

## From Sages to The Grain Dryer

While it is certainly true that the farms are the oldest businesses in the area, I think this one probably comes a close second. The business of "Corn and General Merchant" was started at some time in the early 1930s by Bill Anstey in the 'elephant' barn (That's a story for another day!) behind Sages in the middle of Dolton. The lorries must have been much smaller then to get in and out of the narrow entrance.

By the end of 1948, with Bill well into his 70s and his health failing, it was time to hand over the reins. He had just one daughter, who was not involved in the business, so he sold it to his nephew, who was already working for him, and thus, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949 the business of H J Ward began. Many will not know that there were petrol pumps at Sages, it was one of 3 petrol stations within the village, plus the one at Dolton Beacon (There were others nearby in Iddesleigh, Ashreigney and elsewhere too!)

It wasn't long before the constraints of Sages made it necessary to move out, so on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1951 the business moved up to the site of the former grain dryer at Dolton Beacon. A dryer had been run by the War Agricultural Committee (WarAg) to dry corn for the war effort and was still there and still in use for several years after. Here was a large yard with more room for coal etc.

The old Nissen hut is (thankfully) a distant memory and it has been replaced with new spacious buildings with room to store a vast array, not just of corn and animal feeds for agricultural customers but also feeds for pet owners, plus they also now stock a much wider range of products, many of which Bill Anstey would probably never have heard of back in the dim and distant past.

Jim Ward was to be found at Dolton Beacon 6 days a week, often until 9pm or 10pm, running the business well past its half centenary. He passed away in 2011 just short of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, but the business is still on the same site run by two of his sons, Martyn and Andrew.

I doubt there has ever been an edition of the Diary that has not contained an advert for this business.

**Happy 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to H J Ward Agriculture for the start of 2019  
Long may it continue.**