

# I remember it well...

Reminiscences of village life in the early-20th century including *interviews with local inhabitants*.

**Abrey, Peggy (née Robinson) b.1930**

I attended Melbourn Village School until the age of fourteen when I started work at the village Post Office. Later I moved to Cambridge Trinity Street Post Office.

My grandfather, Harry Robinson, owned the tailor's shop at the corner of the Moor, next door to the bakery. He had three sons who worked with him, one of the sons was my father. They made and repaired garments for all the villages in the area.

The cloth was ordered from London and came by train to Meldreth station. The tailors sat cross-legged on a large table and stitched the fabric by hand. The irons for pressing were heated on a stove in a corner of the room.

The work was very tiring on the eyes as the tailors worked by the light of oil lamps until electricity came into the village.

Easter was the busiest time as everyone had new clothes then. It was a great event when a boy had his first pair of long trousers. The tailor delivered the garments to the customers in all the villages by pony and trap. The best day for this was Friday, as it was payday.

The business closed for good in the 50s when ready-made clothing was easily available in the shops.

I married Gerald Abrey, a skilled carpenter, whose grandfather, Ryal, kept a shop in Drury Lane which stocked almost everything. His two daughters served in the shop. Ryal Abrey was well known in the surrounding areas as he sold provisions from his horse and cart. He had a patter, naming all his wares, and when a customer asked for something he

didn't stock he would say: '*That's the very thing mother forgot to put on the cart this morning!*'

The horse knew the route and would stop at all the right houses and venues. When Ryal returned to the shop he would leave the horse outside; one day it disappeared and was found eating hay in the stable with the cart still attached, having knocked down the gateposts on its way!

**Black, Daphne b.1915**

Local resident Daphne Black started her studies at the local school in Melbourn in 1920. On the first day she screamed all the way there. All the children were standing outside wondering where the noise was coming from but once the headmaster, Fred Aldridge, had taken her by the hand and said 'Come on my little dear', she stopped crying at once. Daphne had ambitions to be a White Ribboner (a Temperance group for children) and asked her mother if she might go to school dressed in a similar fashion. Her mother had not checked the qualifications and when Daphne arrived, dressed from head to toe in white, she was told she wasn't allowed to join as she went to the 'wrong church'. The White Ribboners were Baptists and the Black family were Congregationalists.

Daphne recalls that the infants' school was in the extension at the back of the school. The infants wrote on slates with what she describes as '*thin squeaky things*' but at 7 or 8 years of age they were promoted to paper. She learned to make letters on specially printed papers. Learning was by 'rote', or the mechanical use of the memory, and no reasons were ever given. In the same classroom was the village library run by Wilf Ogden. He was much liked and went on to teach for many years. One of Daphne's boyfriends was Cyril Hagger, and she still has a note he sent her.

Daphne moved schools to be educated in Cambridge travelling at first on an open top bus.

She remembers well the end of the Second World War. Having been de-mobbed from the ATS, she caught a train as far as Royston, and had to walk the rest of the way to Melbourn, but '*the local RAF were putting everything they could find into the sky in one giant firework display*', which helped with the three mile walk home.

**Brooksbank, Ron b.1924**

Ron arrived in the village after the Second World War, and his account of village life, and the duties of the village policeman at that time, make very interesting reading!

Melbourn then had a population of around 1,400 inhabitants, and the Police Station was located in the Magistrates' Court in Cross Lane, a red-brick, Victorian building.

The Magistrate sat on a raised dais with an iron rail set with brass knobs. One of Ron's first jobs was to polish these knobs. His first cycle patrol was with the Section Motor Cyclist, also on a cycle, when they visited all the lanes and main areas of the village.

All policemen had to get a case in their notebooks. After a fortnight when he had drawn a blank, he stopped and reported a cyclist for having no rear red light.

**Cane, Norah (née Catley) b.1914**

Father died of cancer when I was seven. He worked with cows, and it was believed that he got the disease from them. Mother had to bring up four girls on very little money.

At school I learned cookery and needlework while the boys did woodwork. We didn't make whole garments in needlework as the cloth was too expensive. We also did drawing and art. I stayed on at school until I was fifteen, as I had been ill for a year with inflammation of the kidneys.

There was a lovely meadow near our house on