

## SOMERTON

This is a village three miles along the railway from Aynho Station in the Oxford direction. It was my mother's home. We visited grandma and Uncle Stephen and his wife Lizzie. We walked along the canal towing path. Grandma lived in the large house at the bottom of Church Street. She was a nice person. She wore a bonnet and long dress, all black. There was a well at the back of the house. Water was brought up by a windlass. The Seaton family lived next door in the small paddock. Just below lived Mrs Nash. Her son was in the Royal Flying Corps.

At the top of Church Street was the shop kept by Mrs Baldwin - three steps into the shop. Just below her shop lived Mr Tom Walton. He worked at Meadlands farm for most of his life for John Bletsloe of Deddington. Uncle and aunt lived in the Paddocks. Uncle worked for Mrs Walton who kept the pub and a coal business in the canal wharf. Uncle did the weighing up. George Andrews delivered it with a horse and trolley. There were two sons, Hubert and Raymond. Aunt Liz was our favourite. We would say our legs ached, then she would give us  $\frac{1}{2}$ p for the train fare home. We could quite easily have walked home. Aunt was very dear. She used to sing little ditties like "When I was single my pockets did jingle, and I long to be single again", and "I only got married this morning and it fills me with delight".

Mother attended the village school. The school master who liked a tippie once gave the boys corks to plant instead of beans. She left school aged 13 in 1889 and went into service in London, working long hours. Her wage was £3 per year. Her best school friend was Jenny Bayliss. She married Mr Plumbe. The farmers were Mr Godwin, Mr Brown and Mr Emberlin. The Upper Heyford air base had just been opened. Their first water supply from the stream at the lower end of the village was fetched in a large solid tyred army truck carrying a large water tank. The water was pumped by hand into it. The lorries had no real cab. It was a canvas canopy over the top of the driver, with side curtains, and a sheet of canvas covered the front, level with the driver's eyes. He wore goggles.

Small biplanes flew from the air base. The first aircraft we saw were twin-engined bomber biplanes, which flew from the Midlands to the South. They always followed the railway, not very high. We could read the letters and numbers on them. They were very slow. We could see and hear them coming. When they were small dots in the sky we would have had plenty of time to go in the house and had a cup of tea, then come out and see them in the distance over Oxford. They came only one at a time, around four a week. It was wonderful to see them. Sometimes there would be a small airship. They would be very low. Each had a rope dangling from the cockpit.

Mr Webb was the stationmaster (now called manager). One of the signalmen was Mr Austin. He walked from the village of Fritwell, four to five miles each way. The box closed at night. The ganger's name I think was Andrews. He was known as shopman. Mr Tom Moore had a butcher's shop in the street leading to Fritwell. I was christened in the church there. My name had not been decided when we got to the church. My godfather suggested Bernard. He was Mr Tom Gibbard. I like it. That's what I remember of Somerton so I will trot off back home, then go up and have a look round the tiny village of Clifton where I have lived since 1938.