

Skelmersdale Heritage Society

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



JULY UPDATE

Well let's first start with the big news. August will see our AGM and now is as good as time as any to announce that I will be standing down both as Chairman and from the Committee itself. I'm increasingly busy with my day job which can take me all over the country and I no longer have the time to devote as much attention to the Society as I'd like (and the spare time I do get I'd like to spend with my wife and kid!).

So, what does this mean? Well of course it means a few changes, Julie Thompson has been nominated as the new Chairman (Chairwoman? Chairperson?) and I wholeheartedly endorse this. Julie has picked up a lot of the slack from me as I've got busier over the last 12 months and is already bringing fresh ideas to what the Society can do in the future.

Our monthly meetings will, of course, continue, and the Committee is currently looking at the programme for next year (which I hope will include my talk on the darker side of Skelmersdale's past, once I get round to finishing it).

The newsletter will also be continuing in some form though my role in it will be greatly reduced (I still hope to contribute the occasional article though!). As for SkemCast, our monthly podcast will be coming to an end as a regular series at some point in the next

NEXT MEETING:

AGM and General
Display
Monday Aug 5th
7pm

Upholland Labour Club

PHOTOS/VIDEOS

Do you have old family photos or videos featuring the town? We'd love to have a look and get copies so drop us a line.

WANT TO WRITE FOR US?

Whether it's your memories, local history or something else entirely, if it's Skem related we'd love you to get involved. Just drop us an email and we'll consider it for our next newsletter.

12 months. Having produced over 15 hours of interviews over the last four years I feel like it's getting to a stage when we're in danger of repeating ourselves a bit and now is the ideal time to give it a rest. That said, we're not quite done yet, I have some really great archive stuff that I will be publishing before the run comes to an end and I have a final episode in mind that I've wanted to do for a while. Of course, if a subject comes up that's too good to miss, I'll certainly be dusting off the microphone! Of all the things I've done as Chairman over the last few years SkemCast is the one I'm most proud of, it's an incredible catalogue of memories of the town that will be available to future generations and every episode will, of course, remain for you to access on the website.

I'm also very proud of some of the myths I've (attempted) to disperse about the New Town, particularly my two epic series on how Sandy Lane got cut in two and the legacy of Tom Farrimond. The history of Skelmersdale is complex and fascinating and I'm very happy to have added a little bit of understanding on how we got from a village to a mining town, to a New Town.

I'd like to thank all the Committee past and present for their support over the last five years, everything we've done has been very much a team effort and the Society will continue to flourish in my absence. I'll still be attending the meetings but purely as a member who can enjoy a pint, watch a talk and then bugger off home without having to draw the raffle.

Everything the Society does is due to the hard work of our team of volunteers, so if you enjoy what we do, please consider joining the committee as we're always on the look out for extra hands, voices and ideas. Besides, I'm leaving so you won't have to worry about me rolling my eyes every time someone adds something to the agenda at the very moment I think we're finished.

Finally, my thanks to all of you. For the books and calendars you bought, the talks you attended and the membership fees you paid (and by the way it's renewal time for some of you), I'm very proud of what Skem Heritage has achieved over the last five years and I have every confidence it will continue to go from strength to strength.

So, for a final time: See you at the meetings!

Mark

The news from... July 1966

Two dogs had a lucky escape when they were rescued from old mine workings. Sherry, a pedigree Golden Retriever and Caesar, a three month old mongrel Labrador were playing on the lawn of their owner, Owen Giller of 7 Wigan Road when they wandered into a nearby field and disappeared.

The heroes of the story were Stephen Williams, aged 13 of Tarlswood and Ronnie Summers, aged 12 of Tanfields. Whilst near the derelict Crow Colliery they heard whining noises coming from the abandoned mine.

Clambering down into the old pit they managed to rescue the dogs who were cold and hungry but otherwise no worse for wear.

