CHAPTER V.

Six religious houses – The New Church – The churching for women – Health Warnings – Boer War - Social mores – The workhouse – The General Strike – Tobacco smoking – Saving the rent – Managing the economy – Social order.

In close proximity, there were six religious houses in and around Tatworth - five were non-conformist chapels; all were built roughly within a generation of each other. In the first half of the nineteenth century, there were four lace mills in Chard and one in South Chard, busy producing lace [bobbin net] - using new technologies; the town was expanding. The generous act of Lord Poulett - donating land in Tatworth, enabled St Johns Church to be built - it was the last one; it is interesting to speculate how many others would have been built if that had been first? There is little doubt that the surrounding villages to Chard were developed rural hamlets and their inhabitants were poor - closely allied to the land… The hardships of their lives – low wages and large families, ensured they would stay so. Children were brought up strictly and ridged moral values preached. They were Christian if not always chapelgoers. Politically, the majority were radicals [extreme Liberals] – chartists and non-conformists - protestant dissenters who did not accept the views of the Established Church.

Even if the family were not frequent visitors to chapel or church, they accepted the accepted doctrine taught – about duty and honour. The older generation spoke about 'one's place' in the order of things. The gentry were offered as examples of 'the right way to do things' – manners, habits, language and decorum. The Socialist Party and Trades Union were coming into being. The class structure clear in the country but confused in town. In the large houses and estates, snobbery ruled the different jobs.

This period, approximately covers Victoria's reign, and the industrialization of Britain - had an enormous effect on its citizens. Once begun had a knock-on effect prompting great scientific advances in almost every field. These created enormous building projects. Young people left the land to seek work in towns and cities, which demanded the building of houses and factories. As with all expanding societies, there were at the bottom an enormous number of poor, sick and handicapped people. The impetus of the expansion declined about the time of the second Boer War – about the turn of the nineteenth century.

As with all village or town life, you were either church or chapel; and usually the parents dictated this choice - if the parents did not attend one or other of them then their children might attend one of the Sunday schools. Anyone who did not attend any religious institution was considered beyond the pale… neither of these mixed with the other. The congregations, fetes, days out, celebrations and high days and holidays were spent apart. Both services had their own procedures – equally strict. Each regulated outside the village or town by their institutions – with their books, hymnals, collect for the day and flags.

Those of Tatworth who were Church of England had to face the journey to St Mary's of Chard to attend church. It had been a sore point for many years. Here they were the worshipers of the national religion having to put up with having to go all the way to Chard or else go to a non-conformist chapel. In 1827 a meeting had been arrange in the vestry to iron out the problem of too little seating. The unanimous conclusion was to have built a gallery. However, although this built it still did not meet the needs of the Tatworth parishioners. A further meeting found support for a mission chapel to be built, to accommodate all the Anglicans in Tatworth. The lord of the manor, Earl Poulett contributed a quarter of an acre of land and all the necessary stone for the structure plus fifty pounds. The Langdon family of Parrocks Lodge presented the east and south windows,

both to honour his family. The building was designed by Mr Pinch of Bath in the Early English style and cost £1,400, and the builder, Davis of Langport - created the building of local stone.

The foundation stone was laid in June, the year of grace for The Great Exhibition in 1851. The building was finished the following September to be consecrated by the bishop of Jamaica, who stood in for the bishop of the Diocese who was ill. At the ceremony, the congregation witnessed the chapel's first baptism. Just over eighty years later I too was baptised there only by then the chapel had become a church, and fully furnished.

The start of the consecration began when the bishop and accompanying clergy - and Tatworth's principle inhabitants, in procession from Tatworth Manor Farm, led all the assembled signatories. It was a grand occasion as they all filed into the church there met by the assembled congregation turning in their pews to welcome the notables in. Some of the congregation could not be accommodated the crowd was so enormous. They formed an aisle outside the great west door. After the service the bishop and those in the procession returned to Manor farm to be served with liberal refreshments

In 1860 John Payne , the lace mill proprietor presented an organ, and thirty years later Stuart King, the then vicar, carved a set of reredos and lectern which he kindly made and installed.

By an Order of the Church Council in 1866 a new ecclesiastical district was formed which created Tatworth Parish, a parish now of 1552 acres and a population of 852 souls. The mother church of Chard retained the right to nominate each new vicar who in 1851 was that vicar's son, Henry Bell Thompson who had been curate-in-charge of the mission chapel. In 1890, the church was called to attend to the funeral of the king of the gypsies, which was to become an annual service of remembrance, which was always well attended.

