

## EMMA RAY

Emma Ray is 80 years of age this Christmas. Born at 8, Castle Street, the eighth house whichever end of the street you enter, she left the house to marry but came back to her birthplace in 1940.

Educated in Deddington she left school at 13 years of age and was involved with the family dairy smallholding up Green Hedges Lane, the milk being carried from the buildings in buckets suspended from a yoke. House delivery of milk at that time was in small pint cans. The family farmed pieces of land around the village, similar to other farmers of that day.

The shop at 8, Castle Street was the centre of a busy ironmongery business serving the surrounding villages by the travelling horse van: Monday – Hempton, Barfords and South Newington; Tuesday – Rousham, Upper Heyford and Kirtlington; Wednesday – Aynho, Souldern and Fritwell; Thursday – Duns Tew, Bartons and Sandford; Friday – North, Middle and Steeple Aston. The business had the biggest paraffin oil sales in the area. The two 250 gallon tanks at Castle Street were filled four times a week by BP and Shell Mex (2000 gallons), the suppliers giving half a penny per gallon discount for bulk orders in 1920, paraffin retailing at 9d a gallon.



*The Hiron ironmongery shop at 8, Castle Street, 1906. Emma is the little girl on the step*



*Thatched roofs in Castle Street*

Mrs Ray reminded me as others have done how a past Parish Council was largely responsible for changing the proposed route of the railway passing through Deddington to the present route: 'Deddington could have been a prosperous market town and Banbury the village'.

The Hiron family were keen attendees of the Congregational Church and a ritual on Good Fridays was for the whole family to walk around the farming land they rented, father taking stock accordingly. Mrs Ray has reacted to this farming upbringing by developing a keen interest in the detailed aspect of gardening, briars being dug out from the hedgerows and duly budded accordingly for the home garden.

An ardent supporter of the Deddington Flower Show, she was renowned for her produce exhibits and has many tales to relate accordingly. Mrs Ray maintains she is the last person to receive the Amateur Gardener Certificate for potatoes at a Deddington Flower Show. I'm informed that, when there was a dispute regarding the prizes for pears, the judges decided to cut open the pears of two entrants and found Colonel Thomson's pears had 'gone to sleep'. Another time a local agricultural teacher queried her Home Guard potatoes on exhibit, stating the Home Guard normal rough skin spots were not visible; this was quickly settled by Mrs Ray producing the authorised Seed Certificate when asked. Mrs Ray refused to tell him how they were produced – I know!

Mrs Ray's stepfather-in-law was the landlord of the Duke of Cumberland's Head at Clifton and her brother farmed at Clifton; she well remembers that it was a spark from the neighbour Garrett's tractor which set alight the thatch of the building which, together with the farmhouse, were completely burnt down and have never been rebuilt.

There was no district nurse in those early days and again we are reminded of the community self-help approach by the Deddington folk. It was regular for Mrs Ray and others to help the Doctor in nursing the sick and in many other ways. Basic and personal cleanliness we must appreciate was hard work in those days, all water had to be carried from hand pumps and the dry lavatories were emptied once a week. Sewage and mains water came to Deddington in 1936, electricity in 1930. House rates in 1940 were £1 17s.6d per half year and the rent to the Church Commissioners for the house before purchase was 2s. 4½d per week.

Mr Ray was an invalid for many years and with understanding one appreciates when talking to Emma Ray her position and dedicated life. Roland Ray, her son, is a Senior Civil Servant in the Inland Revenue at Bush House, London and her grandson, David, is a PhD and Medical Research Worker.

A lady of strong character who has lived with and carried the handicaps of her day with independence and no fear, one whose busy and hard country life gave her a definite purpose in doing things, be it for others or in the creative world of gardening. 'I was requested to leave by the same door as if I did by another I wouldn't be calling again'.



*Bill Marshall*