

A View of Grayshott from Coxhead and Welch

02/01/2009 11:40 by neil

by: Dorothy Thomas

In 2002 in a recorded interview with Dr. Norman Bamford, Mrs. Dorothy Thomas talked about the time she lived in Grayshott. Between 1968 and 1995, Dorothy and her husband Julian owned and ran Coxhead and Welch, Headley Road, one of Grayshott's two hardware shops. Here, in an edited account for the web she recalls a calmer, less frenetic Grayshott and a number of its more colourful residents. Coxhead & Welch, Headley Rd, Grayshott 2007
How Dorothy Thomas came to live in Grayshott

'My husband was chief designer of air conditioning and central heating for a large company that was going to be bought by an American firm, and American firms think that if you are over 30 you are a has been. Experience isn't worth anything! And so we looked for a small "do it yourself" shop where my husband's passed experience, training first as an architect and then as a heating engineer, his experience would be useful.' *Coxhead & Welch Employees*

And then, we were fortunate, we had two employees, they had both been there for many years. Mrs. Cook who had joined the firm during the 1914-18 war when all the men were called up, and Harry Stevens, known to the village as Toby, a wonderful man, who repaired lawn mowers. He had been apprenticed to Coxhead & Welch in the early days when it was, oh it was founded in 1892 of course, but when Harry joined straight from school he was apprenticed as a plumber, and a tin smith and a lock smith, so he was well qualified. One of our first experiences was somebody who had bought one of these new houses up at Rozeldene, it had two bath rooms, a pink one and a green one, and the mistress of the house couldn't live with one; the colour was wrong,. Could we do anything about it? So, Harry went and looked, "Yes, quite easy", he would switch the bath room suites over and get her the colour she wanted. So he switched the green to pink and the pink to green. *Fascinating people in Grayshott. The Ogstens. Carols in the Square on Xmas Eve..*

Robin Ogsten was the dental surgeon and with his wife Pauline he organised the carols in the square. Robin came into the shop in a panic on our first Christmas Eve. Haslemere Band had been double booked, and couldn't come, and what were they to do? He'd gone around and one of the doctors who played a trombone and another doctor played something else, and somebody else was coming along with another instrument. He was doing his best when Julian said, "Oh my wife has got a portable organ, she'll play for you." So I finished up in a fur coat, no gloves of course, playing the organ in the square. During the singing of the carols it started to snow. And I was frozen, and at the end Pauline came round with a big flask, and said "My dear, you must want a hot drink", and poured out something black, and I thought, "Oh dear, black coffee" which I don't like, but I am so cold it doesn't matter. And I took it from her and took a very large mouthful; it was punch, and as a Christian Scientist, I had not drunk for 50 years or more! But it was a wonderful experience. *Shop ownership in Grayshott in the 1960s.*

In those days every shop in the village was run by its owner. The owner actually served behind the counter, which gave the village a very personal feeling. There was the International Stores in the village, but even that was manned by local people. *Why Coxhead & Welch had so few bad debts and late payers*

But every shop being owned and worked by its owner made a difference in the village. I can remember our accountant asked, "Why was it that we had no bad debts?" Why was it that our bills were always paid so quickly? I said, "It was quite simple. People did not owe Coxhead & Welch the money, they owed Mr. & Mrs. Thomas the money." Therefore when they had the bills on Monday or Tuesday they came in before the end of the week and paid them. *The absence, or near absence, of shop lifting in Coxhead & Welch*

And when a firm came and wanted us to have those big, big horrible mirrors all over the shop so that we could spot all

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the shoplifters, we refused to have anything to do with them. We said it was quite simple because we trusted all our customers. And if somehow we had any shop lifting, I would rather do that than suspect everybody who came into the shop.

To our knowledge we only had one example of shop lifting, and we did not know anything about that until a sealed envelope was poked through the letterbox. And in it was a very small sum of money, under a pound, and a note in not very good hand writing saying, "I am very sorry, and very ashamed of myself, but when I was in your shop a week or two ago, I took two pieces or two packets of dye from your counter, and I did not have the money to pay for them. I am so ashamed so I am sending you the money now."

Now I could not advertise the fact, at least I did not think it was right, and yet I wanted somehow to thank the woman. Now in the bakery on the corner of Glen Road there was a very good woman; she served the shop and the village well, but she was a gossip. I knew if I mentioned it to her everybody would hear about it eventually. So, that's what I did. I crossed the road and told her the story. I was quite sure before long everybody in the village would know that there was a very honest woman somewhere, and we were very grateful for her honesty. We trusted everybody. We were let down once or twice but it didn't matter. *Grayshott personalities.*

I remember one day a car being left right in the middle of the road outside a shop, literally in the middle of the road. And I thought, "Ah it's stopped there because it's going to turn into Glen Road and its got to wait for the traffic to pass." Not a bit of it. Suddenly the door opened and the driver got out. It was an elderly man, well known in the village, Sir Geoffrey Ramsden. He got out, left the door wide open, and crossed the road, the opposite side and started shopping in the village. I waited a moment or two, expecting him to come back to the car, but he didn't. And so one of us went out and closed the door of the car, there was nothing else we could do. And it stayed there for quite a while until we were able to track him down, and get somebody to move the car for him.

There was somebody else in the village, an elderly woman who lived, oh in what are those cottages called, the three storey stone ones just before the shops begin, where One Stop is now. She was elderly, and she had a small dog who was so fat that when it crossed the road with her it couldn't get up on to the pavement until she put a hand underneath its stomach and then the poor little creature could get up on to the pavement.

Now, I learnt that story in a very funny way. I was doing a window in the shop one day and I noticed her car go passed. Then a few minutes later it went passed again, and it went passed again. And I think it was at the third time I started wondering, "Why?" So I spoke to Toby. He told me the story how she couldn't reverse; so she would have to drive round and round Headley Road, Crossways, A3 and back again until she found somewhere where she could park on the right side of the road, because there was nothing else she could do about it. *Shoulder to the wheel*

The village was full of characters, delightful characters. There were a lot of course of retired army folk, a few naval, but mostly army, and they very quickly learnt a bit of my background, daughter of somebody in the Indian army, born and bred in India, etc. They would come into the shop, and if it was a Friday or a Saturday and they wanted paraffin for their greenhouses and Harry and the young man we employed in the workshop were busy, I would take the can and say, "I will go and get it for you", and they would be horrified. "But Mrs. Thomas, I can't bear to see you filling a can with oil." They were way back in India of course in the old days of the Rajah. I laughed because I was very adaptable, always had been.

When Harry was ill and couldn't do the deliveries, we had a large estate car, and provided things were loaded into the car, I would go out and do the deliveries. And sometimes they were so embarrassed because I would be unloading a bale of peat for their gardens on to a hand truck, and wheeling it along one of their paths, and they were so embarrassed they wanted to help me, but of course they didn't have the physical strength. I didn't mind because it gave me pleasure. *More Grayshott characters*

Then there was Miss With. Dear Miss With; elderly and frail, she would come into the shop, all breathless. We had chairs for people to sit on in those days. I would say, "Sit down Miss With. I'll be with you in a moment." And she would turn and say, "Mrs. Thomas, what kind of switches have you got for sale today?" And I would say, "I'll have to think about that Miss With, excuse me for one moment, I will be back.", and I would go round a column, disappear for a

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minute and say, "Good morning Miss With, how are you this morning, are you on your way home from the post office? Let me walk up the road with you." And so I would escort her out of the shop, and back to her home. These were some of the characters of Grayshott.

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Reference:Reference : Grayshott Village Archive 040 04