Arthur Shering - Early Memories

I was born on 4 April 1933 and I am going to record the earliest memories of my life while I was at school until I was about 15.

My father was Jesse James Shering and was born on 9-12-1899. My mother was Elsie Agnes Shering born on 10 June 1903. They married at Alderholt church on 9 Feb 1928. At the time of their marriage my mother was living at Hawk hill farm, Alderholt, and my father was at North Allenford farm, Martin.

It was (I assume) in 1928 after they were married they moved to Drove End Farm, Martin, where I was born on 4-4-1933. My parents had five children; Mabel who was born in 1930, Lesley who was born 1931, Myself born in 1933, Frederick was born 1938 and Ronald was born 1943.

My parents owned Drove End Farm, which was a small farm of about 30 acres, but during the war it was reduced to 18 acres or so. On the farm they kept 3 cows, one horse and poultry and to help out with money Father went threshing or did other casual farm work to feed us all.

Our home was basically a small cottage, slated roof with 2 and 1/2 bedrooms. Downstairs we had the sitting room, a room we called the dairy and a kitchen. Besides the kitchen was a lean to shack which we used to call the scullery where mother boiled the clothes for washing and most of the work went on in there. There were no modern conveniences; the toilet was a primitive little brick house about 20 yards away in the garden. Obviously it was a bucket toilet which had to be emptied as and when required. For cooking mother had an old fashioned grate, which we would start with kindling wood and a bit of coal and most of the cooking was done there. The only backup was the oil stove, which could take a long time to boil a kettle, never mind anything else. Lighting was done by candles and oil lamps. Our water supply was rainwater off the house and we had a well, which was about 100 foot down, and we drew up well-water using a bucket for the house and general purpose. In summer when the rainwater was running out we had to draw water to feed the cattle, horse and poultry.

One of my earliest memories which would have been 1938-39, was the horse artillery who stayed overnight in the field opposite us at the Coote Arms. For Les, Mabel and myself it was a time of excitement to see the horses and soldiers staying out front over night. The next morning they would pull out to travel on from Salisbury plain to Bovington camp as I understand.

We had a varied life at home because as soon as you were old enough you had to do chores and work. By the time we were 8 years old we knew how to milk a cow, feed the calves, feed the chickens, collect the eggs. It was just routine work to us. It was important to help with the gardening, it was important to provide our own food. Mabel and Les had already started school at Martin, when I started being 5 years old, in 1938. For the first 6 months I would walk 1 1/2 miles to school in Martin from Drove End. School used to start at 9 AM; we would take sandwiches for lunchtime. We would come out of school at about 4 PM and go home. By the time I started school Mabel and Les were cycling to school, so it did not take me long to get a bicycle and learn to ride to school. Martin school -pre war- had about 60-70 children from the age of 5 to 14. There were two teachers when I went there, a Miss Saunders who was the junior teacher and taught the 5-9 year olds and Mrs Pridoch who was very nice but a disciplinarian. She would take us on from 10-14 years.

Numbers were greatly increased after the outbreak of war; about 60 evacuee children from Portsmouth were brought to the village to live. They stayed with various families who could take children; this was to get them away from the bombing. They brought with them their own two school masters and they taught those children in the Blandford hall to start with, but were soon amalgamated with the local children. It was quite an awakening when they arrived. As country children we were probably better behaved and more disciplined. They were a bit different, we had to put up with the bullying in the early years but we sorted that out in due course.

It was a Church of England elementary school and the vicar would come and attend once a week for religion. My parents were Church of England, but we went to the Methodist Sunday school because the chapel was closer to our home in Martin. This was every Sunday afternoon, 2:30-3:30. We quite enjoyed that; also we would have an outing to the seaside during summer holidays using Mr M. Flemington's village bus or a Handley Victory tour bus. That would be a good day out, just the children and some of the parents. That is when we went a little further afield and enjoyed it, but during the war it was not possible so we would go to Paradise Farm or Martin Down by horse and wagon to have a picnic and have games up there. Life was pretty quiet in the country and everything moved at the pace of horses and agriculture, but as we were living at the crossroads on the main road from Salisbury to Blandford we would see more going on, when war came we would see large and small convoys moving around.

