

MRS KATH née Meredith ELLIOTT OF GRAYSHOTT

02/01/2009 11:50 by neil

Mrs. Kath Elliott, born Kath Merideth was a lifelong resident of Grayshott. She was born with profound physical disabilities but overcame these with great fortitude and great cheerfulness. She ran the 'Tuck Shop' on Headley Road for many years and eventually became its owner. In later life she also became the proud owner of an electric four-wheel buggy. She drove this vehicle at speed complaining loudly about the rough and uneven pavements of Grayshott. Life became very interesting when she met another similarly motorised resident.

In February 2002, she gave a video interview to David W A Barrett for the Archive. Here is an edited account of what she had to say about her life and times in the village. Kath died in 2007.

'Kath talks about her parents and how they came to Grayshott'

'My mother came from Hertfordshire and worked in London as a parlour maid. My father was a Cockney. In 1910 he was out of work and someone in London wanted a horse brought down to the Huts Hotel at Hindhead. He rode it down to Hindhead and when he got here they offered him a job and he never went back to London to work. In 1912 my mother and father got married and they came to live in Glen Road. I think the house had just been built. We always used to call all round there Glen Road, not Avenue Road. We had The Avenue up the road - what did they want another Avenue Road for? They lived at Rosemary Cottage. It was rented. My dad went to the war and was in France. He didn't wait to be called up, as he wanted to get in the Royal Army Service Corps as he could drive anything.

I can't tell you what year he started it, but he had a garage just down from the Village Hall and it was called Meredith's Garage. He had it for years and years. He also had a taxi. There were a lot of ladies who used to go playing Bridge. He had this taxi on his own for some years and then he took Mr. Skeets in partnership and they had it for several years.

Rockdale, the house opposite the garage belonged to Miss Gertrude and Miss Mildred Pain and they came from up the north. They brought their gardener, a Mr. Statham with them. In Glen Road there were two wooden bungalows which, I believe, were built with wood taken from the hospital at Bramshott. Our house backed on to the Miss Pains' property. They had a butler. The gardener lived in a wooden bungalow, and the bungalow next to his was the chauffeur. Where the butler lived and where we were didn't belong to the Misses Pain. It was at the back of our house where they had bonfires. One day the head gardener came and said that Marsh, the chauffeur, had cleared off, so would my dad like to make an appointment to see Miss Pain to see about the job as chauffeur. My dad wanted the job as he was dying to get out of the garage. He wanted to improve it and get a better car but Mr. Skeets wouldn't. They used to sell petrol. Before they did the alterations, there was a concrete block with one petrol pump. Mr. Skeets had one garage and dad had the other one.

Mr. Skeets bought dad out, as he wasn't happy. Dad stayed to be a chauffeur until one lady died and the other one took a house in Boundary Road.

Where the row of houses are opposite the garage was all the kitchen garden and the greenhouses. The drive went to their garage.'

Kath talks about her childhood in Grayshott

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'I was born in Glen Road Grayshott on the 15th of June 1920 and I was christened because they never thought I would live. I only weighed 3 lbs. There were no incubators in those days and I was six weeks premature. My mother had had umpteen miscarriages I don't know whether you remember seeing the old fashioned sort of wicker baskets which had a top bit and a bottom bit, well I was in that apparently on a hot water bottle. Of course no one had any facilities in those days. We had an old kitchen in the living room and my mother used to bath me one day and rub me all over with oil the next day. When she was doing it she had to lock herself in the room. We never used to lock our doors in those days, but she had to lock it in case anyone came in and made a draught. It was safer like that.

I didn't go to a proper school until I was turned six. I went to a little school in Boundary Road, a nursery school, and then I went to Grayshott and one of the bigger girls used to push me in a push-chair to school. I must have been about ten when I went to Grayshott. I never got on very well. If you start late you are that much behind everybody.

Where the Pottery is was the laundry and in those days you could cut through the field and there was a gate to get into the school. The reason I left there was that someone was pushing me to school down Whitmore Vale Road and a motor bike came round just before the church gate. It ran into me and whoever was pushing me jumped out of the way and my friend jumped out of the way and it threw me on to the grass verge. I wasn't hurt but the chair was buckled. Mum and dad said we are not having any more of that and as I could get on and off the bus I went to Beacon Hill School. Mr. Varley was the Headmaster and Mrs. Varley used to teach the infants. Mrs. Harris taught as well.

