

## Come, Walk With Me!

Brian Tasker

From the road now designated the A356, from Byme Bridge to Broadshard, taking the first right leads into Merriott via Green Nap and Boozer Pit.

Down the little hill there used to be no Lynash Nurseries just fields, but just on the corner at the bottom, now all overgrown, was access to the brook which was technically the mill stream for Bow Mills. Back in the 1930's for us little boys, this was the place to catch minnows and sticklebacks with a jam-jar, and the end of the run for our wooden boats down the stream from Penny Hell and eventually from Manor Farm Barton and Tail Mill. Our boats were no more than bits of wood shaped, pointed at one end and rounded at the other, with a couple of cotton reels tacked on for funnels. To us they could be HMS Hood, HMS Ark Royal or a little Destroyer, what mattered was that controlled by a long stick we could take advantage of the flow of the stream to race them and while away many an enjoyable hour! The pleasures of the banks were not lost on us, sometimes a sprig of watercress to take home, or where to find the golden Kingcups or the yellow Flag Irises; there was a Kingfisher by that corner but very rare to see it.

Coming up the hill towards GreenNap, Pearces' fields on the right, Farmer Dick's on the left, Walditch lane was on the corner, always full of ruts, but then it was well used. In one of the first pair of cottages in the village John Young and his wife used to live, always a friendly welcome in a little cottage with the usual black range, the black kettle was always on the hob and the tea-pot on the fret, but not the place to take a cup of tea-the offering was usually stewed black as well! Frank Parker Jnr's development opposite came much later and was no problem. Frank Butcher's smallholding and market garden he kept pretty well up-together, we used to borrow his horse and cart for our haymaking and he used to buy our "grass keep". Middle lane was the place for exploring, teasels a little way down on the right, Granfy Griggles (wild orchids) and cowslips in fields on the left, further down Bob Gill's old fields - Little Ham and Girt Ham. When they flooded in the winter this was a great place for skating, if the ice was thick enough at least you knew that the water below was probably no more than a few inches deep! More enterprising it was to proceed, in the autumn, further down for the "nutting", even in those days the end of the lane was totally overgrown but that was the place for lovely "filbert" hazel nuts. We reckoned that they had come from originally cultivated stock which would agree with the legend of previous habitation. We boys did explore among the bushes but the most we ever found was the rusty remains of a double-barrelled shotgun, still unexplained! Much easier to find in Middle lane and much more recent was the debris of a stick of German incendiary bombs -WWII - no doubt jettisoned on the way home across the channel, certainly not much there to catch fire!



is it places re-visited always seem so much smaller than one remembered?

A few steps down the road and we have Pitt farm on the right, Granddad Mitchell, Mabel( a stalwart of the church choir), and husband Tom Paull, son Albert. Across the road at Greenways, Dick and Beattie Arnold, son Gordon, daughter Esme. The lane beside Greenways takes you through to Monkhouse lane at the other end, and was bounded on either side by Scott's Nurseries. Foreman Tom Mitchell would often be there with his team budding roses, I was always impressed how shiny and sharp the nurserymen kept their spades. At the sound of the Nursery Bell they would march off in a line with their spades on their shoulders; I should not be so disrespectful, but to my mind they looked just like the Seven Dwarfs in Snow White! Back to Greenways, during the war Dick Arnold was our licensed potato merchant, so if you wanted spuds for yourself or dyed pig potatoes for the pigs he was your man. Strange, potatoes are now sold in 25kg bags, which are heavy enough, but in those days they were in 1cwt.(50kg) hessian sacks, yet people like Dick used to chuck them around with no bother at all. Beattie used to have her "wash-house" and well at the back of the house and they used a little lean-to for their kitchen. The front room always had a Chenille tablecloth and a potplant—bet its very different now! Dick took on the land in the triangle opposite his entrance, demolished the two condemned cottages that were there, and sold the top corner to Bernard Adams who was then able to build a garage.