Picture of the month

Stanley Coronation Park



The Memories of Bill Birchall Part Six: "Humpty Dumpty"

Once upon a long time ago there were horses in abundance, they were all over the place, everywhere - but there was not as many horses then as there are cars today. There were so many horses that I would not have had any need to give a kingdom for one, but if I was hard put to it - and I had had a kingdom I might have offered one for Bess. not Bonny Black Bess, though she was bonny, not Dick Turpin's Bess, but Jack Johnson's Bess - my boon companion of many a long hour. But, as the experts had it - thereby hangs a tale!

There were so many horses that I had better limit my coverage to the area around the top of High Street where it joins Liverpool Road and Sandy Lane - the part we named "Top o' t' Lone" when we were brash youths, proud of being working men, and more proud still to be born (at least in my case) a 'Skemmer'.

High Street was a very long street, but it's main interest lay in the top few yards as far as this tale or account is concerned. Jim Mason the Baker had a horse and was really the first of the collection. We saw little of this horse as Syd Jones, with well-scrubbed, hip-balanced basket delivered the bread, buns and cakes in the streets around, while Jim took off with his horse and van to Stormy Corner and other far-flung places of the Skelmersdale domain. I don't remember where he stabled the horse either.



**Bakers and their carts where once a common sight
around Skelmersdale**

I was more interested in his dog - one Jack, a small black and tan terrier, bright of eye but sad of mien, who would join Nellie and I in pitiful song (from the dog's effort and appearance) any time Nellie and I chose, and we chose often!

Mr Nichol, Alf to my parents, was a new neighbour and only lately come to Number 15, he had a brown hack that seemed to look no higher than the ground. Alf eternally waited for commissions that came but rarely. Alf was newly married and anxious to 'get on', and so it was that he was handy when Dad needed a working partner, he needed a partner in a hurry.

Dad's first choice in the event had felt insecure in his love affair and the imminence of leaving. Alf came in very handy and we were neighbours for a very long time. They moved in the same removal van as we did, to Cortonwood, near to Barnsley. Odd to think I saw them then, very newly married, then with the fullness of time have a son - grow old.

Later I was to feel acute sorrow at the successive deaths of all three, but not at the death of the Colliery that killed - Dad quickly, and Alf slowly, before it died itself.

Joe Heyes, living at 13 had a horse too, and comes next - geographically speaking. In fact Joe had two horses whilst I lived at 17, and I cut chaff for both of them. Chaff cutting was accomplished with a machine driven by a large hand-wheel, the like of which you saw on mangles or clothes-wringing machines in my early days. I was barely tall enough to turn either - but I managed.

Joe - who was a cripple with a bent wrist on his right claw of a hand which he clutched to his chest, and a heavy thick-soled boot on his right foot which made him clumsy - valued my services. Joe had the two horses at separate times, he took one away to die before he had the other. The first one had grown old and tired, the second was taller and more spirited and Joe and I had quite a job teaching it to pass the low awning before we got to the stable. We tried together several times, I pulled on the reins to tug its head down and Joe pushed from behind. It took it a long time to learn, considering that it learned Joe's greengrocery round so quickly, so shortly afterwards.

Joe was a handsome fellow despite his crippled hand and foot, with a fresh clean-looking complexion and he wore a large earring in his right ear. I delighted in his cleverness in handling the large scale-scoop and customer's bass or basket, sliding the fruit or vegetables slowly and accurately with that claw of a hand and bent wrist, Joe taught me much. His sister - an imposing figure, very matronly, very confident and self-assured - was Head Mistress at a school in a neighbouring village, and I can hear in my minds ear the rustle of silk or satin as she came to chat with Joe and I. She was always Miss Heyes, even though I knew her first name was Nancy (from my Mother) but Joe was always Joe - though it was 'Old Joe' before I loved him then he became ageless.

It was part of the huge sadness when I had to say goodbye to Joe, and the newer, cleverer horse and the swish and smell of the chaff-cutter. Kath's mincing machine and the method of feeding the meat into it always reminds me of Joe and the hard struggle under the awning.



Horse and Cart on Liverpool Road

It reminds me too of the straw that made the chaff I cut up for the horses food, and Joe working so hard to earn a living.

