



Account of Purley on Thames

Kirtons Dairy

This article has either not yet been written or converted to PDF, so please close and return to what you were doing

J. W. Kirton & Son

By Ian Nash

My first memories of Mr. "Jack" Kirton were of him delivering milk to my Gran in Glebe Road. She would put out a cloth covered jug and milk would be measured from a small churn. Also I went down to Scrases Farm with the older boys where he was working in the dairy. He worked for Robert Saunders and this was during the war.

Just after the war, I am not sure of the date, he started on his own when Saunders sold the farm moving the business to Yew Tree Farm where he had a small dairy and an eight stall cowshed built, most work being done by the family. Before this the dairy was at the back of the cottage. For a time he was still using R. Saunders bottles later replacing them with "J W Kirton" on the same design.

His round covered most of Purley, along past Tilehurst Station then up into Tilehurst village and down Long Lane. I started going with Mr. Kirton when I was about ten years old with Albert Clark. We would be in and out of the van with the milk. The same old Austin that had come with the business now had a sign written with "J. W. Kirton & Son". My brother John helped Mrs. Kirton wash the milk bottles in the evening.

Mr. Kirton's day started in the early hours hand milking between 14 and 18 cows. They were all of different breeds and all with girls' names. There were Shorthorn, Ayrshire, Friesian, Guernsey and a Jersey - all T. T. tested once a year. He then bottled up and was ready to do the first round when we arrived about 7 am. After this round we had a nice fried breakfast, then carried on till about 5 pm stopping for lunch. Next it was off into Reading to pick up a couple of ten gallon churns from "Farmers Clean Milk Dairies" in Greyfriars Road. The day was far from finished as we still had to do the "camp" in the evening and he went milking again.

I remember walking much of the way home from Reading one thick foggy day in front of the van. It was so thick I had a job finding the correct way round Kentwood roundabout. In another thick fog we were down the "camp" and again in front of the van looking for the deep water filled pot-holes when the wheel of the van caught my leg and over I went. I had the presence of mind to shout "reverse." I was taken into one of the chalets and given a rub down and a drink but nothing was broken.

Sometimes we went to a "Thimberley & Shorlands" sale in the cattle market to buy a new cow for the herd. This was quite an experience. We also took the bull calves to market for veal in the van, holding a bucket under their tail, as they were of no use to a dairyman. Heifer calves were kept but weaned off as soon as possible. This was done by putting two fingers in the calf's mouth and getting it to suck, then gently drawing its head into a bucket of milk and water mix. They soon got the idea and mum was back in the cowshed.

The first heifer to be kept was "Daffodil" and she was spoilt coming up to you and looking for apples in your pocket. She knocked my very small brother "Joe" over but dad was there and no harm was done. Sometimes we would be taken to a Reading match at Elm Park then finished the round later.

