At Home in Devon in the 1920s

Paul Cleave

The inspiration for this essay comes from discussions with those whose families were living in Devon in the 1920s and a diverse collection of archival and ephemeral resources, for example, guidebooks, postcards, women's pages of local newspapers, magazines, ruridecanal records and photographs. Drawing on archival resources, this research aims to explore life at home in 1920s Devon through oral histories, literature, photographs and contemporary observations. The research aspires to discover what it might have been like living and working in Devon, and to find out more about family life of the people who were dwelling here. Its focus is on families who lived in Devon. It investigates their lifestyles, how these were changing and where there was continuity. In the form of a bricolage and period scrapbook, its collection of resources takes us to the era through a visual and written history.

It is the significance of the seemingly 'mundane and every day' – for example, domesticity, housework, school, shopping, family life and daily routines – and the memories evoked through an era, that we learn about everyday life in 1920s Devon.

Devon in the post-war era

The 1920s were a time of change and readjustment to life after the First World War. For many, there were expectations of homes fit for heroes, employment and new opportunities. Although advances had been made in technology and science, the significance of health, nutrition and diet is identified in the work of Jack Drummond.[1] Knowledge of food values in the interwar years raised concerns about the health, poor housing and diet of 'poorer people' which in many parts of the country, Drummond states, consisted largely of white bread, margarine, jam, tea and fried fish. These concerns are recognised by Peake who emphasised the importance domestic science education had in contributing to healthy balanced diets, and

[1] J. C. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food: A History of Five Centuries of English Diet* (Readers Union, 1959), pp. 443–45.

homes that are ‘clean and tidy, sweet and wholesome – real homes in the true sense of the word.’[2]

Period guidebooks for Devon provide details of life in the county for its residents and visitors. *Crediton: The Official Guide* written by Colonel Montague of Penton House, describes Crediton as a small market town in mid-Devon in the midst of a farming community, well known for its manufacture of confectionery, medicinal lozenges and cider.[3] In contrast, the official Exeter guidebook presented the city to visitors and potential residents as historic, ‘the Capital of the West’, and an ‘old Cathedral City’, but forward-looking and thriving.[4] It is presented as an important retail centre with excellent prospects for education and sport, and as a centre for touring. For those living away from the county, *The Devonian Yearbook, 1924* provided news of Devonshire societies, and an advertisement for The Devonshire Dairies on Oxford Street, reminded members living in London that they ‘have always a fresh supply of real Devonshire clotted cream’.[5]

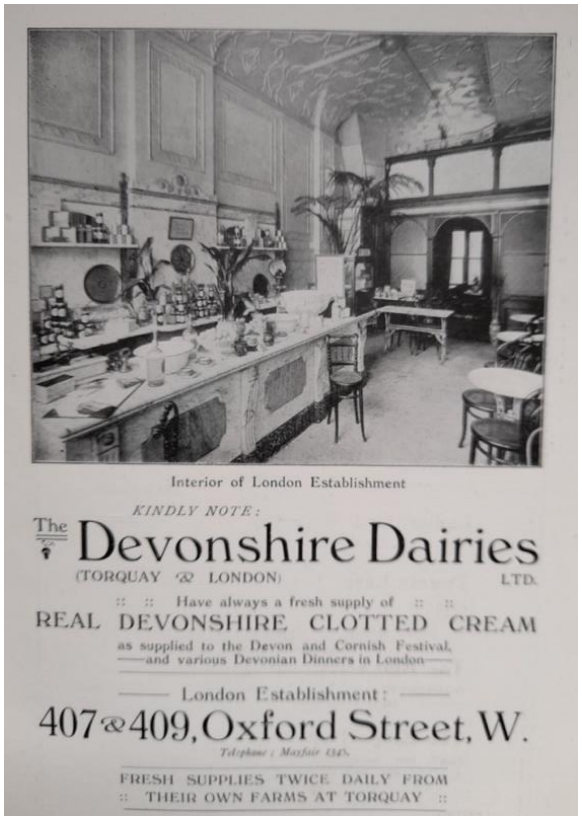


Figure 1: Advertisement for The Devonshire Dairies in *The Devonian Yearbook, 1924*.

[2] N. Peake, *The Domestic Science Handbooks, Vol III – Housewifery* (New Era Publishing Co. Ltd., c. 1928), p. 5.
[3] Anon., *Crediton: The Official Guide* (Crediton Urban District Council, and Commercial Association, c. 1922).
[4] Anon., *Exeter: Official Guide of the City Council* (Information Bureau, 1922).
[5] Anon., *The Devonian Yearbook, 1924* (London Devonian Association, 1924).

The official catalogue for The Devon Agricultural Association meeting, held in Crediton in June 1926 illustrates what would have been a popular days outing for many Devonian farming families, and an opportunity to meet traders and socialise.[6] With a full programme including horse jumping, judging of livestock, sheep shearing, butter making and junket-making competitions, this reflected the industry and rural traditions of county. The county's guidebooks provide an insight into life in Devon and a narrative of change, and continuity with details of education, shopping, leisure and recreation.

