JOHN FLEMINGTON'S MEMOIRS

Shared by kind permission of his wife, Mary.
May 2012

John Flemington

November 1993

Last year I retired from work on the 25th September 1992. I had been given the chance of early retirement, and my works pension and lump sump being just about sufficient to live on I decided we could just about manage until I received the old age State Pension at the age of sixty five.

Perhaps I should say that Mary and I decided, because without her help we could not manage, on what was about half of what we had been used to.

I remember my last day at work as if it were yesterday. It was a lovely morning as I drove to Salisbury, to the Harnham depot of Southern Electricity where I had worked as fitter in the garage for twenty six years. Most of the day was spent packing my tools and chatting to workmates and friends who kept calling in to wish me all the best for my retirement. As you can imagine it was all very emotional, and at lunchtime when there was a presentation of a farewell gift, to which all my workmates had contributed, and all who were in the yard at that time gathered in the garage, I must admit I had a lump in my throat and was rather at a loss for words, and very embarassed by the whole thing.

But you can't spend so many years at one place without making a lot of friends, and I have kept in touch with frequent visits and telephone calls. We also get quite a few callers for a cup of coffee when they are working this way. When I drove out of the works for the last time, I thought to myself that's the end of another era. I thought back to my younger days and it seems to me that all one's life is made up of a settled period and then comes a change, not always of your choice and often dictated by fate, and things out of your control. You are born into this world and are totally dependent on your parents for the first years, then comes your schooldays, and after that your teenage years of fun and freedom which you don't always appreciate at the time. A more serious period then comes to most of us when we decide on married life and setting up home of your own. In our case being of average working class, Mary and I found things rather a struggle for years.

We had four sons rather close together, and it was not until they were off our hands and settled down for themselves that Mary was able to do some of the things she had a fancy for, and was able to afford transport of her own in the form of a motor scooter at first, then later on through working part time as a nurse among other things, to enable her to afford a car.

Anyway, we are now over a year into retirement and we seem to find more and more to do, until I sometimes wonder how I ever found the time to go to work! I guess it must be that as we get older we take longer to get things

done, which in our youthful days would have taken no time at all. But I am getting away from the point, what I thought I would do after I retired, was to write a bit of a record as I remember it, of my earlier life and the things that went on then. You may not find it all that exciting, but some of your descendents may find of interest some of the things that happened to us during our lifetime on this Earth. I know I would dearly love to have some knowledge of my ancestors everyday lives, what their thoughts were, their hope for the future, and the disappointments that life often brings.

I was born on the 7th July 1929, early on a Sunday morning I am told. My parents lived at Fern Cottage, East Martin, the place of my birth, and where I lived until I was married to Mary at the age of twenty four.

It was a fair sized cottage for those days of three bedrooms, a kitchen, scullery cum larder, and a separate sitting room. But in those days and up until after the Second World War, it lacked any amenities whatsoever. No electricity, no piped water supply, just a well outside the back door. And worse still an earth closet toilet up the top of the garden, the contents of which had to be emptied on a regular basis and buried in a deep trench.

The cottage was part of a smallholding of five and a half acres, which was given to my father by grandad George Flemington as a wedding present.

Until a short time after the First World War, my father Ernest Alfred, and grandad George had been tenants of a small farm called Damers Farm in the centre of the village of Martin. Farming was not very profitable in those days, and with the depression which followed the War grandad decided to sell up. He bought a small cottage with a bit of land in the village, and kept chickens and reared a few calves, and when my Dad and Mum married they got Fern Cottage.

My mother was born Sarah Hollyman in the village of Dinton, which is about five miles from Aylesbury on the road to Thame in the County of Buckinghamshire.

When she left school she was sent into service, as it was called in those days, to London to work as a maid in rather a posh house in Muswell Hill for a Colonel and Lady Hammond. During the First World War the Colonel was abroad on active service, and when the Germans started to bomb London with their Zepplin Airship raids he sent his wife and children plus Mother to Martin where they lived at the Vicarage. I don't know if the vicar at that time was a relative or just a friend.

Now the Vicarage at that time was in East Martin, just up the lane from Fern Cottage, and that was how my Mother and Father first met. I know very little about their courtship, my Dad was a bellringer and I expect Mum had to attend Church on a regular basis seeing she was living with the Vicar. How my father came to be a bellringer at the Church is a mystery because

his parents were strict Methodists, and in the years when I was a small boy I can remember attending services at the Chapel with my Dad.

The Flemington family is probably the oldest in the Village of Martin. We can trace our family tree back to the sixteen hundreds. Most of them seem to have been of the Methodist faith, some were even Preachers, but at the very least they seem to have changed faith once because Thomas Flemington, a Shoemaker, was Parish Clerk and a Church Warden in the early eighteen hundreds.

I know little about the rest of my ancestors, though most of them were of very large families, they seem to have survived fairly well, as can be seen from the size of the Family Tree. What I also find remarkable is the ripe old age most of them lived to, it must be a tribute to the healthy country life here in Martin.

One of my earliest memories of baby years were of being pushed in my pram in the direction of Tidpit and Allenford.

In fact the most vivid memory is of Allenford Bridge on the road to Damerham, of the rushing water and the white flowering water weed. Close to the bridge were several large beech trees and one of the first flowers in springtime were the yellow celandines beneath.

My Mother's walks seemed to terminate there, it's about a mile and a half from Fern Cottage so I expect it was far enough as prams were large and heavy in those days, and on the way back was a long uphill stretch called Milligan Hill.

Mum was accompanied on most of these outings by a rather large jolly woman called Mrs Bailey, the wife of Charlie Bailey, a shepherd who lived at Tidpit. This I suppose was the reason that most of our walks seemed to go in that direction, although sometimes in the summer I remember we used to go up past Windmill Hill onto Toyd Down, or in the opposite direction along the Cranbourne road out of Tidpit.

The two families were very close in those days, and I remember many visits to the Bailey Household. Once when we were going down Milligan Hill I fell over the front of the pram, and I was rushed back to Mrs Bailey's where she applied a large lump of butter to an equally large lump on my forehead! On another occasion my elder sister Joyce and I had an all night visit when my brother Peter was born. The Baileys had four daughters and I remember we were put to bed in an old iron double bed, my sister and I and the two eldest Bailey girls Doreen and Rosemary. We had a candle to light the way to bed, and after we were all tucked in, I can to this day see Shep Bailey with his storm lantern as he came to say goodnight.

Charlie Bailey was shepherd for the Woodvines who farmed at Tidpit.

Charlie grazed his flock on Tidpit Down which lies off the road to Cranbourne, while the other shepherd who lived at Tidpit, Fred Penney, worked for George Waters at Toyd Farm who also had land at Tidpit on Blackheath Down. Fred Penney was a real character who could always be relied on to come out with a tall story, or some nonesense or other. There was quite a bit of rivalry between the two shepherds, Charlie who was always rather spruced up in his spare time, sang in the Church choir and rang the bells. He tended to look down on Fred who was always a bit rough and ready, and who had a laugh and a joke with all, and treated everyone he met the same be they peasant or Lord of the Manor.

The road which ran from the Rockbourne Road across Toyd Down and through Tidpit to Cranbourne is little more than a by-way today, but was once part of the main road from London to Poole, which was an important harbour in those days when Bournemouth was little more than a fishing village. The Mail Coaches from London used this route and it is rumoured that on more than one occasion were robbed by highwaymen in Cranbourne Woods, less than a mile from Tidpit. Alongside the road can still be seen the milestones, with so many miles to Poole Gate engraved on them.

I can also remember being taken for walks up East Martin road, Mother was always on the lookout for dry pieces of wood for firelighting, and always came home with a load across the bottom of the pram.

In those days the hedges were mostly left to grow tall and often two or three yards wide, so there was always plenty of dead dry sticks in the hedge bottom. They were also more of a haven for the birds than today when a lot have just disappeared to make larger fields, and those that have survived have been cut short by the tractor mounted hedge cutters used today.

My memories of other events before my schooldays are rather hazy now, and the only other thing I can remember is of being swung round by the ankles by my sister Joyce and striking my head on the corner of the oak sideboard.

My father was out at the time, and Uncle Sid who lived nearby was sent for, and was said to have tried to calm down Mother who always panicked at such times, by saying "don't thee worry Sally he wouldn't be hollering like that if he were dying."

Sid was really my great uncle, being Grandma's elder brother. He owned and lived in Packbridge Cottage, which is on the junction of the Martin and East Martin roads. I remember him as a small, rotund elderly old man, and I think he died around the time I started school.

Up until the time when younger brother Peter arrived, I think I was rather spoilt by my Mother. I did not take to school very easily, and I have been told that I cried all the way on the first morning and my sister had to bring me

home at lunchtime. The teachers at that time were Miss Cox later to marry Bill Selwood, a Miss Mason who lodged at Mrs Read's shop, and the Headmistress Mrs Pryderch.

Part of my dislike of school, apart from being very shy, stemmed from the fact that I was naturally left handed, and in those less enlightened days teachers used to think everyone should use the right hand, and used to keep making me change. Needless to say, I found this greatly upsetting, and I also think in my earlier schooldays that I was slightly dyslexic, because when I started to read and write certain letters and words would appear backwards or jumbled up.

The Village School, now a private house, was divided into two parts known as the Big Room and the Small Room where we started as infants. The school was heated by two huge black cast iron stoves surrounded by wire mesh guards.

In the winter according to your proximity to the stove, you either roasted or froze in the far corners. There was a bell tower and a single bell at the Church lane end, and this bell was rung by one of the senior boys to signal the start of lessons in the morning and afternoon. The school was a Church of England school, and we had frequent visits from the Vicar who used to conduct early morning prayers and give religious instruction. The Vicar of Martin at this time was the Reverend Skillbeck Smith, who had been an army Padre in the 1914-18 War. He was reputed to have been shellshocked, he was certainly a very eccentric person who had a very short temper. He and I never got along very well from the first, and as the years went by I became rather a black sheep in his eyes.