There were quite a few pupils. I used to go on the Whippet bus - a small bus with one man you paid when you got on it. I could get the bus at about 8.15 to Beacon Hill and then it went to Farnham and then it turned round and came back every hour. I got off opposite the school and at five to twelve I could get back to Grayshott for dinner. The bus dropped me off at Glen Road and then I would get the bus back at quarter past one. The bus was never full. I had a pass. Then I would catch the bus back at five to four and I was home at four o'clock and it was much better for me. They did different things, which they didn't do at Grayshott - cookery for the girls and carpentry for the boys. On sports days I used to sit with the teacher who was taking the scores and helped her.

There was no milk in those days - it was Horlicks, or something they had in an urn in the cookery room. Somebody had to put the urn on in the morning, and I used to put the powder in. They had cups and trays and it was my job to fill the cups and they all had their drinks

I left school at 15 because I had missed so much schooling.

My mother and I went round the village to see if anybody would give me a little job to do as they didn't want me to be at home doing nothing. We had my grandmother living with us at the time - my dad's mother - but nobody seemed to have anything for me. They made excuses about the stairs but we had stairs at home and I could also get on the bus to go to school.'

Kath recalls how she came to work in the Tuck Shop

'Well, this is the beginning of the Tuck Box. At the time it was a funny little shop with a lace curtain with a few sweets and things run by a Mr. and Mrs. Friday. Years before it was a saddlers and if you look next time you go past you will see hooks outside where they used to hang the saddles.

Mum went to see Mrs. Friday to ask if she could give me a little job. Something to do - it didn't matter what - just something to occupy me. They started me in June 1935 when I left school. She said I could go for nothing to see what it was like - September time. An elderly lady who lived with Mr. and Mrs. Friday also helped in the shop. She was a funny old dear. I soon picked it up. I sold sweets, chocolates and cigarettes.

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I had worked there for about a year when Mrs. Friday sent me home with a note asking if we wanted to take the shop on. My mum nearly had a breakdown in case we couldn't make a go of it because the rent was £1 a week. We thought about it and anyway we ventured with it and took it on in October 1936. We had three years before the war and the only day we closed was Christmas Day.

Mrs. Friday had made it into a better class shop. She called it the Tuck Box and it stuck all the time. Cigarettes were ten for sixpence. Twenty Players were eleven and a halfpenny; Woodbines were ten for four pence and five for two pence. Mars and Crunchies were all two pence and Milky Way was one penny. All the sweets were two pence a quarter and Quality Street was sixpence a quarter - all loose - no packaging like today.

Opposite Batemans in Crossways Road was a Mrs. Wagstaff and she sold sweets and tobacco. Also, opposite the Fox and Pelican, now the Chinese take away, was sweets and cigarettes and they also sold toys and did cups of tea. When the bus stopped outside the Fox and Pelican and turned round to go back to Farnham, they wanted cups of tea. Where the Undertakers are now there was a newsagent's shop, which also sold sweets and tobacco. There was a lot of competition. We went to tell Mrs. Wagstaff that we were going to take over the Tuck Box. Then Mrs Wagstaff sold out and it was never a sweet shop again and that helped us a lot. It then became a general shop. When she sold out we got a lot of customers.

We opened at 9 o'clock in the morning and closed at 8 o'clock at night and 9 o'clock on Saturdays. The butchers were open till goodness knows what time at night and they were scrubbing down at 8 o'clock and they used to come into us. Ron Bleach, who is on the Council, used to work at the butchers in the early days. We opened on Sunday mornings.

I ran the shop on my own. We couldn't employ anybody. My mum used to come and help me late at night. My dad used to do Sunday mornings. Mum couldn't do it on her own because she was deaf. We used to sell quite a lot of cigarettes. I used to buy direct from the manufacturers. There were no supermarkets that sold cigarettes and they didn't sell sweets. That went on from 1936 until the war came.

When the war came it was very difficult to get stuff and what we got we could sell so then we started closing at 6 o'clock. It was easier when cigarettes were rationed with coupons. The coupons were little strips in the ration books and I had to cut them out - it was quite a job.

If the customers saw a Cadburys van they thought there would be sweets and when I did get a delivery I had to check it. If it hadn't been checked I couldn't sell it till the next day. All the sweet coupons had to be counted and we did this at the end of the month. There was a Food Office in Alton and when we had counted the coupons they had to be sent to Alton. The wholesaler would want coupons when I paid for the goods. If I could give enough coupons for a case of Mars then I could get what I wanted. People with a big family who couldn't afford sweets used to give me their unwanted coupons. I never had queues for sweets.