The parish magazine and ruridecanal records provide details of life in Crediton and its hamlets.[7] For many households they were a regular form of communication, with news of other villages and communities in the parish. They tell us much about a dispersed rural community, and of life regulated through seasons, the church calendar and its festivals, Christmas, Easter, harvest and rogation. They remind us how the church was involved with the wider community, whether in providing Christmas teas and Sunday school parties with book prizes, or through accounts of excursions and Sunday school outings to the seaside. Typically, in August 1924 the village of Bow reported how the Sunday school children, teachers and parents had a 'delightful outing at Exmouth, again the weather was fine, but cold' (p. 104). Some had ventured further afield, and in Brampford Speke it was recorded that 'the Vicar returned home after wintering abroad, on April 29th. He is glad to see his friends again and hopes by degrees to visit them all in their homes' (p. 141). Of immense importance to many parishioners were their annual visits to Dartmoor or seaside resorts by train or charabanc – for them equally as exciting as foreign travel.

In May 1924, Sandford reported how on 23 April, parishioners were able to listen to a radio broadcast for the first time from the 1924 Empire Exhibition at Wembley, and that this was 'a triumph of science' (p. 65). Those who listened felt as if they had been to Wembley, 'only had left our eyes at home', hearing speeches made by King George V and the Prince of Wales (who later became King Edward VIII), the vast choir and bands, commands to the troops, the cheers of the crowds and the calls and jokes of the throngs, 'as if one were on the spot.'

Bow, a village close to Crediton, in January 1924 informed readers that Mr Crawford had delivered a most delightful and entertaining lantern lecture on volcanoes and earthquakes (p.

[6] Anon., Devon County Agricultural Association catalogue of the Crediton meeting, 1926.
[7] Cadbury, Ruridecanal Records, 1924, 1925.

2). It was noted that although an expert on the scientific aspects of the subject, his lecture was 'a model of simplicity, interspersed with quiet humour.'

Christmas celebrations are reported, and the bell ringers' supper, pantomime, concerts, dances and whist drives added to the festivities, and that due to lack of holly berries, decorations at the church at Clannaborough had to be on a smaller scale (p. 3). In Crediton, Miss Hugo and the Crediton branch of the Red Cross Society were congratulated on raising £124 4s 8d (£7,600 in 2024) for The Cancer Research Fund.

There is news of fundraising events, 'socials', dances, whist drives and educational entertainment. For example, in Yeoford in 1925 a magic lantern slide show of Switzerland's mountains, lakes and glaciers, and a silver collection, or a talk about earthquakes and volcanoes. These were important forms of entertainment, taking people in their imaginations to another world.

Events of national importance are recorded too. In January 1926 on Advent Sunday a service had been held for the late Queen Mother, Queen Alexandra, and it was noted that Crediton could join in 'the Empire's – nay it might be said, the world's remembrance of the late Queen Mother' (p. 5). The magazine for June 1926 reported with relief that 'we have passed through troublous times and during the General Strike' (p. 142). Clannaborough noted how 'everything else was overshadowed by the great industrial crisis' (p. 141) and that at Whitsun those who came to evensong 'afterwards heard the service of Reconciliation in the hut, which was broadcast from London'. The British Gazette announced the end of the strike and reported that in Plymouth half of the tramway men 'are again at work'.[8]

Colebrooke reported that the Sunday school children had enjoyed their party and had tucked in heartily to the 'most attractive tea prepared by kind workers' (p. 20), the excitement increasing when crackers were tackled. Eventually, we are told, 'the children went home carrying oranges and sweets – we think – well satisfied.' Their successful fundraising tea and social was attended by nearly 150 people, who were entertained with songs from Miss Catling, who 'kindly came from Dawlish for our benefit', violin solos, a very amusing Devonshire reading, 'and the vicar sang two songs'. With dancing and competitions, the profit for the social was £7 6s 10d (£560 in 2024), which was paid to the tower restoration fund.

[8] *The British Gazette*, no. 8, 13 May 1926, p. 3.

Advertisements in magazines indicate how people were managing their homes. Morse's distemper in sixty shades 'thoroughly hygienic and sanitary' was promoted as an economical way to decorate the home and was easy to clean. The healing properties of Germolene, the promise that Parazone would help in cleaning up, the convenience of Bird's Custard Powder, and the restorative powers of Mazawatte tea reflect an interest in health and hygiene, the influence of packaged and branded consumer goods and growth of multiple retailers.

Today the parish magazines are important records of local and social history. Through the language and nuances of the period, they help us to understand the era, whether observations of the ordinary or special fundraising events to support worthy causes, for example, egg collections for the hospitals and charities. News from the villages and hamlets tells us about prevailing social structures, class, gender, and the role and influence of the church, schools, and institutions on country life. They reveal much about life in rural and farming communities and how in many ways they were outward looking and embraced modern technologies.

Life in Devon

Literature of the period sometimes provides a record of everyday life in Devon, for example in the works of Edith Dart whose novel *Sareel*[9] reflects life in a Devonshire farmhouse. Beatrice Chase, who lived at Widecombe-in- the-Moor, frequently wrote of the rural community she knew in and around the village. In *Through a Dartmoor Window*, her readers are introduced to the hard work and routine of the 'Dartmoor Housewife' who, 'with children and the dairy, all the house cleaning, weekly washing, fires, sewing, cooking, and often farm work, presented an arduous workload without the convenience of gas, electricity, and running water'.[10] Their practical skills and thrift in making rag rugs and clothes for their children from recycled garments and household management are lessons in frugality keenly observed and admired by Chase.

