

## Campden people



When we bought the Ford van in 1936 I took over all the delivery work. In those days very few people locked their doors the baker just gave one bang on the door, opened it, shouted "Baker", and dropped the loaf in if he knew what they wanted. This could have some very funny results. I knew of one baker who absentmindedly, when late for church one Sunday morning, banged on the church door, and shouted baker. The vicar looked over his glasses and said "Not this morning Fred."

There were some very funny things on the round. I went to a lady one day, I had always been in the habit of going in - I went in, she wasn't there, and as it was Friday and she usually paid me I waited a few minutes. Putting the loaf on the table, the Evesham Journal was lying there so I had a look at the front page shouted again, she didn't appear so I left. When I went the next time the door was locked, I thought that was very funny so I said to her, "I couldn't get in, the door was locked", she said "no, I'll tell you why it was locked. When you came last Friday I was in the bath." The baths in those council houses were in the kitchen and they had a table that let down over them and usually a bit of curtain along the front to hide it. She said I just had time to let the table top down before you came in and then you had to damn well stand there and read the Evesham Journal." Oh dear.

Then Mrs Dewey, the schoolmaster's wife, I was putting her loaf on the table when it slipped out of my hand and rolled under the table. I went under after it and I was just coming out from under the table with a loaf in my hand when she appeared. Talk your way out of that one!

Bill Bricknell he lived at Broad Campden and one day he was sitting by the fire – “having a day off Bill?” “Yes I've got phlebitis, I caught the flea on the Banbury bus.” Another day I went to Bill he was painting the door, it was during the war when paint was very scarce – “Smartening it up Bill?” “Yes, I've managed to get some second hand paint “ and I've never worked that one out.

Then there was old Dick Hughes, he was a gardener up at Shepherd's Close, he used to give me racing tips. “Old so and so will win today, whatsiname's riding it.” Oh, yes, that's right, is he Dick? “Yep.” When I went the next day, “what did I tell you.” Well he hadn't told me anything but he didn't seem to realise that.

There was old Sid Nobes's father who kept the pub at Broad Campden. Mrs Nobes said to me on Friday “how much do I owe you”, so I told her and Sid who was about four, standing there, said “don't pay the bugger, he has all our money, I want a donkey.”

And Johnny Franklin he lived on workhouse bank - his wife died, and he lived by himself so I put the loaf in and he paid when he happened to see us. Which wasn't very often. And then I started going in The Volunteer in the back kitchen long before I was old enough to go in the pub and he was in there. And he got into the habit of giving me the bread money when he was in the pub. That raised a problem, how do I pass it on to father without telling him I saw Jack Franklin in the Volunteer. I had no end of problems over that, the lies I made up sometimes I had to carry it for a week before I could find a way of making believe I had seen Jack Franklin and got it.

Another time when father was asked to judge the cakes at the flower show he came back afterwards he said to me “Do you remember selling a Madeira cake to Mrs so and so last week?” I said yes, I said “I thought what a nice one it was.” He said “so did I when I took it out of the oven. It had a beautiful crack along the top and the citron peel was just right, it was a beautiful looking cake.” I said “Well what about it?” he said “Well it was in the flower show, I recognised it when I saw it,” I said “What did you do?” He said “well I gave it first prize of course.”

Then we did goose suppers, The Bakers Arms at Broad Campden used to take the village hall and have a goose supper; we cooked as many as 20 geese and took them over in the van. They were great evenings, we always got a free supper for cooking them. We also used to cook joints for the British Legion dinners and Christmas do's - some of those joints of beef

could be twenty or thirty pounds. The other interesting customer that used to come in the shop was old Miss Griffiths. She told me all sorts of interesting things about Campden - I must write them all down one day. But she told me that the Market Hall had a consecration cross on it, I found it one day on one of the pillars and it meant that there must be no dirty dealing in there because it was a consecrated building.

On another occasion a small girl opened the back door and said "mummy's in the bath, do you want to see her," "Not really." And then there was Sid Bickerstaffe, he wasn't quite twenty shillings in the pound; he got a job delivering groceries, he took half a pound of butter to Miss Sunderland Taylor, she was out, so he flattened it and put it through the letterbox.