I eventually got Walls ice cream. We had the Stop Me and Buy One and they stored their bikes at the Royal Huts Hotel. To start with, I had a very small cabinet, which wasn't electric, and the van went to the Royal Huts and filled up the bikes. One of them came over to me and they put dry ice in the bottom of the cabinet and then filled it up with lollies and ice cream. They did this every day. Then I was supplied with a small fridge. When the war came the ice cream was stopped but I was asked if I would keep the fridge. We kept it in the shop and mum made a cover to go on it so that we could keep stock on it. After the war when we got it again I used to cut the ice cream in blocks to make it go further. It came by rail to Haslemere and our local carriers would bring it up - they were called Funnell and Furlonger. They were based in the big house where Betty Simmonds lives, opposite Café Baa Baa. They had a lorry and a great big shed at the back. During the war they used to keep furniture in it.

At 2 O'clock I would start to sell the ice cream and there would be a queue right down the road. Mrs. Potter and Mrs.

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Venning lived there and they got annoyed because the queue was going past their door. If it went the other way it would annoy the Chemist so I had a gate and made the queue go down my garden path. I could never supply the queue. I divided the ice cream up as best I could as we only had coupons for sweets.

I paid my rent for the shop to a Mr. and Mrs. Rashley and when they died there was no one to pay our rent to but my father knew who owned the shop and he went to him. This gentleman said he would give me the first refusal and that's what happened. We bought the shop and the house in 1947. We didn't really want to leave where we were living.

There was no sanitation or 'phone at the Tuck Box. The cart used to come round. We let the upstairs as a flat. It was all put in my name when we bought it. My mother died in 1948. We sold the business in 1981.'

Kath recalls the war years

'During the war Grayshott had a lot of Canadians based at Ludshott Common. They built huts, which were turned into houses after the war. British troops were here as well. The Sally Lunn restaurant in Hindhead used to be flats.

At the start of the war when the siren went all the shops shut, but I had nowhere to go so I locked the shop and went down to Mr. Yarborough's cellar until the all-clear came. We had a doodlebug once not far away.

Mr. Yarborough's shop didn't have glass windows - it was an open front and he put wooden shutters up at night. It was like that for years until he had a glass front put in it. We had blackout curtains and a blind. It was very dreary time.'

Kath recalls other shops and businesses in Grayshott

'The precinct was nothing like it is now. The front of a shop looked on to the front of Headley Road and this was a photographer's shop - where the Co-op is now - Walders I think the name was. Next to that was a very nice house with small gates - one to the back door and one to the front and next to that was Village House - a big stone, two storey house. The house opposite the Tuck Box was called New Place. Then, at some stage they built another storey on top of the stone house. It was turned into three flats before the Second World War.

Where the Indian restaurant is now it was always a Fish shop. Mr. Yarborough ran it and he used to go to Haslemere station to get his fish from the train every morning. On Tuesdays he used to look for my ice cream and he would bring it and leave it at my front door.

A friend who lived down Glen Road was with me one Monday afternoon and the fire siren went and the village house was on fire. The lady who lived there had died. Our friends in the wooden bungalow next door in Glen Road shouted that Funnell's shed was on fire and it was quite close to the garage where my dad had the lady's car on blocks, so I had to go and warn my dad. Café Baa Baa used to be Tylers wine shop and the chap from there came and helped to put the fire out.

We used to be able to get anything from the shops. Now its all Estate Agents, eating places and offices. The Funeral parlour used to be a mens' hairdressers. There were two wooden bungalows at the back of our garage and the house next door used to be Harris's the grocers. Next to them was Tylers the wine shop and then where the Dining Rooms are was Mr. Burdon - one side was vegetables and the other side was fish. Coxhead & Welsh has always been there which was run by the Hartwells - an old Grayshott name.

Threshers used to be two shops and the empty fish and chip shop belonged to Mr. Waugh. The big shop was a ladies

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dress shop. The first shop after Coxheads was a mens' outfitters and next door was a shoe shop. On the corner of Glen Road was a bakers shop and the bakery was at the back. They used to deliver the bread in vans.'

Typed by Mrs. Maureen Clarke
July 2003

David W A Barrett (Editor and who also conducted the interview with Kath Elliott in 2002)
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