

A Fishmonger's Life for Edward

Edward Ellwood Turner was born in 1924 and interviewed in 1989

I wasn't a bad boy at school. I was a naughty boy making stink bombs with Zinc and acid. You melt it and put it in a test tube and seal the tube with a Bunsen burner. I used to go into prayers in a morning and just drop them. Of course people wouldn't see and would step on them and out would come the smell. Then the headmaster would come in and smell. He knew who it was and he used to say "Stay behind Turner." Then we knew what was coming – three of the best

My father was a fishmonger and so was my uncle and my grandfather. My grandfather worked for a Mrs Bewsher at 24 Finkle Street and bought the business off her. Then my father started work for my grandfather about 1920 I think and I joined the firm in 1939

In 1942 when I was 18, along with a friend we joined up and did 16 weeks training at a place called Formby near Southport. The Regiment was called The Kings Regiment and we moved to Kent near Biggin Hill aerodrome which we were supposed to be guarding. We had rifles but no ammunition. Then one day they came round for volunteers for a regiment called the Duke of Wellington's – "You, you and you" the usual army way. And from 1942 to '44 we training, although we didn't know it, for D-Day. Then one night on June 5th we were told to move and we were issued with ammunition which I thought was funny. We thought we were just on an exercise. We got on these boats and went out to sea. Then we realised what was happening because the shells were coming OUR way and they were always fired THAT way in training. Half the battalion landed on June 6th but I landed on D+1 next morning as a reserve. Half the battalion had been killed and we were the reserves. Our first objective was a place called Fontenay in France and we lost most of our men again. On and on and we were losing more and more, especially the officers. Then all of a sudden we were issued with collars and ties then they didn't know who was who. We did. The privates and NCOs had black boots but the officers had brown boots.

When Arnhem fell it was, my platoon, the 7th Duke of Wellingtons that captured it but I was on leave in Nijmegen so I missed it fortunately. That was the first time I had a bath after about four months. No clothes change 'cos we hadn't got any to change into.

There was a pig in no man's land and a lance corporal and myself went out and shot this pig and got it back and the cook and hung it up and gutted it. Then the next night the Germans attacked us and pushed us out. We pushed them back but they took the pig with them and left a note saying "Thank you." So we got no bacon.

I was in the army from '42 until January '47 then I re-joined the shop. It was always hard work. There was none of this "I'm not going to do it, it's not my job" you just did it. When I worked for my father he gave me ten shillings, or 50p in today's money, a week and the hours were from 8.00am until 6.00pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; 8.00am to 12.30pm Thursday; Friday it was 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday it was 8.00 until 7.00pm, but if the Co-op closed a bit sooner we shut a bit sooner. We never, ever closed before the Co-op. When I came out of the army in 1947 I had £4.10 shillings and I got married in 1953 and I asked my father for a rise. "What do you want a rise for?" I said "I have got a wife." I still had only £4.10s there was no automatic rise every year. He gave me another 10 shillings.

In 1955 my father became ill and could not carry on so he sold it and I was out of work. I worked for Mr McClure, another fishmonger, for about a year then Audrey, my wife, and I bought, and started, our own shop on Branthwaite Brow and I was there until I retired.

Most of the fish orders were standard. From Aberdeen it was a standard order every day except Monday, when we were closed. We mainly got haddock and plaice then from them. Fleetwood would ring us up on Mondays and Thursdays and I used to order on what I thought we would need we could always cancel and order if we were getting too many fish. Say you had a bad day on Tuesday you could always cancel as long as you did it before 12.00. We used to get all the hake, halibut and dover soles and from Grimsby we used to get smoked fish, prawns, scampi, fish cakes and about 18 choices every day so it wasn't too bad.

The farmers used to come in two or three times a week with so many chickens and the pheasants we got from the local squires and we also sold venison, again brought in by the local squires.

Uncle George was in charge of that, he did nothing else but pluck and dress the chickens and he used to buy them. If they were good he kept them; if they weren't he would send them back. The chickens were always brought in live. Uncle George could do about 14 or 15 in an hour which was good going. With the turkeys, although they don't do it now he used to pull the sinews out of the legs first. We had a big oak beam in the back and a big six-inch nail and a groove where they kept putting the turkey's legs to get the sinews out. Even the chickens we pulled the sinews out but they don't do that now, they just chop their feet off.

We also sold rabbits but for that you needed the land owners' permission. Rabbits sold for sixpence skinned or 9d with skins. You caught enough, or sold enough, rabbits you could make a much sort after, fashionable in that era, rabbit skin coat.

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