Moving up the road from Pitt farm in the first cottage were Sammy "soldier" Osborne and Bessie. Sammy went to work dressed in the fashion, corduroy trousers tied under the knees with binder twine and red & white spotted neckerchief, which, if not around his neck, carried his lunch. Bessie, in her earlier days, dressed for Tail Mill as in Hilda's piece, but I always remembered her on Sunday mornings still with her apron on carrying her covered dish of Sunday dinner to the Bakehouse to be cooked. She then also had to go and fetch it! Which reminds me, we always knew when it was Sunday, breakfast was accompanied by the strains of "All people that on Earth do dwell", sung in his own fashion by Farmer Dick's rather unfavoured brother Art as he drove the cows down our street to pasture. Continually repeated all the way and always the same hymn. Life in the village was like that!

After the Boozer Pit fire the cottage next to Bessie's was eventually rebuilt and a family with young children lived there, but the rest of the cottages were pulled down and a nice Hamstone house built for a Mr. & Mrs. Trew, a quiet couple of independent means from somewhere up north, just remember it was them who named the house "Stonehaven" which may have been a clue. Before the war they had moved on and sold to Bernard and Zeta Adams. Now, Bernard was a retired opera singer but quite young, and liked nothing better than to occasionally burst into his former operatic arias for the benefit of all, so that picking sprouts or just weeding in the front garden, we might be entertained to Rigoletto or the like. Nothing could be more different than Art's Sunday morning offerings!

It must have been about the summer of 1938 that electricity came to Boozer Pit. We were not included as only people who had contributed to the cost of the poles got connected. We were just lucky to get a street light on the pole outside our house and benefitted from its light for the one winter, but then all the lights went out for WWII and our night sky was lit by searchlights from Yeovil, quite pretty when they played on the silver barrage balloons! Sometimes in clear conditions, from our upstairs windows we could see distant lights way beyond Toller Down which must have been over Weymouth, but the moon and stars were our norm. With the aid of a planisphere we enjoyed becoming stargazers- just the planets and constellations- no satellites to bother about! Never mind the winters with the frost on our upstairs windows-- inside and out, we were recompensed in the summers. What a view, to wake to the sight of a whole field full of roses without getting out of bed, courtesy of Scott's of course. Seven o'clock quickly became five past and the click of our side gate and the sound of hob-nailed boots meant that Carter Tommy Mitchell had come to fetch the Nursery Horse from our field for its day's work, the signal for me to be up and about as well.

In the shade of its impressive copper beech tree, Beech Tree Farm next door was home to Greenslade Norton, sheep farmer. In his cap, tweeds, brown polished boots and leggings with a long stick Greenslade would set off regularly on Saturday mornings in his Morris Cowley and trailer to Taunton market to conduct his business, other days it was second best clothes and step off down the road to attend the sheep. Greenslade Norton, Parish Councillor, Sideman at the Church, and Air Raid Warden never swore but he had any amount of animals called "Neddy" and never a donkey among them! He enjoyed his "Gold Flake" cigarettes buying them by the tin, no doubt a legacy from his days in the Yeomanry in WWI. He also used to shear his Old English sheepdog with the sheep, intentionally, not like the Specsavers ad today!

Bob Norton had his house built in the vegetable garden beyond the copper beech tree and almost opposite the bungalow Mark Wallis had built on the other side of the road behind the bamboo plantation on the site of an old shed. A little further up on Mark's side a little slope turned in towards another nursery gate. This gave a fine start to run our "soap box and pram wheels" carts all down the road. Mind the cars! -WHAT cars! Risk assessment --small. Cow-muck and horse droppings -- Risk assessment -Medium -- steer to avoid!

Past the gate the next entry was the iron gate to Milton Cottage. Up the steep gravel drive to Mr Swiss, not too quickly to arrive out of breath with one's message. Now, Mr Swiss was Chairman of the School Governors also Clerk to the Parish Council, or was it t'other way round? Whichever, he was a gentleman retired from the Colonial Civil Service. He was usually to be found at ease in his bamboo chair in his conservatory, G & T?, not sure, but that would be fitting. The trouble was that, not only to wait, first on one foot then the other, cap in hand, in case there was an answer, but because of his school connection one could expect enquiry of one's current school activities, kindly meant I'm sure but embarrassing none the less!

