

## **Stockings Cost Sixpence a Leg**

### **Frances Ferguson was born in 1921 and interviewed in 2008**

My father was a signalman at Lambrigg. We lived at one side of the railway and his box was on the other. In those days the signalmen were crossing keepers if they were on a crossing. Anything that came and went that way he had to open the crossing gates. He would know when it was safe. It was the main line.

There's a viaduct just a bit lower down from where I was born and once it had been very wet and it was threatening to be a landslide and the Royal Scott was parked outside our house for twenty-four hours while they shored this banking up. Ever after that the chef, all in white with his tall hat, for a long time used to chuck chocolate biscuits out for us as they went past.

When I started school I went to Grayrigg School. The teacher that taught me in the first class was called Miss Stacey. There were no paper and things, we used slates and pencils with slate pencil cloth to rub it off. At dinner time we ate our cake, jam sandwiches and cocoa cos we couldn't go home, it was two miles for us, we walked there and back. Homemade bread though, our mother, before she was ill, made it every week in the fireside oven, a stone of white and half a stone of brown, delicious.

I had two brothers and a sister. Mother and father decided they would buy a house in Kendal, but mi mother never saw it. She was very ill. We moved in March 1930 and she died in hospital in April.

I was the youngest. I was eight, our George was 10, our Alice was twelve and Tom was 14 when me mother died. He was pretty much in charge was our Tom. He was killed during the war. Father got on his bike rode it to Paddy Lane Bridge then got onto the line and rode the rest of the way along the track to his Lambrigg Box. It must have been hard work for him. Eventually he got moved to Oxenholme No1 box for many years.

Shopping was not hard at Lambrigg we had Leightons. Darren Leighton used to come for an order once a fortnight and then there was J and T Parkers in Stramongate, they used to come for an order. Mr Clough used to come he was a butcher he had a van. He used to come with the meat and mother used to buy. He used to bring sweets as well and mother used to buy us all what she called a "mint pinnet." It was like a round bit of Mint Cake. We got that when we went for a walk on Sunday afternoon.

When we moved to Kendal I went to St Thomas' at the end of Burneside Road. I started in Class 2 and I got three prizes. My sister lent them to somebody and I never got them back. I went to the Senior Girls School. I was in B Class because me father said I hadn't to learn French. He had to teach me English. I was top of the class the year we left and I've still got the book. I picked it myself: "The Old Curiosity Shop."

I was fourteen on the Friday and Monday morning I went to Netherfield. My first job was flipping ends. Where the cotton had been cut off the machine you had to pull it through and tidy it up. I left there and dad gave me five shillings a week pocket money to look after the house. He was good was me dad. He used to fetch me shoes. He never took me to get my own. Then I got a Saturday job at Woolworths. I loved it. The manager was called Mr Bell. When it was holiday weekends he used to come and knock on the door asked my father "Well we'd like her to come in on Friday as well as Saturday is that all right with you." Me dad let me keep my double day's pay but I had to buy my own stockings. Sixpence a leg in Woolworths. Well they boasted there was nothing over sixpence at Woolworths but nylons were one shilling a pair.

Then war broke out. I left home and went nursing in Lancaster. I worked at the County Mental Hospital, CMH. I was there until I got married. Sister Katie Coyle used to stand us in line at seven o'clock in a morning. She inspected our hands, checked our fingernails were clean and then she would count and there would be nine. She used to say "Do not move" and she would go to the telephone and say "My staff are not starting work until I've got another nurse." And she got one.

Our wage was a pound a week. We lived in, so we had to pay for our food. Everything had to be spick and span. All the beds had to be lined up so they were in a straight line. There was no higgledy-piggledy. So I left there and got married and we lived with his mother for a bit and I had my daughter, Viv. Across the road was Mrs Smith who had got this house and she was a widow and she had nothing and she let rooms. We moved there. Her son was at Oxford. He was what they called a "boffin."

Then I was made redundant, a little while later they rang me from County Hall, "Would I go to Maudes Meadow?" and I thought "Why Not?" This was late 1960s, the year that was the Winter of Discontent and I was there for six years. Three-day week, no lights, on nights. On each corridor there was one big gaslight that shone right up each corridor. I had thirty odd old folks to see to. We resorted to using candles in the end. I used to make porridge when I went on duty and put it in the Aga and leave it overnight.

The first time I was there on my own I heard this screaming and I dashed all over this blooming place. I went to one of the old ladies and said "Did you hear that screaming". She said "ee me lass it's only the peacocks in the park." There was three or four of them and they couldn't half screech

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