

## **LORNA EMMERSON (nee FLETCHER) - My Brompton Days**

*(As told to Brompton Heritage Group - August 2011)*

Lorna's family on her mother's side was rooted for generations in Brompton. One of her great grandmothers on her mother's father's side had worked in a linen mill here even at the age of 90. It was said that she frequently fell asleep when she was supposed to be watching a loom to make sure a thread didn't break.

Three generations later, Lorna's sister Gwen (9 years older than Lorna) also went to work in Wilford's Mill, where she stayed until its closure in the late 1950s.

As a girl, Lorna heard a lot about her great uncle, John Bell, brother of her grandmother on her mother's side. He owned a number of properties on Cockpit Hill and at Water End, which he had inherited from his father. He opened his own shop in one of them, selling just paraffin, candles and treacle. Lorna's sister Gwen remembers how the treacle used to drip from the tap of its container after the treacle had been drawn off, leaving very sticky patches on the floor. Unfortunately John Bell was not a good business man and all his property eventually had to be sold to pay his debts. One year when there was a particularly bad flood, and beck water rose part way up Cockpit Hill, John rescued a little boy from drowning in it.

John's sister, Rebecca Bell (Lorna's maternal grandmother) wanted to marry another Bromptonian, John Dunn, but her family objected to him. At that time John Dunn enjoyed drinking with his pals, but as the Bells were very staunch Methodists and therefore tee total, they did not approve of Rebecca's choice of husband. Rebecca was determined, and told John that she wouldn't marry him unless he changed his ways. This he did, but her family still disapproved and Rebecca inherited nothing from them because she married him against their wishes.

John Dunn, who worked for Harry Smith, a taylor with a shop behind Brompton Church, later became a local Methodist preacher. He travelled widely to the surrounding villages such as Potto, Swainby and Osmotherley, on his bicycle, even after the doctor had told him his heart could not cope with the strenuous exercise. He died before Lorna was born, but she has inherited some of his books. He was a wide reader, and she still has his copies of Keats and Browning's poetry and a set of Dickens' novels.

Lorna's mother was Florence, daughter of John and Rebecca. She worked for the Place family in Northallerton, as a maid. They owned a woodyard at North End, and so she came to meet Jack Fletcher, who worked there. They married and lived in Brompton where they had 3 children – Gwen (9 years older than Lorna), then Jim (one year younger than Gwen) and then Lorna, 8 years later.



*(Photo, donated by Lorna, shows Florrie Fletcher with her grandchildren)*

After John Dunn died, they moved into number 35 Cockpit Hill to live with his widow (Rebecca Bell). Lorna's father bought No. 35 and another house on Cockpit Hill when John Bell had money difficulties, though he didn't particularly want to. When Lorna was old enough to have the responsibility (about 8 years old she thinks) it was her job to take the mortgage repayments down to the Halifax Building Society, then at North End, Northallerton, carried in a locked tin box to which the Halifax kept a key. She was fascinated to see the compartments inside the box where the different denominations of coins were placed.

Lorna's father was a busy man. He had a vegetable garden behind No. 35 in which there was an old weaving shed (probably still there today). In the days of Great Grandfather Bell this had held a number of looms which people in the village were able to hire for their own weaving, probably both before and after the Linen Mills came to Brompton.

By Lorna's day the looms had gone and the shed held her mother's copper for boiling up the clothes etc. on washday – a job her mother loved – and her father's lathe and tools. He sharpened saws for people in the village and Lorna had the job of taking these back to their owners and collecting 3 (old) pennies for each one. She also earned some pocket money for herself by clearing up the sawdust on the work benches.

Her father liked to make things for his children. Once he made a wooden car with pedals and a scooter for Lorna. They all had bikes which he had constructed.

Another job that Lorna was given was fetching the milk each day from the farm on Water End. For this she took a billycan to be filled. Sometimes if the farmer was still milking (by hand) at the time, he would squirt some milk at her straight from the cow. On the way home, with the can full, she would swing it back and forth until she could take it in a complete circle over her head. The can had no lid, but she never spilt a drop!



*(Jim and Gwen Fletcher)*

As she grew older she was sent into Northallerton to do the sort of shopping that couldn't be done in Brompton, such as getting the wireless batteries refilled with acid, and visiting Timothy White's, the Chemist's shop.

Surprisingly the one job neither Lorna nor Gwen did was potato picking in the autumn. Most of the village children did this, but Lorna and Gwen's mother thought the work would be too backbreaking for her daughters. Lorna rather regretted not being able to earn some extra money for herself.

Lorna went to the village school on Station Road until she was 11. She missed many days at school with childhood illnesses. Her mother liked to have her at home and Lorna admits that she was often busy helping with the housework when she was supposed to be poorly. She enjoyed doing this, but fell behind with her school work.

She didn't have a great dislike of school, only of having to run the gauntlet of a gang of intimidating boys who lurked at the crossroads. After Gwen and Jim had left school she had no-one to protect her. The Headmistress was intimidating too. She slapped the children's wrists hard when they got things wrong. Once, in a composition about herself Lorna wrote, "I am a big girl". The teacher immediately crossed out "big" and inserted "little" – an insult which rankled.

Lorna had many friends and remembers clearly how the girls used to hold a rope across the width of Cockpit Hill and as many as 6 of them would be skipping at a time, while the rope was turned by girls at each end. As there were only 6 cars in the village, traffic was never a problem. They also roller skated freely on the road, which seemed to be their main playground. Whips and tops were popular, and the children liked to decorate their tops to make them pretty as they spun round.

