

Fred Greenway – shopkeeper, poet and property developer. Ewelme News, Mar-April 2022

In newly discovered documents by Fred Greenway, a former shopkeeper and sub-postmaster, is his report of another ‘raid’ which occurred circa 1950 at the same premises. Fred encountered a band of young ‘desperados’ trying their luck. His account, which may raise a smile, (especially to those of us of a certain age) is titled

‘Gangsters prefer balloons!’

“I came across a group of small boys excitedly jumping about and making curious noises outside the door of the village post office. They seemed to ignore my presence and continued a kind of what they considered, ‘small arms fire’ rat-a-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat! Each was ‘armed’ with a cap pistol, but none of them had any caps left! After a breathless burst of this make believe ‘fire’ one of the gang would try the door, and seemed surprised that the lock held.

I enquired in a detached way; what they were doing, and Pat [Harwood], who seemed to be the leader, replied - ‘Blowing this lock off!’ This seemed a pretty grim business and I cautiously asked ‘Why?’ Pat gave me a scornful look appalled at such ignorance. It seemed incomprehensible to him that anyone could be so innocent as not to recognise a real Post Office hold up.

‘Why’ I repeated, ‘do you want to blow the lock off?’ ‘Why?’ replied Pat impatiently, dismissing the question. ‘To get at all that money of course!’ James Busby, who never misses Sunday School, sensed that this reply did not adequately describe the desperate nature of their plans, for covering me with his water pistol, he said to Pat – ‘Never mind about that old money ... let’s get some of them balloons!’”



Fred Greenway outside his store in The Street.

Fred Greenway, (1901-1971) was born in Minehead and moved to Ewelme in 1935 from Woodstock (where he ran a shop) with his first wife Constance (1888-1948). Fred initially ran Ewelme's main grocery store and post office (now Quiet Waters), situated in the High Street. It was originally built by the Howells (Robert Howell was recorded in 1863 as being grocer, draper and postmaster and was still working in 1901 aged 72 with son William. Cyril Howell subsequently built Ewelme garage next door). Fred quickly became a central character in village life and his store was described as a 'miniature Fortnum & Masons'.



Wartime photograph of Fred Green with some of the village children.

When war came, Fred converted the disused Wesleyan Chapel (the present village shop) to store emergency food supplies as he was put in charge of rations linking with the NAAFI at RAF Benson. In 1942 he opened, and ran for decades, a sub-post office known as Clay Lane Post Office at RAF Benson to cater for Service personnel and their families and was featured in an article in the RAF Benson Beacon in March 1966. When the High Street store was taken over by International Stores and run by the Johnson's, Fred converted the Wesleyan Chapel to a store and post office. In addition to his jobs as a shopkeeper and running two post offices, Fred was also a property restorer. He renovated a former shop/bakery at what is now Kings Pool House; and he converted the upper floor flat at the Wesleyan Chapel. He renovated the almost derelict 'Brownings' and lastly lived in his renovated cottage at Lower End.

Fred's love of Ewelme was reflected in his essays on local life and characters. His archive contains informative documents, (particularly his account of the war years '*Ewelme – One More Page*') and contains several historical playlets and poems - reflecting his romantic view of history and nature. In an entry in the Ewelme News a year ago regarding 'War Dogs' we related that Fred apparently unsuccessfully offered his Labrador Marco for war service in the summer 1941. Marco appears to have been the successor to a former dog Major, as we found a moving eulogy for Major dated 23rd

September 1940 dedicated to Fred's wife Constance. There are many dog owners in Ewelme who have experienced the pain of losing a beloved pet who may appreciate the sentiments expressed in Fred's poem.

Major, A Dog

*I'm growing old and the light is fading, treat me gently and hold me near.
Your gentle hand, my way restraining, and your love'd voice to calm my fear.
Soon I must go on that lone journey, to the solitude of the great unknown,
And when for me, there dawns that morning, don't call me back, I must travel alone.
But on that morning, I shall know my way, for the tender'st Voice will call my name,
And perhaps, like yours, His Voice will say "Look! I called old Major, and he came."*

Ewelme Village Archive