

Memories of Childhood in Stoke Works

This article was first published in the August 2018 United Parish Church Community Link Magazine. We thank the church for allowing us to publish this article on the Stoke Parish Council Website

Author- Greta Hedges

Our home was No 2 Wyche Cottages in Shaw lane next door but one to Stoke Works school. My earliest memories of life at home are of very cold winter mornings. I would awaken to the clatter of cups and chatter in the kitchen downstairs. I could hear the fire being prepared and the riddling of ashes in the lead grate. My mother would be preparing sandwiches for my father to take to work at the Salt Works. Eventually the smell of bacon and eggs would reach my bedroom. It was one big effort to get out of bed on these dark cold mornings. The inside of the windows of my bedroom in winter would be thick with ice, which I always scraped away with my nail to see outside.

We had no central heating in those early years. Once out of bed and suddenly missing the warmth and comfort of the feather bolster, pillows and heavy candlewick counterpane. I always dashed downstairs to the welcoming fire blazing in the gleaming black lead grate. A big kettle or pan would be boiling away on the side, its steam curling upward towards a large clothes horse which was secured to the ceiling by a cord. It could be lowered to retrieve my clothes for school which by now had been thoroughly warmed by the fire.

Most of my friends' families worked at the salt works in the village. Everyone knew everybody's business. Nothing stayed secret for long. We fared better than most in the village as my father after leaving the salt works each evening began his second job keeping poultry on his allotment. He had hundreds of hens and also grew vast quantities of beautiful vegetables. In the day my mum looked after the hens and collected all the eggs bringing them home in large buckets. She could often be seen with these buckets full of eggs dangling from the handlebars of her bicycle as she brought them home for cleaning.

Most people had to be really thrifty as they only had low wages. I think my father's pay packet from the salt works was about £9 7s 6d a week. He worked hard and long hours starting at 7am and not finishing until 5 pm. I only ever went on holiday with my mother as dad had to stay home to water the vegetables, feed the chickens and collect the eggs.