

Emma Chant's Recollections

Mrs Chant was born in 1885 and lived in West Chinnock until she was eight years old. She then moved to Merriott and lived there for the rest of her life. She was well known in the village. In later years, she lived in a bungalow at Evergreen Path and it was here, in January 1973 when she was 88 years old, that Bob Patten interviewed her in connection with his interest in local dialect and folklore. This article is based on notes he took at the time and which he has kindly contributed for publication.

The Village

Merriott used to be a very close place and strongly suspicious of strangers. Two lads who came from Crewkerne to court two Merriott girls were given a hiding and did not return.

It was known as 'Little Ireland' because it was so rough and the locals spoke so broad.

There were many nicknames in the village because of the replication of names: at least one boy did not know his father's real name.

Merriott used to have two clubs (Friendly Societies) and a band.

There used to be a Bible Class and Boys' Brigade in Merriott. Also a 'church nurse' who performed the vicar's wife's duties for a bachelor vicar. (The bachelor vicar was the Rev Percival.)

Merriott School Treat was taken in the Bridport area. (Probably West Bay)

All the farmers used to give a Harvest Supper.

Bonfire Night in Merriott was a big do, with a bonfire in a field.

Stretch Corner, between Merriott and Bow Bridge is said to be haunted. (Still is!)

Dialect

Leazing/Lazing - picking up corn for fowls in a field after harvesting and raking. Children's work.

Chancetime - occasionally

Babyboss - a precocious child

Veller - a ploughed up field (from 'fallow')

Going sticking - collecting firewood

Remedies

Remedy for a cold: featherfew (feverfew), peppermint and elder blossom tea, made from dried ingredients. Or elderberry wine.

Remedy for a wasp sting: put 'blue rag' on it. No good for bee stings.

A linseed meal poultice was used 'for everything'. (Linseed from locally grown flax.)

Cure for a sore throat: a thick woollen sock around the neck for a night.

Cure for a wart: pick a broadbean leaf and rub the wart with it. Throw it away and say nothing about it. (Mrs Chant did not know any wart charmers in the area, but her husband jokingly 'charmed' a workmate's warts and they went away.)

Unlucky

Bellows on a table

Walking under a ladder

Opening an umbrella indoors

Crossing knives

Mrs Chant's mother had been very particular about these.

Riddles

A hundred years ago, wordplay such as the following was used to sharpen children's minds when only primary education was available to most children.

Stand up in the house and talk. (A clock)

Go all round the house and stand up in the corner. (A broom)

What's the difference between a farmer and a dressmaker?
(He gathers what he sows and she sews what she gathers.)

I've got one leg to stand upon Plenty of arms have I have a wrap around me
And I am not always dry. Sometimes narrow, sometimes wide, Often you'll find
me at your side. (An umbrella)

As I was going through a field of wheat I picked up something good to eat
It was neither flesh, skin nor bone and I carried it home 'til it ran alone. (An egg)

As I was going through a field of wheat I picked up something shiny
I took it home, Made Mother and I tidy. (A needle)

As I was going through London Town I met a London scholar
He shook hands **AND DREW** off his hat I pray you tell me his name
I've told you his name already. (Andrew)

School Rhymes

Bandy legs Crooked sides Teapot nose
And canister eyes. (Said about a schoolmaster)

Mr Pamphlett is a very good man He tries to teach us all he can Reading, writing and arithmetic. And he doesn't forget to use the stick. (Mr Pamphlett was the village school headmaster