



Ena James, née Gatrell: growing up in Lowtherville



Ena grew up at 19 Lowtherville Road at the beginning of the twentieth century. The family was largely self-supporting, for the house had a large rear garden that was planted with vegetables and fruit, and chickens and pigs were also reared there. Each Christmas, Ena's dad, Sidney Gatrell, killed a pig, half being used for pork at home, the other half sent to the bacon factory at Wroxall to be smoked.

Ena's brothers, Gordon and Enis, were valets to Mr. Baillon who lived at *Caithness* on St. Boniface Road. The Baillon family were Catholics and each Sunday the valets had the job of taking him to church at St. Wilfrid's. It was not long before Ena was herself engaged to assist the Baillons, her job being to take a newly-acquired puppy out every lunch-time. In recompense, she was given lunch by Mr. Baillon's housekeeper. Not long after, Ena began taking cans of milk from Bob White's cows on Down Lane to Mrs Newbery and to Miss Drayton on Kent Road. She did this before going to school at St. Margaret's, Lowtherville, and was always given a basin of bread and milk upon delivery. Bob White himself always gave her some pocket money for the task.

A further source of pocket money for Ena, as well as for her two brothers, was to help Rowland Jackman when he took young ladies from East Dene on riding lessons over the Downs. Ena and her brothers used to open the gates at the top of Down Lane for the horses to pass through. They did the same when the riders returned. The young ladies were mostly French and always rode side-saddle.

Ena began school at St. Margaret's, Lowtherville, when she was 4 years old and she recalled the large open fireplace with a brass-topped fire-guard. Her teacher was a Miss Gardner. Aged 8, Ena moved down to the Council school in Albert Street. There was also Sunday School at St. Margaret's which was, in the first instance, a church. Sunday evenings were spent with grandfather, James Moses, who was a stonemason for Albert Sims. Grandfather lived at *West View*, Newport Road, and here the family would gather round the piano and sing hymns, afterwards enjoying a supper of sandwiches.

A further means of the family's self-support came from when Ena's mum let out rooms, most often to cyclists during the summer months. Quite where the family all slept in such instances is unclear, although the two brothers who were valets may well have been living in at *Caithness*. Yet more occasional income came from passengers on the waggonettes that Jackmans operated for well-to-do visitors to Ventnor. As the vehicles approached the tollhouse, their horns blowing, the Lowtherville children would race down across the allotment gardens and wave in excitement at all the ladies in their hats and veils. Passengers would respond by throwing sweets and coins down for them.

The substance of this story comes from a set of notes that Fay Brown made when she interviewed Ena James in her nineties. Ena seemed to be able to talk endlessly about past times, recalling vivid details of her early life as if it was just yesterday. Ena lived until she was 97, a salutary reminder that, for all the privations of life in Lowtherville one hundred years ago, they did not preclude a long one.