

the call to arms that women undertook men's work. Mrs Gwen Newman said, 'My mother was one of a group of women who helped the war effort by sweeping the streets of Keynsham to Hallatrow. Sometimes the sweeping was followed by a mounted horse-drawn barrel of tar, which was sprayed on the road.'

Mrs Newman recalled that during the war the buildings on the far South side of Keynsham's workhouse in the Conygre Farm direction were used for training nurses to help at 'the Front'.

## Conditions on the 'Home Front' in Keynsham in World War

I am indebted, for the following information, to a man above reproach, the tall respected figure of Mr Jessie Stickler, who has distinguished himself both in the banking profession and as a Methodist local preacher. Born in Chipping Sodbury in October 1902, he was only six months old when he came with his parents to live at Number One, Station Road, Keynsham. Next door to them was the vicarage, which Mr Stickler declared to have a garden of almost two acres, which encompassed most of today's Vicarage Green.

His father, in the leather business, wanted young Jessie to mix with the local children without 'any snobbery', and accordingly sent him to the neighbouring school at Temple Street. 'From there I went to St George's School, then I took a degree at London University, where I got an Honour's degree, a First, in Bachelor of Commerce. The University does not offer it now as the banks would not support it, so it died out.'

Mr Stickler continued, 'And of course, before the buses took all the trade, crowds of people would go down for the morning train. In those days, before the War, you could tell the time by the people who caught the trains. Joe Bloggs always caught the 7.19 and Miss So-and-So the 8.37. The road was full of people catching trains. You would get hundreds between 7.30 and 9.30 in the morning.

'On some Saturdays, an even bigger crowd would come up the road off the 1.00 train for rabbit-coursing, down the lane beside the Pioneer public house, and before the police could stop it, it would be over. Hundreds of people came to that. Of course we didn't see it. It was all 'hush hush' and our parents didn't approve of it. But we knew what was going on. They were such a rough crowd and I was only a boy then.' One imagines that in one of the fields at the end of the lane, one group had rabbits in boxes, while another group held dogs. Presumably bets had been placed earlier, and at a given signal, one conjectures that both groups of animals were released, with betting on which dog killed first, or on which dog killed most rabbits. Whatever actually happened, it was obviously a pretty bestial affair.

Jessie continued, 'If a car came, we all ran to the door to see it. You could hear it coming, as there were no silencers much in those days. It was quite an event, and all the children stopped what they were doing and went out to look, from the triangle outside the church. Opposite St John's was the vicarage, which had most of the land where Vicarage Green now is. It had a wacking great garden of almost two acres, I think it was.

'I recall the buses coming too. It was nine pence a return to Bristol, which

was a lot of money in those days. Then the Pioneer started a bus which would come a minute before the other one. They didn't publish a timetable, but the people supported it against the big concern, the Bristol Omnibus Company. There was quite a performance about this.

'I believe the houses in Station Road did have wells, but we had a tap. We lived at Number One, but things are completely different now. There was a path on only one side of Station Road, when I was a boy. There was no path on the church side. There was no need for one. The railway bridge is the same as it used to be, and I used to arrange to be on the bridge at eleven o'clock in the morning to see 'The Great Bear' go through. It ran from down south somewhere right up to Carlisle.'

[Bert Robe wrote 'I travelled on a train pulled by 'The Great Bear' several times about 1918-19 when it was under test as a stopping train from Swindon to Bristol. But it proved to be too heavy for the 'Express Train' work for which it had been designed.']

'There was a well up Charlton Road on the left hand side just before you came to Charlton Park Road, and you could turn the handle of it until quite recently when some hooligans knocked the rollers off it. I remember Mr Coles, of a leading Methodist family, who had to go there and draw water when West View Road ran short, which they did every now and again. And he found tiny minnows in it,' laughed Mr Stickler.

He continued, 'In 1914, Victoria Chapel had decided to start a Scout troop and we youngsters persuaded our parents to let us join. We turned up for the first enrolment and lined up in two ranks in the old church hall at the rear of Victoria, and a chap, one of the Jenkinsons I believe, agreed to be the Scout Master. It so happened that he was also in the local yeomanry, I think, and he went off and got killed in the war so we never saw him again. We had all turned up and been told what to do and how to get a uniform, which was the big draw.

'Most of our men went into the North Somerset Yeomanry. It was the correct thing, if you belonged to a sufficiently high social family, to borrow a horse or own one if you could, and join the NS Yeomanry. You used to go off for a fortnight and have a good time. I believe Tubby Loxton was in that. It was a form of the Territorials.'

[Bert Robe wrote that 'A number of Keynsham young men were in the NSY. In addition to Tubby Loxton there were, to my knowledge, the Stokes brothers, Cyril and Eric, and Mitchell Bond, who was in France in 1914 and served in the Home Guard in World War II.']

I asked Jessie about food rationing. 'I lived with my Mother then, and we had half a pint of milk twice a week. Things got a bit bad towards the end of the First War . . . I well remember when the grocer's boy, who was delivering the groceries, kicked over our half pint of milk. There was consternation in the camp!

'I was called up at the end of the Second War, but it was so near the end that before I could do so we were told not to.' I recalled that the young men were called up first, and that only slowly was the call-up age raised. Mr Stickler agreed, and explained why. 'You see, I was 37 in 1939 and if I was reasonably intelligent, I could be of some use [to the country, not conscripted] whereas a

boy of 17 could be dispensed with.'