Devon as observed by authors visiting the county shows how others saw it. Winbolt[11] typically describes Devon as unsurpassed as a region for the holidaymaker, and that its people

[9] Edith Dart, *Sareel* (Philip Allan & Co, 1922).
[10] Beatrice Chase, *Through a Dartmoor Window* (Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1928), p. 46.
[11] S. E. Winbolt, *Devon* (G. Bell & Sons Ltd, 1929), p. xlix.

are polite, gentle and cheerful, and in their speech there is a pleasant purr, with a soft and persuasive intonation.

The county was photographed by E. O. Hoppe and presented in *Picturesque Great Britain.*[12] Hoppe's distinctive sepia-toned images of Devon depict aspects of its cobbled streets, towns and villages, coast, landscapes and countryside.

H. V. Morton's *In Search of England*[13] presents the county, its people and terrain with reflections of the routine of market day in Barnstaple. For both the farmer and farmer's wife, this was an important weekly routine involving preparing produce for market, for example, strawberries, cream and ducks, loaded into panniers and conveyed by pony and trap to market. Beyond Morton's bucolic depictions are hard work, a social structure and rural way of life.

Hughes[14] writes romantically of the cob cottages of Devon colour washed pink, white or lemon, which appealed to the visiting public. Corey (1927) contributed a description of Devon lanes for the *National Geographic* magazine. The county is depicted as rural and rustic, and the author was intrigued by its geography, people, deep winding lanes and hospitality. At Dittisham, he enjoyed a cockle tea, starting with a plate of cockles and 'working slowly down the table with plum jam and cream, bread and butter, cakes and a fine ruddy old hostess.'[15]

A tale of two Exeter families

A variety of primary and secondary resources reflect on the domestic setting of life at home, and include accounts found in family stories (from both public and private domains), biographies and qualitative semi structured interviews. In researching the domestic domain, newspapers, cuttings, literature, magazines and cookery books of the period provide evidence beyond the anecdotal, and in the example of Devon help explain what it might have been like to live in its urban and rural communities.

[12] E. O. Hoppe, *Picturesque Great Britain* (Ernst Wasmuth A.G., 1926).
[13] H. V. Morton *In Search of England* (Robert M. McBride & Company, 1928).
[14] M. V. Hughes, *About England* (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1927), p.141.
[15] H. Corey, 'Down Devon Lanes', *The National Geographic Magazine*, Volume LV, No. 5, 1929.

Access to archive material from two Exeter families illustrates contrasting lifestyles and prevailing norms of social class and gender in 1920s Exeter. Qualitative interviews and unpublished accounts from George and Lavinia – a young couple with three sons born in the 1920s –and Diana – with her memories of a middle-class family – provide an intimate insight into family life in Devon.

George and Lavinia

George and Lavinia's married life started in 1921 in rented accommodation in Exeter, where George worked for the railway and Lavinia (who had been in domestic service as a young girl in Exeter, and on starting work was informed by her employer that she would be known as 'Rose'; her housekeeping and cookery skills honed by an exacting 'mistress') ran the home and cared for their four children. They later moved to one of the new houses on Burnthouse Lane and bought their own home in the 1930s.

Their daughter, Jean, recalled her mother's life as ordered by hard work, daily routine, frugality and the respectful observance of Sunday, when the parlour might be used. Cooking for the family included baking days when cakes, fruit tarts, sausage rolls and pasties were made. All laundry was done at home and started on Sunday evening with preparations for Monday's washing, known as 'copper day' – a reference to the copper boiler used to wash the clothes, and on Tuesday dealing with starching and ironing done with flat irons heated on the range. With gas lights, and 'tin baths' in front of the fire, Lavinia's routine was marked by a regulated weekly pattern of household chores in addition to daily cleaning. After ironing on Tuesday, she would bake, and Wednesday was reserved for grocery shopping and cleaning. With Thursday marked as a major baking day, Friday for 'top to toe' house cleaning, Saturday was set aside for shopping. No housework was done on Sunday, but a special Sunday roast dinner and tea were enjoyed by the family. At midday, Lavinia changed from her work overall to apron and clothes suitable for the afternoon's lighter work or shopping – using local shops: baker, butcher, grocer and the Co-Op. She was a skilled needlewoman who supplemented the family income through sewing and alterations, work that could be done at home.

There was little time for leisure and entertaining or a social life beyond encounters within the social structure of the neighbourhood. There was a weekly ritual, varied only by season, for mother of: cleaning, cooking, baking, spring cleaning, preparations for the Christmas table, sewing, and preserving what fruits and vegetables were available.

For her father, in his spare time, maintaining the home, and working in the garden and three allotments to provide a seasonal supply of fruit and vegetables for the family left little or no time for a social life.

Figure 2: George and Lavinia, c.1921.

Diana

Diana was the daughter of author George Goodchild. She was born in 1915, grew up in Exeter, spending much of her childhood in Pennsylvania Park (an elegant Regency terrace overlooking the city), a spacious period home with staff, a cook, maid, and nanny who relieved Mrs Goodchild of the drudgery of housework, in contrast to Lavinia's weekly routine. The children were educated privately, and the family enjoyed leisure time and a social life.

She recalls how her parents regularly met their friends for morning coffee on Saturdays at Deller's Café – the popular social centre and rendezvous – where her mother ordered 'coffee milk' (featured on a 1920s menu at 4d a glass), and where Diana would host her birthday parties. Diana and her siblings enjoyed their freedom, whether playing in the private park in

front of their home or at weekends on family countryside motoring excursions in the open top Chevrolet. Diana recalled family holidays in Devon, camping at Haldon and renting a chalet at Shelley beach in Exmouth, where she and her siblings would watch 'timber from Scandinavia, and apples from Normandy' being unloaded at the docks. The family regularly ventured further afield with their car, and the children's nanny spending the winter months in the south of France and skiing holidays in Switzerland.