Sometimes the smell of new cakes reminds me of satin-or-silk rustling Miss Heyes, with the smell of freshness and lavender that surrounded her, - entertaining 'her brothers friend' - me!

Immediately across from 'the Skem Arms' (which was really Number 1 High Street) at the start of Liverpool Road, were brick-built stables, neat and professional looking, and housing black horses with long tails. There were a number of them as I remember, all smart and well-groomed, erect and so very, very dignified. Every great occasion for miles around had these horses for their processions and parades. Every dignitary that ever lived up to then had these same black horses leading or following him in death. Some said the Liverpool Mounted Police (and they were smart) bought their horses from Fox's. They were the largest funeral people in town, and as their stables heralded the start of our Bromilow's pads walk - Nellie and I managed to make many friends of the horses and stable lads. The smell of the stables rivalled the scent of new-mown hay - encountered on the same walk - in our nostrils. Sometimes we began our walk at the stables; sometimes

we ended it there. Though this walk was officially known as Bromilow paths or pads, to Nellie and I it was always the 'Daisy Fields', Buttercups, Daisies and Dandelions were in abundance in their season.

We found use for them all and each had a different purpose, testing whether we liked butter, making chains like Mayoral ones, and telling the time of day.



Bromilow Pads leading to Liverpool Road

Streetwise and horse-wise I have taken you round in a small loop. From now on the direction is hard to describe but as well as the end of my journey will be the end of my tale. The direction, naturally is the geographical part, and as yet I have not followed Gerald's instructions on Draw, Paint or graphics, I have to fall back on words. So, imagine a rather large triangle, the convergence of High Street, Liverpool Road and Ormskirk Road forms the top of triangle. Straight down and forming the whole of the left-hand side is High Street - not the whole length of it, just as far as Barnes Road where my first school was situated. As the school is the last building in the short road then let the school form another corner, and finish the triangle by a direct line to the top of the triangle. If you allow for the small jump-off to the Fox's stables you have the whole theatre of action and horses within that triangle.

The gardens of 17 and 19 High Street featured a great amount in our young lives. The adventures we had there could fill a whole library, instead of a few short stories. There was a wall at the bottom of the garden, it would be about five foot high at our side but fell to seven foot or more at the Johnson's side. On either side of the wall lengthwise was a

was a raised portion about a foot wide, the whole resembling a turret. Any interesting event - like Bill Johnson breaking in a young colt, Nellie and I would watch from the grandstand seat at either side of the turret.

Jack Johnson was the owner of the small-holding that backed on to a good part of the High Street. Amongst a good many things he was a coal-merchant and owned one or two horses. I do not remember a Mrs Johnson but I remember his son and daughters. Bill, his son was an expert with horses - from births to deaths. Again, many are the tales I could tell, but my best-remembered one is of a circus that came to the football field at the top of High Street. It wasn't so much a circus as a glorified rodeo show, and a prize of five shillings (a lot of money in those days) was offered to anybody who could ride a very unruly pony. Several lads tried and failed - but Bill succeeded - abundantly - even to riding round clutching the pony's mane with one hand and waving with the other. He never outlived his fame in Skem. Between you and me, it was really Bill, who in the end got Joe Heyes's new horse to negotiate the low awning.

Like most other people thereabouts, the Johnson's became our friends. When we started school we both would take a short cut through Johnson's yard, and climb the wall (an older generation than ours and possibly with clogs had made footholds). Nellie needed a leg-up, which was afforded by her contemporary Maggie or either of her two older sisters. I could and did manage it on my own and enjoyed the climbing. But - as I have mentioned in an earlier tale - it was prohibited shortly after starting school, on account of it scratching or scouring the toe-caps of my foot gear.