Across the road two cottages seemed to stand guard to the main entrance of the Manor

House, the nearest was Mr Davis's the gardener. To deliver a message to Mr, or usually Mrs, Temperley at the Manor House I worked out the best approach was to try to catch the attention of Mr Davis somewhere in the garden. He would kindly take you to the door of the huge kitchen and hand you over to the Cook-housekeeper who would decide the importance of your message and act accordingly. I can only remember once being taken right through the house to their conservatory, again cap in hand, it must have been a special message requiring an answer!

Mr Temperley, of independent means, was normally only encountered taking his gun around close to his own estate to shoot at pigeon or rabbit, but Mrs Temperley ....

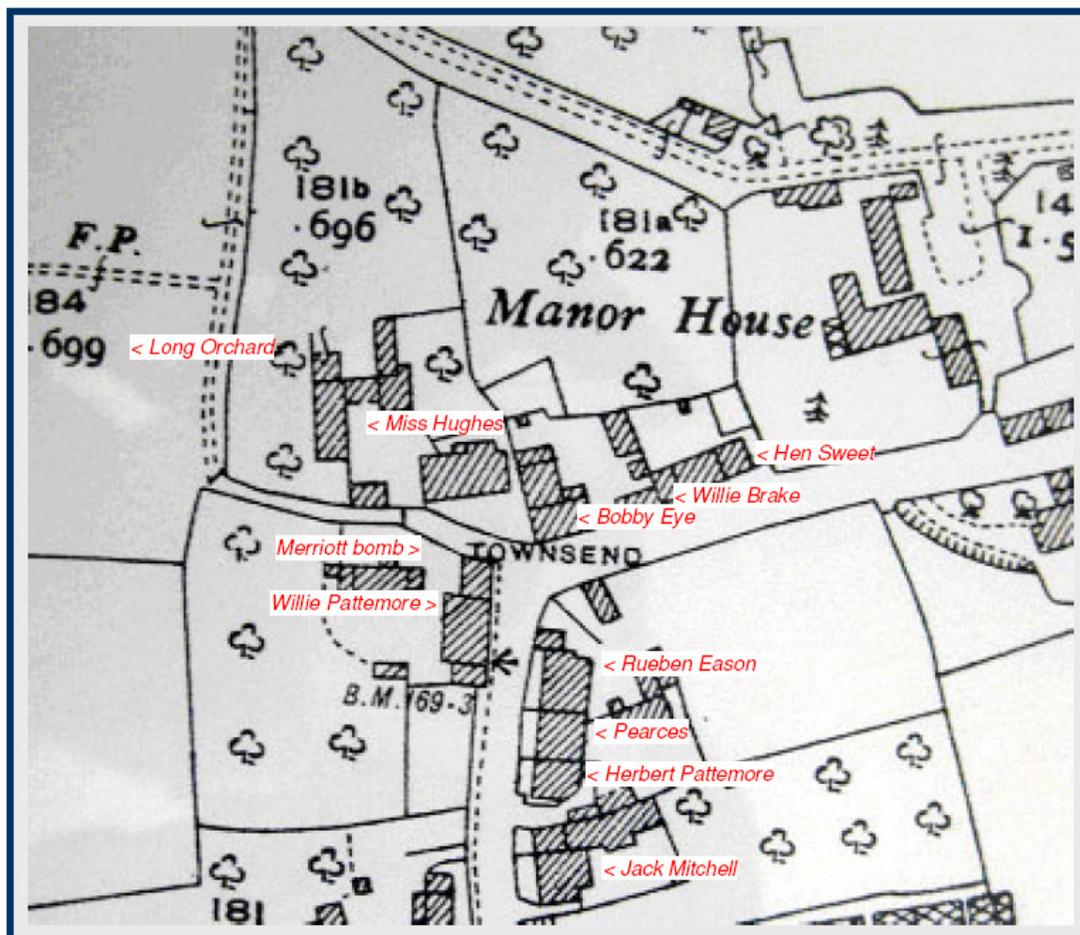
Mrs Temperley was the President of the local Women's Institute, and a Member of the Primrose League (see Wikipedia). She would wear a Queen Mary style hat, and come to think of it liked to look regal in her whole outfit, usually true Conservative blue. Apart from opening fetes and things she could be relied upon to ensure we celebrated Empire Day on May 24<sup>th</sup>. I am not sure how the Primrose League was a part of this. On the day all of us schoolchildren would be assembled in the morning in the Tithe Barn to be addressed by Mrs Temperley extolling the virtues of The British Empire and how its sphere of influence resulted in the one fifth of the world map being coloured red.

