**Article received from one of our Readers, about living in the**

**Post Office Stores in Kirby le Soken**

I was five when my parents took over the Post Office Stores in Lower Kirby. The house, attached to the shop. was approaching 400 years old. I found it a fascinating place, with two staircases, an attic room – which became my playroom, and downstairs a ‘cold room’ where meat hung.

My mother cooked the hams that were sold in the shop. There was little in the way of health and safety rules to be adhered to in the fifties. Although my mother made sure everything was kept clean and tidy, bread and cakes were kept uncovered, as was the meat.

My parents worked long hours in the shop. As far as I remember they closed Wednesday afternoons and all day Sundays. However, they were never really ‘off duty’ as villagers would often knock at the door when the shop was closed if they’d run out of anything and couldn’t wait until morning.

Customers often brought in their orders written down and my mother would make the order up for Dad to deliver in his small van. The orders were always transcribed to a small, red covered book which was kept for reference and, often, repeat orders.

Outside our house was a tall tree, and I remember my parents worrying that it might come down in high winds. It never did when I was there, although we did lose one of the damson trees in our back garden.

Occasionally, for one reason or another, I would have a baby-sitter, and on these occasions I was often taken to spend time with Mary Oxborrow, who lived next to – if memory serves me correctly – the blacksmiths. I would help – well, I was told I was helping but in retrospect I was probably more of a hindrance – feed the chickens that were known as ‘the Prims’, because they were kept behind the Primitive Methodist Church.

My best friends were Jean Smith and Pearl Russell. Pearl lived next door, in what are now called Malting Cottages. There were several children, I believe, and the family occupied two of the cottages. On the walls in the living room hung splendid, brightly coloured rugs.

Mr Russell was a handyman and on one occasion laid a ‘crazy paving’ path for us in the garden. He included my name as part of the ‘cracks’ but I imagine that is long gone.

Jean lived in the left-hand cottage in the pair of houses where Walton Road meets Sneating Hall Lane. The lane that leads off from Walton Road was less made up then, and whenever I hear the line ‘walk together down an English Lane’ it’s that lane that I picture in my head, the way it looked when I was small.

Later, when my parents moved away, I stayed for a while with Pru Rayner and her husband, who lived in the right hand of the two cottages. I came across a letter from Pru the other day, in which she describes me as ‘her other little girl’.

The Vicar at the time was Revd Thomas, and much of village life revolved around the church. Revd Thomas could often be found in the Red Lion, raising a glass or two with his parishioners. The annual fete was, as it is now, a highlight of the year, and much of the social life took part in the church hall. I remember Jimmy Heath very well, he taught me to play whist, and it was lovely to see a room in the hall had been named for him, as he was a very prominent part of village life.

I spent many happy hours playing croquet on the Rectory lawn with Rags (Ragland) the vicar’s son, and other children from the village. I’m sure we didn’t adhere to Croquet rules, but we felt very grown up.

Malting Lane was known as Dump Lane, and I’m sure I’m not the only person who still refers to it by that name.

The village children spent most of the summer holidays playing at the backwaters and we’d all return home covered in thick, black mud.

These days I write a bit, and whenever I write something involving a village it is always Kirby-le-Soken that I have in my head.