The Vicar had three daughters, and a wife who was a very timid little woman, not surprising really.

My mother used to to do the washing and ironing for them, and one day we were at the Vicarage with my sister Joyce who sometimes played with his girls. The Vicar came out to start his car in the garage but the battery was flat, and the engine refused to start. The Vicar then got all us kids pushing to start it, but it was too heavy for us so he got out and put my sister behind the wheel while he helped us to push. Well it was all downhill along the drive and we soon got the car moving, my sister was instructed to jump out and the Vicar jump in as soon as the engine started but you guessed it, the changeover never worked, and before the Vicar could get behind the wheel the car ran away and smacked into the large oak gatepost at the bottom of the drive, the result a badly bent front bumper and radiator.

Well I laughed so much the Vicar got infuriated and told my Mother I was not to come near the Vicarage again. Another inccident was at Church Sunday School one Sunday afternoon. We were expected to take twopence

collection money which went towards the yearly outing to the seaside, but I managed to lose mine coming across the fields.

Miss Taylor who used to take Sunday School didn't mind but the Vicar sent me home and said I was not to attend again. Well as you can imagine I was quite pleased at this, as I already had to go once a day to the evening service where Dad was one of the bell-ringers, and twice a day was a bit much when I had to stay in my Sunday best all day and was not allowed out to play. Sundays before the War were taken very seriously in our house and any frivolous activities frowned upon.

Well unfortunately for me Mother sends my Dad to protest to the Vicar, and I don't know if violence was threatened because my Dad was a bit fiery tempered if upset, but the outcome was that the Vicar relented and I was welcomed back to the fold.

Another inccident with the Vicar took place several years later. This occured when Angus Curtis and I let down Hogger Bundy's bike tyres. At this time Hogger was the Church Verger and because he was at the Church at the time told the Vicar. Well the Rev. Smith stormed into the School and read the riot act, and in the end Angus and I had to own up. But in spite of the fact that Angus was over a year older, in the Vicar's eyes I was the ringleader, and as such I was singled out for the worst punishment. We were both caned but once again I was excommunicated from the Church, and told never to darken its doors again, at least not while the Reverend Skillbeck Smith was Vicar.

Of course I was once again highly delighted at this turn of events, after I had got over the caning that was! because it meant that not only was I getting out of attending Church but also from blowing the Church Organ whilst Miss Taylor played during services and at practice twice a week. A job for which I had been volunteered by dear old Mum.

But needless to say once again my joy was shortlived! Vicar had gone too far this time! Mum said, exceeded his power she reckoned and promptly wrote a letter to the Bishop of Salisbury. Well the Vicar had to come in person and apologise the Bishop said, and although Mother was highly delighted I was less pleased, for once again I was returned to the fold.

In those days before the War, there were no less than three shops in Martin. There was Mrs Reads, an elderly widow who always seemed to be severely dressed in black. I remember she always wore a black velvet band around her neck, with a large brooch at the throat. Her shop carried a very large stock of haberdashery, anything from buttons, elastic, and threads and needles to candles and paraffin. She was a very devout churchgoer and always used to give prizes once a year at Sunday School. Usually books!

Further up the Village on the other side and opposite the school was Mrs

Scammels shop. This was part of the flint and brick thatched cottage, and I remember it now like walking into a cool white-washed parlour, no counter as such, just a plain deal table and shelves all around the walls. This shop was favourite with the school kids because there was a terrific choice from rows of sweet jars on the shelves, boxes of candy like the sweet imitation cigarettes which were all the go then, and strings of liquorice which we used to call boot straps, as they were very like the leather strips we laced our hobnailed boots with in those days.

The third shop was Fred Hacker's, much more modern looking and built into a new Bungalow that Fred had built. Fred was the most outgoing of people and was involved in most things that went on in Martin, especially if there was a profit in it for him. I suppose in modern times he would be regarded as an entrepreneur, and eventually Fred saw off the competition and when Mrs Reads closed took on the Post Office as well. He became most successful, selling almost everything people in the Village needed, and until the advent of post-war supermarkets when village shops went into decline everywhere. He started when in his twenties and rented a room in my old Uncle Sid's cottage, and continued until he was almost in his eighties when failing health forced his retirement. Now we have no shops or Post Office in the village, people have to rely on a few mobile van shops or go to Salisbury or Fordingbridge.

During those pre-war schooldays there was of course no television or any form of entertainment other than that which we made ourselves, but there was hardly any restriction on children as to where they could go, and we used to wander far and wide over the countryside. None of the Farmers raised any objection as long as we behaved, closed gates behind us, and didn't run about in growing crops. Indeed we were very often welcome especially at harvest times to give a hand leading horses, picking up potatoes, stooking sheaves of corn and many more activities.

Farmers are notoriously mean when it comes to money, but they used to hand out a few coppers and the occasional sixpence. But of course there were lots of other perks to be had in the countryside, and we usually came home with something useful, it might be a rabbit or even a pheasant, swedes, turnips and potatoes, or perhaps a huge cow cabbage. There was always something going free if you knew where to look, and country boys certainly knew that. We were all very proficient with a catapault, setting a rabbit wire, and even the use of ferretts when we were a bit older. Of course we sometimes got into mischief stealing apples from an orchard perhaps or using someones thatched hayrick as a slide. But we were taught to respect the countryside and there were hardly any cases of malicious damage done as often reported today.

We lived at Fern Cottage in East Martin where we had five and a half acres of pasture land of our own. Father always kept at least one cow and used to buy in several young calves at a time and rear with the surplus milk. Mother used to make butter in those days, and we also had pigs and chickens, so I suppose we had a better standard of living than most farm workers which was what Father did most of his life, except I believe for one short spell when he worked at Sandleheath Brickyards. As you can imagine working on the land was very labour intensive pre-war, most of the work was done with horse drawn implements, there being hardly any tractors then.

Father was very good with horses and cattle and worked at various times on several of the local farms, but in his later years and especially during the War he worked firstly with Poores threshing gang and during and after the War, Dibbens rival outfit. In the days before Combine Harvesters became commonplace this was a year round job, and they used to sometimes travel as far as thirty miles or more to farms far and wide. At first steam engines were used to move and run the threshing machine and tackle, but when more powerful tractors came on the scene such as the Marshall which were ideal for the job, being much more maneouverable and faster on the road.

Of course this meant very long hours especially during summertime's longer days when he would be up at five-thirty to get the cow milked and everything fed and seen to before he left for work. During this time I was expected to milk the cow, feed the calves and anything else which needed doing after I got home from school, and I was not very happy when my mates were often out playing football or cricket an hour before me. We also had a large garden in which I had to work at times as well, but it was all good experience and I love gardening to this day. We also had school gardens during the war and the plot which Gerald Poore and I shared always got top marks.

The cow which Dad had pretty well all my school days was named Old Nancy. She was a real beauty, a cross between a Guernsey and the old fashioned Shorthorn Strawberry Roan. She was exeptionally quiet and except in hot weather when the flies bothered her you could put a stool and bucket down and milk her in the yard or anywhere. I had a problem one day however, when halfway through milking she was stung by a fly or something, lifted her hind leg and stood it in the bucket. Try as I might I could not get her to lift her leg and I wasn't strong enough to lift her myself, so in the end I just led her on which of course tipped the bucket losing all the milk.

We lived close to two of the three farms in East Martin, Bustard Manor was farmed by John Baker and just up the road round the bend was Talke's Farm which was Jim and Ethel Taylor's, brother and sister! The one other farm was

St Brides which belonged to Captain Rhodes.

One farm worker who was quite a character and who played a big part in my life was Charlie Williams, who lived with his mother until her death, and was a batchelor all his life. We were neighbours and friends when I lived at home in East Martin, and in later years when he lodged with Mrs Symes next door, in Townsend Lane. He died last year, well into his eighties.

My best schoolmate and the one with whom I spent a lot of my spare time, and got into the most scrapes with was Mervyn Ings.

We used to roam for miles, and later on when we got bikes we used to go even further. There were very few cars on the road in those days, and very little danger whether you were cycling or playing football on the way to school. In the whole of Martin I don't think there were more than half a dozen cars.

Mervyn lived in the Council Houses which backed on to our own fields. He was the only boy and his Parents and sisters spoilt him I think, he always seemed to get the latest toys and any other gadget going. I remember he had a nice racing bike long before any other kids, most of whom had to put up with old second hand or do it yourself models. I well recollect once he had a Marmoset monkey given him. He had it for quite some time, it was great fun to play with on the lawn, and eventually he got it to perch on the handlebars of his bike and used to ride round the village, much to everyone's amusement. However the Monkey was never quite the same after one incident. There was at that time a huge old Elm Tree on their front lawn, the monkey often used to play in the branches, but one night we couldn't coax it down, no how, and eventually in the end had to give up and leave it to the next morning. However that night there was a very sharp frost, the monkey got its tail frostbitten and lost of third off its three foot length. It was never the same again, and faded away the following year.

Bows and arrows, catapaults, and later on air rifles, we were crack shots with either, and I regret to say now, that any wild bird or animal, was considered fair game. We must have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands, over the years. The ceramic insulators on the Telephone Poles were also favourite targets. In those days of course conservation of wildlife was unheard of, no one thought twice about shooting a bird, the hedgerows used to be teeming with them. The same thing applied to collecting birds eggs everyone did it!

Now it's a different story, because of the intensive farming methods employed since the war, all in the name of progress, most of the wildlife has just disappeared. Crops are sprayed, hedgerows uprooted and the whole environment in which the wildlife flourished is gone. I know it's no excuse for what we as children did, but what's happened since is far worse, because

it was done by adults with profit the excuse.

During those early years of my youth the water table was much higher, and all the winter and often into late spring we used to have a large stream and sometimes quite a river running the whole length of the village. There were even occasions when the fields between Martin and East Martin were flooded, and we had several enforced holidays from school. There was one occasion when on going to school in the morning we saw a lot of groceries and dog biscuits caught in the weeds along the edge of the stream. George Easters 'the Coalmans' wife had fallen in at dusk the previous evening on her way back from Mrs Reads shop. All this water was a great delight to us children! We used to have boat races on the way home from school, float bottles to use as catapualt targets on Bustard Pond, and more than once arrive home soaking wet.