Another time a lady came in the shop and bought a tin of soup - half an hour later she brought it back - she said I had written the price on the top with a red felt pen. Had I got one with the price written on in black because she thought red was unlucky. I said would she like one without the price on at all. No, she said, it didn't matter as long as it wasn't in red. So I went out with the tin of soup and rubbed the price off with some lighter fuel we kept for that purpose and gave her the same tin of soup back.

In another case, a small boy came in the shop - he looked at the York stone floor of the shop and said "Daddy how the devil did the pavement get in here?"

And there was another occasion a lady bought a packet of English Breakfast tea - she brought it back and complained it was Indian.

And then there was a Mrs Hazier from Blockley. I wasn't feeling well that morning, I had got bronchitis. Charlie was in the back room playing a funeral march on the piano which didn't help either and when Mrs Hazier came in she said, "oh you do look ill, whatever's the matter," and I said "I've got bronchitis and am going back to bed as soon as I have got somebody to relieve me. Oh, she said, it's a dreadful complaint, my husband died of it."

Another customer who came in the shop was Miss Josephine Griffiths, she often came in on Monday morning to pay for the week's bread and the odds and ends she had and as we were never busy on Monday we would stand and talk and she told me all sorts of interesting things but one of the things was about Charley Sykes [Seitz], a great Campden character. Apparently his family, consisting of Charley, his sister and grandmother came to live in Campden in the house, now St Pauls Convent, in about 1870 - they had previously been living in Bombay - with the grandfather who worked for the East India Company. The children's parents were both dead, and they were being brought up by the grandmother. On the death of the grandfather they came to England. I can only remember Charley as a very old man but in his youth he was a very tall striking figure with black curly

hair, a black beard. His portrait was hung in the Royal Academy dressed as a brigand, though I cannot recall the name of the artist although he was quite famous. They lived in considerable style. Charley became a medical student, his sister did whatever Victorian ladies did in those days, usually nothing, and then the blow fell. The grandmother died, and with her died a very generous pension from the East India Company. And that was all they had. Charley had to give up his studies, and he gradually went from worse to worse. A better man might have struggled on and tried to qualify but he was no fighter and he just gave up.

He took to drinking and earned a precarious living cattle droving, blackberrying, odd jobs - at the end of his life he just lived by cadging and scrounging. Old ladies were very good to him they used to put little food parcels out. Scud [Scudamore] Griffiths used to leave The Times by the back door for him to collect the next day. He always read it and could discuss the affairs of the day quite intelligently. At the end of his life he lived at Box Cottage, Broad Campden. The rent was sixpence a week - he never paid it - but called regularly on the landlord to complain about the state of the building. This story of him recalls how he once saw some men planting a field of cabbages, so he asked if they had got a few to spare. They gave him a handful of plants which he put in his garden, a few days later he saw a rabbit eating them, he came straight over to the vicarage and demanded to see the Vicar, "You know what, I mean to say, Hitchcock, God sends these little rabbits," and the Vicar had to agree with that one, "well" said Charley, "I planted cabbages in my garden and God sent a little rabbit to eat them, and you know Hitchcock, God owes me fourpence." Hitchcock paid up, he said that was the best one he had heard to date. I hope God reimbursed him when he got to Heaven. At the age of 70 he became entitled to an old age pension, which was ten shillings a week, and everyone thought that that would enable him to pay his way and stop scrounging. But Charley had other ideas. For years he had cherished an ambition to be buried in Bombay, and so when he collected his first pension he went to Lloyds Bank and opened an account - to be known as the Bombay fund.

Thereafter every Friday he took his pension straight to the bank to be paid in and carried on living as before. On summer months he would sit on a seat on Sheep Street corner and invite the tourists to take his photograph, for which he charged them twopence. He had his hair cut once a year during sheep shearing season, when he would persuade some farmer to run the sheep shearing scissors over his head - he died when he was about 80 - the neighbours noticed he had not been seen for a few days, and went in and found him. It was not possible to bury him in Bombay and his Bombay fund gave him a nice funeral and a burial in Campden. His sister

was traced and came to the funeral - and Campden lost a very colourful character.

