eighty mile journey was from Wellington to Spaxton. I do not know why, but the Southcombes did not settle and within two years they had returned to Devon. Perhaps the north Devon coast was quieter and the isolated than our village, with the comings and goings from and to the busy industrial and market town of Bridgwater. The Kiff family, of which I was later to become the youngest daughter, had now grown with the birth of my sister, Beatrice, and this happy event, coupled with my parents liking of the village and its people, persuaded them to stay.

Life at No. 96

I was born in 1922, and Beatrice announced to all and sundry in the village that she had a tiny sister. As a result, I have been known as "Tiny" ever since. It was a time of change for the Woodhouse family, the new owners of Court Farm, had now been in occupation for about a year, but despite the change in ownership, my father continued to work at the farm, looking after a mixed herd of dairy cattle. He finally retired in 1963 after forty two years' service. Mr & Mrs Woodhouse were to serve the community well, for they donated to the Village Hall the land for the large playing field. It is now well used by both the local cricket and football teams, and a number of teams of children organised by volunteers in the village.

In the 1920s there was no water supply to the house. Getting water was hard work, water for washing and cleaning was obtained from the brook running alongside the house.



No 96, Splatt Lane in the 1930's

This of course, was part of the mill stream from Court Farm Mill Pond to Splatt Mill and part of the Peartwater. My mother and my sister and I used to get the drinking water in two one gallon earthenware pitchers from the lift pump at the Mill, the home of Horace Porter's parents. Mother always sent us off with the kindly warning not to break them. We never did! Comfort eventually did arrive in

the late 1920s when a well was sunk and a pump installed in our back garden for our use and the Parsons family next door. It was most probably not very deep for it often ran dry in summer, when it was back to the old routine. Electricity was not to be installed in this part of the village until the 1950s, so we used Aladdin oil lamps for light during the dark winter evenings, while Mother did the cooking on a coal fired range in winter and a paraffin fired Valor stove in summer.

The School

Although there were some forty to fifty pupils, the school, consisted of only the main building with two class rooms heated by tall cylindrical coke stoves. There was no lighting whatsoever. I do not know how we read if at all on dark winter days. Although the entrance to the school was opposite Splatt Lane and there was no pavement, and all along the front were majestic elm trees, there was no major safety problem for there was very little motorised traffic on the roads. We had great fun going to school playing hopscotch and other games as we joined the Webbers, the Jeanes', the Allans, the Hills, the Parsons, Horace Porter and other families from Currypool. A daily outing for two children was to go down to the Rectory, where, the Reverend Louis Bush was the Rector. The task was to fetch two large tin pails of hot cocoa for those children who stayed at school to eat their sandwiches. Often the cocoa must have been stone cold by the time they got back, as Geoff Routley's tempting orchard was conveniently located in between Cooke's Almshouses and the field gate where Bernard Ingram now tends his sheep. "Scrumpling" has gone out of fashion.

Play

We always had plenty of time to play. Often we went across to the Mill to see the corn being ground. We were fascinated with the change that was taking place before our eyes. The corn from the fields was tipped into a large funnel at the top of the mill, and meal for the animals at the many farms in the district flowed from big pipes into bins at the bottom. At this time Horace Porter's uncle Jim Bailey lived in and worked the mill. He was always pleased to see us, but sometimes his patience wore thin, with "Will you kids go home and not come back". Next day he would be shouting over the hedge to know why we had not been in to see him!

CHAPTER 2

KIBBY S BEFORE THE WAR

Pay and Conditions

We soon grew up and at the age of fourteen I started work as an assistant in the shop on the corner of Bush Road and Peartwater Road, nearly opposite the Village Pump. Despite what is generally thought, there were only three shops in the village at that time, Kibby's, where I worked The Post Office and Four Forks Bakery, where John and Kathy Edwards now live. The hours were long with ten and a half hour days on Friday and Saturday and, lthough Thursday was a half day, I worked fifty one hours a week for seven shillings - less than a penny three farthings an hour - less than 1p! In my one hour lunch break I walked home to Splatt, had a cooked lunch and still got back on time.

