

Reminiscences on a Business

Burnett's Butchers

St.Dennis and Indian Queens



by
John Pearn

Information from the 1940's
over 50 years

Reminiscences on Mr. P. Burnett's Butchers Business

St. Dennis

His shop was opposite Trelavour Square and the family house was in Wellington Road on the corner, with the yard and garage next to the shop. Above the shop was a flat. The shop had a main room where the meat was sold to customers. A back room had equipment for making sausages, hogs pudding and housed a large walk in fridge.

My father, Mr. F. Pearn, worked for Mr. Burnett from the age of 16 years. His first two years on leaving school was in the printing business with Mr. Edyvean of St. Columb. He left printing as the ink did not agree with him. I believe he suffered with headaches! At the time Mr. Arthur Greenslade also worked for Mr. Burnett. Father learnt all aspects of the trade from slaughtering, cuts of meat, selling from the shop and rounds in surrounding villages.

Slaughtering

In the early days cattle were stunned and bled. There followed the use of a humane killer, a more civilized method of killing! Today butchers receive most meat from abattoirs.

The slaughter house of Mr. Burnett was at the bottom of Trelavour Road, standing in a field and reached by a short lane between the houses on the left side before ascending the hill. Cattle bought at the market such as St. Columb could be grazed in the field before slaughter. Some cattle were taken to Tregoss where Mr. Burnett had a farm. Father sometimes drove cattle from the market to Tregoss via country roads before the days of cattle lorries.

Equipment

The main shop had hanging racks on which large pieces of beef, lamb and pork would hang. The butcher's block, a heavy wooden table, stood in the centre of the room. Here meat could be chopped, sawed, boned and cut to the customer's requirements. There would be a variety of tools such as choppers, sharp knives, hacksaws and the steel for sharpening the knives!

A weighing machine would stand on the shelf behind the block. A collection of weights would be used to weigh the meat. During the war meat was rationed and was limited in weight when purchased. The thick table would be scrubbed with a

wire brush at the close of the day. Sawdust was spread on the cement floor to prevent butchers and customers from slipping.

The Door and a Story

I remember the door had two sections. The top part could be kept open while the bottom section kept out any wandering animals fancying a snack. As a girl, attending St.Dennis School, my wife Margaret often took her mother's order to the shop on the way to school. This was often given to my father. Her duty was to collect at dinner time and take home. Margaret in her hurry to get home often forgot the meat. Father, knowing the time they were dismissed for dinner, would be looking out of the top half of the door ... "Margaret, you have forgotten your Mum's order. I have it here for you!"

The Butcher's Rounds

Originally it was by horse and wagon. Later came the Austin van, then a variety of vans. Holiday time I sometimes accompanied my father on his round. St.Dennis village, Egypt, Trerice, Retew, Treviscoe, Little Treviscoe, Nanpean, Gothers, Enniscaven, Carne, Gaverigan, Stamps and Foxhole were all visited in turn as well as Tresadarn St.Columb.

The highlight for me would be fish and chips at Mrs.Golley's take away, Little Treviscoe. There was no place to sit in the shop but the Co-op man and father had a special place in the kitchen of the house. Fresh fish and chips with peas served by her daughters. As much as you could eat!

The vans had wooden shelves to hold the meat, sausages, hogs pudding, liver and tripe. A butcher's block just inside the back doors for the usual method of chopping, sawing, boning and cutting. There was also a hanging machine for weighing. There would be no bowl of water to wash your hands just a mutton cloth to wipe your hands to be taken home and washed. The money collected was placed in a leather pouch. This was before the days of health and safety, but there didn't appear to be upset tummies!

Mr.Burnett had an Airedale dog known as Tim. There was little traffic on the roads in those days and Tim would meet my father's van at Steep Carne where his round ended and then follow the van back to Trelavour Square.



One of the first vans owned by Mr.P.Burnett's butchers business and driven by Mr. F.Pearn. This van is standing in St.Francis Road Indian Queens. Fred is in a typical butcher's coat. The van is an Austin and registered in Cornwall i.e. CV

The Business Expanded to Indian Queens

Mr. Percy Burnett had a brother, Mr. Reg Burnett, who lived at Indian Queens and he too was a butcher. Mr. Reg Burnett and his sons ran the business and after the death of Mr. Reg Burnett it was taken over by Mr. Ralph Burnett, son of Mr. Percy Burnett. Ralph was now in charge of the St.Dennis shop and he asked my father, Mr. Fred Pearn to manage the Indian Queens expansion.

Experience in all aspects of the trade led him to taking on the role. He had help from a youngster. The shop was a room in the family house of Mr. Reg Burnett, while the walk in fridge was in the outside garage. However, by this time meat was obtained mainly from wholesalers. Slaughtering played no part in the life of a family butcher.

I can recall Mr. A.Common, Mr. S.Bullen and Mr. P.Bennetto working with the combined businesses. Eventually my father had to give up the trade due to arthritis but he had enjoyed over 40 years working with the St.Dennis butchers. He served many customers from behind the van in all winds and weathers. In latter years he had to contend with traffic following the A30 through Indian Queens, Fraddon and Blue Anchor.

Competition was keen in St.Dennis, there being Mr.Yelland, Mr.Kellow and at Indian Queens Mr.Williams of St.Columb Road. These butchers saw in latter years the growth of supermarkets and also the change to decimal money.

Is the industry any safer today with health and safety rules and pre-packaging?
Would the child of a butcher be allowed to travel with his dad during the school holidays?



Mr. F.Pearn outside the two part door at the Indian Queens shop where he was manager for Mr. Ralph Burnett, son of Mr.Percy Burnett. Their business was centred at Trelavour Square, St.Dennis.

This shop was in the family house of Mr. Reginald Burnett, a brother to Mr. P.Burnett.

The door is typical of a butcher's shop, a bottom half and a top half. A similar door was in the St.Dennis shop.

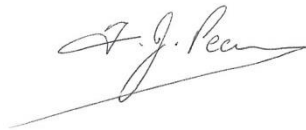
Here Fred wears a white butcher's apron over a butcher's coat. Village butchers rarely wore a straw boater as seen by those serving in town shops.

The typical headgear when on a country round would be a cloth cap. Today's working man would have a safety helmet!

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Pearn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Son of

Mr. Fred Pearn

A butcher for over 40 years

May 2020

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