In 1928, Diana's parents and friends, who were keen motorists, decided to build a tearoom with petrol pumps on Haldon Moor, known as The Haldon Chalet (inspired by their winter sports holidays in Switzerland). With its art deco colour scheme of cream, blue and orange, it became a popular place to stop for homemade cakes, and cream teas sold at 1/6d. Motorists may have been reassured to know that some Devon roads were patrolled by the AA Road Service Outfits,[16] and their Devon and Cornwall headquarters were to be found on the High Street in Exeter.

Figure 3: Diana's childhood home, Pennsylvania Park, Exeter.

[16] Anon, *The Automobile Association Handbook.* (The Automobile Association, 1924).

Other published biographical accounts provide personal references to life in Devon in the 1920s, for example, White,[17] daughter of the former rector of Chulmleigh, recalled village life in the 1920s, a household staff with governess and nanny, and occasional shopping excursions to Exeter.

Beer remembered her childhood in Exmouth, and how she felt isolated from the history of the time, considering Devon to be remote and London almost inaccessible, except to the rich. As a treat, she was taken to Exeter, 'the big city' and visited the cathedral, museum, Rougemont Castle and St Nicholas Priory. Her excursion finished with tea at Deller's, 'the apotheosis of a café, glorious and exciting', which was permeated by a smell of coffee, 'a drink we never had at home.'[18]

Kirkland[19] identifies a trend for menus to offer light refreshments and teas in addition to full meals in tea rooms and cafes at the resorts and in shopping and busy thoroughfares in towns, for example Clapp's Café in Exmouth and Bromley's in Barnstaple. For many, tea, coffee or ice-cream sodas in a café or department store such as Colson's in Exeter were an affordable and memorable treat.

Fred Pennington's account of life as a farmer's son in North Devon evokes a traditional farmhouse lit by paraffin lamps and candles, and a kitchen with an open fireplace, wood-fired 'cloam oven' and hearth. The introduction of a range, which eased the work of the cook, was a modern touch, but Fred lamented the taste of food cooked in the 'cloam oven.'[20] However, he notes a lack of amenities – running water and indoor lavatories.

People give a personal connection to place and time, and reminiscence extends beyond the anecdotal. George, Lavinia and Diana tell us of families with contrasting experiences who place Devon in the wider world through their accounts of work and leisure, whether tending an allotment or holidaying abroad.

[17] U. White, *Truly Rural* (Private circulation, 2000), p. 17.
[18] P. Beer, *Mrs Beer's House* (Macmillan, 1968), pp. 11, 146.
[19] J. Kirkland, *The Modern Baker, Confectioner, and Caterer* (The Gresham Publishing Company Ltd., 1924), p. 199.
[20] F. Pennington, *From Ploughboy to Priest* (Charles Herridge Ltd., 1984), p. 33.

Food in 1920s Devon

Housekeeping and cookery books of the 1920s indicate changing tastes in food, an interest in regional dishes and household management advice for those with less domestic help. Florence Jack's *Good Housekeeping Cookery Book*,[21] annotated by Lady Walker of Crediton, has a selection of dishes for her cook to prepare, including a recherché pineapple salad decorated with nasturtium flowers. Marcel Boulestin included Devonshire recipes such as Devonshire fried potatoes in A *Second Helping,*[22] and Dorothy Allhusen's *A book of Scents and Dishes*[23] includes two recipes for Devonshire cream.

The English Folk Cookery Association founded by Florence White in 1928 encouraged the public to appreciate regional foods she felt were disappearing. Catherine Ives' (1928) *When the Cook is Away*[24] addressed some of the domestic changes after the First World War, with practical advice and recipes for middle-class housewives who had little experience of cookery.

The ubiquitous *Radiation 'Regulo Controlled' Cookery Book*,[25] produced for owners of gas cookers (in print for almost fifty years), provides examples of popular dishes and menus of the period, for example roast rabbit, or a vegetarian meal (cooked in 40 minutes in the oven) comprising tomato dumplings, baked mushrooms, creamed potatoes, and apple snow.

Francillon, who had taught 'mistresses and their cooks',[26] ran a cookery school at Harcombe in Devon for a clientele that included 'those compelled to do their own cooking without having been sufficiently fortunate to have had a training.' A recipe for Devonshire cream is included in the extensive repertoire of dishes.

Many housewives cut out recipes and seasonal household advice from newspapers and magazines – typically recipes for the home preservation of fruit and vegetables, jams, jellies, salting runner beans and bottling fruit. The *Farmer & Stockbreeder* included recipes for 'seasonable chutneys', and 'as the days were growing shorter',[27] ideas for cosy tea parties.

[21] Florence Jack, *Good Housekeeping Cookery Book* (Good Housekeeping Magazine, 1925).
[22] X. M. Boulestin, *A Second Helping, or More Dishes for English Tables* (William Heinemann Ltd., 1925).
[23] D. Allhusen, *A Book of Scents and Dishes* (Williams and Norgate Ltd., 1926), p. 111.
[24] Catherine Ives, *When the Cook is Away* (Duckworth, 1928).
[25] Anon., *Radiation 'Regulo Controlled' Cookery Book* (Radiation, New World, Ltd., 1927), p. 196.
[26] W. G. R. Francillon, *Good Cookery* (J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1920), p. v.
[27] E. Craig, *The Farmer & Stockbreeder, and Agricultural Gazette*, 209, 10 September 1928.

