

## A Snapshot of life in Chippenham

*The Ironside/Cooper Family at 16 – 17 The Hamlet, Chippenham by Gladys Evans (nee Ironside). Born 1/1/1907 and died 2003.*

*Life in Chippenham in the early 1900s*



Some brief biographical details of the author's life to help with family references and her connection with family in the surrounding area of Chippenham:

Gladys Emily Ironside was born 1/1/1907 at 43, Park lane, Chippenham.

She was baptised at St. Paul's Church, Chippenham by the Rev J. F. Griffiths 6/2/1907 as Gladys Emily Ironsides to Arthur Payne Ironsides & his wife Emily Annie. Father's occupation recorded as Assistant Store Keeper.

Her father, Arthur Payne Ironsides was born in the first quarter of 1881 (aged 2 months in the census of that year) in Lyneham (Bradenstoke Road) to Theodore Ironsides, a railway guard & his wife Harriet. His siblings were: Amy Sarah (1876), Ernest Thomas (c. 1879), William Henry (1882), Wallace Berry (1884), Olive Mabel Victoria (1887) & Howard James (18190).

Most of these children were baptised at St. Paul's Church in Chippenham. They lived in Lyneham and then at 4, Railway Cottages in Chippenham. Theodore Ironsides was born c. 1846 to Thomas & Amy Ironsides in Stanton St. Gabriel, Chideock, Dorset. His father Thomas was an agricultural Labourer.

Gladys' mother, Emily Annie Cooper was born mid 1878 in Langley Burrell to Sidney Herbert Cooper & his wife Emily (nee Cole).

Sidney Herbert Cooper married Emily Cole in the first quarter of 1875. He was a Mason by trade and lived with his family in Pew Hill for a while, as well as being born in Kington Langley.

Emily Cole was born in Langley at the end of 1844 to William Cole and his wife Edith. William was an agricultural Labourer.

I was born on the first of January 1907 in a terraced house in Park lane, Chippenham, just three doors down from what is now the entrance to John Coles Park – what was then a hayfield. Opposite was St. Paul's Church school, originally for both sexes and all ages to fourteen (!) but later just a Junior School, and now, in the eighties, a block of privately-owned flats.

When I was three years old, we moved to The Hamlet, a collection of attractive cottages in "Ann Hathaway" style, belonging to the Langley Burrell estate of the Ashe family. At that time The Hamlet was a "private" road, and at the Greenway Lane end, was closed to traffic, such as it was, by a row of stout oak posts. The centre post was hinged and locked and could be laid flat for carts to go through, either for delivery or access to Langley Road, the other end of The Hamlet. The key for this post was left with my Grandfather – he being the very first tenant of the group of cottages. He lived at No. 16, and we went to occupy No. 17.

I imagine the reason we moved from Park Lane, can only have been the size of the garden. My father was a dedicated gardener, & would have appreciated the large back, side & front gardens of No. 17. Families did not buy vegetables as we do now. All veg were home-grown, but my father's special loves were sweet peas & dahlias, and much ground was given to them. He also built a greenhouse, & I remember the wonderful tomatoes.

Each cottage had sitting room, pantry, washhouse, back lean-to, porch, two double bedrooms and a landing big enough for a single bed – very limited accommodation for a growing family; no hot water, the only heat was the one open fire place; oil lamps for lighting when we went there first; later gas was installed & much later still, electricity. But upstairs, only candles. There was a fire place in the main bedroom – only used during illness. My father built on at the back, an extra sizeable room with sink etc. and washing facilities such as they were. This room made the house seem much bigger, especially as the family grew.

Toilet "facilities" were, of course, "up the garden path", in all weathers; earth closets built four in a block. Each was quite separate and there was also plenty of room for coal or wood or garden implements & such things as gardeners need, to be stored.

At the end of the garden of No. 17 my father & his friend Mr Berry, built a large summer house, & this became a happy playground for us. I remember at one end was a small chicken house. I suppose eggs were a welcome addition to our food.

As the family grew, the second bedroom was altered, so that there were three separate bedrooms & no landing, of course. By this time I was ten years old; there were five of us, me, Herbert, Dennis, Phyllis & Reg. I imagine washing day must have been a night-mare. A friend came once a week to help, a Frenchwoman I remember. Originally there was only one cold water tap between the two semi-detached cottages, but with the additional back room, this water was brought inside, of course. Some time later, perhaps late twenties, brick built water closets were built close to the back doors – but still no bathrooms & no hot water. A large zinc bath was kept hung on a wall & used for the necessary bath nights.

I cannot recall the births of my two older brothers, but I well remember being taken with them, to stay for two or three weeks at Kington Langley with cousins Geoff & Greta Chedd. When we came home again, we had a new sister Phyllis, & some two or three years later, came Reg.

