

# *Jottings of a Geriatric*

by  
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*You ask me what it was like when I was young – here are some bald facts with no literary aspirations!*

I lived with my parents near Whitewell. There was no public transport and a motor car was indeed a rare sight. Twice a week, Mr Curry, a local farmer drove his horse and flat cart to Clitheroe. Occasional passengers perched on boxes or whatever, for the sum of 2/6 return. This return journey began officially at 3.30pm from the Station Hotel yard. Eventually, Mr Curry would emerge, having freely imbibed, and once more we clambered on the cart amidst a miscellany of parcels or even livestock. On the way home, we climbed up and down to open gates at various farms where he delivered his parcels, and, at the Red Pump and the Whitewell Hotel, Mr Curry further refreshed himself, while we sat and shivered in the cold.

Our cottage, in common with others, had a cold water tap only and no proper sanitation. The living-room and kitchen were lit by oil lamps, [the wicks trimmed daily], while candles lit us to bed. How scared I was of the flickering shadows on the walls!

At four years old, I began to attend the little village school about a hundred yards up the road. There were fewer than twenty pupils and we sat at long wooden desks. We all wore clogs and had fun making sparks fly from our clog irons on the limestone road. Every morning the fire grate had to be cleaned out, the fire lit with paper and kindling and coal piled on, before the kettle could be boiled to make a cup of tea. I remember going with mother, armed with a sack, to gather sticks, fallen twigs and thin branches, from the "Black Planting" wood nearby, for kindling. On Shrove Tuesday, after school, all the

scholars, aged between 4 and 14, walked round all the cottages and farms, knocking on doors and chanting, "Please, we've come a-pancaking!" We each received an orange but, at our last call, Wood End Farm, we were ushered into the kitchen and seated around the big table. Mrs Whitaker and her daughter were busy at the big black range, making and serving delicious pancakes!



In Easter Week, mothers boiled eggs hard and coloured them with dyes made of onion skins and other vegetables. Some mothers used cochineal, of which my mother did not approve! The more ambitious wrote names with a candle or even made patterns a la batik. On Easter Monday we found a grassy hill, down which we rolled our eggs, each hoping to crack the others. In my case, opponents were thin on the ground.

Whit Monday was another highlight. Dressed in a white needlework frock, I was taken to Slaidburn, where all the children in the parish gathered to walk to Whiteholme, the home of the squire, where we were each presented with a sixpence or possibly a silver threepenny bit. Back we went to the parish church to attend the service, before going to the sports field. There, a chosen few danced round the maypole and we competed in races and were fortified by tea and buns in the