(Yes, Mrs T. and my bit of Empire was that my Dad machined the crankshafts of the Rolls Royces made and shipped to India for the 1912 Indian Durbar!) Whether the lecture or the National Anthem did us any good I do not know - just perhaps the memory after all these years! More to the point we were all given an orange (from South Africa perhaps!) and the headmaster was prevailed by her request to give us all a half day holiday, hurrah! Perhaps the Queen Mary hat had something to do with it!

Back to the Manor House, brushing along the Valerian (the plant the troops brought to Britain from the Crimean War—I thought it was the original until much later when I found it growing everywhere!) which grew on the roadside wall, we used to come to three cottages now replaced. In the first was Hen. Sweet, another of the red spotted kerchief brigade, he had two sticks, one to walk with, and one over his shoulder carrying his kerchief wrapped lunch. The next was, at least during the war, home to George Pitt, and his wife, son George, daughter Georgina, and he worked for Greenslade Norton whose chap Albie Wills had been called up. Willie Brake from Bowood lane had retired to the third one. Now Willie loved broad beans, and he liked them ripe, "Mr. Tasker they bean't proper ripe 'til they be pitchey-eyed, I der like 'em like that". So to please Willie you picked the over ripe ones!

I am not sure if it is still there but next to those cottages was a building that was Bob England's chicken house and it was necessary to negotiate its wire pen to get to Will England's cottage behind. Robert was always known as Bobby Eye, hence Nellie Eye his wife but I don't think the "Eye" ever applied to Will. These were the Englands who were the mainstay of the bellringers at the church. At the end of the war it was Granfer England from Sandy Hole who hobbled from retirement with his stick to resurrect the tower team and also indoctrinate young Frank and young Ronald in changes, peals, quarters and that sort of stuff. They used to ring from the base of the tower which

also used to double as the choir vestry so the words "Treble's gone" meant keep well out of the way or white surpliced choir boys might be carried heavenwards on a bell-rope!



I digress, Nellie Eye's shop was just the front of their cottage, up a couple of steps, clang of the bell as you opened the door, a few steps along the flagstone passage and left into the shop. Nellie never had a big stock but, take your own bottle, and she would draw you a half or a pint of vinegar from the cask that sat in the corner and you hoped that you could spend the penny you earned for going on some sweets!

Next tucked away in the corner, lived a Miss Hughes, seemed a bit reclusive, and nobody seemed to know much about her either, but she did not bother us youngsters and I don't think we troubled her, only possibly to retrieve the odd ball from her front garden. Her view was directly towards the back garden of Willie Pattermore where the Merriott bomb demolished the chicken coop, I cannot remember any complaint that it blew her windows out, which I expect it did but it was wartime and such things happened!

Between these two gardens was the stone stile of the footpath (now Parrett Trail) leading into Long Orchard, sometimes we used to take the left split of the path which took us across the fields to Sandy Hole and School.