Grimsditch camp was built in 1939-1940. We would see the troops on manoeuvres and also the troops coming to the pub. Two things I remember very well was that one time Mother took Mabel, Les, Myself

and Pamela Bath (whose parents owned the Coote Arms) to Hut farm to pick mushrooms. It was a good area for mushrooms, because it had not seen the plough, but unfortunately a load of gypsies came along and kicked the basket of mushrooms out of my mother's arm. The gypsies said it was theirs and they had the right to them; in the end we did not get the mushrooms. As children we were very upset.

The second thing was when Mr Ted Bath, the owner of the Coote Arms, at harvest time had two corn ricks on the right going down past the Coote Arms and a tramp came up from Martin, stole a piece of rope from there and went up to Vernditch bottom and hung himself there. We did not actually see the body, but the shepherd, Dick Jeans and Ted Bath went up with the horse and cart and brought the body down. They laid the body out in the granary for the police to deal with.

During the early war years, up to 1943, we had periods at night when the German bombers would come over and during the day we would see 'dog fights' or such things happening, spitfires and hurricanes chase off the bombers. A lot was going on, at Woodyates there was an anti aircraft gun, barrage balloon and searchlight stationed. Also on Windmill Hill there was stationed a searchlight and anti-aircraft guns.

After the army had moved into Grimsditch camp the rifle range was built at the top end of Martin down which was used by the army and various home guards. My father belonged to the Martin home guard, of which there were about 35; most of them were ex service men having been through the 1914-18 war. They did various guard duties, some nights on bridges and various places, so every one got involved in the war. We knew more about the war because of where we lived we would see the convoys of troops come by. Much more so in 1944 in the build up before D-Day.

In 1943 mum was pregnant with my younger brother Ronald and I was farmed out to go to my gran at Hawk Hill Farm. There lived my grandfather and grandmother with my Auntie Ethel and Uncle Cecil who was obviously doing the farm work. We used to visit Hawk Hill Farm about twice every summer to visit the grand parents. We would go down in the morning on our bikes and come back in the evening; it was a grand day out for us.
I did not have much choice about going to live with my grandparents, I was told to go to Hawk Hill farm and that was where I went. It was quite an experience for me because at the age of 10 years I started at Damerham school. I had to walk a mile and a half across the fields to school. Up through the meadows, up to Butler's farm, which was just a footpath, and through the back of Damerham to the school. I did not mind; the only thing was that when I was not at school I did a lot of work

at Hawk Hill farm helping Uncle Cecil. The only good thing there was that they had a radio, which we did not have at home. I was always interested what was going on during the war and listened to the news reports, like most people did, either through news paper but mostly through radio. I well remember Mr Winston Churchill's speeches; he was quite a man.

In 1944 mum had come down with Les and Mabel and I had kicked up a fuss, I wanted to go home because I was missing company and missing Les. They let me come home and I returned to Drove End, which raised another problem as we only had 2 and 1/2 bedrooms so Les and I shared the double room, Mabel had the single room and Mum and Dad used the main bedroom. So when Fred come along there were three boys in one bedroom and it was a little bit crowded. I come home on the Sunday and when I come home on the Monday from school at Martin, Mum told me to put my working boots on and I went over to work for Mr Ted Bath as and when required. Which meant that for the next five years I worked most evenings, weekends and eventually I had to help in the mornings milking the cows. For about four years I milked three cows before I went to school and when I come back. On the first Monday I went there I had to lead a horse to hoe cabbages in about a three-acre field. All hoeing had to be done by hand or by a horse pulling a horse hoe. That was not always as pleasant as it sounded because the ground can be knobbly or stoney and if you were not careful the horse could step on your foot. Hoeing by hand was a rather boring backbreaking job but we all had to do that. The only time when I did not work was Sunday afternoon. I worked mornings, evenings, weekends and school holidays until I left school at the age of 15.

On the Coote Farm, which was about 200-250 acres, he had two horses, one Allis Chalmer tractor and one Fordson Tractor. That was in the latter 1940s. He milked between 15 and 20 cows; he also had a flock of about 200 sheep. It was mixed farming and organic as all farms were in those days. The farm workers that I most remember was Dick Jeans, the shepherd, he had served in the 1914-1918 war and went through the battle of the Somme. He had seen something. Then there was Harry Stacey who joined the army at the age of 16 and served in France until the end of the war. Bill Kerley was in his forties, he was the carter and had not served in the services, but was in the home guard.
There was also a lot of casual labour, doing hoeing, haymaking, harvest and then of course potato picking. Potatoes and mangels were put into clamps and covered with straw. During harvest time, when I was about 10 or 12, I would be leading a horse and soon learned to drive the Allis Chalmer tractor. There were converted wagons with a draw bar in stead of shafts. During harvest time there would be a tractor with a two-wheel trailer and converted wagon. If I were lucky I would drive the tractor or

lead the horse, but also help load the sheaves on the wagon or trailer. By the time I was 13 I was doing a man's work.