In the years before TV & Radios & before cars were everywhere, all entertainment for a family had to be thought out & usually planned ahead. My Father was always very busy with the garden, but at weekends & other holidays, we all went out to picnic. A favourite place was the little wood at the top of the golf links near Allington, where were primroses, violets & bluebells & trees to climb too. Then we went to Bird's Marsh, walking through fields of spring flowers, now sadly gone, to get to that little beauty spot.

Going past Bird's Marsh, we walked to Kington Langley, where were other relatives & friends. Another day, we would walk to friends at Langley Burrell. Here were kept pigs, & in the gardens were apples & celery too! Celery dug that day just for us for tea! At Kellaways lived the Thomas family next door to the Grimshaws: - Picturesque cottages with well-tended gardens, & of course toilets away from the houses behind high hedges!

There was one other outing which remains in my memory – a trip to Cherhill White Horse. With Father, Mother, pushchairs & bicycle we set off for the Chippenham Railway Station, & a ride on the "Calne Bunk", a short train from Chippenham to Calne Station. Then a long walk to Cherhill, sharing rides on pushchair and cycle, with a final climb up that hill to settle above the White Horse for another picnic. It seems the sun always shone!

As soon as I was five years old, I was taken to St. Paul's Infant School: - I have vague memories of a large open room with long forms & wooden benches, blackboards on easels, and of course just one black coal stove for warmth – we must have been very tough. At seven years old, one progressed to the "Big School". The larger school was divided in half – boys & girls, separate at all times: - two heads, Mr Thurston & for us girls, Miss Morgan. They must have taught me something, because I gained a scholarship to the local Grammar School, and left in July 1918 for the best six years of my school life.

We were still living all together at No. 17 The Hamlet, with my Grandfather next door, now a widower with a housekeeper. My Father was working at what was then Saxby & Farmers Works (now Westinghouse), my brothers & sister all well & all except Reg were at school. I had a good deal of homework every evening, which I thoroughly enjoyed & I was given every encouragement at home. Things were not easy – I worked in the bedroom by candle-light, & there was very little privacy. However all seemed set well.

Then in late January 1922, there was a 'flu epidemic. Father died at home on 12th February. For two weeks he was delirious, at home, but each night came friends of his to sit up all night to allow Mother to rest – a fine example of practical help from firm friends. But he died on a Sunday morning, & the whole family was distraught.

After the funeral, the Uncles & Aunts got together to make plans for our future!! My Grandfather agreed that his housekeeper should go, & we should all go to share his home. With hindsight, I feel this was a sad, not really good move, but have to remember that there was no money – no modern social security help – just a widow's pension & allowances for children. First Mother & Reg & I went to Pontypool with Herbert to her cousin's farm for two weeks holiday. We left Herbert there to work for a time.

When we came back, we went into No. 17 to live. Dennis went to Harlow & Phyllis to Chingford to two Aunts. They must tell their own stories – they stayed away for some months, & eventually we were all back together at No. 17. How Mother managed was miraculous! One can only have great admiration for all similar women in such situations in those days!! Personally I have no memories of having been deprived in any way – but according to today's standards, we were all very deprived indeed – there could have been very few “trimmings”.

For myself, there was a discussion by the Uncles about “putting” me to a clerical job at Saxby's (Westinghouse now) but my Uncles decided that I should continue my secondary education – hopefully to earn more money one day, no doubt.

So I stayed at Chippenham Grammar School till 1924, finishing with a chance to go to London University. This was quite out of the question of course, & I began a year's Pupil Teaching at Ivy Lane School where I was very happy & reasonably successful. (I think this practice was a good one & might usefully be re-introduced today, before serious teacher training begins!)

After this year, I easily got my first job teaching at Yatton Keynell Village School, cycling some five miles each morning & evening! I stayed there two years & remember very little about it except that a child brought live mice to school! The general atmosphere was a happy one.

Then I came into St. Paul's School – where I began myself years before. No longer a wearisome bike ride – but older children & a Headmaster who was never without a cane! It was a bad atmosphere here, but I stayed a year till I had serious 'flu. Although it was suggested I take three months leave, I had lost interest and left.

After several months I fully recovered & taught two young families of two children each their very first lessons. This I thoroughly enjoyed & I know I had the satisfaction of hearing each of the children successfully able to read! They were the Family Stevens in Langley Road & Family Smith in Marshfield Road. The pleasure of having concrete results & having taught a child from scratch to be able to read, write fluently & count too, has to be experienced to be believed!