Back to Willie Pattemore, primarily our village chimney sweep, known as Willie Hut, but Mr Pattemore to you lads unless you wanted a clip round the ear! And Willie's wife Bertha, who had been "in service" knew how to behave properly, so let's have no nonsense. I reckon the picture from Fred Pattemore's collection of the children was taken outside Willie's, the occasion, Silver Jubilee, would have been that of King George V and Queen Mary in May 1935. There was a big white marquee up at the "rec" with feasting and sports and all of us children were presented with mugs. There was a similar "do" for George VI and Elizabeth Coronation in 1937 and more mugs but I also used to have a mug for an uncrowned Edward VIII, where did that come from?

At Townsend Corner, in the other half of Willie and Bertha's was Morgan Jones, a true little Welshman. Why did he retire to Merriott? Perhaps his wife was left the cottage being related to the Sprakes who lived there before?

Moving to the other side of the road the first little building was the garage cum workshop for Harry Eason's Austin Private Hire car - Big Six I think it was. Through the open doors was the gleaming black car surrounded by such things as square petrol cans with brass knobs and five gallon drums of Pratts Motor Oil. Harry had learnt his trade as a mechanic at the Austin factory in Birmingham so it had to be an Austin. Brother Jack and father Reuben had not embraced the car technology so when the wagonette emerged from the adjoining barton doors it was a crack of the whip and the horse was off at a smart trot to Yeovil to do their eggs and veg round! Again their cottage was part of a block of three so joined to Pearce's in the middle and Herbert's (Fred's Dad) at the far end. Pearce's yard entrance went right past Herbert's house and the yard was big enough for cowstalls and stabling for their pony and trap, no surprise then for Herbert's poor wife to find the odd curious cow with its head through her back kitchen door. Does Fred remember Pearce's efforts at an Air Raid Shelter? In the early part of the war -well before The Merriott bomb- not for them an Anderson or Morrison, we all had to inspect the very large hole- about six feet deep that they dug inside an outhouse at their back door. Fred - Did they ever finish it? I can vividly remember the bright yellow sand of its sides, which, for me, did confirm the claim that geologically Scott's Nurseries flourished on a seam of "Yeovil" sand and that was all!

Memories Fred, the birds' nests we watched in your back garden hedge, remember the time we observed a young Cuckoo from the egg hatching to the fast growing chick pushing out the other chicks and finally fledging - text book stuff. This was our observation, the first principle of Science, who said that?

Next cottages along, I am sure Jack Mitchell only lived in the far part but who else?

What about when the whole of that was re-thatched? The front gardens were swamped in bundles of reed (probably of local wheat straw) and bundles of twisted withy spars. Another delay then on the way to school was to watch the thatcher laying in and fixing the reed with spars gradually working up the roof patting all the ends flush and finally trimming the lot with a special hook, like a grass hook with an offset handle. Clever how they got the chocolate-box look working by eye alone. Time to dawdle no longer when the milk lorry arrived at about twenty to nine. Opposite Fred's house at the end of