News of regional bakery and confectionery competitions, and stories of regional specialities such as the Ridgway buns, show how Devon was competing nationally to raise standards. The *Western Morning News* reported on the high cost of brown bread which may have discouraged its consumption.[28] However, during the economic depression, Bensusan[29] observed over the length and breadth of the country a change in shopping, diet and cookery in rural areas, and how for some housewives poorer quality convenience foods, including white bread, were perceived as saving time, money and fuel.

What the 1920s home might have been like

Mrs Peel looks to a better standard of post-First World War homes and describes the homes of the working classes and advances in the welfare of all classes bound together by a sense of duty. The examples of garden city developments as providing cottage-style homes to meet modern needs demand a bath, gas or electric lights, and with 'the promise of higher wages, shorter working hours and the gift of education waiting for all', there was a demand for 'a room in which the husband and father might enjoy his leisure, the young entertain their friends, and the mother take her rest.'[30]

'Designs of new homes for working families'

The era was not all art deco, modernism and Bauhaus, but people looked to an improved quality of life and homes that were hygienic, with sanitation, gardens, fresh air and sunshine and in contrast to crowded slum conditions. Versions of garden city homes were popular and designed with modern ideas as to health and general well-being. Newbould considered how the home would be used and that a parlour might be a useful space if used every day, not just on Sunday, but 'perhaps for the pupil with home lessons or the student who wishes to better his position.'[31]

In an era of emerging modernity, the traditions of farmhouse and country cottage continued in rural Devon. Many housewives had a routine of labour-intensive housework with little time

[28] *The Western Morning News*, 25 November 1921.
[29] S. L. Bensusan, *Latter Day Rural England* (Ernest Benn Limited, 1928), p. 107.
[30] C. S. Peel, *A Hundred Wonderful Years* (The Bodley Head, 1926), pp. 240–43.
[31] H. B. Newbold, *House and Cottage Construction* (Caxton Publishing Company Limited, c. 1924), pp. 38–39.

for leisure or recreation beyond the home. Rural homes – for example, a thatched cottage with coal- or wood-fired range or hearth, maybe an oil stove, water pump, meat safe, no running water, mains gas or electricity – could be contrasted with newer urban developments, and homes fitted with gas, electricity, bathrooms and toilets, which were easier to manage and, for some, required less or no paid help.

How did people live? What was life in the 1920s like for the housewife? How was the home managed? For most families, their home was furnished using local suppliers, shops or auctions. Advertisements in *Crediton: The Official Guide* show how Hoskins (suppliers of tinware and enamel kitchen utensils), and Denner's and Newcombe's (who had 'second-hand furniture in stock') could help furnish the home.[32]

Figure 4: Advertisement for Denner's from *Crediton: The Official Guide*, 1922.

Figure 5: Advertisement for Newcombe & Son from *Crediton: The Official Guide*, 1922.

[32] Anon., *Crediton: The Official Guide* (Crediton Urban District Council, and Commercial Association, c. 1922).