This was May 1937 and Mr Kibby had taken over the store the previous September. With the new

ownership came a new name and what was known as "West End Stores" became "Kibby"s". This name remained until the shop closed in 1989. The young Mr Kibby (he was only twenty one) lived away from the shop as the main house was occupied. We were therefore limited for space. We only had one storeroom upstairs, no flush toilet, and all deliveries had to be made through the shop and up steep stairs. This was not funny when the flour was delivered in parcels weighing eighteen pounds each. The shop had bare floor boards which were scrubbed with hard soap and warm water heated in a kettle on the oil stove once a week by David Chedgey's grandmother. The luxury of two bentwood chairs for the customers did not last long, for business is business, and Mr Kibby soon realised that village gossip was a hindrance to selling. The chairs never came back.

The counters in the shop were generally clear but tins of biscuits with glass tops were displayed in front. The bacon slicer was quite small and operated by hand and the shop was heated from an open fire. It was my job to clean out the grate and lay the fire with wood recycled from the wooden boxes used for delivering lard, butter and tinned and dried fruit. It had to be very cold before we were allowed to light the black enamelled Valor oil stove. The shop was lit by Tilley lamps. These had to be pumped up from time to time.

Our Provisions

As we were a General Store, we sold a wide range of goods. Besides general groceries, we offered Beecham's Pills, Carter's Liver Pills, Vaseline, Veno's, Camphorated Oil and Owbridge's Cough Mixture, Doan's Backache Pills and of course Epsom Salts. A good selection of saucepans, kettles, cups and saucers (no mugs), yard brooms, galvanised pails and chamber pots were also available. Customers who had chickens purchased meal and corn from us. There was not a large variety of breakfast cereals: Cornflakes, Shredded Wheat, and porridge oats were the sole choice. Butter, lard, sultanas, currants, prunes, brown sugar and rice came in bulk and had to be individually packed after weighing in blue, orange and brown bags. Gallon cans were filled with Aladdin Pink Paraffin at the back of the shop.

Outside we pumped the petrol. To serve it we had to pump by hand the petrol into a glass cylinder marked in gallons at the top of the pump, and the fuel then released into the customer's vehicle. We served cars and vans, but farmers did not bring their tractors to the shop, but took the petrol away in two gallon cans, often six or seven cans at a time. It was a foul smelly job. The pump was on a windy corner and besides coping with the rain and the snow, it was a job to keep your skirt in place.

In those days most people grew their own vegetables, either in their garden or on the generous allotments which still exist at the back of Peartwater Road. We therefore did not sell fruit and vegetables that could be grown locally. Canned cat and dog food did not exist, and milk was delivered by Horace Bailey directly from his farm in Splatt Lane. He used his especially adapted push bike with the milk churn in a side cart for deliveries, the milk being dispensed from the churn in pint measures. Mr Herniman used to sell his meat directly from the Pightly slaughter house. His pony and cart made regular deliveries in the village. Bread was delivered in our part of the village by Bill Palmer who baked his bread in two ovens in a cottage at Lower Merridge. Although horses were still being used, especially on the farms for ploughing and harrowing, there were not many horse drawn covered carts as used by Mr Palmer. Fish was delivered by Ron Hodge's father in a small horse drawn cart.

I can still remember some of the prices from that time, that is before the war. Brooke Bond tea was four pence a quarter and Mazawatee tea at the higher price of sixpence did not sell well. The children could get sherbet complete with a liquorice straw for a ha'penny and Fry's Fiveboy Chocolate for a penny and most sweets at tuppence a quarter. Rice tuppence ha'penny a pound. Woodbines tuppence for five. Players eleven pence ha'penny for twenty and petrol one and eleven pence a gallon.

Deliveries from Afar

Deliveries from suppliers were frequent, in fact on most days. They could also be exciting, for although we had deliveries of groceries, some cleaning materials, sweets and chocolates from the wholesalers. Berry & Co and Mumford Brothers whose distribution points were in Bridgwater, items bought in larger quantities were obtained from further afield. Feathery Flake flour, rice, sacks of demerara sugar, exotic tins of fruit and dried fruit came from Bristol. Tate & Lyle delivered granulated sugar in vans in the company livery - "by appointment to His Majesty, King George VI", who was a brand new sovereign then. The yellow and brown GWR vans brought Woodbines from Wills at Bristol and Players from Nottingham, Craven A from Carreras, starch from Reckitt's, washing blue, Harpic, Brasso and Silvo. Petrol, National Benzole in 200 gallon loads, came from Bridgwater.