The daughters knew us from early on. Maggie and Nellie were at school together. When I started school I was introduced to the short-cut home. I loitered on the way often, watching Bill patiently leading a colt round and round - talking to it, 'tchking' to it, feeding it carrot, fondling it - sometimes kissing it I thought, but Maggie said he was breathing secrets down its nostrils and only Bill and the colt ever knew what those secrets were. I soon became firm friends with Bill. He would talk with me and explain what he was doing, but more importantly he would tell me what the colt thought and what it was doing. Sometimes if I asked too many questions he would lead an older mare called Bess out of the stable, put a feed-bag on her head and then lift me onto her back and leave me there. It was only in imagination I rode her bare-backed, even though I was there to start with. Her back seemed as large as a table-top on which Mother sat us on bath-night after we'd been bathed and she began on another. Bess's back seemed like such a table and my legs weren't long enough, nor was I tall enough to ride her astride. With hindsight I realise that Bill plonked me there so that I would and could not bother him with chatter or getting 'under his feet'.

It wasn't until I told Mr Johnson (Jack when we were alone together) that I could read properly and could read books - big books - grown-up books, that he and I became friends, and my alliance with him and Bess began. Mr Johnson and I were idling in the house after having a drink of water. There were never many books about in the ordinary houses in those days, though I often saw a huge Family Bible together with Fox's (not ours) Book of Martyrs and The Pilgrims Progress. Children's books and annuals were strewn on the floor.

Jack had a brown wrapping-paper backed book on his shelf and in neat, rounded handwriting was scripted 'Fairy Tales', and underneath, 'by Hans Christian Andersen'. That book was destined to influence my infant life for some time. Jack liked a good many of the tales - and resting the open book on one of his knees, I lolled against the other and read - sometimes the same tale over and over. Often my young eyes grew tired but Jack did like it and had confessed - strictly for my ears alone - that though he was 'good at reckoning' he couldn't really write. None of his children or his two grandchildren knew this, so I was to keep it a secret. In return Jack gave me the odd penny, or after long sessions a threepenny bit. For you young ones - working on the decimalisation I had to use on the old non-electronic machines - an old penny would work out at four pence today and the threepenny bit at twelve and a half pence (I presume Bill's relating to inflation as an old penny is about a half new pence and a threepenny bit would be about one new penny because six old pence (half a shilling!) is two and a half new pence - Editor!).

Too he taught me the time, how to mark the scores at a cricket match, gave me opportunities to be with Bess and the chance to be first-reserve driver when he used Bess in his landau for paid-for rides at fares and shows in Skem and neighbouring villages and towns - including Ormskirk and Southport. Before I tell you the main part of my experiences at that time I will remind you that Jack had two lovely little girls for Grandchildren. The two had not started school at the time of which I am writing, lived in another part of Jack's big house, and were almost always around either the big kitchen table, or leaning on the huge fire-guard that served as a clothes-drier as well as a protector. Jack would always shush the children off - suggesting they played elsewhere when we had our reading sessions.

One afternoon I had called on Jack without giving him notice and Annie the eldest daughter ushered me into the huge kitchen without announcing me and there was Jack - the brown paper-backed book open on his knees, closed together with his Granddaughter's on either side of him, staring at the book as he spoke - telling them the fairy-tale just as though he was reading it. As you can read, I've remembered the instance to this day. I do not think Jack would tell a deliberate lie or mislead them with cruel intent,

but I know he felt ashamed at not being able to read and to you who read the tale around Skem Station, I feel sure that once again the truth was left unsaid. This was not the main purport of this writing even though it was yet another example of things being not what they seemed.

Over the years Bess and I grew closer. Though we did not have a common language I felt we did communicate. I would be with her as often as I could, in the stable, in the yard, chance encounters in the street, even when she was a locum at funerals. In her way she could tell me when part of her harness was loose or tight to the point of some discomfort to her. Though it was a high stretch-up I could and did loosen her bit when she ate, drank or was uncomfortable. On almost every excursion she took in the landau I was there, Jack said I would be company for him and Bess - that I would attract custom, and when it came could sit high on the driver's seat with him, and even stand up and drive Bess in the landau home when the day's stint was over. Between customers there was often a long wait, I would take out the Rainbow, or later, the Children's Newspaper or Boy's Magazine and read it as I lolled against Bess's forelegs.