The Gimsditch army camp, which was partly on Swaynes Firs land where I live now, was an encampment with pre-fab huts and some Nissan huts. There were about 2000-3000 troops stationed here. The Canadians were the first to be at Grimsditch camp, after that it was the British recognisance corps.

In 1944 the American troops come, or the GIs as we called them. Life took on a different pace then, obviously the war was slightly starting to turn in our favour. There was a great build up then prior to 1944 and D-Day. I think the Americans had an armoured engineering unit here and they would be training in the area, on the rifle ranges, Martin Down, all around. We got to know a lot of the young Americans. The Coote Arms was such a lively pub back then. In the evening the troops and people of the area, including young ladies, would come to the Coote. There was a war on and people lived for the day as tomorrow might not come. Until D-Day there was a lot of troops in the area and many convoys would come by. It was nothing at that time to see a convoy of a hundred vehicles come by. There were no signposts, so dispatch riders would leap frog the convoys to make sure they went in the right direction.
There were also manoeuvres and training going on all around us. On two occasions there were tanks and guns set up in our orchard and quite often a machine gun set up by troops on our lawn to cover the cross roads when on exercises. On some occasions in 1944 the American troops would do route marches from Grimsditch Camp all around Coombe Bissett along the chalke valley and down from Broad Chalke to the Drovend Cross roads. There would be a few hundred and some of the less fit would be lagging behind and have to be collected and put in the ambulances who followed along behind, as they had full kit and rifles to carry it was tough training for them.

As far as the airforce was concerned, from 1942 onwards we saw the large formations of our bombers flying to Germany, The British had Wellingtons and Lancaster Bombers. When the Americans came over we had the Flying Fortresses. There were airfields around, one near Fordingbridge at Ibsley, a large one at Tarrant Rushdon in Dorset.

While I was at school in Damerham in 1943 there was a Lancaster bomber, which crash-landed. We were out in the playground and the bomber missed the school by 200 yards and carried on for another mile to crash at Ballsbury farm. To this day I don't know what happened. It was from 1944 onwards that the Germans were not bombing so much, because they lost a lot of aircraft. They were then using flying bombs. The doodlebugs were aimed at the big cities, but often we would see them

fly over. Eventually our Ack-Ack guns and fighter planes managed to knock a lot of them out before they got to their destination. They created terrible damage and killed a lot of people. After D-Day the war turned and we could start to over run the various sites where they came from and the doodlebug's menace was stopped.

After I come back from Gran's in 1943, I started to work for Ted Bath leading the horse and milking cows, so my morning would start about 6:30 going over to the Coote Arms and I pulled the three wheel trolley taking the milk churns from the bottom to the top and then go to help in the cowshed. Milking would be done by Ted Bath himself, Bill Kerley, Harry Stacey and myself. We would milk between 15-20 cows and finish by 8 AM. Afterwards school until 4 PM. Then more work either hoeing or helping with the harvest. The hoeing of mangles or kale was done by hand, also leading the horse up and down between the rows. It was a battle to keep the weeds down. In May-June time grass would be cut, initially using two horses pulling the grass cutter, which had two blades reciprocating and cut a swathe 4-foot wide. Later they got a tractor and put a draw bar on to pull. After they cut the grass it was left to wilt for a day or two in the sun; then it would be put into rows by a horse and side rake and then manually put into pooks (small heaps) after which it was picked up by horse and wagon or tractor and wagon. Usually I would start loading it on the wagon and when there was a load, it was taken to be stacked in a rick.

After haymaking there would be a break until harvest; but not completely, other things had to be done. Mangles had to be cut out by hoe, leaving them 10 inches apart. Potatoes had to be planted by hand initially but later became more mechanised.
Harvest was a big event; part time employees coming in to help would back up the farm staff. It could be factory workers that came and helped at night, or casual workers. At harvest Bill Kerley had the work with the scythe; I would sometimes help him. He cut the field's corners out, because there was no way the tractor could get in to a corner. As the binder cut the corn into sheaves workers would follow to put the sheaves in to hiles of about 8-12 sheaves to dry out, and then be collected and put into ricks; usually in the same field. Most ricks were put in pairs, so that the threshing machines could come between and thresh the two ricks without moving.