CHAPTER 3

THE WAR YEARS

New conditions

On September 3rd 1939 war was declared. Things soon began to change. Evacuees arrived from London and Bristol and rationing was soon introduced. With the increase in numbers in the village and the extra administration, more staff had to be taken on. Later on in the war we were also to lose Mr Kibby to the RAF. However, as he was stationed near Bath he could get back from time to time to support Mrs Kibby who had taken over the running of the shop. Despite the difficulties, the Kibby's moved into the house; a wise move, as their two children, Jeanne and Moya, were soon to be born. With the increased business, two storerooms were added, a cold room was installed, an Ideal Boiler fitted to supply running hot water, electric lighting provided and a generator installed. Apart from Four Forks, there was no electricity in the village at this time. Mr Kibby must have been resourceful to get these things done during those difficult times. Blackout was achieved by placing shutters fitted with iron bars on the outside of the windows.

Rationing

I am sure that a large number of readers can remember rationing. Every week each person was limited to 2oz of butter, 4oz's of margarine, 8oz of sugar, 4oz of bacon, 2oz's of tea and 2oz of cheese. However agricultural workers were entitled to 12oz's of cheese. Once a month each person was allowed a pound of jam or marmalade. In addition, the government introduced a points system for tinned fruit, meat - often Spam was the only tinned meat available – dried fruit and Golden Syrup. The points system was not generous and families could only obtain a few of these luxuries. Children suffered as sweets were rationed and petrol was strictly restricted to essential uses only.

All this was a nightmare. Petrol coupons had to be handed over before we filled a customer's vehicle, and in turn we had to hand them over to the delivery man before he would fill our underground tanks. The ration coupons had to be sorted, counted and sent to the Food Office in Bridgwater by our secretary every four weeks.

However, there were benefits to rural life, which were probably not enjoyed by those living in the towns. As most people kept chickens and fresh milk was readily available, we tended to have a surplus of the rationed dried egg and dried milk. Some farm workers also did not take their full ration of cheese. Our only problem was to fairly allocate this surplus to our less fortunate customers. In addition, to make life more bearable, and do their bit for the "War Effort", the Women's Institute sold on a Friday their surplus fruit, vegetables and flowers under the cover of the pentice in front of the Smithy. The word pentice or penthouse means, besides a flat on the roof of a block of flats, a shed built against a building, especially one that has a sloping roof. The pentice was of course the present bus shelter, but in those days was the shelter to protect both the horses and the blacksmith from the elements. The pentice was deep enough to take a horse, but was made smaller in the 1950's.

Deliveries to Outlying Villages

From the very beginning of my service with the shop in 1937, we had a van. This was a very important aspect of the business as we had customers as far afield as East Quantoxhead, Fiddington, Goathurst, Broomfield and even King's Cliff on the edge of North Petherton. Competition was keen for, despite a successful business at the Post Office, we served customers both at Four Forks and Charlynch. In those days we were not permitted to sell postage stamps.

Although I missed the general village news that was shared over the counter - I will return to this later - it was good fun going out with the van. The crew of the van was overmanned by today's standards. There was a driver, a salesman and a boy to do all the lifting and heaving. I often went as the salesman - salespersons were yet to be invented. Manpower was short, and often firemen from Bridgwater lent a hand to act as drivers. The van had to be packed last thing at night in unpaid overtime - this was done for love. At eight o'clock the following morning we were on the road. Life was very complicated for nobody phoned as few people were connected, and customers either gave us lists on scraps of paper, some in books, but often only verbally. I soon developed a good memory. Methods of payment were also not simple as some paid on the nail, others a week in arrears and the more wealthy by monthly account. Hygiene was also a bit of a problem for although the paraffin was held in a tank underneath the van, we were dependent on customer's goodwill if we wished to wash our hands after serving the pungent oil. There were no rubber gloves available.

Vandalism is not a modern invention. On one occasion we were delivering paraffin down at Tuxwell. Everything went fine and off we drove down the unmetalled track that formed the drive up to the Big House, Quantock Lodge. When we got to Radlett we found that some nameless darling boy had turned the tank's tap on before we left Tuxwell. The big tank was nearly empty.