One dangerous activity Mervyn and I used to do was make bombs with big green quart bottles with a screw top. We used to put a quantity of carbide powder in, add a measure of water, screw down the stopper as fast as possible, throw it away and run. Sometimes it would explode before we got to a safe distance and at other times we used to wait for what seemed ages for the big bang. Carbide was used in lanterns and bicycle lamps, and even in car headlamps in the early part of the century.

Other boyhood companions in the days before the 39-45 war were Vic Harris and his brother Jimmy. Mike Cox (Jiffey) Bill Smith, Gerald Poore, Norman Brown, Gerald Woodford. These were all natives as it were, others came and went over the years as farm workers were constantly on the move. Some could never settle in one place, and in other cases the farmers soon got rid of anybody they didn't get on with.

It was quite common to see one family go in the morning and another arrive in the afternoon, especially at Talke's Farm. Jim Taylor was not the best of farmers, the whole farm was in a pretty ramshackle state and Jim was constantly being harassed by his sister Ethel. He had a fairly large Dairy Herd but a very motley under fed herd of cows they were, and contrasted most unfavourably with the Dairy of Bustard Manor, where John Baker had a very modern dairy building and an all Freisian herd of cows. The state of Jim Taylor's fences was always a source of amusement to my father, his cows and heifers were always out on the road, and instead of mending the fences Jim would try to mend the errant cow's ways by bolting a triangle made of three staves of wood around the cow's neck so that it couldn't push through the gap in the fence. I always thought it would have been easier to mend the fence.

Our land was divided in half by a hedge and fence which at one end had several Elm trees in it. One of the largest trees blew down in a gale, and I

spent many hours with father cutting it into logs. There were no chainsaws in those days, all the work was done by cross cut saws and the axe. The cross cut saws were several feet in length, and needed two people one each end, to pull in turn. At the lower end of this hedge nearest to Packbridge, was the stump of what must once have been a huge Elm tree. It was about eight feet tall and six in diameter, completely hollow in the middle, but amazingly still growing. One side of the rim was growing a young tree at least twenty feet high, with several small younger saplings around the rest of the rim. This of course was an ideal place to play and could be made into almost anything to suit any fantasy. From a ship at sea to a fortified castle. Spaceships of course were sometime into the future! But many hours were spent there over a period of several years, until one day it was mysteriously burnt down. I of course got the blame but was on this occasion definitely not guilty, I always suspected it was Vic Harris but could never get him to admit it.

Between our house and Bustard Manor lived Mr Brown the local haulier who between hauling cattle to market, could be seen moving people and their worldly goods as they came and went to the farm cottages. I remember him as rather a stern man who always seemed to be rather cruel to the cattle as they were loaded up the ramp into his cattle truck. The house and yard were on the opposite side of East Martin lane to us, but he had a large garden bordering our yard where he also had a lot of hens and several hives of bees. Once a year we got a treat when he took the honey from the hives, he always gave us a dish of honey comb which we enjoyed very much. I can't remember exactly when he died, I think it was around the outbreak of the war. The boys Gilbert and Norman weren't old enough to run the business and it was left to his daughter Ida to carry on the work, driving the truck and all until Gilbert who was called up for the Army came home after the War.

Gilbert still has the Haulier's business and keeps a few cattle and sheep on rented ground and on his own field at Townsend, but as I write is on the point of retiring.

We were bordered on the north-west of our fields by the Vicarage orchard and Barter's Field. Now Teddy Barter with his son Jack ran a small farm with house and farmyard next to the school, he had several fields which ran from out boundary , and from the back of his farm around the Church. Teddy was a funny little man, who with his pipe and cap always reminded me of Popeye the cartoon character. His son was just the opposite, a big, lean, hulking sort of man almost twice Teddy's size. They also, as did almost all the farmers, have a dairy, but usually only about nine or ten cows. He did however have two lovely shire carthorses which he used to work the land between the Village and the main road A354. Bennets Farm had land next door and they used to work together. They were about the last two small

farms in Martin to get mechanised, using horse power until well after the War. Old Teddy never really came to terms with a tractor and Jack had to adapt to the old Fordson they used. Most of the implements were converted horsedrawn ones and I can still see old Ted beating his stick on the old binder and shouting 'Whoa, whoa, dammit!' to the tractor as though it was still a horse.

Jack Barter and my Dad were great cronies and were always to be found haggling over some deal or other, whether it be chickens, calves, or rabbits. Especially during the War, when things became scarce or hard to come by.

The other two small fields between us and the Church were rented by Bert Scammel, husband of the shopkeeper opposite the school. One was part of an old orchard and in it was an old Russet apple tree which we used to raid, when we had the chance. These two fields belonged to Mrs Read, and there was also a barn backing onto her shop. Bert Scammel was a bent, bow-legged old man who was not very strong! I was told he had a rupture, not that I understood what it meant. He often used to waylay me on the way home from school to get me to heave some hay out of the loft and carry it out to the cows. I used to get the odd sixpence mind, or some extra sweets when I went into the shop.

He also kept a small dairy herd of about 8 cows, and I suppose it must have been their sole income apart from the shop. He had one field of his own of about ten acres behind his shop and garden, and this he used to keep mainly for hay.

Talking about haymaking reminds me that in my earlier years Father with the help of George Easter and George Poore used to cut with scythes about half of our fields for hay in one day. It was very hard work cutting hay with a scythe, and if one man cut one acre in a day it was good going. It wasn't until during the war and after, that Father used to hire someone with a grass cutter to do it. All the family used to be involved in the rest of the work, raking into rows, then turning it until Dad reckoned it was just right, then putting it into heaps or stooks and finally carrying it to the back of the cowshed where it was built into a rick.

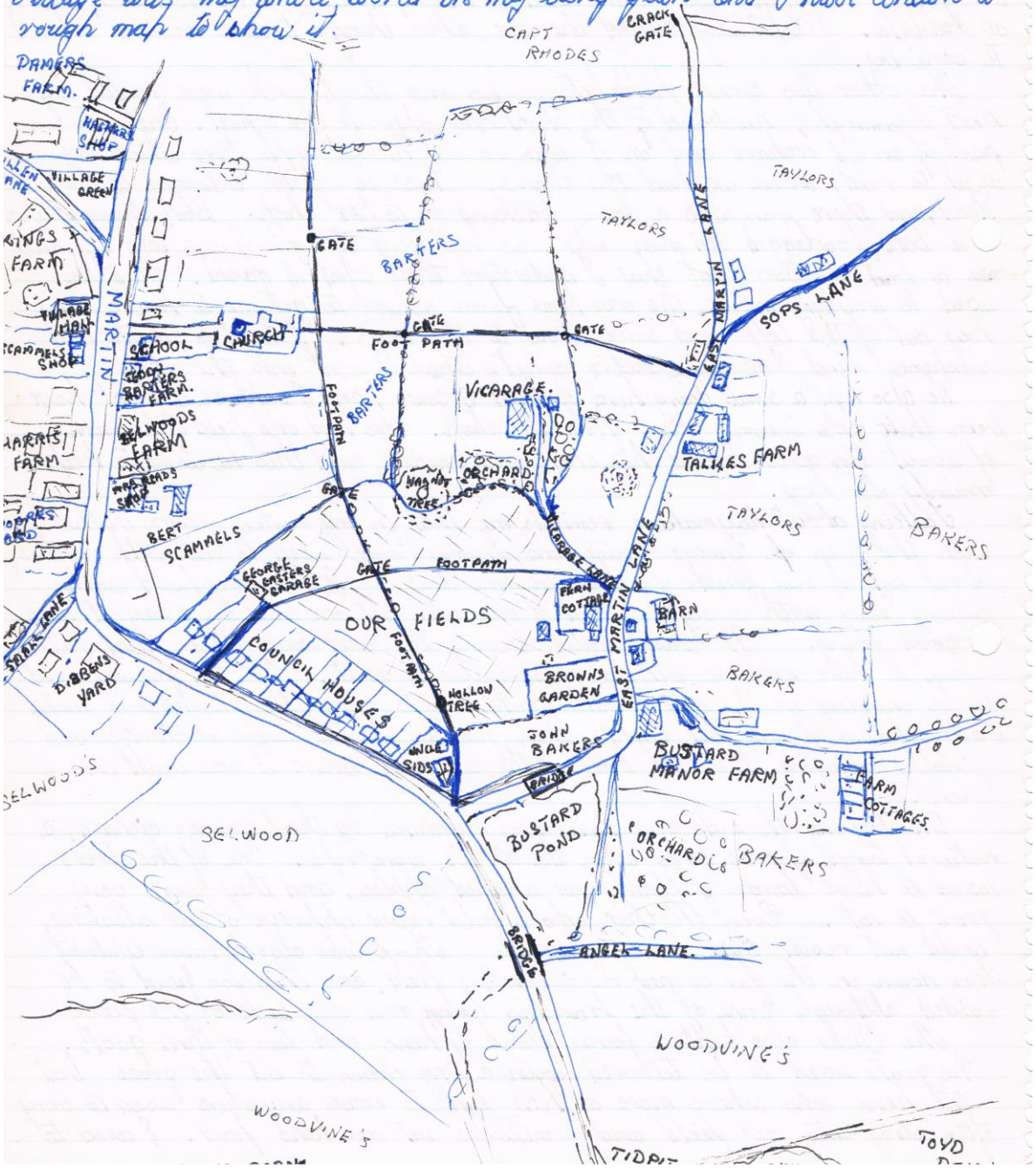
On the north side our land was bordered by the Vicarage orchard, a natural target for us boys when the apples were ripe. One of the trees used to have large yellow pear-shaped apples and they were very good to eat. Even Mother, who would never approve of our stealing, could not resist the lovely flavour. There was also a huge Walnut Tree down in the far corner near Barter's field, and this too used to be raided although some of the branches hung over our side of the fence. The Vicar also kept a large flock of hens and two or three goats. The goats used to be tethered with a long chain to eat the grass, but the hens who were more or less left to roam anywhere used to

very often stray into our field and sometimes eat our hens food. I used to get my own back on the Rev. Smith by stealing their eggs which often they would lay in the thick old hedge on our boundary. We also had the odd Cockerel for dinner as well. Dad and I would tell Mum it was a surplus one of ours. Once I even had a Hen and her brood of a dozen chicks which she had hatched in the hedge unknown to the Vicar.