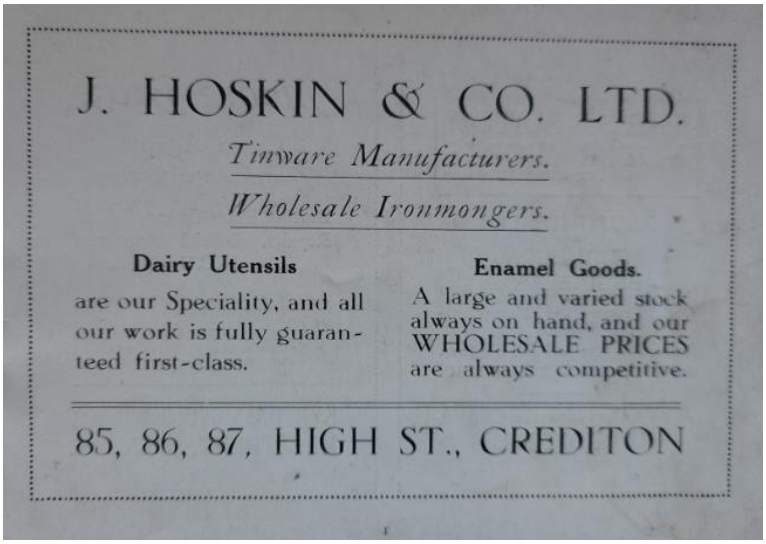
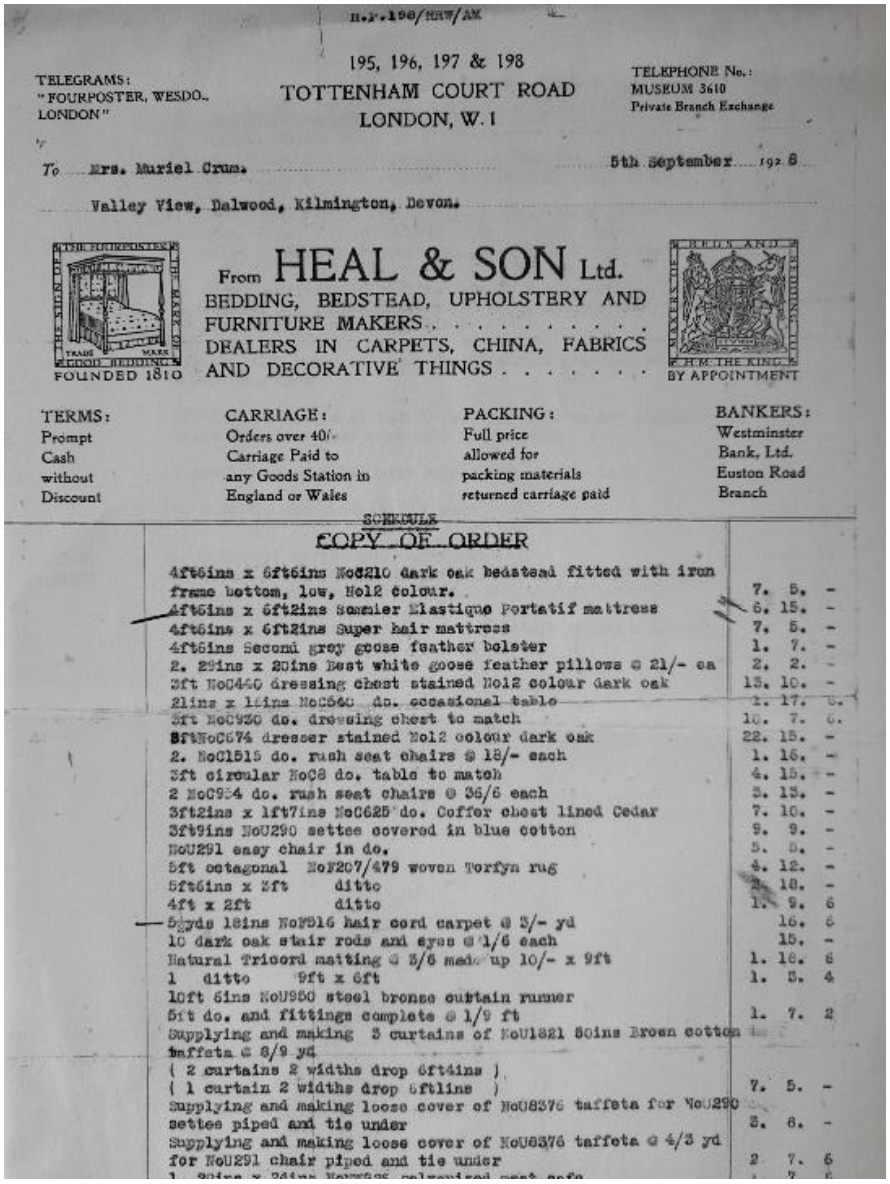


Figure 6: Advertisement for J. Hoskin & Co. Ltd. from *Crediton: The Official Guide*, 1922.

In contrast, Mrs Crum's order from Heal's furniture store in London for furnishing her Devon home, Sunny Cottage, in 1928, demonstrates how Heal's important suppliers to the middle classes could provide an arts and crafts cottage-style interior, as indicated in the detailed invoice. Heal and Sons were influential in their style of furnishing for smaller homes, and by the 1920s 'with housewives moving into the kitchens, good taste made itself felt in finer dressers and tables.'[33]

[33] Heal and Sons, *Heal's Catalogues, 1853–1934* (David and Charles, 1972).



H.F.198/MRW/AM

195, 196, 197 & 198
TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD
LONDON, W.1

TELEGRAMS:
"FOURPOSTER, WESDO, LONDON"

TELEPHONE No.:
MUSEUM 3610
Private Branch Exchange

To Mrs. Muriel Crum. 5th September 192 8

Valley View, Dalwood, Kilmington, Devon.

From HEAL & SON Ltd.
BEDDING, BEDSTEAD, UPHOLSTERY AND FURNITURE MAKERS . . . . . .
DEALERS IN CARPETS, CHINA, FABRICS AND DECORATIVE THINGS . . . . . .

FOUNDED 1810

BY APPOINTMENT

TERMS:	CARRIAGE:	PACKING:	BANKERS:
Prompt Cash without Discount	Orders over 40/- Carriage Paid to any Goods Station in England or Wales	Full price allowed for packing materials returned carriage paid	Westminster Bank, Ltd. Euston Road Branch