When they wanted a change of scene they took themselves off across the fields, usually with picnics, and could be gone for hours. They nearly always went roaming off after Sunday School each week.

The Whitsuntide Carnival was a huge event in the village. Gwen and Jim, being close in age, always entered the fancy dress competition as a pair – as Punch and Judy, or 2 Red Indians for example. When Lorna reached the age of 3 it was decided that she too should join in, and a canary outfit, complete with yellow beak, was made for her. When the day arrived she was put into this costume, but she disliked it immediately and tore it off. She never entered the fancy dress competition in that or any other year. Nevertheless, she loved the Carnival and turned out with everyone else to admire the procession, the elaborately decorated floats pulled by well groomed cart horses, the decorated bicycles, the band and the excitement of it all.



*(Photo supplied by Lorna shows Jim and Gwen in Fancy Dress costume ready for the pageant)*

Lorna was 6 when World War II broke out, and was affected by the sweet rationing. She and her friends tried to find ways round this, by buying Horlicks tablets and lemonade crystals, and by raiding the village allotments. These were to the east of Water End, and reached as far as the Stokesley Road. Lorna's family never went hungry. Her mother was a good manager, and baked every Thursday – bread, tea cakes, pies, and, when she could get the ingredients, the family's favourite, a rich fruit loaf which they called "beloved cake".

Jim wanted to join the Royal Navy, but as he was working as a joiner for Wilson and Willoughby's undertaking business, he was required to stay in his job because of the increase in demand for coffins, especially for the pilots from the local airfields who died in service.

At the age of 11 Lorna went to the Allertonshire School, which was one of the very few schools in the country to be built during the war. Here she enjoyed her education and can't now remember missing any days through ill-health. All the Brompton children were put together into the B stream, but Lorna soon shot ahead of the others and was promoted to the A stream. This meant she was separated from her friends.

She cycled to school each day. Her favourite subjects were Art and Domestic Science. With the latter they would have a whole day at a time, and occasionally were allowed to

use “the flat” for a whole week. The flat was a self-contained apartment, with kitchen, bathroom etc. where the girls made breakfast, lunch and tea (to which mothers were invited, to be served by their daughters) and learned how to run a home. The boys, of course, did woodwork and metalwork instead.

Towards the end of her schooldays Lorna became a prefect. One memory which stays with her particularly, was being asked by the History teacher to go into Brompton Church to do pen and ink drawings of the 3 hogback stones. She made such a good job of this that the teacher kept the pictures to show to future classes, though Lorna would have liked to have kept them for herself.

On one occasion, a Prize Giving Day, Lorna recited a poem by William Wordsworth, the sonnet Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, to the assembled school and parents. She can still recite it today word-perfectly.

When she left school Lorna worked as a telephonist in Northallerton, cycling down there, then back for lunch at home, then back to work for the afternoon, along with a crowd of other Bromptonians. She enjoyed the work in the telephone exchange, which was then above the General Post Office.



*(Bethel Chapel on Cockpit Hill now used as a house)*

The Fletcher family were Methodists. At first they attended Bethel Chapel on Cockpit Hill and then the Wesleyan Chapel on The Green after Bethel Chapel closed. Lorna sang in the Chapel choir and played rounders in the Chapel team. Much of the family's life revolved around Chapel activities.

Lorna's father, Jack, had, as a boy, won a scholarship for Grammar School but was



unable to take it up because his family needed him to go to work. He was always good with figures and at accounting. After he married he moved from Place's woodyard and had various jobs in Northallerton. At one time he was at the Cold Storage (near where the Cricket Club is today) and later went to Moody's – the builder. He also worked at night as a boiler man at the Friarage Hospital. From home he ran the Grattan Catalogue Club, to which most of the village seemed to belong. The goods they ordered came by train to Brompton Station.

Lorna did the deliveries round the village, taking shoes, clothes, household goods etc., and people came to No. 35 Cockpit Hill to make their weekly payments, from which Lorna's father was able to take his commission. He was a generous man, and when someone was able to pay outright instead of in instalments, he passed his commission on to the customer, though this was not something he was obliged to do.

To Lorna the house was like a thoroughfare with people trooping in and out all the time; not just the Grattan customers, but neighbours wanting to borrow an egg or some sugar etc. (which was always provided). At the age of about 17 she had to have her appendix removed, and, perhaps because of the constant coming and going she seemed to make no progress in her convalescence. Time went by and she was still off work. Then one day her mother's cousin visited from Darlington. She must have sized up the situation immediately, took Lorna back with her, looked after her and gave her some peace and quiet. A week later Lorna was able to return to work!



*(Picture below shows on the left 16 years old Lorna with her friend Joan on the right - both were telephonists at the Post Office in Northallerton)*

The most important form of entertainment for young people in Brompton was the dances. Lorna went to those held in the Village Hall on Cockpit Hill, where they danced to Bert Langthorne's Band and to others in Northallerton Town Hall where the music was usually provided by Bert Sherwood's Band. A lot of Brompton people would be there, and afterwards they all walked back to the village in a companionable group.

When Lorna looks back on her early days she realises that though there was not much money to spare this was more than compensated for by the friendship of others and the freedom she enjoyed from an early age, which enabled her and her friends to make their own entertainment. Her memories are vivid and keep surfacing – the boys swimming in the nude in the deepest part of

the beck; she and her friends putting on "shows" in her father's work shed, and so on, but we have to stop somewhere.....

Lorna Emmerson, talking to Jennie Hancock of the B.H.G.