There were two threshing machines in Martin; one owned by Fred Dibben, with sons Bert and Monty. The other by George and Jesse Poore and Steve Poore. My father would go on a few farms to help with threshing two or three times a week. Steam engines going about with treshing tackle were always a big event for us. They would go from farm to farm. Life for all of us in winter was mostly cold and wet, the house

was cold and draughty and we would put blankets up behind both doors and go to bed in pyjamas and socks plus overcoats on top of the bedclothes.
All the cows would live outside and the cow-shed would tie up 8 x cows, with a small lean-to shed which held 2 x cows which was where I had milked 3 or 4 cows every morning and evening. At least in cold weather we would get some body heat from the cows when milking.

In frosty weather there was no concrete yard, so the frozen ground was awful for the cows and humans to walk on. Anywhere that animals walk to feed or wait for milking was over 6in of mud and when it froze it became all jagged with peaks and dips so walking became dangerous for all. Feeding the sheep and cattle outside was a cold and hard job; I would go with one of the men with a horse and cart to cut and gather kale which would be about 5 foot high, first to cut with a chopping hook, load on the cart and feed to the cows in the grass fields. I still remember the extreme cold and wet as the icicles fell on you when cutting the kale and our hands would be freezing as we had no rubber gloves for protection. If there was no kale we would load up some mangolds from the clamp, along with some hay which had to be cut from the hayrick with a big cutting knife. The hay ricks were thatched so to get the hay we could start from the top and cut out about a quarter of the rick from top to bottom. The quarter would last our 20 cows about 3 weeks, we would cut and load out every day what was required.

Besides cows, there were sheep on the farm. Dick Jeans was the shepherd. Martin Down was very well grazed in those days. I was the last person living to take sheep on Martin Down and also took 'Judy' the sheep dog along. I did that during my summer holidays, because Dick Jeans, being a man, was needed to help with the harvest. I very much enjoyed that, mum would put sandwiches in for me plus a bottle of water. The sheep would also have to be fed hay as and when required during winter. Lambing time was around February and as they were all in 'Folds and Hurdles', shelter was provided by straw bales or four hurdles topped with hurdles and sheeting and straw to give the ewe and her lamb some protection from the weather. The shepherd would have his 'Shepherd's hut' near by, with his woodstove going as he would stay with them night and day during the 3-4 weeks period. Often weak lambs would be given heat and hot milk to avoid mortalities. Sometimes I would help out with lambing and from 13 years old I would help out with delivering the lambs and later on with cows calving.
Keeping warm in the cold weather was a problem, I had a US army jacket along with a jumper and two pairs of socks and rubber boots. Knitted gloves helped but not when it was wet and freezing, however hard work kept us all going.

Life for mother was very hard. Not only did she have us children to look after, but also she would look after the poultry and do the gardening on not very good soil. Les and I would help; more Les than myself as I was working for Ted Bath. On market days she would take a basket of vegetables etc. in and go to Michael and Doris' shop in Brown Street and exchange for other things. She would also do all her main shopping in Salisbury. It was an event for us to go in to Salisbury, on the double decker bus, go upstairs and watch the countryside go by.
We would have deliveries for our bread from Mr Dan Palmer from Damerham who had a bakery and would come up every Friday between 4 and 5 PM. He was very good to us kids, because he would give us a jam doughnut from the back of his van. Mother had a standing order with him for bread and groceries as we did not have a telephone and did not send letters, so she had to order a week ahead. Earlier on the Friday we would have the butcher, Clarkes of Hanley deliver the meat. Meat was rationed so he kept our ration books. We did not have fillet steak but managed to get by. We also had a Mr Palmer from Sandleheath come around; he had a travelling hardware store. He would have a lorry with canvas sides to show off his wares, but the important thing was that he sold paraffin and mother would get that from him. For lighting we had candles or an oil lamp and that was that. We also had an oil stove and eventually a Primus stove. Once a year the gypsies would come around to sell clothes pegs. The other callers we used to get were tramps. Because we were on the main road the tramps would travel from the workhouse in Salisbury to Blandford and call in. We got to know a few well. Some had bicycles, some walked. They would call in and mother always gave them water, sometimes bread.