Our land, and the surrounding area in the lower part of the Village was my whole world in my early years and I have drawn a rough map to show it.

get my own back on the Rev. Smith by stealing their eggs which often they would lay in the thick old hedge on our boundary. We also had the odd cockerel for dinner as well. Dad and I would tell Mum it was a surplus one of ours. Once I even had a Hen and her brood of a dozen chicks which she had hatched in the hedge unknown to the Vicar.

Our land and the surrounding area in the lower part of the Village was my whole world in my early years and I have drawn a rough map to show it.



One other place we used to play, especially when it rained, was the Old Barn belonging to Talke's Farm which was right opposite Fern Cottage behind the Farm cottage which was also theirs. It was used mainly to store farm

implements, wagons and carts, the grass cutter and binder.

Sometimes hay was stored at one end, and in the extension built on one end calves were reared. Barn Owls used to nest up in the roof beams and more than once I was clawed and scratched by the old birds as I climbed up to look at the young. Many were the happy hours we played in the barn, but we always had to keep an eye out for Jim Taylor who had a pretty short temper and if he got close enough would give us a clip round the ear.

Once a year the main part of the Barn was cleared out to be used for the annual sheep shearing operation. This was a two day job as Jim kept a large flock of sheep. In my early years they were all clipped with hand shears, but as time went by mechanical clippers run by a flexible drive from a small petrol engine came into use. The sheep were penned into the yard in front of the barn, moved through the barn as they were shorn and released into the field at the rear.

Of course we children were fascinated by all this, and used to hang over the hurdles penning the sheep for hours watching all that went on!

The farm cottage I mentioned earlier opposite our home was called Wayside Cottage and occupied when I was young by an old lady called Mrs Alner. I can't remember now exactly when she died, it was some time shortly after the end of the war. Charlie Williams and his Mother came to live there after Charlie moved from Bustard Manor Farm to Talke's Farm. Why he ever moved there after knowing Jim Taylor's reputation I don't know, but he stuck it there for many years until after his mother's death, when he joined the Hampshire County Council as the local roadman, taking over on the retirement of Fred Penney who had given up shepherding many years earlier.

This then was the centre of my world, and we rarely left it except for the occasional trips to Salisbury to be kitted out in new clothes for school when I had worn out or grown out of the present ones.

Mum always went to the same shops I remember. It was Whaleys for grey flannel trousers, shirts and underclothes, Clarkes for shoes and boots, and if there was a clock to be mended or repaired it was Tribbecks the Jewellers. Socks and Pullovers, Scarves and Gloves were always hand knitted by Mother, as were the whole range of baby clothes. Mother was never without her knitting whenever she had time to sit down, I think the earliest sounds I ever recognised must have been the click of her needles. Sometimes when I was a bit older and Father managed to get a day off he would take me with him to the cattle markets. This I would enjoy very much, as apart from the cattle which in those days were bought and sold in the Market Square, there were also held auctions of all sorts of miscellaneous objects of country life.

In those days there were three aucitoneers in Salisbury, Woolley and Wallis,

Knapman's and John Jefferys. They used to hold these other sales in their own yards and we would hurry from one to the other in fear of missing some bargain. Father loved wheeling and dealing and would often buy things to sell on again, like second hand bikes and lawnmowers. If he made himself a pound on some deal he was as pleased as if he had been given a fortune.

The only other day trips away from the village were the Sunday School outings once a year to the seaside. These outings were eagerly awaited for weeks beforehand, and great was the excitement when we all set off on the day. I can't ever remember it being anything but fine weather but one tends to remember only the good times. The games on the sand, donkey rides, sand castles, Punch and Judy shows, Ice creams and fish and chips for lunch. Those were the days!

I think I only twice went on holiday before the war, once when I was fairly small and I can't remember alot about it except that it was to my Mother's home at Dinton in Buckinghamshire. The second time was to the same place but by then I was ten years old and it was the summer of 1939. My Mum's sister Auntie Liz took me there on her way back to Norwich where she lived all her married life.

It was the first time I had ever been away on my own and quite an adventure, I expect I must have been very apprehensive at the time.

The Hollymans were quite a large family and well known in the village, Uncle Jim had the Village Bakery, Uncle John was a male nurse in a nearby mental home, and Uncle Tom and Uncle Charlie were gardeners at the Manor House near the Church. Grandad Hollyman had been a dairyman at the farm nearby. They lived in what were originally two cottages and they had a huge garden, it must have been about two acres in all, they kept pigs and chickens. Grandad owned this and Tom and Charlie and his recently wed wife Jilly all lived therer.

Uncle John had his own place further along the road, and Uncle Jim the brother had a modern bungalow and his own small holding on the Thame to Aylesbury main road, opposite the turning to the village. There was another son Frank, but he was killed at the age of nineteen at the battlefront Somme in the First World War. Sadly they are all dead and gone for many years now, and lie at rest in Dinton Churchyard.

I spent two or three weeks there on that holiday, and the thing I remember most, apart from my Grandparents and Uncles, is of making friends with a boy of about my own age who lived nearby. He was a nice lad and we roamed the village and fields and played together the whole time. But what made such a lasting impression on me was his appearance, for he was what I now know to be an Albino. His hair and skin were dead white and he had

pink eyes. I've seen rabbits, birds and other animals in this condition, but never another human being.

Uncle Charlie and his wife Jilly brought me back to home, and I remember we travelled on a Royal Blue Coach, very posh these buses were compared with our local village bus. Charlie and Jilly were going to spend three weeks at Fern Cottage, but when the rumours of war with Germany became louder each day they cut the holiday short and returned home.

Thinking of the war has reminded me of the time when we have had military maneouvres around our village. When I was only a few years old we had a detachment of the Royal Artillery camped in the fields around Bustard Pond and between there and Tidpit.

What made this occasion so memorable was the horses and the horse drawn limbers and guns, for it was in the days when the army had not yet become entirely mechanised. Since then I have only seen the ceremonial troop which is kept for State ceremony or military shows. Later on before and during the War our area was often used as a training ground, and provided a great source of entertainment for us kids. There was a rifle range and an assault course built on Martin Down, and we used to go there when not in use to retrieve any overlooked ammunition, discarded cartridge cases, spent bullets, or anything else we could lay our hands on. It's a wonder none of us were injured or killed, for we used to take the cordite out of the blank cartridges to make up an explosive device of our own, or we used to push them into a suitable hole and hit the end cap to explode them.

When war with Germany was declared I'm sure that my age group didn't take it very seriously. I was ten years old then and not very interested in world events. I can remember being made to sit still and listen to the radio as the solemn declaration was made on that Sunday morning at eleven o'clock, but the thing that had the biggest impact on me and the other village children was the arrival of the evacuees. Those billeted on families in Martin all came from Portsmouth, but to us they may as well have been foreigners, they didn't speak our native dialect, and being from the big city didn't have a clue about country ways. They were completely at a loss, as we would have been if we had suddenly been dumped into their way of life. Most of them had never visited a farm or been in contact with animals, apart from cats or dogs, never even knew that their daily pint of milk came out of a cow. Never known what it was like to be able to roam free, climb trees, watch the wildlife or even to get their shoes all muddy! I think it was what is called today a 'culture shock', but they learned, some quickly, some slowly, some just couldn't handle it and returned home to take their chance with whatever Hitler dished up. Mind you! for the first year the War was a bit of a non event, and it wasn't until the evaccuation of the army from Dunkirk and the

start of the Battle of Britain that we began to sit up and take notice.

One event which took place in the summer of thirty eight has only just come to mind. Very often in the fine weather we went for a walk on a Sunday afternoon, and one Sunday myself with sister Joyce, young brother Peter, and the two Bailey sisters Doreen and Rosemary walked up to the top of Windmill Hill. We were sitting there on the grass resting after our climb, when suddenly we saw this huge Airship circling around over the Village and heading towards Southampton. It had the black cross in a white circle of the German Air Force on its tailplane, and we just stood there with our mouths open watching this huge Airship cruising by.

We learned afterwards that it was the Graf Zeppelin, and it was believed the Germans were on a photographic spying mission with the coming war in mind.

As the war went on there came into service with the Air Force many new types of airplane, which became of great interest to us boys, and we could name them all. During the war there were several crashes in our area, but the first crashed plane I ever saw was right at the start and not the result of enemy action at all. It was a Blackburn Skua belonging to the Fleet Air Arm which crashed into the fir plantation in Knoll Woods.

Needless to say Mervyn Ings and I were soon on the scene and came home with a few souvenirs, although there wasn't much left intact after it had ploughed through the trees. The pilot's body had been removed by the time we got there.

During the war and until I left school I worked Saturdays and other odd times for Mr Jowell at Swayne's Firs where he ran a poultry farm, mainly in two long buildings by the house, but also in moveable units in the field. Swayne's Firs is on the main Blandford to Salisbury road, and nearer to Blandford just off the road the R.A.F. had a bombing range. We used to get used to planes, at that time. Blenhiems and Wellington bombers, flying from the airfields on Salisbury Plain to the Crichel bombing range. They usually flew fairly low and seemed to follow the main road as a route marker.

One day I was working in the field and heard planes approaching, I stood up to look and was astonished to see coming over the trees two German Messershmitt fighter planes not more than a hundred feet off the ground. I just stood there in shocked disbelief as the pilot in the nearest plane actually waved his hand to me.

I afterwards learned that they had flown to Salisbury and shot down a Barrage Balloon and strafed the goods yard at the Railway Station.