If the position was uncomfortable for Bess, she would turn around and with her nose or food-bag nudge and push me into a position she found more to her liking. These were happy, exciting days. On the longer journeys back as I stood tall with Bess's reins loosely held we would walk, then trot and, in front and on either side I could see the foothills, the woods, the copses, the horses in neighbouring fields that would whinny a welcome, race down to watch us. Some just glanced up as we passed and didn't deign to neigh or whinny. All of it was lovely - but the loveliest was me - standing tall like a charioteer and driving Bess from far-away places like Ormskirk and Southport to the actual place outside her stable, where she would stand and wait, knowing she deserved further attention like giving her a drink after taking her harness off and wiping and brushing her down.

Even after I left Skem I missed and often remembered Bess. The good news from Ghent to Aix (Browning's masterpiece of a poem) was brought by Bess. John Gilpin and Dick Turpin both rode Bess in turn.

As the years passed by I saw Bess and Jack Johnson less often. We had moved to Yorkshire when I was nine but we would visit Skem at every opportunity. When Grandad died the visits became fewer but I would always call to see Bess. As a youth my visits became even less.

As a young man I took my first serious girlfriend to Skem and to see Bess and suddenly recognised that both Jack Johnson and Bess were and looked older. It saddened me - Bess at least should have been immortal.

I almost forgot Bess in the years that followed. Work needed a lot of concentration. Courtship was time consuming. A war came - I was of a divided mind. Conscience held me in turmoil, the romance was broken. I went into the Army - experienced the horrors of war and came to

know fear. But before that time came I was issued with tropical kit and given seven days embarkation leave. At the start of the leave Mother wanted to go to Skem with me to say goodbye to my relatives there in case I didn't come back. Oddly enough as Mother and I passed Skem station there was Uncle Harry in his engine-driver's uniform on the platform. But, as I said in my tale of Skem Station, thereby hangs yet another tale.



On one of the evenings of this leave I was told a couple of my old pals were in the Skem Arms. I went and met them and we chatted and remembered and talked of older, happier times. One of them told me Jack Johnson was in a neighbouring room. I went to see him along with my friends. He recognised me even though I was in uniform and had not seen him for years. When I enquired about Bess he told me that she had retired at the same time as he, and that he had found her a very comfortable place in a home for retired ponies, donkeys and horses. She grazed most of the days but occasionally pulled children round the countryside in a landau. He turned to one of the friends and told him how clever Bess had been in time gone, and how he could slacken her reins, let them rest on her broad back and leave Bess to make her own way home - even to the stable. And I had stood proud and, as I thought, driven her all that way myself. This time Jack had not left the truth unsaid, but there was a war on and I was getting used to hurts and pain.

As I have often said - in the manner of the line in that hymn - sometimes 'things are not what they seem'.

Being a stay-at-home housewife in the 1950s

By Julie Thompson

In the 1940-50s a housewife's job was never done, every day including Sundays, there was always work to be done. Dorothy Glover and her family including her two sisters Eunice and Margaret, her two brothers Wilfred and George moved in to 11 Olive Grove with their Mother Alice. What follows is her recollections of living there during this period. Telling the story of the weekly tasks Alice her mother had to do. But before the family moved to Olive Grove in 1947, they had lived at 16 Market Street Pottery fields. So, Olive Grove would be their first home with electricity, an inside toilet and a bathroom.



Dorothy, aged 15

Starting with Sunday mornings, like every other morning the first job to be done when you got up was make the fire, because without the fire there was no heat and there was no hot water, so we had to have the fire lit most days. When my Mam Alice made the fire she had to clean it out first, remove all the ashes and put them in the metal dust bin, put newspaper on the grate, followed by sticks of wood, which were kept ready to use in the oven next to the fire, this was never used for cooking but it was a good place to keep the wood nice and dry, Mam always said the oven smelt of smoke so she never used it to cook, she would then add the coal and light it with a taper which was similar to a match but longer.