Mother would kill old hens and young cockerels most weeks. She would do well over 50 at Christmas. A boiling hen would also be well in demand at other times of the year. I would often on the way to school deliver a chicken or eggs. Mrs Schamels would every Friday have a chicken and half a dozen eggs; she would often give me 3 pence. They were very good to me.
Christmas time at home for us was magical. Mother was busy and we would have to help plucking chickens to get the orders out before Christmas. On Christmas day there would hopefully be gifts for us. Like with all young children we would go to bed Christmas Eve, hang our stockings up. The next morning we got a few things in our stockings, but not much. Lunchtime was usually a cockerel with all the trimmings, but before that we would go to the front room. There would be a small Christmas tree in front of the window, with all the gifts in mums washing basket. Presents would be handed out, we would get a few toys, and I remember once getting a small train set. As we got older we would get clothes as opposed to toys. We would have our lunch and in the evening we would eat Christmas cake. We would not have many visitors on the

day; it did not matter as we made our own fun. After we lost our mother Christmas was never the same.

Life was not all work, winter evenings would be taken up with card games as a family, we also had a dartboard in the kitchen and Les and I would play on. Through the summer months I was very keen on football and cricket. If we finished early we would get on our bikes to Bustard Corner where the village lads would meet. If front of Bustard manor we would put sticks up or put coats down. It was not much of a football pitch, but if you got 20-30 lads together playing football until dark we would have a great time. We did not do so well for cricket, as we did not have so much flat ground. Sometimes at night Mabel and I (and sometimes Mum) would go to the whist drive at Blandford hall. I don't remember winning too often. Very occasionally there would be a man come around with a movie apparatus, very antique. That is why they called them the 'flicks'. It would not cost much to go in, maybe 6 pence and would draw quite a crowd. We would sit back and watch Roy Rogers or whoever. That was another evening and more entertaining. Another thing we did was visiting relatives. About twice in summer we visited Alderholt, going down on our bikes. Also visited our other grandmother in Elm View, East Martin. We would go there, have tea on the lawn and play games. People would also come and visit us. Uncle Burt and Uncle Joe, before they took on farming would come to visit us. Aunt Polly when on holiday at Hawk Hill would always cycled up to see us. She was a lovely aunt and I am sorry we did not see more of her.

Mr Ernie Flemington was another Coote Farm part time helper. He had a few acres. I was friends with his son, Peter. I often helped Ernie doing hedge cutting for Ted Bath. Hedge cutting in those days was very difficult, they were allowed to grow wild for 2-3 years and then you had to lay it. You had to cut out the big wood, which could be as big as your arm. Then it was axe job, saw job and hook job. You had to burn the debris; the bigger wood you would keep for firewood and the smaller stuff you would burn. The thorns were the biggest problem. After that you would lay the hedge, if it were less than 4 years old it was relatively easy, but after that it could be a problem. Sometimes the hedges were not laid and allowed to grow wild. This could be lack of time and money, but the hedges also gave shelter for the cattle.

As I think of the village, we had the Methodist chapel and next to that were two of the smallest houses in England. Jess Ingram, a 1418 veteran, liked his beer and I could only describe his wife as looking like a 'hag'. She was what she was. Jess Ingram was a hurdle maker and would go to Vernditch bottom most days. He would walk by with his tools and go to make hurdles. They were very much in demand.
The other side of the chapel lived another fellow, Freddie Beal, he was

short and always in breaches. He was never married and lived with his mom and dad. He was a spar maker. As boys we used to tease 'five spars' a bit. The spars were wanted by farmers who thatched their own ricks, or did the houses as well. We did not have specialists doing that. There was always someone on the farm who was good at thatching and they would do the ricks or the houses.
Then there were the Rhunyards. Arian Rhunyard used to keep the Roe Buck pub during the early part of the war; he then came to live at Martin with his brother Frank. They were casual labourers for Ted Bath at hoeing and harvest time.

One person who became a good friend of mine was Charlie Newman from Pentridge. He served in the RAF during the war. After the war he took a job at he rifle range, because there were still people using it. I can remember in 1939 Les and I went ferreting and rabbiting in the fields at the back of Drove End Farm; which is now Richard Baker's fields, but used to belong to Sid Bennett. It was a big day out for us to go with Charlie Newman. It was not easy in those days. If you lost your ferret in the big hedges or underground you had to dig them out. We had to catch the rabbits as they came out and ran into the nets.

Charlie Newman served in the war and he was always one of those people who could light up a room. He would go to the pub, was a very good dart player and he was a bit of a wit. In the 1980's I used to visit him in Pentridge every couple of months and take him a bottle of whiskey. Eventually the big 'C' got him and it was the last of him. I went to his funeral and that was that.

