

proximity to one another. Each displayed their goods on the forefront under the canvas canopies that ensured that the produce and customers kept dry in the winter or protected from the sun in summer. The canopies had to be pulled in and out each day with the aid of a long pole with a hook in the end.

Other characters also come to mind. Mr Matthews, the cobbler who repaired shoes on the premises which is now Friends the estate agents in Villiers Road, seemed to be a very tiny man but this may have been due to the lower level of the flooring on his side of the counter! His conversation was limited because his mouth was always full of tacks which he was using to repair whatever shoes he was working on when we called in.

Mr Atkins the chimney sweep lived in Chalk Hill. This was the time before smoke free zones, and coal fires were the norm. Mum used to book a visit from Mr Atkins about once a year and much preparation was necessary beforehand! Ornaments had to be removed and surfaces cleared as this was a messy business. Mr Atkins would arrive in his van and would set about fixing a tarpaulin sheet over the fireplace before he could start work. The sheet had a hole in the center through which he pushed his cleaning rods, a number of which were screwed into one another, with the brush on one end. As soon as this was ready Peter and I would rush up the garden in time to see the brush come poking out of the top of the chimney. The soot was carted away in a large canvas sack.

Perhaps my favourite character though, was Mr King who had a nursery garden at Park House where Ian and Pat Mackay now live. I remember going along to Mr King's to buy tomatoes and cucumbers. He would take me through his greenhouses and carefully select the best fruit and pop everything into brown paper bags. The wonderful smell of the tomato plants will stay with me forever. Mr King (the late Barbara King's father) was a dear little man with a white moustache who usually wore a beret, a blue apron and hobnail boots and who always had a twinkle in his eye.

If I was ever at home on a Tuesday, perhaps in the school holidays, I would meet Mr Johnson the rent collector. He would arrive on his bicycle dressed in pinstripe trousers and a bowler hat, and it was his routine to stop at Mum's for a cup of tea and biscuits. Each Christmas he would give Peter and I half a crown - a lot of money then - and very generous of him.

There were many more shops and businesses in Oxhey Village then, W H Smith's bookshop on Chalk Hill, Mr Witty the hairdresser, and Mr Henley who repaired umbrellas from his house in Pinner Road. Others included Mr Dixey the butcher, Mr Dyson the chemist, Mr Hopcraft and Mr Hocker who each ran grocers shops, and Mr Smith who owned the newsagents at the bottom of Upper Paddock Road before Mr Barden took over.

All the shopkeepers and trades people seemed to me to be very kind and were very patient with children. I feel privileged to have been a part of those bygone days before the majority of shops were put out of business by the large supermarket chains. It is more than the shops that we have lost, but fortunately memories linger on. At least we still have the likes of Loveday's the bakers which operates in much the same format as it always did and is a reminder of the old fashioned style of shopping. Long may it survive and prosper!