The village was served by the vicar whose first job was to gather about him his church committee then start the Sunday school. Depending on his authority, he controlled the type of service… in conjunction with the organist, or choirmaster.

The Vicar, tried to make the morning service as popular as possible but jobs in the home and farm prevented a large gathering. The local gentry did attend matins, which may explain why there were so few workers. However, communion, for the confirmed, was straight after matins or morning service. Occasionally there would be an afternoon service if there was a christening or Mother's Day service. If those were not laid on, Evensong was at 6pm. The church was lit by oil lamps, which gave the interior a warm glow even on the coldest night. The flickering candles on the altar made a focusing point for the congregation.

After the service, the congregation stepped out of the church into the blackness with the cheery glow behind them. There was no traffic to worry about so the various families could make their own way home all walking in different directions calling out their 'goodnights'. There was no fear that anything dangerous was going to happen – it never did. Everyone hurried home to get out of the cold.

Towards the end of the expansionist period there was an immediate increase in family size, which created a population explosion. Churches and chapels benefited - their congregations increased. This religious fervour continued right up to the First World War. The horrors of that campaign were felt all over Britain, and certainly by the county battalions. When the war was over there were fewer men left and for those that were many had lost their faith. The many single parents that were available to go to church were trying to bring up a family - lacked time and energy. The numbers attending church or chapel never returned to pre-war levels.

Families usually sat in the same pew. The congregation entered the church to kneel down to say their prayers for forgiveness - for any wrongdoing, before the service began. The collect for the day, or the days psalm, gone over in one's mind… and no one spoke. The service was known by heart as were the hymns… the sermon, always long and boring… the collection, a period of

coughing and movement. It was forever the same… the Langdon's windows reflecting the spluttering candlelight and the decorated altar the only piece of colour. Fortunately, the heating managed by the sexton took the chill off the inside or it would have been most uncomfortable.

In the summer, it was usual for families to visit each other in rotation after the evening meal, which on a Sunday was the main roast of the week. The older folk would 'sit out the front' and converse with passers by.

A special service was said for 'The Churching for Women'. After having baby women would go to the church and the vicar would read the service, which would cleanse her – release her from sin.

At about the age of twelve children were confirmed, after which they could attend communion services. For several weeks the candidates would attend classes one evening a week. They had to memorise and recite the Ten Commandments, The Creed, The Catechism, The Lord's Prayer and various other psalms and collects depending on the vicar in charge. At the ceremony, the girls had to wear long white dresses, white shoes and veils. Boys wore their best school uniform. Each awarded a prayer book or hymnal.

Modesty was considered an essential part of life. Sex was never referred to, parts of the body not discussed, child birth a total mystery, climax had something to do with a car or fire pump, menstruation, even to women, a necessary evil, but nobody could quite explain why, masturbation made you blind and the Marquis d'Sade, all you could expect from a foreigner.

The picture commonly painted by artists of 'rural idyll' shows a quaint timber framed cottage, with unruly thatch, chickens running about, children playing with a kitten and mother sitting on a stool outside the front porch with her lace pillow. The colours were clean; the light bright and there was not a scar to be seen. It was a picture of bucolic calm - gracing many greeting cards. It was not like that at all. Most cottages were either converted hovels, rows of terraced factory homes or estate houses. They were not owned by the inhabitant but rented. Mains water was piped to the village in the thirties and electricity some years later and main sewers, some time after that. All had deficiencies relating to construction, few had any damp course, most were damp and many leaked. The community existed by 'following dear old dad' - there was little place for individual action or free thought… for, what is good enough for me is good enough for you. The dress code, hairstyle, meals, habits and pastimes, 'as they had always been' – predictable; anyone who deviated not accepted – a bit of a cad.

It was little wonder that there were many undernourished and sickly children in Tatworth village. Large families, little money coming in, and damp, draughty unsanitary homes, were bound to lead to colds and influenza. Chilblains in the winter sun-stoke in the summer and little understanding about personal hygiene all contributed to a poor physique. No one understood about the need for balanced meals and clean water. There were no inoculations or advertised health warnings. Hospitals if visited had to be paid for. If the family had previously paid into a penny a week health club or hospital scheme, then it was free. It was common for young children to have chicken pox, measles and whooping cough and cases of diphtheria and scarlet fever were rare. TB and glandular fever feared, whilst rickets and blindness not unheard of.