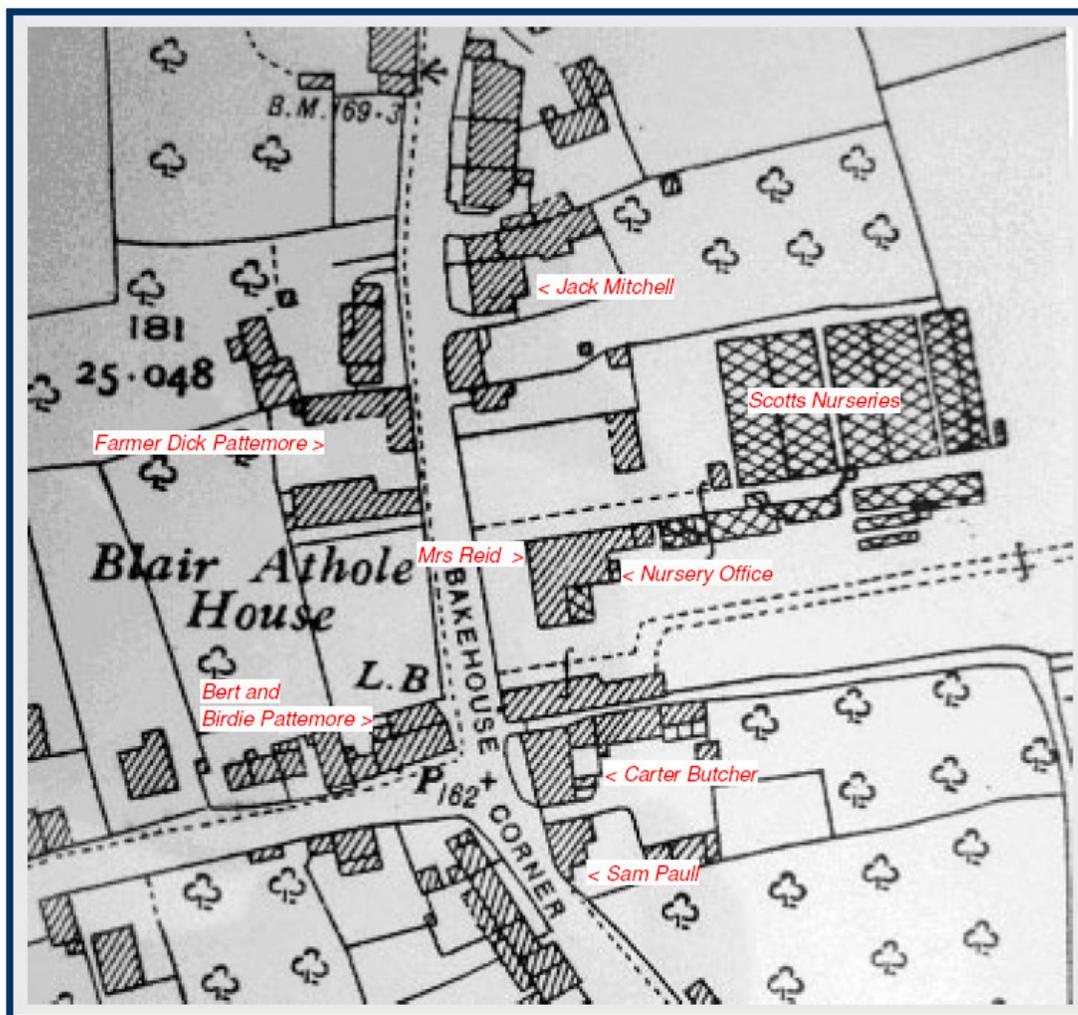
Arthur Wills' drive there was a substantial wooden platform about four feet square and three feet high which was the milk stand, which as I remember must have been communal for farmers Pearce, Mitchell, and Wills and they had to get their churns of milk on to the stand by eight-thirty for collection, labelled with tie-on labels on the handles. The milk lorry driver would collect the full churns, Aplin & Barrett, or even Wilts United and leave empty churns for next day -- so if there were no labels on the churns the lorry had been - we must be late for school boys! You could tell that our farmers had pretty small dairies as with evening milk and morning milk in separate churns there were still only nine or ten churns usually on the stand, small fry by comparison to the bigger farms in the county. The milking was all done by hand, ask Fred Pattermore, he learnt to milk with Jack Mitchell, six a.m. start eh Fred! Again a full ten gallon churn weighed about a hundredweight so not easy to chuck around, hence the stand at the same height as the lorry base for loading. What about Farmer Dick Pattermore next along to Arthur Wills' towards Bake-House Corner? Can't remember his milk arrangements.

Keeping on the other side of the road, next to Jack Mitchell's long gone cowstall, and before Scott's entrance, back from the road was a little cottage lived in by Frankie Langdon and his wife. At firework time here was our source of penny bangers and sparklers, for the rest of the year Frankie did the Sunday papers, and during the war while our regular postman Tommy Sweet was in the army, struggled, peering through his tiny glasses to deliver our post. David, didn't Sam Burgess also do the post during the war?

