



W. J. Dyer – Baker, Confectioner and General Store, Whitwell

Following on from the article a few weeks ago on the shops in Lowtherville in the mid 20th century we have, in the History Society's archives, some interesting photographs of a Whitwell shop from about the same time.

William J Dyer's shop, in Whitwell High Street, was opposite the White Horse Public House. Mr Dyer was known by the locals as "Twisty" and, maybe, the reason for his nickname will become clearer later! Although the premises are now a private house, and the shop front window has been replaced by a conventional domestic window, the white-painted lintel over the shop window is still part of the façade, and can be seen as you drive by.

Bill was a Master Baker with his bakery situated at the rear of the shop. He was renowned in the village for his 'dough cakes', while his 'Coventry cakes' were legendary! Although recognised as a Bakers and Confectioners, it was possible to purchase almost all items that you would find in a general grocery store.



As in the 'Lowtherville shops' article, a general store like this was essential in a village like Whitwell, as most people did not have cars and they had to stay local for their daily/weekly needs. In the 1950s, families would get their whole week's shopping from local businesses and we have some first-hand knowledge of what it was like at Bill Dyer's.

Just up the road, opposite what is now Whitwell Garage, was a family home occupied by Mr and Mrs Alec Widger. Every Saturday morning, Mrs Widger would write out a list of her week's requirements from Dyer's and her son, Rodney, would take the list down to Mrs Dyer at the shop along with a £1 note, which, generally, was more than enough to cover the bill. Rodney would then go back later in the day to pick up the order. He has told me that, quite often, the total bill was less than a pound, and under normal circumstances, change would have been given.



This is where 'circumstances' in 'Twisty' Dyer's shop were far from normal. On one occasion, Rodney says, the bill came to 19/7d and he was fully expecting 5d in change. However, one thing that was NOT given in this shop, was change, and Rodney found out the hard way how the Dyer's operated! He went home without the 5d change and explained to his mother what he had been told by Mrs Dyer. When his mum opened the shopping bag she found more cheese than she had ordered and a note stating that the extra cheese was instead of the 5d change! Mrs Widger was not happy, but had to accept the situation as there seemed to be no alternative!

When Bill Dyer retired he was succeeded by his spinster daughter, Joan, until the eventual closure of the business in the late 1980s. Someone who got to know Joan well has remarked that it was astonishing how so tiny a shop had such a range of stock. Today, there are no shops in Whitwell, just the White Horse pub.

Article updated post publication in SWC to reflect correct closure date of late 1980s.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: **Colin Beavis and Rodney Widger**. *Photographs from the Society's Archives*