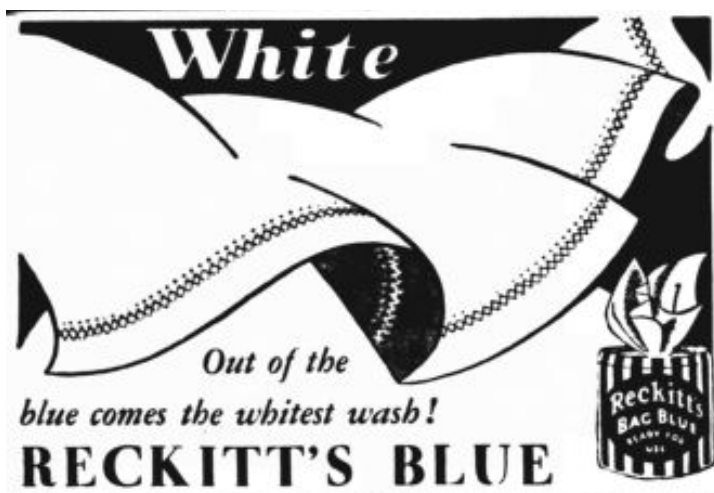
Once the fire was lit, the next job for her to do would be to go upstairs to change the bedding, ready for washing on Monday morning. I always helped Mam to do this, we had three double beds to change, the first thing we had to do was to take off the sheets, the bottom sheet you had been lying on all week was taken off ready for the wash, the sheet that had been above you was put on the mattress to replace that for the week and a clean sheet was put on to replace the one that went over you, we did this every Sunday, there was also heavy woollen blankets on the bed but they would only be washed once a year on a good drying day, and if you were lucky you would have an eiderdown on top of the blankets.

Mam always cleaned the letterbox and front doorstep on Sundays using Brasso on the letterbox and a pumice stone on the step. Also, on a Sunday we would have to cook the Sunday dinner, which would consist of roast beef, boiled potatoes, vegetables and gravy, we also had a pudding. Mam would make a rice pudding or a jam roly-poly which was made with flour and water mixed together and rolled out then jam added and then rolled up and put in a greased pudding basin. It was then steamed in a pan of hot water, and we made custard to have with it. It was really nice, sometimes Mam would make bread and butter pudding. She would put butter and jam on the bread and put it in a tin dish, then make some custard and pour that on the top and cook it in the oven, because the custard got a good skin on it, it tasted delicious. If we had made too many potatoes for dinner, we would sometimes mash the rest and make them into potato cakes for tea.

Monday was the busiest day of the week being washing day, whatever the weather the washing had to be done. So, early on Monday morning around 7 O'clock Mam would have to fill the boiler which was situated in the washhouse using a bucket with water from the kitchen tap, then she had to attach the boiler to the gas tap in the kitchen using a rubber tube. This was to heat the water in the boiler. While we waited for the boiler to reach its temperature the washing would be separated into piles starting with the sheets, then the shirts, then coloureds, work clothes and so on.

When the boiler had reached its temperature, which would take quite a while, Mam would need to transfer some of the hot water into a big metal dolly tub. She would then top up the boiler with more water from the kitchen, add some washing powder to the dolly tub and wash the sheets, one at a time using a dolly leg, turning it round and round in the dolly tub. She also used a rubbing board which was on legs and was made of metal with ridges on it, so you could use it to rub your clothes up and down, you could also use a scrubbing brush or a block of fairy green coloured washing soap.

The sheets would then be put in the boiler to boil them whiter. When they came out of the boiler they were put in to another dolly tub with clean water to rinse them, then they were put through the mangle. You had to feed the washing through while turning the handle as this would remove the excess water and the sheets were then ready to be put outside on the washing line. This had to be put up on Monday morning so it would be nice and clean, it couldn't be left out all week like it is today. The sheets were always hung out first, the shirts were next. They had to be washed in the same way but the collars had to be starched, you had to mix some water with the starch powder in a bowl and dip the collar of the shirt in to stiffen it. Sometimes, we used 'dolly blue' this would come in a little block with a netting over it tied at the top.



