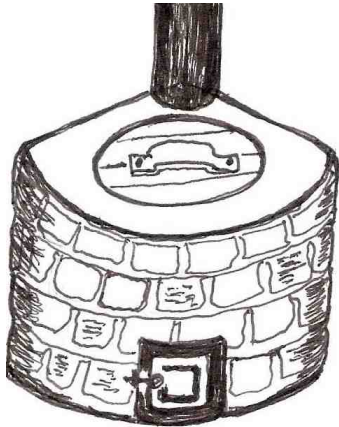


Glemsford Station House

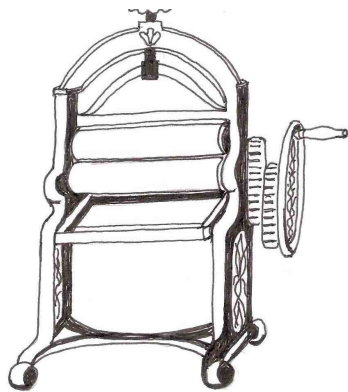
Keeping clean; keeping amused by Celia Hall

Doing the washing



Once again this was a laborious process. It was hot and steamy and took a whole day to carry out. The brick-built washhouse, where this took place, was across our small back yard, opposite our back door. Inside was another kitchen range and in one corner a brick-built copper (a large metal bowl contained within the brickwork and covered by a wooden lid) with a fire grate underneath. Early on Monday mornings the copper was filled with water from the kitchen pump and a fire lit in the grate below. It took an age for the water to heat up enough to put in the bed sheets, towel, shirts, etc. and the soap powder. Then they had to be left to boil for a time, giving them a stir occasionally with a wooden copper-stick.

Ironing



Next, the washing had to be rinsed in a tin bath and squeezed between the rollers of a mangle to get out as much water as possible before pegging it all out on the washing line in the goods yard. This was, of course, only possible in good weather. If the weather was bad, then we had damp washing hanging in various rooms for days.

Our other clothes, woollen jumpers, etc. had to be washed by hand. My mother used to complain about her wrists aching from trying to squeeze out the rinsing water; they couldn't be put through the mangle because it would have stretched them out of shape.



This was done using heavy flat irons that had to be heated up on the kitchen range, then slipped into smooth, shiny metal 'shoes' that would slide over the clothes without damaging them. My mother had a system whereby one iron would be heating on the range while she was using another. When this iron cooled down, she would swap them over, and so on. There was no ironing board, just a blanket folded on the table to iron on. It was my job to iron the handkerchiefs but I found the weight of the iron hard to cope with.

Cleaning the house

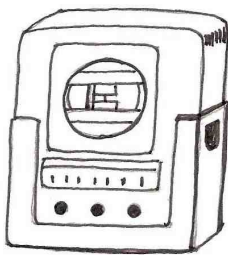
This involved brushes, brooms, mops and 'hands and knees' washing of floors. Rugs were taken outside and thrown over the washing line to have the dust beaten out of them. I was in charge of polishing the brass doorknobs everywhere, the brass fender around the range and the cutlery. I was also meant to polish the furniture, but the smell of the polish made me faint the first time I tried, so I wasn't expected to do it again... (Really!) And when my mother did it instead, I had to keep out of the room until the smell had disappeared.

As for the lavatory

This was a large, windowless shed made from railway sleepers. We reached it by going into our back yard, then through the woodshed to the right of our back door. At the far end of the lavatory shed was a wooden box with a hole in the middle. This box stretched across the width of the shed. Underneath the hole there was a bucket that one of the porters took out every Saturday morning in order to bury the contents in the ground to one side of the orchard – somewhere that I avoided!

I could never understand why we had this primitive arrangement when there was a flush lavatory off the waiting room on the station. All my mother could do was to scrub the box vigorously and try to make it as pleasant as possible.

Our entertainment



This came from the wireless that stood in the corner between the range and my father's armchair. At teatime, when my father was still on the station, I would climb into his chair and listen to Children's Hour with Uncle Mac. I enjoyed items such as Toy Town and the Norman and Henry Bones mysteries, Biggles, Ballet Shoes and Swallows and Amazons. Later, when my brother came home, I would move over to the chaise longue under the window and he would sit in my father's chair to listen to Dick Barton and Paul Temple. In the evening, my father reclaimed his chair to listen to news bulletins and Henry Hall's Guest Night. In the meantime my mother continued her chores until she could sit down to listen in her chair on the opposite side of the range. But even then she was busy knitting, sewing and mending our clothes.

The wireless also demanded a great deal of care. It was powered by things called accumulators, heavy objects that apparently had to be recharged at intervals. When they ran down, my father took them out and replaced them with newly charged ones, then disappeared on his bicycle to have the dead ones recharged and bring them back home in readiness for the next 'swap time'. Large valves also had to be checked and replaced if necessary. It was all just a mystery to me.

In retrospect

It was not an easy house to live in, particularly in winter when the insides of the window panes froze into intricate patterns and draughts whipped under the doors so that when we sat before the range our backs shivered as our legs scorched.

But we remained relatively healthy – I resisted the childhood illnesses that my friends suffered, to the amazement of other mothers in the village, and have since sailed through power cuts, shortages and other trials thanks to the resilience that the station house gave me.