

And Finally... A Family Photograph

David Gibbs

(Article from *A Miscellany of Merriott Memories*)



This photograph was taken outside our family home, No 7 Hitchen, on the occasion of my brother Jack's marriage to Marianne Turner in 1955. The wedding was at Broadway, Nr Ilminster and with just one car owner in the family at that time a coach was hired to transport guests.

Most of the people in the photograph are family members who lived locally. Had such a photograph been taken twelve or fifteen years earlier, a second coach would surely have been necessary for, as I have mentioned elsewhere, when I was a small boy family members living in the village included not only my mother, father and three siblings but three grandparents, six uncles and aunts and twelve cousins. But by 1955 some had passed away, others had moved away, and there were others who might have attended the wedding but chose not to for reasons long forgotten. Even so, the photograph includes eight people born Gibbs, two who had acquired the name through marriage, and one who later acquired the name through marriage.

If you look at Sue Osborn's *Family Names* page you can see that in the 19th Century the village residents were close to being one extended family with just 23 surnames accounting for over 70% of the population of about 1000. These names Lawrence, Osborne, Sweet, Pattemore, Wills, Mitchell, Trask, Eason, Hooper, Rousell, England, Shuttler, Rendell, Paul, Lacey, Dawe, Higgins, Warry, Gibbs, Doutch, Chant and French. The Gibbs name, including spelling variations, was number 20 on the list.

Sue's research shows that members of the Gibbs family had at various times married into seven other village families, namely Trask, Lawrence, Wills, Osborne, Pattermore, Sweet and Eason.

Sue Osborne has also published a list of marriages solemnised at All Saints Church during the period 1900 -1924 and of the 178 marriages listed 77 appear to be between young men and women who were born in the village, including several members of the Gibbs family. For instance, Elizabeth Anne Gibbs married Henry Mitchell, William Gibbs married Bessie Lawrence and Florence Gibbs married George Douth. Lawrence, Mitchell and Douth are all family names that feature in on the top-23 list. (The list also records that Sarah Ellen Gibbs married William Henry Mansfield and Hannah Gibbs married Charles Old, but Mansfield and Old, both village families at the time, do not feature in the top-23 list of village names.) In still more recent times, one of my cousins, Laura Gibbs, daughter of William Gibbs/Bessie Lawrence, married William Wills, another surname from the top-23 list. But there, I believe, the marriage links between the Gibbs family and other long-established village families come to an end. (Chapel marriages during this period are not included in this summary.)

The 1900-1924 marriage list also records non-Merriott family names beginning to appear. The marriage net had widened. This was probably partly due to the availability of the humble bicycle that provided young men with the means to seek a bride from slightly further a-field. Thus we see Minnie Gibbs married Jack Tout (from Hazelbury Plucknet) Bessie Gibbs married Albert Dollard (from West Chinnock). Arthur Gibbs married Hilda Maria Tett (from Hewish, West Crewkerne) and Lottie Gibbs married Stanley Templeman (from Hinton St George).

My own generation also relied on our bicycles to get around, and especially to go a-courting. My sister's husband, Ken Durant, lived at Clapton and my brother's wife Marian Turner lived down Dinnington. And if you have read the previous article you will know of my cycle journeys to South Petherton when I was courting Pat Thompson. Pat was not strictly a South Petherton girl as she was born in Hammersmith, West London, her family moving to South Petherton in 1941 when she was just five years old. As I type these words (May 2017) we are just a few months away from celebrating our Diamond Wedding. My bicycle served me well!

In case anyone should be interested, the following lists who's who in the photograph and, to make their identity clearer, their relationship to me. From left to right:

My father Arthur Gibbs

Aunt Min (Gibbs) and Uncle Jack Tout.

John Webb, from Weymouth, my brother's life-long friend: they met when they were National Servicemen in the RAF. John and his wife (see below) made the journey from Weymouth to Merriott on his motor cycle.

Uncle Arthur Tett, from Brixham, wearing the trilby. My mother's brother.

My cousin Donald Mansfield.

My cousin Desmond Tout, wearing the bowtie, and his wife May.

My cousin Geraldine Templeman.

My girl friend, Pat Thompson. We married three years later in December 1957.

My sister Florrie.

My mother, Hilda Gibbs.

Behind my mother and sister, my cousin Ralph Dollard and his wife Beryl.

To the left of Ralph and somewhat obscured, my brother Jack (bridegroom).

In front of us is our sister Marjorie (Gibbs) Durant.

Behind Marjorie, that's me (best man).

My second cousin, Sheila Gibbs.

My second cousin, Janet Wills.

Behind Janet, is the photographer's wife (the photographer was a friend) of the bride.

My cousin, Gwen Bailey.

John Webb's wife.

Ethel Gibbs, my cousin Harry's wife

Ken Durant, my brother-in-law, holding his baby son Christopher.

Finally, the coach owner and driver, Frank Parker from Ilminster.