You could dip this in some water and squeeze it and it turned the water blue, the advert for dolly blue used to say 'out of the blue comes the whitest wash'.

The shirts would be next out on the line followed by the rest of the washing. The washing and pegging out would take you well into the afternoon, we would then need to empty the tubs of water. To do this we needed to roll them out of the washhouse and then tip them over so the water could run down the flags to the grid. While it was doing this we could brush the flags at the same time to clean them.

If it was a rainy day the washing had to be dried in the living room in front of the open fire. We would have to pull down the pulley line from the ceiling using the rope, this had a wooden frame attached to it, until it was close to the fire and tie it to a hook on the wall. We would put the sheets on first and when they were dry the shirts and so on, this took a long time as there was nowhere else to dry your clothes. Sometimes if you had a good drying day, you could make a start on the ironing, but if not, it would have to be done the following day. For tea on a Monday, we always had something easy to make like bacon, egg, beans and fried bread.

Tuesday the ironing had to be done, we had an electric iron at Olive Grove but when we lived at Market Street we had no electricity, so we had to use a gas iron, the gas was attached to the iron from the gas supply probably from a mantle light to a tube at the back of the iron, there would be two rows of six jets inside the body of the iron, and gas flowed from these jets, which were then lit. This heated the metal base, making it hot enough to press out creases.

Mam never had an ironing board, so she used the dining table with a cover. We ironed the sheets first and put them on the pulley line to give a nice base to put the other ironed clothes on. The shirts were then ironed, folding them exactly as they would have been when they were bought from the shop. We lined them up next to each other on the pulley line so they looked very smart, everyone who visited would look up and be very impressed how well ironed they looked. All the other clothes were ironed and put on the line but further back. As the week went by and the clothes were removed and worn the line went emptier and emptier, so by the weekend there wasn't much left on the line.

We also washed and dried our handkerchiefs as we used quite a few in a week with a clean one every day for school or work and one for the evening if we went out. We could sometimes go through three a day and with there being six of us that's quite a lot in a week! They were mainly white, but we did have some with initials embroidered in the corner, these would have been bought for us as presents. They were all put in the handkerchief drawer, so you knew were to get a clean one from. Mam always used to say, "when you meet a boy look at his hanky and check if it's folded and ironed properly, that will tell you what kind of family he's from".



L-R. Dorothy, her Mum and sister Margaret at Olive Grove

On Tuesday afternoons Mam would need to go shopping as we had no fridges or freezer's then, only a pantry to keep the milk cool. The shopping would be done at the Co-op on Elson Road, where family's had a divi number, our number was 2589. You gave your number to the shop assistant, and she would log it in a book, you could then pay for your goods at the end of the week. Several times a year, you would receive a dividend, the profits would be calculated and shared out among the members according to how many purchases they had made from the store, you would collect it at the Co-op Hall upstairs above the shop. You just gave them your number and they would look it up and you would receive your share of the profits in cash. The Co-op van would also come round twice a week delivering bread.



The Co-op, Elson Road

On the junction of Smith Street and Sandy Lane was Bells Café and I remember when I was a little girl it was called Swifts Café, and during the War when you went there to ask for some cakes they sold them by the weight, so you didn't ask for 4 or 6 cakes you asked for a quarter of a pound of cakes or half a pound of cakes. I had a little shopping basket as a child and when I went with my Mam, she would ask for a quarter of cakes and we would get four small square cakes that would fit in my little basket.

Wednesdays we cleaned the bedrooms upstairs, there were no carpets in the bedrooms just lino on the floor and a rug at the side of the bed, so we had to brush under the beds, mam had to put a scarf on her head because of all the fluff, she was covered in fluff when she had finished. Wednesday was also the day she cleaned the windows with a wash leather or Windolene when that became available.

