

# St.Dennis CO-OP Looking Back

by

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I joined the staff at St Dennis Co-op back in August 1957. The manager at that time was a Mr. Sidney Willcox, with Mr. Dennis Lobb his deputy, followed by Mr. Gordon Watson.

Mr. Willcox ran a very tight ship and I started work very much behind the scenes weighing dry goods. At this time these included currants, sultanas, peas, rice and tea. Very few groceries in the 1950's came pre-packed. I was taught by Joyce Lewarne (nee Davey) how to measure, weigh and prepare the goods ready for our customers.

Over time I moved onto the shop floor, serving customers each day and putting together customer orders. In those days, the shop assistants fetched the groceries for the customers (think personal shopper!) and totalled up their bills, including ½ pennies. This was before both decimalisation and computers or electronic tills.

The one thing that fascinated young children in the store was the over-head wire. This wire carried a small wooden screw in cup that would contain the cash from customers. The wire would whizz the money over to the cash desk and back again with their change. We had two wires in the grocery section and a further wire in drapery.

If we think about online shopping today, I like to think it all started with the Co-op in St Dennis. My next move was to go 'out and about' around the village taking orders direct from customers. So, if you think on-line shopping is new, then think again, as we were doing it over 70 years ago. Simply substitute the computer with a pair of walking boots and a good old notebook. Collecting orders meant that two girls were out every day to different areas of the village including parts of Nanpean and Whitemoor as well as St Dennis, visiting customers in their homes. The customers would pay for the previous weeks groceries and then place a new order for delivery in the next few days. I don't however remember any delivery charge for the door-to-door service provided.

From memory I think there were probably 11 or 12 girls in the grocery section and 2 in the drapery. Back then you could buy everything you needed in the Co-op, from groceries, paint and paraffin to chicken food and not forgetting drapery which included everything from shoes and underwear to curtain material and soft furnishings. You could even buy a coat!

Opening hours when I started were 08:30 to 12:30 and 13:30 to 17:30 Monday to Thursday with a later opening until 19:00 on a Friday. The store always closed for an hour at lunch time. Saturdays in those days were early closing, finishing up for the day at 12:30. A later decision was made to bring forward the closing time to 17:00 Mondays to Thursdays.

I made some really good friends during my time at the Co-op, both staff and customers and very much enjoyed chatting with customers until I left in the Spring of 1965. I can even still remember some of the customers "divi" numbers.

*Liz Hawkey (nee Rowse)*