SCHEDULE

COPY OF ORDER

4ft6ins x 6ft6ins NoC210 dark oak bedstead fitted with iron frame bottom, low, No12 colour.	7. 5. -
4ft6ins x 6ft2ins Somnier Elastique Portatif mattress	6. 15. -
4ft6ins x 6ft2ins Super hair mattress	7. 5. -
4ft6ins Second grey goose feather bolster	1. 7. -
2. 29ins x 20ins Best white goose feather pillows @ 21/- ea	2. 2. -
3ft NoC440 dressing chest stained No12 colour dark oak	13. 10. -
21ins x 16ins NoC640 do. occasional table	1. 17. 6.
3ft NoC930 do. dressing chest to match	10. 7. 6.
3ftNoC674 dresser stained No12 colour dark oak	22. 15. -
2. NoC1515 do. rush seat chairs @ 18/- each	1. 16. -
3ft circular NoC8 do. table to match	4. 15. -
2 NoC954 do. rush seat chairs @ 36/6 each	3. 13. -
3ft2ins x 1ft7ins NoC625 do. Coffer chest lined Cedar	7. 10. -
3ft9ins NoU290 settee covered in blue cotton	9. 9. -
NoU291 easy chair in do.	5. 5. -
5ft octagonal NoF207/479 woven Torfyn rug	4. 12. -
5ft6ins x 3ft ditto	3. 18. -
4ft x 2ft ditto	1. 9. 6
5½yds 18ins NoF916 hair cord carpet @ 3/- yd	16. 6
10 dark oak stair rods and eyes @ 1/6 each	15. -
Natural Tricord matting @ 5/6 made up 10/- x 9ft	1. 18. 6
1 ditto 9ft x 6ft	1. 3. 4
10ft 6ins NoU950 steel bronze curtain runner	
5it do. and fittings complete @ 1/9 ft	1. 7. 2
Supplying and making 3 curtains of NoU1821 50ins Brown cotton taffeta @ 8/9 yd	
(2 curtains 2 widths drop 6ft4ins)	
(1 curtain 2 widths drop 6ftlins)	7. 5. -
Supplying and making loose cover of NoU8376 taffeta for NoU290 settee piped and tie under	3. 8. -
Supplying and making loose cover of NoU8376 taffeta @ 4/3 yd for NoU291 chair piped and tie under	2 7. 6

Figure 7: Mrs Crum's order from Heal's furniture store, 1928.

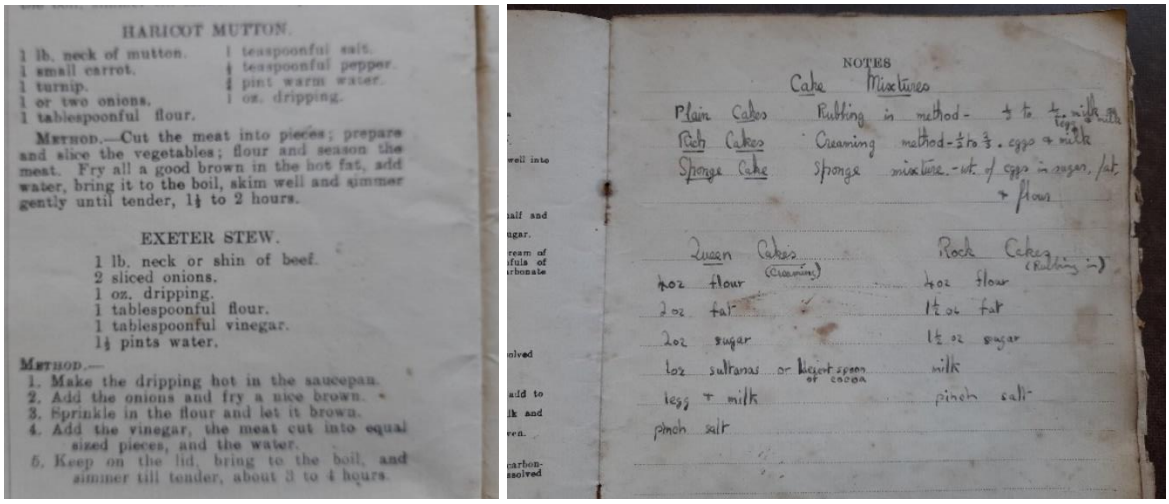
Domestic science education for home and kitchen

Advances in education in the 1920s identify the importance of teaching girls domestic science through lessons that combined practical skills with the theory and understanding of running a home, cooking, laundry work, caring for the sick, and an expectation of the role of women. Hutton states that it was not the aim of the cookery teacher to 'turn out highly skilled cooks at fourteen'[34] but the aim should be to teach girls the principles of cookery and home management and prepare them for adult life. 'Teachers were recommended to consider

[34] D. E. Hutton, *The Domestic Science Handbooks, Vol II – Cookery* (New Era Publishing Co, Ltd, c. 1928), pp. 1–3.

whether the girls might work in shops or factories, or enter domestic service, or work at home on farms and small holdings' (cookery books of the period sometimes refer to a shortage of domestic staff, and many school leavers still found work 'in service').

The suggested curriculum is structured to combine theory and practical skills. It is indicative of change and the benefits of a modern labour-saving home, anticipating the use of gas and electricity and labour-saving household appliances, for example electric irons. It might appear gendered and stereotyped today, but in the 1920s it was aiming to improve standards of hygiene in the home and encourage the consumption of healthy balanced diets. Girls would have been provided with training in all aspects of 'housewifery'. Blachford considers the teaching of woodwork and metalwork as important to the education of boys. During the 1920s, it was suggested that girls should learn about the use of tools and be able to carry out 'small repairs in the home'.[35]



HARICOT MUTTON.

1 lb. neck of mutton.
1 small carrot.
1 turnip.
1 or two onions.
1 tablespoonful flour.
1 teaspoonful salt.
¼ teaspoonful pepper.
¾ pint warm water.
1 oz. dripping.

METHOD.—Cut the meat into pieces; prepare and slice the vegetables; flour and season the meat. Fry all a good brown in the hot fat, add water, bring it to the boil, skim well and simmer gently until tender, 1½ to 2 hours.

EXETER STEW.

1 lb. neck or shin of beef.
2 sliced onions.
1 oz. dripping.
1 tablespoonful flour.
1 tablespoonful vinegar.
1½ pints water.