The only enemy action that came anywhere near Martin was one night when a German bomber was caught in the searchlight beams and shed its load of bombs to help make a faster getaway, and on another occasion a land

mine was dropped nearer to Woodyates.

On the first occasion we were taking cover downstairs in the passage which led to the sitting room, this was thought to be the safest place between the two thickest walls in the house, and we used to sit on the floor wrapped in blankets until the all clear was sounded. My elder sister Joyce was home from her job at the time, but despite the pleas of Mum and Dad refused to leave the comfort of her bed. We heard this German plane come overhead and all of a sudden there was an unearthly, terrific screaming noise which in the dead of night was enough to convince me the end had come. After what seemed an age, there was complete silence, then almost at once three loud explosions. My sister was out of bed and downstairs with us almost as quick as it took for the bombs to fall! She wasn't so brave after that!

We did once have an Air Raid Shelter, Dad and I dug it out across the yard from the house. We put corrugated iron sheets on the top, and then piled the surplus earth on top of that.

We only used it on a few occasions as the German raids gradually ceased, and anyway it was hardly worth it because by the time we had got warm clothes on, got across the yard and settled in the all clear would sound. But a funny thing happened one morning when Father went out to milk the cow, it was very dark and pouring with rain and he couldn't see old Nancy anywhere. He called out to her, but no response, but after a while he called again and heard a faint moo and when he came back to the yard where the sound had come from, he discovered she had somehow climbed on top of the mound which housed the shelter and the rain softened earth had collapsed and Nancy was down in the bomb shelter! I was called from my bed and we had to dig away the entrance to get the old cow out. None the worse for her adventure, but it was the end for our shelter.

When the Battle of Britain was on Mervyn Ings and I used to cycle on through Fordingbridge to Ibsley where there was a fighter aerodrome during the war. We used to watch the Spitfires and Hurricanes taking off and landing, and several times we actually saw the dog fights in the sky taking place over towards Southampton.

Sometimes we were moved on by the R.A.F. police, and once a funny thing happened when as we were gazing up to the sky an old lady rushed out of her house and dragged us inside, saying you will get yourself killed! you will be killed! and she ordered us under her kitchen table and fed us with home made cakes and lemonade.

Mervyn's elder sister Freda and her husband Bob Kenchington kept a cycle shop in Fordingbridge and we often cycled down that way. I remember that their garden ran right down to the river Avon, and they had a small rowing boat that we rather badly rowed up and down close to the bank. We were

too scared to get out in midstream as neither of us could swim. We made many a trip to Fordingbridge and spent a lot of time there during school holidays, but this was only one of our playgrounds and as we gradually acquired better bikes, we roamed far and wide throughout the district.

During this period in the early part of the war, the village children and the evacuees were slowly integrating and it was decided that instead of running the two schools separately (the evacuees had been using the village hall) that until we took the eleven-plus exam all the children under that age would be taught at the Village School and over that age at the Village Hall by the two masters from Portsmouth, Mr Jordan and Mr Johns and Miss Grout who was the only woman teacher with them.

I had gradually improved my education since making a bad start in the infants section, and when I came to take the eleven-plus exam I was the only one from five taking part that year who passed the exam, more by luck than knowledge probably. I could have gone to the Bishop Wordsworth School in Salisbury, but I didn't go much on the idea of losing all my school friends and having to make new ones, I was very shy then and even now I don't like being in the 'limelight'.

Anyway my Parents didn't make me go in spite of great pressure from Mrs Priderch the Headmistress, who tried desperately to make me change my mind. Whether I was a fool not go I shall never know, I may have had a better future and been a lot richer now, but this I do know, having a better paid job often brings with it a lot of stress with bad effects on your health and happiness. I'd rather be happy than rich.

At the age of eleven then I crossed the road to the Hall, Mr Johns was my Master and the first thing I found out was that discipline was strict, you couldn't fool him so easily as the schoolmistresses I had been used to. A piece of chalk or even a book would very often fly through the air if someone was not paying attention, and I must admit I had the cane on more than one occasion.

However there were some compensations, especially in the sporting activities. We no longer had mixed games with the girls like rounders but were encouraged to play cricket and football and if the weather was bad we had P.T. in the main hall. Among other subjects "Johnser" had been sports master at Arundell School and we boys enjoyed the tuition we got. However one of his other subjects he was keen on was music, especially the piano and singing, and when he discovered I and one of the Portsmouth lads one Billy Bean! had the right sort of voice he had us out the front singing "descant" while the rest sang in the ordinary way. One of his favourite songs I remember was 'Jerusalem' and we seemed to practise this for hours on end. He tried to teach us how to read music, semi-quavers and suchlike, but I am

afraid it was not a great success.

On one occasion when my attention was straying he shouted out "Here Flemington, and show the class where middle C is on the piano." Well I didn't have a clue but it must have been my lucky day, because when I stabbed blindly at the keyboard by sheer good fortune I hit the right note. I think he was so surprised he never asked me to do anything more and I gladly retreated to the back of the class again. Another song we were always singing was Non Nobus Domine, I never did find out what that meant.

Anyway my education under Mr Johns progressed very well and I have a lot to thank him for. He persuaded me to stay on at school for an extra six months (the school leaving age at that time was fourteen), and he gave three of the girls who also stayed on, and myself, extra lessons on our own.

During the War everyone was expected to do their bit, and that included us school kids. As I mentioned before we village lads were all used to doing odd jobs on the farm, and the evacuees soon copied us. At harvest and haymaking, potato picking, even collecting blackberries for jam, we were allowed time off from school. And in addition we had the school gardens up Church lane. All the older boys were paired off and given a plot each, Gerald Poore was my partner, and we won first prize one year for the best plot when somebody decided there would be a competition. Needless to say the prize was a gardening book each, not very exciting as we were already well versed in that department. The crops were sold by the Womens Institute.

I think we enjoyed harvest time most of all, especially as the Binder went round and round until there was only a narrow strip left in the middle of the field and all the rabbits were trying to hide until one by one they were forced to make a bolt for it. That's the moment we were waiting for, and all of a sudden there would be boys chasing rabbits to all parts of the field. If we were lucky enough we would knock over one or two, or if we had a dog we might get more. Anyway we usually came home with at least a couple and Mum would make another lovely rabbit stew. During the War I think we must have had rabbit stew almost every week, we always had plenty of onions, shallots, carrots, swede and parsnip to go in the stew and I used to love it. I didn't mind if we had it several days running.

Another enjoyable time for us boys was when the Threshing Machine put in an appearance. We used to follow it around all the farms because not only was there a chance of earning a few pence, but when the bottom of each Rick was reached there used to be literally hundreds and sometimes thousands of rats and mice trying to escape. The farmer usually erected a fine mesh wire netting all around the area and filled this with as many dogs and boys with sticks as he could round up. We used to tuck our trousers, if we had long trousers, into our socks otherwise you could get them running up your leg.

Not a nice experience if they were inside your trousers. Anyway when the rick was reduced to a couple of feet, the mice and rats would start to run for it and the area enclosed would become a frenzy of beating sticks, shouting and hollering kids and dogs tossing rats into the air. The Jack Russell terriers were a marvel to see, so quick that as one rat was tossed in the air with its neck broken they were on to another before the first hit the ground.

The vermin were slaughtered by the thousand and it must sound terrible by todays standards, but you must remember there were no pesticides and poisons in general use in those days, and some control had to be exercised, or there would have been no crops to harvest.

Another activity we boys used to love during the autumn and winter months was the game shooting season, when we used to join the beaters under the direction of the gamekeeper, who endeavoured to keep us in some semblance of order and a reasonably straight line as we drove the game towards the line of guns, who were concealed behind hides constructed of hurdles and straw. We didn't get much in the way of pay, but the shoots used to adjourn for lunch at the Coote Arms pub or the Working Mens Club, and we always had plenty to eat and drink. Bread and cheese and a slice of pork pie, sometimes we were even slipped a bottle of beer instead of the usual lemonade. At the end of the day the Pheasants and Partridges were braced together, and we boys would be given the odd Hare or a couple of Rabbits in addition to the few shillings pay. We used to come home happy even if we were wet and cold after walking for miles over ploughed fields, through Kale almost head high, over hedges and ditches and through the wet dripping woods.

I can't remember taking a lot of notice of girls during my schooldays being country lads we knew all about the differences between the sexes, after all once a year Father used to engage my help in taking our cow down to Tidpit where she would be serviced by Woodvine's bull. After watching a performance like that it was hardly neccessary to instruct me about 'the birds and the bees'. Of course we used to tease the girls and have some fun, but sex wasn't talked about openly and even then the boys were more interested in playing football and cricket than talking to girls. We had one of the evacuees staying with us for a couple of years, a girl of about my own age. Her name was Elsie Hoare and I remember her as a podgy girl with spots and glasses. I can't think I was very attracted to her and probably treated her badly.

Thinking back to those days, I wonder what the evacuees must have thought of us. Coming down from a city like Portsmouth with the amenities they had, like electricity, running water, sewerage and proper bathrooms. To come to a place where candles and oil lamps, a well for water, and privvy up

the garden were the order of the day must have been beyond belief! To have a bath was a major operation, first of all the copper in the outhouse had to be filled, rain water was used if possible, as it was when Mum did the weekly wash on Mondays. Then the fire underneath was lit and kept stoked up with wood for a couple of hours until the water was boiling, the large tin bath was then placed in front of the kitchen range and after the boiling water was carried in Mum would adjust the temperature with some cold and bathing would commence starting youngest first. Of course we boys were banned from the kitchen when any girls were bathing, and vice versa, my Mum was very strict. Saurday night was usually bathnight, my parents had theirs after we had gone to bed.