The Izod family lived at Westington for about 300 years. The last survivor was Nat, an extremely deaf man. One day he went to the Doctor where the following conversation took place. Doctor: "Are you constipated?" Nat, "Eh?" Doctor: "Are you constipated?" and Nat still couldn't hear him. The doctor, very loudly, "Are you constipated?" "No." says Nat, "Church of England." Another occasion he went to church in a brand new overcoat, navy blue with a velvet collar. He placed it over the back of the pew and after the service he found his new overcoat gone and a very inferior garment left in its place. He was very annoyed and he gave his opinion of the people who went to church and did that sort of thing. And on the way down he called at The Eight Bells to repeat the complaint. Jim Aston, trying to be helpful, said "have you seen the Vicar about it?" "No," said Nat, "it wasn't him, he was nowhere near me the whole time."

Jimmy Austin came home one night and had taken a great deal of cider and fell asleep in the chair by the fire. The grandfather clock struck 11 and woke him up. He cursed the clock and went to sleep again. The clock struck 12 and woke him up again so he grabbed his old muzzle loading shotgun out of the corner and shot the works out of the clock. He said it never served him that trick again.

Nezzy Plested, the stone mason repairing the pinnacles on the Church tower, took a gallon of cider up with him every day to save coming down in his lunch hour. And how he got rid of it they still don't know. On one day in Campden he was engaged to install a stone fireplace for Mr Huyshe at Pike House - Huyshe had designed the fireplace himself and gave Nezzy a detailed drawing on how he would like it done. He returned and found Nezz installing a completely different fireplace. When he complained, Nezzy said, "My father did them like that, my grandfather did them like that and that's how I'm going to do it - if you want anything different get someone else."

Some amusing things happened on the bread round in my youth. On one occasion I walked up a very long drive and the lady met me at the door and said "I want a bag of flour, I couldn't shout and tell you because my hands were all wet."

The Red Lion was a great place for local characters, one night they were discussing who would be the oldest man in Campden. George Stowe solemnly announced Nezzy Plested would have been the oldest man in Campden if he had lived.

On the occasion of the general election Bill Jeffries said "I never took any notice of politicians, half the lies they tell you aren't the truth."

A few years ago Reg Keightley was putting in a window in next door to me - it's the needlework shop now - it was Friday night and the job was not quite finished and they were having their annual holiday the next week so Reg asked them if they would mind working Saturday morning to finish it off so as they could tidy it off before the holiday. Bert Bruce said he was quite willing to work, Jim Plested said he was willing to work all day Saturday if needs be, and he turned to Ted James, "what about you Ted?" "Well," said Ted "I was thinking of getting married but I can put it off." He did.

Another old Campden stone mason, Charley Keightley, worked on the windows of the Catholic church. And as an old man he used to sit in the bay window of The Volunteer and tell anyone who cared to listen how they were done. It was Charley who first pointed out to me that every window was different. That piece of information cost me a pint.

There was also in The Volunteer Josiah Simmons, late of the 17th Lancers. A real old soldier. His favourite one was, "have you ever heard the tale of the mines? No? Well mine's a pint." Josiah was the first man in Campden to drive a motor car. I think I've mentioned that before.

Slap Blakeman was always appearing before the magistrates for being drunk and disorderly. One day the Chairman of the Bench happened to meet him in the street. "Hello Blakeman, I haven't seen you for a long time." "No sir, well what with the strength of it and the price of it there isn't much chance."

The late H J Massingham, in his book *Shepherd's Country*, tells how in the Snowhill Arms one day they were discussing the poor quality of the beer when one local remarked the twelve apostles brew the beer these days, eleven of them brings the water and the other the chemical tack. I wonder if it was Judas Iscariot who brought the chemical tack.

There is a story of Jack Keen who is said to have drunk 17 pints of cider in the Bakers Arms one night, and then he turned round and said too much of this cider isn't doing him any good -I think I'll have a pint of beer. I said to the landlord "It's a good story but who counted them?" "I did" said the landlord, "he had them all on tick, he never paid."