METHOD.—
1. Make the dripping hot in the saucepan.
2. Add the onions and fry a nice brown.
3. Sprinkle in the flour and let it brown.
4. Add the vinegar, the meat cut into equal sized pieces, and the water.
5. Keep on the lid, bring to the boil, and simmer till tender, about 3 to 4 hours.

NOTES

Cake Mixtures

Plain Cakes — Rubbing in method - ½ to ¾ milk with egg
Rich Cakes — Creaming method - ½ to ¾ eggs + milk
Sponge Cake — Sponge mixture - wt. of eggs in sugar, fat + flour

Queen Cakes (Creaming)	Rock Cakes (Rubbing in)
4oz flour	4oz flour
2 oz fat	1½ oz fat
2oz sugar	1½ oz sugar
1oz sultanas or 1 dessert spoon of cocoa	milk
1 egg + milk	pinch salt
pinch salt	

Figure 8: Extracts from Margaret Cleave's cookery notebook, c. 1928 (Crediton High School for Girls), with its recipe for Exeter stew (left) and notes on cake making. These are typical examples of practical recipes and instructions.

[35] G. Blachford, *A History of Handicraft Teaching* (Chatto and Windus (Educational) Ltd., 1961), p. 99.

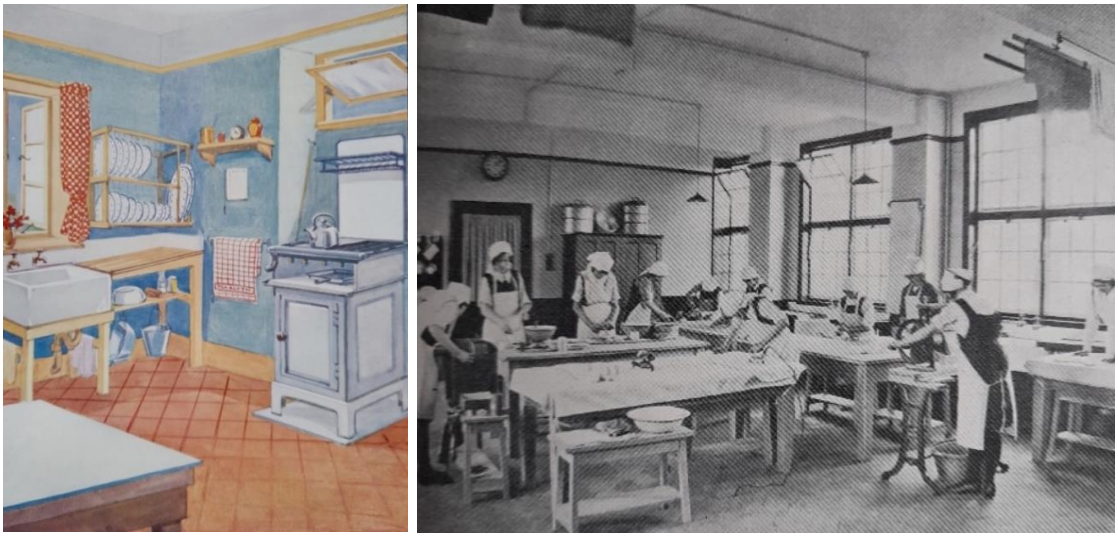


Figure 9: A 'light and airy' model kitchen of the 1920s with its gas cooker, and a domestic science classroom attributed to Devon Education Committee.[36]

Photographs as a resource

Photographs – whether informal snapshots or those taken in a studio – are a rich resource of people, places and events. Examples from photograph albums and private collections provide informal and spontaneous snapshots, a record of daily life and events, for example, visits to Devon resorts, a seaside outing, a schoolboy's visit to Exeter Cathedral or a formal studio portrait. As we look at the images today, they tell us much about the dress, fashions and etiquette of the period, for example wearing hats, smoking or casual seaside attire.

Photography became an affordable hobby for some. Enterprising local photographers, for example Chapman of Dawlish, captured the local and topographical on postcards. Henry Wykes, Chandler's in Exeter, and numerous commercial studios throughout Devon were important in recording people, events and celebrations. Their legacy is a visual record of life in the 1920s, and the narrative of photographic postcards and photographs presents life captured at a point in time. This is a valuable resource, later used in the work of Jackie Sarsby[37] and James and Robin Ravilious[38] in recording life in a changing Devon.

[36] N. Peake, *The Domestic Science Handbooks, Vol III – Housewifery* (New Era Publishing Co. Ltd., c. 1928).
[37] J. Sarsby, *A Dartmoor Farmer, His Daughters, and His Diary* (The Rothersfield Press, 2018).
[38] J. and R. Ravilious, *The Heart of the Country* (Scolar Press, 1980).

Snapshots of life in 1920s Devon: photographs from author's collection

Reflecting on life in Devon in the 1920s

Researching life at home in Devon in the 1920s reveals how a county well known for its agriculture, which was popular as a tourist destination, was coming to terms with modernity. Through archival records and oral histories, it is evident that for many families the 1920s were a time of hardship, but the promise of better homes and modern technologies heralded social changes. Reflections of an era enriched through personal reminiscence enhance our understanding of life a hundred years ago.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Mrs Jean Clay for permission to use family recollections of George and Lavinia, to Diana Swayne's family for permission to use The Day Before Yesterday,[39] *and Ann Corey for newspaper references to food.*

Paul Cleave, 2023/24

[39] D. Swayne, *The Day Before Yesterday* (Private circulation, 2001).