During the war all the civilian population were encouraged to do their bit to help the effort to defeat the Germans, all possible scrap metal was collected, even the iron railings from outside people's houses and any aluminium utensils that could be spared. The government had many campaigns to encourage people to save for victory, such as Warship Week. There was a competition in the schools to design a poster, and much to Mr Johns delight I won the 1st prize in my age group for the whole of the New Forest area. The competititon entries were judged by Augustus John the famous painter who lived in Fordingbridge, and from then on 'Johnser' and I had a much better relationship, although he was still pretty strict. The poster I did was a water colour of Nelson's flagship H.M.S. Victory seen through a stone archway, with the ship and arch picked out in Indian ink. Needless to say I was quite pleased, especially as a prize of five pounds was given, worth having, in those days it was the equivalent of a weeks wages. I still have the poster, Mary had it framed after we were married, but like us its getting a bit faded now.

By this time after three years of the War, Mervyn and I were getting together quite a collection of mementos, we had all sorts of bits from aeroplanes, aluminium panels, perspex from the windows, more ammunition and even clocks and instruments. Some we gathered ourselves and others were swapped, I also had quite a lot of cap badges. There was one occasion when we had a fine haul.

A German twin engined Dornier had crashed into a sand pit over Cripplestyle way, next morning Mervyn and I were on the scene and luckily for us the Home Guard who were supposed to be keeping people away from the wreckage, had gone for their breakfast. It didn't take us long to gather some souvenirs and we came home unchallenged with a belt of machine gun ammo and other bits including what was one of my prized acquisitions, a clock I managed to wrench from the smashed cockpit. I kept it for years and even mounted it in a wooden frame, we had it for a mantlepiece clock when

we were first married. We were glad to have anything free then!

When the Americans came into the War, it widened our scope considerably, they were notorious for being wasteful, the equipment they used to throw away was unbelievable.

A camp had been built to accomodate them at Grimsdyke about a mile from the Village, with the dual purpose of being used as a hospital after the invasion of Europe for which they were training. There was a dump at the back of the camp on the edge of Jim Taylor's farmland, they used to set fire to it periodically and us kids and some adults as well used to try and get anything of use first. A lot of their gear used to be shipped over from the U.S.A. in lovely wooden crates, and these were eagerly carried off, as timber to make anything was very difficult to get hold of during the war. But this was not all, every so often the crates would be full of oranges or other fruit, tins of spam pork luncheon meat, tins of jam and marmalade and other goodies. One of my finds was a padded machine-gunner's seat out of one of their vehicles, it was spring loaded and adjustable up and down by means of a pedal. I had it for years as a bench seat in my workshed which I had constructed out of a chicken house Dad bought for me. The Yanks became a familiar sight around the village before and after D Day when a lot of the walking wounded used to find their way to the village. We invited three who came walking by on Sunday tea time to join us. They certainly enjoyed Mum's home made cakes, but I'm not so sure about the tea. These three often often dropped in, and we used to get a supply of their candy which was wonderful compared to the meagre sweet ration of our own. I can't remember their names now, but one was a Sergeant whose home was in Tennessee. He completely baffled Dad when he asked if our dog Jock was a good bird dog.

My sister Joyce was at that time working as a maid for the Mackintosh family at Alderholt Park. This Sergeant met her on one of her Sundays off and for a while there was quite a romance between them, he used to bribe me with a ten shilling note (fifty pence now but a lot of money then,) to lend him my bike so they could go off for a ride somewhere. My sister only ever went out with this one Yank for a brief time, but there were several girls and one or two married women, who consorted with them en masse , their reputations suffered as a consequence. On more than one occasion we stumbled upon them engaged in activities which we had previously only witnessed in birds and animals.

Jim Taylors farm bordered Grimsditch Camp and his sheperd was a character by the name of Jack Harris, a man of over middle age at this time, who lived with his married sister at Townsend. A real countryman with a very dry sense of humour, Jack and I became very good friends. During

holidays and Sunday mornings I used to visit where the sheep were on the farm. I used to help carrying the hurdles and pitching the next days fold for the sheep, and when that was done we would go off in search of a rabbit or pheasant with Jack's old four-ten shotgun. He taught me a lot, how to set traps and rabbit wires, where to find pheasant and Partridge nests, Badger sets, and where the Fox was playing with her Cubs. I used to take him some of Mum's fruit cake and very often he would send back a pheasant or a rabbit in return. He also used to give us much of his sweet ration, which he didn't have much use for. A quiet pint of beer in the evening in the Working Mens Club was more to his taste.

Years later after Mary and I were married and living at Townsend Jack used to lodge with his widowed sister in a Council Bungalow just round the corner from us in Downview Road. And when his sister died rather suddenly Mary used to give him a cooked meal most days for several years until he himself passed away in Fordingbridge Hospital after a few days suffering from pneumonia, the only time he had been ill in his life. By this time Jack had been retired for many a year, and apart from his daily pint he used to enjoy a small bet on the horses, one of his favourites being a horse called Goodmenaremist, a name I shall never forget. I think he used to back this horse every time it ran. Jack used to sit in the corner at the Club sipping his pint and watching people putting money into the one armed bandit, when Jack judged it was pretty full and no jackpot had recently been won he would go up and slip in a couple of ten pence peices, and very often he would capitalise at others expence. Good Men are Missed!

July 1994

I am glad I have not, until today, made any addition to my story. Chapters were written periodically until about the end of April when one of the wettest winters of my life came to an end. This meant that first of all I was very late getting underway with the gardening, and rather foolishly I started to put in a completely new kitchen for Mary, and this took me a lot longer to complete than I had anticipated. I should have started much sooner.

On top of this my brother Peter suffered a second heart attack, having had one six years earlier. Peter lives in Salisbury and not having much of a garden of his own, rents one off the Council owned allotments nearby. Because of the wet weather he had been unable to dig it over and I volunteered to do it for him.

Like me he loves his gardening, and I thought it would be good therapy during his recovery if he could potter about planting and weeding if the hard work was done. Happily at the moment he is recovering well, but its possible he may need an operation later.

Anyway I have had several busy months, but things seem to be settling down and maybe I can get the rest of my story written.

By the way this month saw my 65th birthday and I have been able to draw our state pension. We shall be a lot better off, it's almost doubled our income.

As the war progressed, the build up to the invasion of Europe saw the whole of the area become one huge armed camp.

There were American and British forces hidden in every wood and under the trees in the hedgerows. One American Division was stationed in the woods and fields between Allenford, Knoll Farm and Damerham. Many of their soldiers were Negros, the first real black faces that us country boys had ever seen. They were very friendly and kind to the locals, and many were the candy bars and chocolates that came our way whenever we cycled that way. Some of the local girls must have reciprocated as there were a couple of coloured kids in Damerham at the end of the war.

Along the road between Allenford and Damerham were huge piles of ammunition, land mines and petrol cans covered with tarpaulins and camouflage netting, hidden under the trees.

One day there was a terrible explosion as one of these blew up, killing a Sergeant and several men. It was of such force that tree trunks were hurled almost half a mile, and when we heard the bang at Martin School, plaster dust came down from the ceiling and every window rattled.

Today, fifty years later you can still see the gap in the trees where those soldiers died.

As mentioned before, when I reached the age of fourteen, Mr Johns persuaded my parents to let me stay on at school for an extra six months. And I am sure that I benefited greatly from this individual tuition. So when I eventually left to go out into the world outside and earn my living it was the beginning of 1944.

I don't know how Father heard about the first job I had on leaving School, probably from someone in the farming world.

Anyway one Sunday morning he said come along, we are going to cycle up to New Farm to see Charlie Farris about a job for you. Mr Farris owned H&F Farris, Agricultural Engineers and after a discussion in which I can't remember having a great deal to say, I found myself to be apprenticed there or the next few years. In those days there were none of the formalities and paperwork of today. Just a handshake between father and employer and that was it. The weekly wage was fifteen shillings per week, rising by ten shillings each year. Fifteen shillings was the same as seventy-five pence in todays money, but in real terms allowing for inflation it would be something like fifty pounds now. The average man's wage at that time was only five or

six pounds per week.

After getting over my initial few days of apprehenison and shyness the job turned out to be ideal, in fact in spite of having to cycle five miles each way in all weathers I loved every moment. I had always been interested in and quite good at woodwork and anything mechanical, and in those days agricultural engineering covered this and so much more. Blacksmithing and Welding and even a Moulding Shop where cast iron parts were made for the various farm machinery that was manufactured there. Among the things that were made entirely on the spot were hay and straw elevators, sack lifters, ring rollers, chicken houses on wheels, harrows, and various farm trailers using an old lorry axle and wheels. All this was on top of the repairs of a multitude of different makes of tractors and machines.

During the War years a great mass of farm machinery was sent ot Britain as war aid from America and Canada, at that time with the huge acreages under cultivation in North America they were far advanced mechanically, and this had the effect of propelling our horse and cart farms of pre-war days into the machine age in a few short years.

H and L Farris had acquired the Massey Harris agency, and as they were at that time the biggest manufacturer in North America it gave the firm a big advantage in our area, which was up to twenty miles radius of Salisbury.

I had the good fortune to spend a great deal of my time as an apprentice under a real old fashioned craftsman who could turn his hand to anything. His name was Freddie Mullins, a small man with a bristling moustache, who though normally very easy to get on with, had a fiery temper when upset.

He and I got along fine, he taught me all he could unstintingly, not like some who used to think it clever to withold knowledge to let youngsters make mistakes and then make fun of their predicament. I owe him a lot, and look back with fond memories of those days fifty years ago.

Fred could turn his hand to almost any craft, but in the main he did most of the mechanical work, plus the blacksmithing and the moulding and casting of machine parts.

Jack Judd was the carpenter, but also lent a hand elsewhere when necessary. Harold Stevens was a semi-skilled general hand who helped whoever was busiest. And then there was Bunny Baker who served at the petrol pumps and in between was the general dogsbody at everyone's beck and call. Charlier Farris worked as well most of the time except when visiting customers, attending agricultural sales and on Tuesdays when he always went to Market Day in Salisbury. This visit to the Cattle Market was most important to Charlie as he could meet all the farmers from a wide area, sell machinary both new and second hand, and arrange any repair jobs.