(Later after marriage, I had further happy experiences of this in Dr. Lowe's children at Reybridge, Lacock, & later still Dr. More's [or perhaps Moris'] children in Lacock Village. These were all specially happy days.)

In 1927, I took a job as Manageress of Johnsons (Dyers) Ltd shop on the Bridge at Chippenham. The shops were new then & I enjoyed being totally alone & responsible for the new business. Head Office was Bootle, Liverpool – there was a happy atmosphere at all times in dealing with them. Clothes for cleaning were sent to Liverpool for dry cleaning & dyeing every day - & sometimes returned every day too! Of course, all sent by rail, having been collected by horse drawn van! I must say how much I was paid! After six weeks training at Trowbridge shop, I began with £1 per week.

This was 1928 and I had friends who worked in a Drapers shop for 5/- [five shillings] (25p today 1990!) per week, including full day Saturday! In order to increase my £1 per week, I had to show an increase in a three month period's takings of £50. This meant a tremendous extra effort in 3 months, when one remembers that to clean a

suit only cost 3/6 and a pair of trousers just 1/6. The book keeping, packing, despatching & then receiving, completing & delivery to customer was quite a job. However, in 4 ½ years I reached £1-10s per week, managed to help Mother & eventually left to be married in 1932. I had become engaged in 1928, (much to the consternation of the Dyers company). I had received a wrist watch with my ring & I remember my Grandfather gave me a £5 note – the first I had ever seen!

From 1928 – 1932 we had to save money towards marrying. This was not easy, but was just the way life was then. My husband & I had met playing tennis at Saxby's Tennis Club (now Westinghouse), and we played in the first team for some 3 or 4 years, thoroughly enjoying going away to play in other towns! We also went to Bath Theatre quite often & in the summer, went 3 or 4 times to Southsea for our holiday. I wonder how we managed that! Wilf worked in the office at Melksham for Pond Tayler & Collen, flour millers, cycling the seven miles each day! I remember one summer holiday at Southsea & watching the Schreider Trophy Air Race around the Solent. An aeroplane was quite an excitement in those days.

We had many tennis friends, among them Charlie Townshend, who took us twice to Wimbledon Tennis Club, where we had seats on Court No. 1. Charlie had property in Wimbledon & was able to get tickets every year. I remember Suzanne Lenglen, Jean Borotra, Fred Perry, Helen Wills-Moody –we were so lucky!

In 1931, Wilf bought a piece of land at Beanacre, part of a huge hayfield it was. He paid £60 for sixty "lug" of land, & our house was built of Bath stone in the middle of the plot, & the large piece of land surrounding the house eventually proved a wonderful playground for our two children. It was much too big to cope with as a garden, so we kept many chickens for years & planted fir trees too. Now there is a house with a good garden on either side of the original one.

In October 1932 we married at St. Paul's Church, Chippenham & eventually settled in the new house. At that time the house had no electricity & no mains water, but a gas cooker & one light in the kitchen. In the sitting room we had an Aladdin Lamp & huge coal fire! After 3 months, electricity arrived in Beanacre, & we were given three lights & one plug free! Mains water did not come until about 1947.

Beanacre in 1932 was really a village, where people all knew each other & all went either to Church or Chapel & generally entered into village life. There was the Post Office Shop & two smaller shops & of course, the village Pub "Carpenters Arms", now "The Peacock". There never was a school except for a short while during the war, when there were evacuee children around. All children went into Melksham to school. Most had to walk there & back – no buses at that time. The G.W. Railway had a Halt at Beanacre, as at other villages between Chippenham & Trowbridge, until Beeching closed them all.

After the 1939-45 War, gradually village life altered. The Methodist Chapel closed & is now a cottage. The Post Office & small shops were uneconomical & closed. For some years there was only the Pub "The Peacock", & now in 1990 that has closed permanently. So now Beanacre has nothing except the Church. There are new houses, new people but no "Village Life" as we knew it in the Thirties!

*Pictures as follows:*

*1 – Arthur Payne Ironsides & his wife Emily Annie (nee Cooper) with children Gladys Emily (born 1907), Herbert T (born 1910), Dennis A (born 1912), Phyllis A (born 1914) (before Reginald S's birth in 1917)*

*2 – Marriage of Arthur & Emily in mid 1905 (photo taken in The Hamlet, Chippenham)*

*3a – Mrs Emily Annie Ironside with the 5 children (including Reginald S (born 1917) 3b – the 4 older Ironside children*

*4 – The Ironside children in The Hamlet, Chippenham*

*5 – Mr Ironside of 16, The Hamlet (first occupant) – National Dahlia Champion*





Hamlet, Chippenham



MC DONALD  
16 THE HAMLET  
FIRST OCCUPANT

NATIONAL DAHLIA  
CLUB