CHAPTER 4

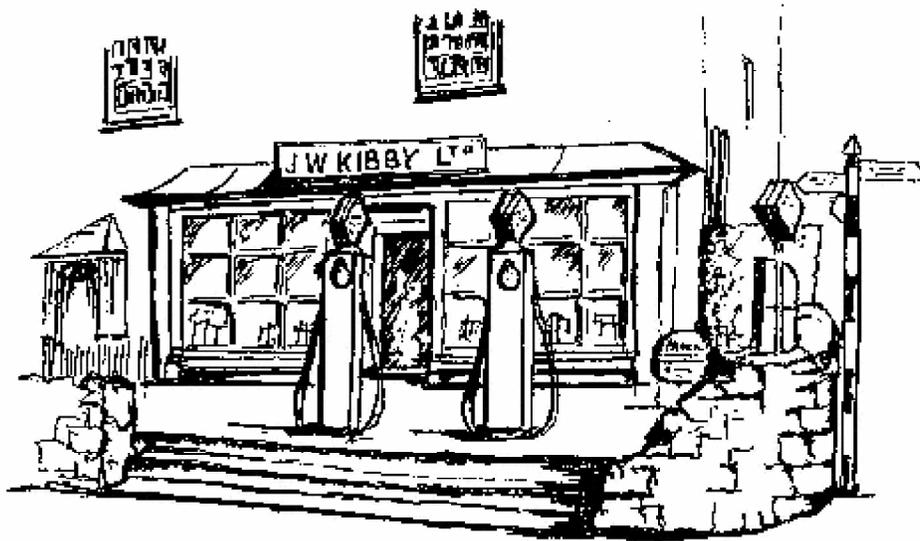
KIBBY S PICKS UP AFTER THE WAR

New and Resurrected Brands

The war ended in 1945, but rationing continued until 1954. The evacuees returned to their homes in the cities, and despite the nation's difficulties the situation improved. Bananas from the West Indies and oranges and lemons, almost unheard of for years, gradually appeared. Food manufacturers were developing new lines and old lines were reintroduced. Unox took the place of the wartime American Spam sent on Lend Lease, canned pears and peaches were more plentiful and brand names like Jacob's, Peek Frean, Huntley & Palmer, Symington's, Rinso, Soako and Van den Berg and Jurgen's appeared on our shelves. Customers began to smile.

Carnival and Fireworks

As a mark of the celebratory spirit and the increased freedom all round, the Spaxton Carnival was revived. During this brief comeback, we obtained a licence to sell fireworks. Children were allowed to buy them - they were less powerful than today's and regulations were not so stringent - and they were let off along the street, in gardens, and around the bonfire in the Knight's field behind the Swedish houses, Stockholm Terrace. They were an exciting spectacle reinforcing both the tractor drawn and the horse drawn floats also surrounded by flaming paraffin torches carried aloft by the villagers.



Kibby's Stores in the 1960's

Amusing Stories

The shop, as I've already hinted, was a centre for exchanging news and amusing stories. Such gossip was not encouraged: as you will remember, the bentwood chairs had already been removed. But you can't stop people baring their souls. One old lady, who was later to remarry, had a sick husband. On enquiring after his health she would reply. "My dear, I thought last night he was going to cross Jordan, but he changed his mind and came back, and he is much better today". Next time she visited a few days later he made the same uncompleted journey! He did cross before she remarried. We also had our embarrassments. Some people do not write clearly, so much so that on asking them what they wanted they could neither remember, nor read their own writing. Another customer would write amongst her

many requirements "lib. Apricot Marmalade". I would patiently ask whether she wanted Marmalade or Apricot Jam and she would reply "Yes, that's what I want". She got what was nearest on the shelf and was perfectly happy. Boneing the Bacon and Making Icecream Mr Kibby was sole owner of the shop until

1950 when he sold a part share to his uncle, Mr Bartlett of Minehead. At this date he moved to Torquay, coming up to keep his eye on the business from Tuesday to Friday. He sold his remaining interest in the late