During the War years the mechanisation on the farms had progressed at

such a rate that Fred with my assistance spent most of our time repairing tractors and machinery.

There were so many different manufacturers and various models, that there was always something new coming along and something new to learn. As I mentioned before most of the makes were of North American origin although by this time several were setting up factories in the U.K.

I can still remember most of them, there was Allis-Chalmers, Massey-Harris, John Dere, Case, McGormick, Minneapolis Moline, Fordson, Ferguson, Marshall, Caterpillar, David Brown, and probably more. A lot of these have since ceased to exist or have amalgamated. Massey-Harris of whom we were agents had set up factories in Manchester and Kilmarnock, and machines and spare parts were sent by rail to the old goods station on Tollgate Road. This meant that the local hauliers, Bert Bacon and Sons from Coombe Bissett were delivering goods to us every few days. The first Combine Harvesters came from Canada and used to arrive in one huge crate about the size of a horsebox and weighing three tons. This took quite a bit of handling but aided by a tractor and ropes it was persuaded to slide down ramps off the lorry and by means of rollers into position to be assembled. The first three were done under the supervision of an engineer from the factory, but after that we were on our own. The engine, gearbox, and the threshing drum and concave were already assembled, but all the rest was packed in around in various boxes and sacks. There were thousands of nuts and bolts, flat washers, locking washers, split pins, grease nipples, and many more small parts all in separate small bags.

It all reminded me very much of the Meccano Set which I'd played with not so long before.

It took three men three days to get the Combine up and running, and when we were on our own longer than that.

The engine which powered the Massey-Harris 21 Combine was a six cylinder Chrysler running on all petrol as opposed to most of the tractors which started on petrol but switched over to paraffin when hot. At that time diesels were pretty rare, whereas now everything on the farm is diesel powered.

I used to love the sound of those engines, which had just a straight exhaust pipe and no silencer, and gave forth a lovely throaty roar when opened up.

As soon as I reached the age of sixteen I got a licence to drive any farm machinery on the road, although on many an occasion I had done so previously. But this enabled me to deliver new tractors and combine harvesters to the farms sometimes up to twenty miles away very often.

Needless to say I was highly delighted, and probably a bit big headed to be the envy of most of the other lads of my generation, the majority of who

worked on the farms at that time. Charlie Farris also acquired a tractor and low loading trailer of his own, quite a fast Massey-Harris which could manage about 25 M.P.H. in top gear, and with this we could pick up our own machinery from the railway, also collect and deliver to the farms. I remember one trip I made as far as the other side of Winchester, which took me all of one day.

Nothing delighted Charlie more than attending Farm sales when he could very often buy up second hand tractors and attachments quite cheaply, and after they were overhauled and repainted he could sell them on again at a nice little profit. This also meant some nice trips out for me, but these were not every day, most of my time was spent in the workshop or at the forge. Fred and I sometimes used to go out to the farms and repair a tractor in the barn or cartshed. Charlie Farris used to drive us out in the morning, drop us off with our tools and lunch bag and collect us late afternoon. Fred never had a driving licence, but when I was old enough to get one, Charlie bought an ex army pick-up Austin with a canvas covered tilt for the rear. This enabled us to go off on our own and get back as soon as we had finished, and we could attend to breakdowns out in the field, which were quite frequent especially at haymaking and harvest times.

The pace of life was not nearly so frantic in those days and generally the attitude was, well, if it ain't finished today I will wait till tomorrow. I remember one occasion which still makes me smile today. This came about when Fred and I went one day to repair a gearbox in Farmer Giles Fordson tractor in the lovely old village of Teffont. We were working in the cartshed alongside the farmhouse, the job entailed blocking up the tractor underneath its belly, unbolting it all round and sliding the two halves apart.

Well, the job was going according to plan and by dinner time we had the gears all spread out on the bench. Just then Farmer Giles appeared with a large saucepan all steaming away, he said 'I thought e could do with warming up on such a cold day, I've warmed you up some of me homemade cider,' and left us to get on with our dinner. Well I tried some of this but found it far too sharp for my taste, and left the rest to Fred.

He drank the rest which must have been at least two pints and we started back to work, but after about an hour Fred all of a sudden said, 'I think we shall have to leave this job and come back tomorrow.' I said 'what's up Fred don't you feel well,' and he said, 'no I don't, I can see two bloody tractors and I can't work on them both at once.' Well I went and told Farmer Giles and he laughed and said I'd better drive you home then, and when we got back he and Charlie Farris laughed for ages, and poor old Fred never lived it down.

Farmer Giles was a favourite farmer of mine, always ready for a laugh and joke, but one day I remember was not so pleasant.

He had another farm apart from the one at Teffont, and this was over the hill by the stone quarry at Chicksgrove.

The main line railway ran through this farm and one foggy morning the express train to Exeter and the West Country hit one of his Fordson tractors on the crossing, killing the driver and carrying the wreckage the best part of a mile up the line.

Some little while after we collected what was left for spare parts, and Farmer Giles bought a new Fordson Major from the insurance.

The supply of this new tractor involved another inccident which I was to remember for a very long time. I knew the day before that I was to deliver the Fordson Major to Chicksgrove and return with a Minneapolis-Moline tractor of his which needed overhauling. My younger brother Peter was home on school holidays and I asked Charlie Farris if it would be okay to take him along for a ride as I had on previous occasions.

Well all was fine until we came to the return journey, the old M.M. was in a bit of a shaky condition but it started up okay and away we came, but unknown to me the brakes were practically useless and the hand throttle controlling the governed engine speed tended to leave the engine racing like mad. Between Chicksgrove and the Dinton-Teffont road is a very steep dip in the road and a bend around a large pond at the bottom. Well as we went down the hill I closed the throttle but the engine still raced away, I applied the brakes and nothing happened, we must have been doing over 40 M.P.H. at the pond and how we got around the bend I don't know to this day. I was up over the hill the other side before I came out in a cold sweat and realised Peter was still clinging beside me.

Many were the farmers I knew well in those days after the War, most of them dead and gone now. Some of the names I remember well were Donald Hicks at Odstock, Jack Toser at Homington, the Ropers at Handley and Wilton, Tommy Green at Thickthorn, Jimmy Riddle and his old father at Woodyates, Beckleys at Bowerchalke, Butlers up at Chase Farm, the Days and Dibbens at Handley, Langford at Compton Chamberlane, the Sims brothers at Homington, John Kent at Coombe Bissett, the Clare brothers at New Farm, and Mr Martin at Gussage. All these were of course in addition to the local farmers around Martin, Bernard Rowe at Hut Farm, John Baker at Bustard, Woodvines at Tidpit, Jimmy Taylor at Talke's Farm, Captain Rhodes at St Brides, Reg White at Kings Farm, Captain Main and later on Denshams at Damers Farm, and then there was Ted Bath who ran the Coote Arms Pub and the farm there. Then there were all the little farms and smallholdings which abounded at that time, Shering at East Martin and h is brother at the Coote, Sid Bennett, Bill Selwood, Teddy Barter and his son Jack, Bert Scammel, Joe Melsome, Harold Frampton and Jimmy Curtis.

All the bigger farms employed several farm workers, some as many as a dozen, so you can imagine the number of men I got to know well. Even today I often come across someone from the past, most of them long retired now, but still retaining a good memory of the past when though the work was hard, there was always someone to share your troubles with and plenty of hands to share the work. What a contrast today with perhaps the farmers and one employee cultivating vast acreages, how lonely it must be most of the time.

Anyway I am getting a bit ahead of myself in my story, as for almost two years after I started work the War was still in progress, and not long after I began my apprenticeship an event took place which has stayed vividly in my memory all my life.

As I said before as the War progressed most of southern England became like an army camp, and maneouvres went on almost daily. A lot of these maneouvres involved Paratroop drops in the open farmland around here, and of course this always aroused our interest and we always stopped work to watch.

One morning such an operation was taking place in the open fields sloping away from New Farm towards the Rockbourne road. It was midmorning tea-break time and we were standing at the rear of our workshops watching these paratroops dropping up to within a few hundred yards of where we were.

I had been detailed to help a fitter who had come down from Manchester to repair a tractor which had a faulty gearbox, and was still under guarantee. He was even more interested than we were as hundreds of parachutes floated down from the Dakotas, which was the plane often used for this purpose. I suppose coming from the north he wasn't used to seeing such a spectacle as this.

As the planes flew over, one had just started dropping the paratroops and perhaps as many as a dozen had already left the plane, when without any apparant cause from about four hundred feet in the air the Dakota dived at a steep angle and plunged into the open field about three quarters of a mile away.

As the plane started to dive two more paratroops managed to escape from the open hatch, one whose parachute for a split second fouled the tailplane of the Dakota was extremely fortunate.

The plane just started to pull out of its dive and hit the ground almost in a belly flop, and a huge column of oily smoke arose. The chap from Manchester said 'let's go,' and I said the quickest way is to go by car round to the Rockbourne road so he and I jumped into his car, raced around the road to the nearest point, then over the fence and into the field.

The shattered fuselage was well ablaze as several of the troops were trying to reach bodies still inside and others lying close by. We pulled a couple of the bodies away from the heat and flames and some of the men were having to restrain the Sergeant Major from trying to reach someone in the worst part of the blaze. Ammunition and other explosives started to go off and everyone had to retreat, none of the bodies we had pulled away showed any signs of life, and the sight and smell of those blackened and burnt corpses with their limbs twisted at all angles stays with me even now. Thirteen men died in that crash, two American aircrew and eleven British paratroops.

When we got back to Farris's and told the others what we had seen the full horror of it all began to dawn on me and I just couldn't eat a thing at dinnertime. I began to realise that until now I had been looking at the War as something of a game, now it was different.

Ever since I was a boy during the War I have been very interested in all types of Aircraft, and still are now.

But I have never been very keen to fly in one, I am beginning to think that the crash of that Dakota and scene afterwards, subconsciously affected my mind.

