

**Life at Downland Cottage, Martin** – a conversation between Jennifer Saunders and Angela Farmer.

Jennifer Saunders was born at Downland Cottage, in Martin, where she grew up with her parents.

Her father was in the navy during the war and, after the war, worked at the Dockyard in Portsmouth, where he lodged during the week. Later he worked at the munitions store at West Dean and was there until he retired. Because he worked away, he had little involvement in the village.

She remembers her mother fetching the milk from Harold Frampton's dairy, next door (now Dennett's). Harold would fill up her quart jug directly from the cow. Then her mother would take it home and pour it into a wide, shallow dish and let it settle and the thick cream would rise to the top. They would have this cream with fruit from the garden; strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries and blackcurrants.

She told me that their well was not in the garden, but in the kitchen. There was a manhole cover over it, in the middle of the floor, and her mother would take off the cover and draw their water up in a bucket. But whenever she was drawing water from the well, Jennifer was forbidden to come into the kitchen.

The wells in the village were not very deep and in hot summers they used to run dry, so everyone had to get their water from the pump on the village green, where the well was much deeper. There would be a queue of people, who had gathered as many jugs and bowls as they could fit into a wheelbarrow and wheeled them to the green. When they had filled their jugs, the wheelbarrows were a heavy weight to trundle home. At home, Jennifer said, not a drop of water was wasted. Her mother had different bowls for different tasks; one bowl of water for washing hands, another for cleaning vegetables, another for washing up and a jug of water for drinking.

Jennifer went to the village school, where, she said, they taught you all you needed to know. The boys learnt woodwork and the girls learnt to sew – important skills in the war time. After a few years she changed schools and went to Leaden Hall in Salisbury. There was quite a group of children who rode their bikes to the Blandford Road every morning to catch the bus to the Salisbury schools. Sometimes they left their bikes behind the hedge as Sundown Farm, sometimes at The Coote.

Jennifer went to Leaden Hall, in the Close, and later to the Clive School, which no longer exists. She remembers how the girls on the bus used to strain to look out of the windows as the bus approached the top of Coombe Hill, to see if there were any gypsies waiting for the bus. There was a big gypsy camp on top of Coombe Hill, she said, down the drove road that runs behind the dog kennels. If there was a gypsy at the bus stop the children would rush to the back of the bus and crowd into the seats together, to avoid having to sit next to the gypsy, because if they did, their mothers would make them strip off all their clothes when they got home and be washed, as the clothes would usually be hopping with fleas.

In those days, at school, there were regular inspections of hands and hair – for bitten nails and nits. The bus conductor was very strict with the school children and if he caught anyone biting their nails on the bus he would give them a slap.

Jennifer remembers her headmistress at the Clive School for girls also being very strict. She would stand in on some lessons with a two-foot rule and if a girl wasn't paying attention, she'd prod her from behind with the rule.

Jennifer used to go to the Sunday service at the Church and then Sunday school at the Methodist Chapel.

When she married, she moved to Broadchalke. Her husband worked at Southern Command in Wilton and then was moved to the Ministry of Health, and so they moved to London.