



Growing up in Whitwell: Part Two - the 1940s

When Audrey became a teenager, the Second World War was looming, and it was to dominate the rest of her youth, as it did for that whole generation of young people.

In the late 1930s Whitwell had changed remarkably little since the 1900s. This picture of Whitwell Forge shows Farmer James Lowe of Southford Farm having his horse shod; although there were private cars on the streets, horses were still used for most deliveries and farm work and, as Audrey recounts, the journeys she made to Newport and Ventnor were by train or on foot.

I started at the Grammar School in Newport when I was thirteen. We travelled by train, and it was quite a walk from the station to the school at the top of Church Litten. We took our Matriculation exam when we were sixteen but things were difficult because we had to get up at night when the sirens went off, and when there was a raid in the middle of an exam we all had to run to the underground shelter in the football ground and were put on our honour not to speak to each other and discuss the questions. Apparently all these things were taken into consideration when the papers were marked and despite the difficulties I managed to pass. I had hoped to join the Civil Service, but then came another blow: because of the war the Civil Service exam was cancelled, so we were advised to leave school and find whatever jobs we could.



While I was looking for work, I had to walk to Ventnor and back one day a week to get my insurance card franked. I found a job duplicating the records of a Society in case they were destroyed in the war, but when that finished, it was off to Ventnor again each week. Then I was sent to Dabells, the big drapers in Newport, and was put in the children's section. I hated every minute of it. After a month Mr Dabell called the staff together and said he had orders to reduce the numbers, and he thought that the fairest way was for the last persons to be taken on to be the first to go. I wasn't really sorry to leave, but by this time I was beginning to despair of getting anything more permanent and was fed-up with trailing into Ventnor each week.

At last I saw an advert in the County Press for work in the Ministry of Food Office in Newport, went for an interview and was lucky enough to get the job. The work was very interesting but certainly kept us on our toes. Everyone had a ration book entitling them to buy meat, eggs, margarine etc, and each retailer had to cut out the appropriate coupon from people's ration books and send them in to our office once a month. A spot check was done at random which meant counting hundreds of little coupons. We also had to calculate how much food each retailer was entitled to, e.g. 349 x two and a half ounces of margarine - no calculators of course. Every day we had a three hour power cut in the office, but there was a little gas ring, so we kept ourselves going on hot Oxo drinks.

After a while I was asked to take over the Registration Department which meant working with identity cards as well. The issuing of the ration books and ID cards was very closely controlled, and every evening I had to go to the police station with our Inspector, to lock the books and cards in a safe in one of the cells, and of course get them out again in the morning. My job was to keep track of everyone's change of address and give out new cards - new babies had to be registered on production of their birth certificate and issued with a ration book as well, and women's names were changed on marriage which also meant new cards.

Because the Island was a 'No-Go' area, non-residents had to have special permits issued by the Police. When the PLUTO pipeline was put across the Island the workmen were from Ireland, and they were given temporary yellow ID cards and emergency ration books. Occasionally young girls came over from Ireland to join the Sisters at the Priory at Carisbrooke, which meant going up there with the Police to register them. During this time, I had to work longer hours in the summer, which meant cycling to Godshill and getting a bus into Newport, which was alright going, but hard work having to pedal all the way home after a tiring day. My lasting memory of these cycle rides is of the smell from the honeysuckle in the mornings.

Although the war ended in 1945, food rationing didn't end until 1954 - as the ration book above for Kathleen Mursell of Downlands Crescent shows - so Audrey's job continued until 1948 when she married Gordon Chiverton in Whitwell Church.

Audrey Chiverton and Lesley Telford, *Ventnor & District Local History Society*. Images from our Collection.