1950's to Mr Merrett of Combwich. However, before he left he invested in a new red Berkel's bacon machine. Despite having the generator, the machine had to be hand operated; but it was much larger and easier to keep clean. The very sharp circular blade was cleaned daily with a very fine clear oil. At this time the bacon came from Harris's depot at Highbridge, and was delivered as green and smoked sides. This had to be boned by first cutting round each rib bone and placing a piece of twine round the cut and pulling the meat away from the bone with a steady pull on the string. I was severely reprimanded if I left any meat on the bone. It had to be clean for meat clinging to the bone was lost profit. In addition the boss decided it would be a good idea if we made our own icecream, although most shops obtained icecream from the big manufacturers like Walls and Lyons. Every evening I was sent up to Bill Geen's father at Bush Farm to get a gallon pail of fresh milk. In fine weather this was a pleasant walk across the parkland. Sadly it is not now. The gallon cost two and sixpence, and I paid on the nail. People liked our ice cream, but it was simply made like custard. From the gallon of milk a little was taken to mix a paste with ice cream powder and sugar; the remainder was then boiled and the paste was added with brisk stirring. After a few minutes simmering, the oil stove was turned off and the pail allowed to cool overnight. The following morning the contents were poured into a metal container in which there were wooden beaters mounted on a spindle.

This container was placed in a wooden drum packed with ice, the lid of which had a rotating handle which neatly fitted onto the spindle. The next bit was very skilful, for I used to have to turn the handle until I felt the beaters working hard against the thick ice cream. Often this arm-aching exercise took over a half an hour. The ice cream was now nearly ready; the beaters were removed, the wooden barrel repacked with ice and the contents allowed to cool for at least an hour. The delicious ice cream was served straight from the container as ha'penny cornets and penny and tu'penny wafers.

The Twentieth Century Arrives - We have Electricity

As we have noted earlier in Splatt Lane, mains electricity was brought to our end of the village in the early 1950s. We stopped using the generator and were able to install equipment which the unlimited power supply now permitted. Out went the old hand operated petrol pump and two "new" but second hand pumps complete with dials and National Benzole globes were installed. Life was now much easier filling the cars which were gradually coming back after the lean war years.

Also the delicious hand made ice cream went. We succumbed to Lyons Maid. It was popular. In addition, with freezer cabinets we were able to offer Bird's Eye fish fingers and frozen vegetables, especially peas. The younger generation started, even in these early years, to depend on convenience foods. Canned cat and dog food now became popular, and instant coffee took the place of Camp Coffee and Lyons Bev. The supermarkets were yet to make their presence felt. Trade continued to grow. Sometime in the 1950s a second van was purchased, extra staff taken on, so there were now

eight people working for the business. Even in the 1960s business was looking good for Mr Bartlett installed a cold counter displaying Bowyer's sausages and meat pies. These were delivered to us twice a week.

CHAPTER 5

COMPETITION WE COULD NOT OVERCOME

By the early 1970s the first supermarkets began to appear in Bridgwater. Tesco had by today's standards a small shop in Fore Street. More people had cars and business began to decline. After the death of Mr Merrett and the retirement of Mr Bartlett at the end of the sixties, difficulty was experienced in selling the business. The shop however did not close, and in 1970 Mr & Mrs Leach and their son bought the shop, the goodwill and the stock. There were now new problems, for a year later decimal currency was introduced. Many of us can remember the headaches, difficulties and length of time it took us to stop referring to shilling, half crown and ten bob. Other businesses were also having difficulties in the new competitive climate. Long established firms were closing down and as a result we started selling bread, this time baked at Kilve; now also sadly closed.

Sometimes the challenge from larger outlets coincided with the ageing of our assets. When petrol companies were discouraging deliveries to small outlets, the underground petrol tanks began to leak and replacement would have been prohibitively expensive. They were therefore made safe by removing all the residual petrol and its vapours and filling them with concrete. The pumps were removed. In addition a home was also required for the Leach's daughter so in the garden of the shop the house known as "Rocklands" was built. Everything was getting smaller. The last owners of the shop were Ron and June Carder and Miss Piercy. They purchased the shop in 1979 when a lot of people were retiring and buying up small businesses. Ron, June and Kathleen moved down from Birmingham, and fought doggedly to keep going. But the business had now declined to only a fraction of the peak in Mr Kibby's day and I was employed only in the mornings during the week. In place of the two vans, deliveries were made by Mr Carder in his own car. There were no other staff. Goods were now obtained not from the many manufacturers and distributors far and wide, but from the Cash and Carry store in Bridgwater. There was no alternative. It was a sad day when the store closed on March 31st 1989. I found it difficult to leave, but as you can see I have many happy memories of fifty two years service to the shop and the village.

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