

MY MOTHER'S KITCHEN

Number 81, High street, where our family lived from 1935 to 1976, was once a pub called the Wagon and Horses and the layout of the four rooms downstairs reflected this earlier occupation. The room at the north end of the building was where the beer barrels had once been kept and which my mother used as a scullery, and next door was the kitchen in the middle of which was a large work table with a well-scrubbed wooden top. A large drawer at one end of the table held a selection of kitchen implements including various knives, wooden spoons, ladles, a vegetable peeler, a rolling pin and a potato masher. All were made of metal or wood as plastic had yet to be invented.

On the kitchen side of the scullery wall was a three burner Valor paraffin oil stove and, on top of two of the burners you could put a metal box/oven for roasting and baking. After WWII my Mother bought a small electric cooker, to improve the facilities, which had two rings and a small oven. Under one of the rings was a small grill which enabled us to make toast which was a big improvement on the previous method of putting the bread on a toasting fork and holding it in front of the coal fired range on the opposite side of the kitchen which was mainly used to heat the water tank in the bathroom above.



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The front of the kitchen looked out on the High Street and the back had access via three steps into the garden and yard. My Daughter has an abiding memory, as a little girl, of the fly paper which hung throughout the summer months from a boxed-in beam which ran across the boarded ceiling.

My Mother was what might be called today, "a plain cook" or, in other words, good wholesome food and nothing fancy. Everything was cooked from scratch, there being no "convenience" foods available, with the possible exception of tinned fruit salad and Mandarin Oranges. We always had a roast joint on Sundays, followed by a fruit pie, and home-made fruit cake, rock cakes or jam tarts were served at tea-time together with my Mother's version of rusks which were like a well baked scone. All her recipes came from a hand-written recipe book inherited from her Mother.

We didn't have a fridge until the 1950s and the scullery with its red flag stone floor laid directly on to the earth (with no damp course) was the coolest place to keep milk, butter and other perishables, During the shooting season, Game such as Pheasants, Partridges or a hare hung there from the ceiling, and at Christmas time home-made ginger beer quietly fermented in a large crock standing in a corner for a few weeks

My Father's farm at that time was mainly fruit orchards so my Mother spent a lot of time making a variety of jams and bottling fruit for the winter months, and she also made a delicious lemon curd. During the war she preserved eggs in a large metal container filled with a solution of Isinglass. They were alright for cooking but didn't taste very nice when fried or scrambled.

Although the kitchen had only the most basic equipment, my Mother, like most of her contemporaries, always produced delicious and nutritious meals, and I can't think of anything that I didn't like with the possible exception of Jugged Hare!