

## LIFE AT CHRISTMAS FOR A LOCAL BUTCHER

Ron Oliver retired from his butcher shop (39 Station Road), formally Greenstead's, in 1994, having served the community with fresh meat and poultry for nearly 50 years. The Birchington Roundabout had the privilege of talking to Ron about his half a century in the village.

"I remember when I was 11 years old I was evacuated away from Birchington - that was in 1940. On my return in 1945 I was old enough to work so I asked the local butcher if he needed any help. He said 'yes'. Within three days of my return to the village I was in full time work! I was 15. Little did I know that I would spend the next 50 years in the same shop doing the work I came to love and being part of village life.

### **TIMING AND PREPARATION**

"Christmas was a particularly busy time of the year for butchers in those days. With no freezers available it was all down to timing and preparation. Nearly a month before Christmas we would start our work ready for the big event, Mr Maunder, the manager, would order the items that he knew would be in high demand, from local markets. The popular meats at the time were, Beef, Sirloin, Ribs on the bone, and Topside. Pork was mostly whole legs and loin. The meat was all top quality and with a little more fat on than people have today.

### **BIG DRAUGHTY OLD BARN**

"We also supplied poultry, which was a luxury in the early 1950's. One year I can remember being taken out to Alland Grange Farm near Manston with a colleague called Nobby Spain. We were employed to pluck the freshly slaughtered turkeys, it was very hard work, which was done in a big draughty old barn. The weather in December that year was very cold. We then had to repeat the process out at Charles Willett's Farm at Acol. Mr Willett had a small poultry farm at the back of the big house, run by a Mr Skilling.

### **DELIVERED IN THE TRADITIONAL METHOD**

"While we were working hard at the farms the shop was frantic with activity. Sausages, sausage meat, chipolatas and best of all our own beef dripping, all had to be made on site and be ready in good quantity for the Christmas rush. Once Christmas Eve arrived it was literally "On your bike!" All of our goods were delivered in the traditional method. The bicycles were heavy with no gears. We all worked extra hard in the week before Christmas, mostly 6 am till 8 pm with only an hour for lunch. All for about £6 a week!

### **PEOPLE EAT WITH THEIR EYES**

"The first day back after Christmas was always enjoyable as customers and friends would call in to say how much they enjoyed the meat they had purchased. My manager always told me that people eat with their eyes. It was very true. We always made an effort with the quality and presentation of our meat. The shop would show off the produce, birds and rabbits in the window and go to a lot of trouble with the display. Later on, animal rights activists put a stop to the practice, as it seemed to upset them seeing real animals on display in the window. Oh how things have changed!

### **LARRY GRAYSON**

"Over the years I must have served thousands of people and I recall many of them with great fondness. We often had famous people shopping with us including Larry Grayson and Hugh Laurie, (then comedy partner with Terry Scott). Once we had one of the **Beverly Sisters** standing outside the shop and all my customers ran out to ask for her autograph! Luckily they all came back in after the fuss had died down. Oh happy days!"