He thought there were no Zeppelin raids over Keynsham in the war, though my Mother recalled them being picked out by the searchlights over Streatham, London, and how she and her family had all gone to the windows to look at them. Jessie said, 'They were about but we didn't get any.'

'There were a number of air-raid shelters built in the village, but we did not have one. I lived with my mother then, and we decided that we would die in our beds if we were to die at all. A right decision I think,' commented Mr Stickler. 'I think that most of the bombing that we got was in the Second War, when Bath and Bristol were both bombed.'

'There were trams in Bristol and trams in Bath, and when the bus service started, it ran from Brislington, which was the end of the Bristol tram lines, to Newton St Loe, which was the end of the Bath tram way. But they soon found that the buses, which were run by a Methodist or a churchman of some sort, from Brislington, did not go out on Sundays, and nor would the Bristol Tramways, who only did so when they were bound to. That is, they did not have the moral courage not to when the Greyhound came along and ran theirs on Sundays, so the Bristol Tramways decided to run on Sundays as well. As it was 9d to go to Bristol, you thought twice before getting on.'

['The owner of the Pioneer buses was a Mr William Russett, a well-known Baptist who was often at the Ebenezer Baptist Chapel in the High Street. The buses were based at Barton Hill in Bristol,' recalled Bert Robe.]

'I suppose there was some poverty in Keynsham in the First War, but nothing desperate, nobody starved or anything like that. In those days Temple Street was the down-town area of Keynsham.'

['Jessie Stickler is being unduly critical of the inhabitants of Temple Street. Poor many of them may have been, though not all, but there were many worthy people among them. They had a strong sense of "community",' wrote Bert.]

Jessie did not remember the houses in Albert Road being built, but recalled that Martin Gibbon's mother remembered there being gates across the top of the road when it was still a farm track.

Mr Stickler continued, 'There used to be more horse transport than cars in those days, and I remember a horse falling down and breaking the shafts of the cart outside our house. This caused consternation in the camp, too. You see, outside the church, where the pavement at that time was so wide, was the meeting place for people. That was the centre of Keynsham. It is the Council that has forced the centre of Keynsham down to the top of Bath Hill. In those days you used to get quite a few travelling cheap-jacks, who made their living by doing funny things, and by buying and selling. I remember one Doctor selling quack things but he said he must not call himself a Dr. Then I did not know what he meant but later I realised that he had been a Dr who had done something naughty and had been struck off. Some people would do a bit of conjuring, and then pass the hat around.'

'I can just remember the two upright stone pillars with hooks in them, just outside the church wall, where worshippers would tie their horses. The pillars were some six foot tall, and the Council later took them away. The Loxtons

used to come down from Queen Charlton to Victoria Methodist church by horse, and used to put their horses near the hut at the back of the church, at 'Stoke's Stables', which used to sell hay.

'In those days the roads had not been tarmacked and when they were, people did not understand it. I remember a chap with a motor bike and side car coming along the High Street, turning into Station Road, which had just been done half an hour earlier, and his bike went one way and he went another, and sat himself on the tarred road.

'Before that, they used to have men sat at the side of the roads with a pile of stones, smashing them up. They used to have a thick pair of trousers, with string tied round their legs just below the knee. Someone else would come along to fill up the pot holes and level the road with the stones. That was more skilled work. I remember that.

'Whenever I walk by Ronto's, even now, I can't help feeling dust in my eyes. There were clouds of dust from Bath Road and the High Street and Temple Street. There was no tar on the roads. I still get the sensation now and then. I came out from the car park the other day, near where the Lamb and Lark used to be, and I found myself half closing my eyes and blinking. I remember also the water carts spraying the roads in the hot weather, to keep the dust down.'

Young Jessie Stickler did have a bicycle, but not until the roads had been properly tarmacked. 'Then you could ride a bike alright. We did have a carrier in the village, a Mr Short, of Albert Road I think it was, who would take parcels and things into Bristol for you for about 3d in his van. He didn't take letters. Then one day he went off to America, and I never heard of him again. Rather a pity because I used to play with his son.

'Keynsham was a quiet town, with not much excitement in it that I knew of. It wasn't a village of heavy drinking. The Wingrove was near us, but it was not one of your ordinary Keynsham pubs, but a better-class one. The gentry went there. I remember the village's one bobby, but I kept on the right side of him.'

## Billeting

Mr Stickler recalled that during the First World War, soldiers would from time to time march through Keynsham on their way to the coast. 'They would usually stay in the village one night, and a Lieutenant or a Captain would knock at your door and look at your house to see what room you had and would then tell you, not ask you, that you would take one or two men for that night.'

He knew that mules had been assembled on the Conygre Farm fields, adding that 'Some were there for quite a time. Mules and horses were used a fair bit in the war to start with, together with some London buses, and probably some Bristol buses too.'

Jessie gave me the following photo, sited in Keynsham, of some of the wives and mothers of the village, just after the war. Taken by 'Fredk. M Orchard, Photographer, K'm, Som.' it also had written across the back, in ink, 'Keynsham W. Methodist Women's Bible Class circa 1919.' Mr Stickler