

# HERBIE NICKLEN DAMERHAM GROCERY STORE



AS TOLD IN FEBRUARY 1984  
WRITTEN WITH KIND PERMISSION  
OF MRS DAISY NICKLEN

I was born in 1907 and attended Damerham School until the age of 14 when I left to start working at the village shop. My duties included weighing up goods, cleaning brass scales and windows, grinding coffee beans (the



*Herbie Nicklen Born 1907 and died 1985*

aroma spread far and wide) and delivering groceries on a bicycle.

At the time Sandleheath shop was under the same management as Damerham and some of the bread was baked there daily. Two horses

were used to pull the baker's cart to the outlying villages. Now these two horses were quite opposite in character, one would like to take a nip at your arm every time you went near him and the other was so stubborn and would regularly refuse to move.

On our rounds we would be given lots of cups of tea, some we could drink and some we used to lubricate the wheels of the bread van! In those days tea came in tea chests and we had to weigh it out into 4oz and 8oz packets. On one side of the packet would be the grocer's name and on the other the words 'Blended to suit the water of this district!' It was quite surprising how many people believed that. Sometimes we would run out of this tea and would put a

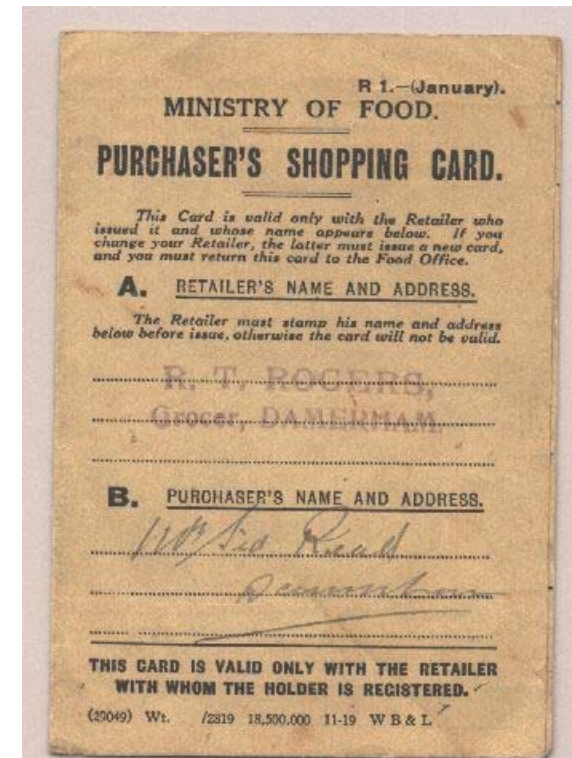
substitute in people's grocery order. Some people would send it back to the shop saying "I don't want that tea I'll wait until your own tea comes in", so we would just pour it into one of our packets, send it back to the customer and

everyone was happy! I only wonder if any of these people are around and reading this.

Besides bread and tea various cakes, buns and bread, puddings were sold. The bread pudding was made out of stale bread and cakes put on large flat trays and when it came out of the oven it was lovely and brown. The baker would quite often put it on the stone bakehouse floor in the doorway to cool down. I'm sure sometimes people would wipe their feet on it as it looked just like a very large door mat! It was cut into squares and sold at 1d a piece or 7 pieces for 6d. I think there must have been a lot of demand for indigestion tablets around that time.

Well after some time a Ford Van was bought to deliver the bread. It was quite an experience to drive it because through stopping and starting so many times each and every day the foot brake rarely functioned for very long. So when you wanted to stop you had to put your foot on the brake pedal and reverse pedal together and then it would stop with a huge jolt. Another of its special features was the hand brake which when applied kept the vehicle in neutral, well sometimes the ratchet would get worn and while you were delivering the bread the hand brake would jump off which meant the vehicle was in top gear and the engine had to be started by starting handle. When you went to the front and gave the handle a mighty yank the van would jump right at you. So you had to jump into the cab a bit quick to avoid chasing it down the road! It was great fun. On some deliveries we had to go up the long hill towards Broadchalke, now the vehicle only had 3 gears, forward, top and bottom, and some days we would get half way up the hill and it would just

give up. So we had to walk up the rest of the hill with the bread. On our return we had to turn it around and start back down the hill using the foot brake so by the time we reached the bottom it was so hot that it seized on so we would go bird nesting while it cooled down. The horse and cart, although much slower ,



was much less trouble than that old van!

After the 2nd world war the shop stopped being a bakery and just sold groceries. For a while I used to weigh the village babies in the scales which had a large basket just like a cradle so the baby could be laid in it. I kept a record of each baby's weight.

After I retired in the early 1970 's I was lucky enough to be selected to receive the Maundy Money from Her Majesty the Queen at Salisbury Cathedral. It was a very special day I will never forget.