So we have arrived at Scott's main entrance, first door at first shed on the right was our port of call to buy tomatoes, the scales were there to weigh up our 1 lb. or so in a brown paper bag, but if nobody was there it was up to the glasshouses where the garden centre was later. Usually whoever came back to the shed brought a box of tomatoes just picked, there is no smell quite like that, you can't get that in the Supermarket! Great interest at the end of one season, the first time Scott's had gone for steam sterilisation of the glasshouses. Our surprise was to see a mobile boiler, which looked just like a traction engine, set up at the entrance and yards and yards of flexible pipes going everywhere. I suppose there must have been a pump to circulate the steam all around but wisely for about a week we youngsters had to keep out of the way so did not really find out how it all worked. I don't remember a repeat visit so perhaps it was not very successful or perhaps the novelty had worn off!

If one needed to visit Mr Wallis himself in his office that was round through the other entrance and up some outside wooden stairs at the back. In between was the original nursery house, Athol House. Dear old Mrs Reid was living here at the time, actually she really lived just in the front in a virtual bed-sit. She was the widow of John Reid who had owned the nursery after John Scott. She was proud to tell you that she came from Lossiemouth near Elgin in Scotland, when Lossiemouth was just a fishing port and certainly had no RN Air Station. She used to say that the good quality of Scott's roses was due to her John importing good hardy and disease free rootstocks from Scotland. She really could chatter away especially if assisted with a "wee dram" from the bottle

she kept under her bed! And certainly no excuse for Merriott to be ignorant about Scotland!



Back to BakeHouse Corner as we called it, not Baker's Cross as in the bus timetable. Past the old Scott's stable block and the footpath to the houses, the thatched cottage was home to Carter Jack Butcher, probably though belonged to the nursery as they used all the yard at the back, and next again was the Mud House. This cottage I understand was demolished somewhere in the sixties - sadly before Planning could slap a preservation order on it as an historic building as I am sure it would be classed today. Why the fuss? Simply because we always believed that its walls were historic "Wattle and Daub" construction so however old might it have been? And in our time still in use by Sam Paul the cobbler. The front door was only a little over five feet high and little rooms led off right and left from a flagstone passage, living on the left and Sam's workroom on the right, and Sam would sometimes attend your requirements through his little open window! We felt sorry that Sam who would normally been about six feet tall was now very stooped having lived a long time in such a low house. Being the young varmits that we were that did not stop us one firework night from putting a banger under the inch gap beneath his front door-not that dangerous with no carpets on the flagstones- and the result? Didn't think he could move so fast, and he chased us right

up as far as Bundle Shute!

To complete our stroll to Bake-House corner, previously David Gibbs has mentioned Billy Holman's shop, but let's take this back in time. Billy Holman was invalided out of the Navy early in the war and was married to Iris Pattemore a daughter of Bert and Birdie Pattemore. Bert and Birdie retired to their bungalow on Shiremoor Hill and their property on the corner was converted into the shop of David's day. Before this however the front was Birdie's shop, tobacco for the nurserymen and sweets for us children, but the back was Bert's workshop. Behind the double doors we never knew how far it went back -it was always too full of wagons and bits. Bert was the village wagonwright or more properly wainwright who always had carts and wagons in there in various states of construction or repair. We loved to watch all the work, undercarriages, decking, axle trees and the rest. The wheels would come from Arthur Stickland's father the wheelwright, and the ironmongery from Edward Paull the blacksmith, and to finish the wagon would be brightly painted and the owner's name carefully sign-written on the front, a truly village craft.

To us this was life and we still sought amusement sat on Birdie's front step eating our ha'peth of comfits from a little pointed bag and taking car numbers.

Perhaps the bus will be along in a minute, the good old Safeway, or one of the two new green Southern Nationals, DDV38 or DDV39, yes we knew there were two because we had recorded them previously and doubled checked our notes as one would expect of well taught Merriott youth. And where in the world would the bus take us? Who knows!

Brian Tasker.  
December 2011