My grandmother had a number of stillborn children that needed to be baptized before burial. It was not unusual for pregnant girls to commit suicide rather than face the disgrace of being a single mother. Divorce was unheard of, not that many wished they could. The main reason for women not wanting a divorce was that the courts found in favour of the man - they retained custody, the home and all possessions. For men it was the shame and the cost. The main reason for discontent was the husband's drinking, leading to physical assault.

What made life at Rosalie Cottage so different was Rosa's ridged rules of behaviour - which she demanded from her children. The were few crisis, life was structured along tried and tested

paths. It may have been boring for nothing upset the ordered existence, but it was most certainly predictable – calm and ordered.

The society, prior to the turn of the nineteen-fifties, was disciplined. The majority lived by the law, the property owner and the employer. Over all would be the rules set out in the bible. Shame, honour, duty and integrity were qualities set out by parents, by example, the school – usually by motto, and church or chapel - by sermon. As most other people followed the same dictum, the qualities were reinforced.

All men wore a hat or cap summer or winter, it was the mark of a freeman - considered an essential part of daily dress. Women too put on a hat or bonnet when going out, wore gloves and did not think of attending church or chapel without wearing stockings. Men doffed their hats: when meeting a woman in the street, for prayers, Armistice Day parade, the National Anthem played or when a funeral cortege passed by… A death in the village was accorded closed windows, drawn curtains and black armbands. My father insisted that my brother and I should raise our caps to neighbours, their friends and elderly relatives. This ended very quickly when we copied our friends and stopped wearing caps… but even then, we had to touch our forelocks. Eventually, even this mark of respect died out during the early part of the war… it was then that society changed - to be less formal; this was certainly so with our Victorian upbringing.

It was an ordered society where anything out of the ordinary feared. This was never more so than for the handicapped that were treated as odd, sometimes ridiculed and certainly not considered. Many at the turn of the century confined to the workhouse or mental institution. For caring parents of such children it was extremely difficult, for the state provided no help.

The majority who went out to work understood that no attendance meant no pay and even if one attended - if for some reason work could not be done, payment would be stopped. Rain would only stop work if the animal could not operate properly. Thankfully there was always maintenance in the barn or outhouse to tide one over and if necessary using the flail to produce chicken feed. In times when no money came in a loan could be arranged from the tally man or produce bought 'on tick'. Everyone used cash even the employer who paid weekly. It was considered a disgrace to be in debt and 'saving up' was the order of the day. Most homes had a number of tins where money was put for each article of expense – so much for the for the paraffin, the weekly shopping, the butcher and baker; the coalman and the rent. There was a good deal of swapping between the tins!

Individuals were extremely independent, especially my grandfather who would not accept charity in any guise. There were no social services or welfare relief other than a merger amount for the weekly insurance man there was nothing for a rainy day. Anyone too old or feeble ended up in the workhouse, if the family could not look after them. Workhouse inmates were expected to do some work in the cookhouse, laundry, or garden. If too infirm, put into a special sickroom where the fittest fed the others. Because travelling was difficult, the inmates rarely had visitors, which made life that of a prisoner.

Chard had the nearest workhouse which was divided in casual and residential sections - casual for vagrants, usually ex-soldiers – some shell-shocked, who moved from place to place chopping wood for each before moving on. Residential, were long-term inmates, some children reared by the workhouse, other orphans, others pregnant – who had been thrown out of their home. The workhouse children were found work when they came of age others apprenticed or joined the services. The workhouse was provided with money from the rates, by donation or by benefaction. Life was hard not just, because money was short but by intent. It was considered that to earn ones keep was essential and that the harder life was the faster inmates made progress to leave – to make room for others.

During the depression – between The General Strike and rearmament for the Second World War - in the early thirties, large number of unemployed and displaced men roamed the countryside

looking for work. They often slept in barns or outhouses and begged house to house. They were not abusive but filled with sorrow that they had nowhere to go.

In the early twentieth century most men smoked – it was considered unmanly not to; the whole action of: buying, unwrapping, lighting-up, holding, expelling, stubbing out and conversing, was part of society – even part of the social graces. In some cases, buying tobacco considered more important than buying food. Cigarettes and tobacco was issued to the services, they were used as barter, often as contraband or a bribe. The smell was considered sexy, masculine, homely and calming. Children collected cigarette cards and mounted them in books provided by the tobacco companies. They swapped them, stole them, collected the stubs, and made them. No male wishing to ingratiate himself, enter into a group, start a conversation or feel at ease shunned the use of his cigarette case. It was part of life - promoted, advertised, issued and welcomed.