Thursday's jobs would be cleaning the kitchen, the cooker, taking the carpet up brushing the floor and then mopping it on your hands and knees with a bucket of water and a scrubbing brush. Our kitchen was only small, we had a table in the middle with a plastic tablecloth, a cupboard with our dishes in and one with the food in. The cooker had four gas rings, a gas grill and a gas oven, we had a metal dust bin where we could empty the ashes from the fire. You didn't put much more in the bin because most of your food waste could be put on the fire. There was also had a small pantry where the gas meter was, that we put shillings in.

We would go to Tootles cake shop at the bottom of Sandy Lane to buy some cooked meat and potato pies and some Vanilla's as they were everyone's favourite. We also went to Martland's butchers at the bottom of the lane if we needed to buy any meat.



Bell's Cafe

The gas man would come around every so often to read and empty the meter. He would count out the shillings on the kitchen table and would give you a rebate because there was always more shillings in the meter than needed to pay your bill. Everyone looked forward to this day as they would get a little bit of money back, people were always asking "when's the gas man coming?" because this would mean they had a little bit of extra cash. I used to ask Mam for something new like a pair of shoes and she would say wait until the gas man has been to see how much money we've got; I think everyone in Skem was the same.

Mam did general cleaning every day, but we didn't have a Hoover or a Ewbank, so we had to brush the carpets, which weren't fitted, and around the edges of the walls where there wasn't carpet we had lino, so you needed to get down on your hands and knees to clean it.

Some of the rugs we had, we made ourselves. They were called peg rugs and were made out of old coats mainly, you would cut the fabric up into small ribbon pieces, trying to keep them all the same length, use a piece of hessian for the backing and draw on it with a pencil the pattern you wanted to follow. Then, you would cut one leg off a clothes peg to use to pierce to hessian to make a hole to thread the material through, to do this you would push a piece of fabric through the hole and then back through another hole close to it, so both ends of the fabric would be showing on the same side, it would take a long time to make, but would be a strong and durable rug.

Also, the bathroom would be cleaned on a Thursday, to clean the bath we would use Vim powder, dampening the surface first then sprinkling the vim and leaving it there for a few minutes then wipe it off with a cloth, this job was usually do by me when I came home from work.



Alice Glover

Friday was the day the living room was cleaned getting ready for the weekend, the floor was brushed and moped and the furniture was polished with mansion polish and after dinner we did the weekly shop in Sandy Lane, we used to make a list in a little book every week, but it was nearly always the same. Friday night was also a night for a trip to the Empire Cinema, Billy Shaw's Picture house.

Saturday mornings Mam would go to Peats paper shop in Sandy Lane to pay for the weekly papers, that we had delivered during the week including Women's Own, Radio Times and The Ormskirk Advertiser.

We would all be at home for dinner being the weekend, then in the afternoon we would sometimes go on the bus to Wigan shopping. The crumpet man used to come round in the afternoon with a basket full of crumpets, he would walk under the windows and knock to see if you wanted to buy any.



Majestic Cinema, High Street

In the evening, we would go to the Cinema again this time to the Majestic Cinema at the top of Sandy Lane. Mam would sometimes go to a social event at Liverpool Road Mission Hall and there would probably be a Hot Pot supper.

Once a year on a hot day in the summer I would help Mam to clean the mattresses on the beds. The cover of the mattress was called a tick. It was a light grey in colour with thin black stripes and it was stuffed with flock, this was made up of pieces of wool, we needed to unpick the stitching on the seam of the mattress cover and take out all the flock from the inside. We left it in a pile on the bedroom floor, ready for putting it back in when we had washed the tick. To do this we needed to move the furniture and the beds to one side and take out the rugs. When the tick was dry and ironed, we would take it back upstairs and fill it up again with the flock and sew the seam back up, we needed to wear a scarf on our heads to do this because we got covered in fluff.

During this time many women stayed at home to look after their homes and families, as they didn't have the luxury of modern living we have today. It took a lot of time and effort to run a home, and this could not be achieved if you had to work all day as well. There weren't many opportunities for women to work back then, and it was expected that when they got married, they would stay at home to do the housework and look after and family.