Quite a few people would come by bus to the Coote Arms. From the Woodyates direction: Again Charlie Newman who came by bus until he got his motorbike, the Peach family; Jim Peach served in the war, Bing, Jack. The Isaacs family from Pentridge; Reg and Jack Isaacs and others. From Hut Hill there were the Pritchards and a few others. From New Farm way come quite a few; the Stevens family and Ernie Gulliver who worked at Jervois Farm.

I have not mentioned too much about my father, Jesse Shering. His parents were tenant farmers at Kites Nest Farm; he was born there. He would come over Martin Down with his brothers, David and Levi to Martin school. They eventually took on North Allenford farm, again a tenanted farm. From there the 1914-1918 war came along and all three brothers served. Uncle David was in the ambulance corps. Levi served in the 1914-1918 war and was also a keen cyclist. It would be nothing for him to cycle after work to Bournemouth and back. He was very fit but died at a young age of TB. My father also served in the 1418 war, I am still trying to find out where and when, but we understand in 1917-1918

he served in the Hampshire Regiment in Ireland. It was not the most pleasant place, but better than being at Ypres or the Somme. The Coote Estate, which owned most of the farm and cottages in Martin was sold on 17th June 1920, and it is probable that my grandfather bought Elm View Farm at East Martin for Uncle David and Drove End Farm for my father Jesse.

Grandfather Charles Shering died at North Allenford on 11th January 1926 and Grandmother Mary died on 12th January 1946 at Elm View, East Martin.Auntie Francis married John Hammett, a farmer, in 1937 and moved to Somerset where she died in 1975.

In 1943 Mum was loading the wagon at harvest time, when on getting down to the ground she landed badly and twisted her knee badly, so from then on she bandaged it every day and carried on with her work regardless of the pain. My mother died on 3rd August 1947. She went in to hospital a few days before, which we were told was for appendicitis, but she never came back. Unfortunately, I never went to see her in hospital, Les, Dad and Mabel did, but I did not. I was probably afraid to go. There was a big funeral and all our aunts and relatives came, she was buried in Martin churchyard. Mabel at that time was working in London in an office as secretary. When mum died she came back to look after us. Fred was 8 or 9 and Ron was ready to start school. Mabel was unhappy to come home but she done it. She got a job in Salisbury, but did not do gardening or looking after chickens like mum did.

I got caught to do an extra year in school because the leaving age was changed in 1947, from 14 to 15 years. I left school at Easter 1948 and Mabel thought I should look for work living away from home, because living space at home was very limited. I went down to Somerset for an interview; that was the first time on a train. I met the people but did not like it, so said no and come back home. My Uncle Joe was looking for help and I went to work for him. Uncle Joe was at that time courting Dorothy, which turned out to be Auntie Dot.

Mom's brother, Uncle Joe, lived at Pennings Farm. He took the rented farm in 1942 and Les went to work for him at weekends and school holidays. When he left school at the age of 14 he worked and lived there full time. When I left school in 1948 I went to work there as well. Les and I would be up at 5:30 AM to help milk the cows and feed the calves before breakfast; after that it was general farm work until milking time again at about 4PM. Our only time off was Saturday afternoons, when we would go to Salisbury, having to walk mile and a half across the fields to catch the bus at Coombe Hill. I did not mind the work but it was hard and not a happy life. Les and I were always hungry as well.

I decided that I wanted to do something different, I did not want to see the same field every day so to get out of it I went to the recruiting office to join the Royal Navy. At 15 I could only go in as a boy seaman, so I put my name down for that. I then got a letter and had to go down to Orchard Place in Southampton for a meeting. They gave me a medical check and an education test. They said yes and that I would soon hear from them. When I told Uncle Joe he was very upset and tried to stop me, I wanted away and a change from farm work. I was sacrificing earning money, but I wanted to see more of life. I had passed both the medical and the educational tests, but some of the boys failed the tests and were in tears.
I had to have my father's permission and his signature to sign on for a 12-year engagement plus boys service, from the age of 15 to 30.
Luckily they changed the rule, so the 7 and 5 year rule came in. Seven years in the regular services and five on the reserve. The day I left I took my bike back to Drove End and had to go to Orchard place again. There we were formed into a group and were taken to Portsmouth, put into a naval truck and taken to HMS St. Vincent.

UPDATED 8 February 2010