As time went on and I acquired more skill and knowledge mainly thanks to old Fred, Charlie began to trust me to do jobs on my own, and when I got a driving licence I was able to go out to the farms on breakdowns. Apart from Haymaking and Harvest when we used to get urgent requests for repairs to Combine Harvesters and Binders, the rest of the year was mostly for tractors failing to start or coming to a halt in the middle of a ploughed field, which very often meant walking for several hundred yards carrying a heavy toolbox. Another frequent request was 'the milking machine engine won't start'. A lot of the milking of the cows was done in the fields from a portable milking machine, or in dairies where there was no electricity supply. For several years after the War there were still many remote farms not yet connected to the mains. Even H&L Farris had no supply for several years after I joined the firm, we had a large diesel engine which had to run every day to supply the house and workshop. In the main workshop was another engine, a petrol paraffin fueled Ruston Hornsby which was very temperamental to start sometimes, this, by means of a long overhead shaft and numerous belts and pulleys, drove drills, lathes, a mechanical metal saw, and grinding wheels. At the top end of the workshop Jack Judd had a band-saw, circurlar sawbench and a planing machine for his carpentry use.

Alongside the main workshop was a Timber store and behind this was the Moulding Shop. The floor of this shop was covered with grey-black moulding sand to a depth of about a foot. This was entirely Fred's domain and when it came to the actual casting everybody obeyed his command.

Fred would spend anything up to three weeks preparing the moulds from a multitude of wooden patterns of cog wheels, brackets, road wheels, roller rings and much more, of every shape and size. The moulding boxes were made in two halves one of which was set into the floor of sand, the other half was removeable to enable the pattern to be removed, leaving a hollow space to be filled with the moulten cast iron. When Fred was satisfied that all was ready, everybody was called on to assist. First the furnace which was under a lean-to shed adjoining had to be cleaned out and relined with fire clay, then from a huge scrapheap at the rear cast iron was carried to the furnace and broken down with sledge hammers into suitable size. Fred would supervise this very closely and reject any unsuitable material, he could just look at a piece of freshly broken casting and tell whether it was hard or soft iron. When sufficient cast iron and furnace coke was piled up ready, the furnace and long handled buckets for carrying the molten metal had been lined with fireclay and everything possible had been done to ensure a trouble free day's casting, a halt was called for the day and everyone was told to be ready for an early start the next morning.

Charlie Farris himself would get up early and fire the furnace so that by the time we got there everything was ready for a day's hard work. Once started operations had to continue non-stop, and something to eat and drink had to wait until one at a time a few moments could be snatched during a lull in proceedings. Charlie Farris operated the opening and closing of the furnace to fill the buckets with the molten metal, and Fred was in charge closely supervising the filling of the moulds one by one.

One man kept the furnace topped up and others were busy carrying, those buckets when full weighed about two hundredweight and by the end of the day back ache was almost guaranteed.

With all the careful preparation things used to run smoothly and I can only twice remember incidents which could have had much more serious consequences but fortunately no one was hurt.

The first was when unknown to us the roof had leaked during rain the night before and was present in one of the moulds.

When we started to pour the metal, the mould blew up scattering sand and splattering metal everywhere, but luckily no one was in the line of fire. The other incident was when the plate on the front of the furnace gave way, and about two tons of molten cast iron poured out on to the floor. We ran for it and only the soles of our boots suffered, but it put an end to casting for the day.

One of the things I used to look forward to was the summer agricultural shows. These were usually one day affairs, but one year the Southern Counties Show came to Salisbury and this was a three day event. Taking part

in these shows meant quite a lot of preparation. A tent was erected for entertaining friends and prospective customers, and a whole range of equipment transported to be put on show. Apart from the Show Day itself this meant at least one day before and after running back and forth and I used to enjoy this immensely. Almost everyone, farmers and workers used to have a day at the show and a good time was had by all. Two of my favourite Shows were at Romsey and Ellingham near Fordingbridge.

When I first went to work at New Farm Charlie Farris and his wife Nellie had two children, Rosemary who was about ten or eleven, and Hedley, known as Chubby, who was about four or five. Shortly after the War had ended Nellie had another girl, Georgina, when she was well over forty years old.

Nellie Farris came from the White family and was a sister of three farmers locally, Reg White at Kings Farm Martin, Charlie White at Allenford and Gordon White who farmed at Thickthorn near Handley on the Blandford road. Rosemary Farris grew up to be a very nice looking girl, but rather snooty like her Mother, in later life she was to marry and divorce Viscount Portman.

Hedley was much more likeable and like his father, but he didn't have the energy and drive in the business sense like his father and when he took over the firm years later he let it decline and in the end gave up altogether. He became a Salisbury District Councillor and found local politics to be more attractive. Georgie grew up to marry a farmer and lives at Hanging Langford. The other day I saw her on a local Television Programme with her pedigree sheep, and I remember on more than a few occasions when I carried her in her carrycot from the car into the house for her Mum.

It was through Rosemary Farris that I was to meet Mary who was to become the love of my life, and my dear wife.

Rosemary when she was about fourteen, became very friendly with another girl called Rosemary Coward, who lived close by, and often they used to wander through the workshop to be teased by the men. There was at that time another lad from Martin working there by the name of Gordon Budd, and he and I used to chase them into the stores and round the back of the workshop to try and steal a kiss and cuddle. Mind you I think they used to give us every encouragement.

Well one day some months after they came in with another girl of about the same age, a tall slim brunette with a hip swaying walk that I found irrisistible. Her name was Mary and I discovered she lived at Knighton Wood where her father was shepherd for Major Lamb, whose farm stretched from the Chalke Valley right over to the Blandford Road.

Mary was at that time attending school in Salisbury, and after I became

friendly with her she used to run over the fields to the bus stop at Grimsdyke to be early enough to catch me on the way to work in the morning. We would have a few minutes together, then when the double-decker Wilts and Dorset bus arrived I would follow on my bike all the way to New Farm and if I had managed to keep up would get a wave and a blown kiss from the back of the top deck. In the afternoon, when they returned from school I would try to get in to the yard at the right time to give her a wave when the bus stopped at New Farm. Young love! Would it last forever? In our case I think it will.

At the time when I first met Mary I was eighteen, and therefore being four years older I had since leaving school been going out with several girl friends. However only two were to be of any consequence, the first was a girl called Olive Bleach who had been evacuated here during the War, and after leaving school had become a nanny at Bustard Manor looking after John Baker's two young boys. She was my first real girl friend and living as she did only about a hundred yards down the road from my house at Fern Cottage, I saw her often. She spent a lot of time at home when she wasn't working and I used to visit her at the Manor when the Bakers were out.

One incident I shall always remember occured on a Saturday evening when Mr Baker and his wife usually went out and never got home before eleven o'clock. After Olive had put the boys to bed I arrived and made myself at home, and I was sitting in John Baker's armchair with Olive cuddled up in my lap when at about nine-thirty we heard the car pull up on the gravelled drive outside. After the initial seconds panic had worn off Olive rushed me out of the side door and I raced over the lawn and over the garden wall and up the road to home. A confrontation with a man the size of John Baker was not something to look forward to, and I don't think he would have been too pleased had he caught me curled up with the nursemaid, drinking his whisky and smoking his cigarettes. Soon after this Olive went back to Portsmouth, her home town, and eventually married a sailor, though this ended in divorce and she even came back to Martin years after and married a local, Ken Shearing, and went to live at Wilton where he worked in the carpet factory.

The other girl I went out with for any length of time was a Martin girl, the sister of one of my best friends Jiffy Smith.

Her name was Susy and I liked her very much, I don't remember now how it was we drifted apart, I am sure we never quarrelled, she was a lovely girl, and I still have a soft spot for her nearly fifty years on. She lives in Salisbury now, but I see her occasionally, and we are still good friends. Many were the walks we used to have around the countryside accompanied by her old dog Joe, and many were the times I used to give her a lift down from the bus stop

at the Coote Arms on the bar of my bike. Her brother Jiffy (Bill) went into the Marines when he was sixteen and made a career of it. He brought one of his pals home on leave and this pal (Taffy) and Susy were married a few years later, but tragedy struck when they had not long been married, when he was killed in a road accident in Suez where he had been posted.

The first time Mary and I walked out together was when the bluebells were blooming in the woods at Knighton Hill. I used to cycle up there in the evenings and we met in the woods. It was several weeks before I met her parents, and that only came about because one day her Mum said 'you may as well bring him in home because we know who you are going out to meet!'

After Mary left school that summer she got a job as a nursemaid to a family at Burgate and then later on she went to train as a nurse at Salisbury Hospital. At that time I had a new racing cycle and was very proud of the distance I covered in very short time. I used to visit her at Burgate and later on when she was in the nurses home at Odstock Hospital.

I used to get from Fern Cottage to Odstock in under half an hour, and that took some hard pedalling to achieve. Mary also had a new bike, and on her days off when the weather was good we used to go far and wide. We used to take a picnic and go somewhere out in the country or sometimes we even went down to the coast at Mudeford. One day we cycled as far as Sherborne in Dorset to visit my sister Joyce, a round trip of nearly eighty miles.

One day on the way back from Mudeford we were caught in a terrific thunder storm at Somerly and by the time we reached East Martin Mary was soaked through and had to borrow my sister Joyce's clothes. My mother unfortunately did not approve of Mary and did all she could to put me off. Mary was born when her Mum was single, very much frowned on in those days. Her stepfather Ernie was a bit of a rough character, and also frequented the Coote Arms Pub, although he was never drunk to my knowledge. Anyway, Mother thought I was letting myself down, but she never suceeded in putting me off Mary in spite of many harsh words between Mum and I. In fact I think it probably made me more determined, and I spent more and more time away from home with Mary. We used to meet on every possible opportunity and as our friendship grew we became ever more close and were lovers before Mary was sixteen. We loved one another with a great passion, and although in the many years since there have been times when temptations have been put before me, I can honestly say that I have never loved another.

V.E. DAY + 50

8th May 1995

Yesterday the whole country celebrated the end of the Second World War

fifty years on. The Martin Working Mens Club was open from midday until midnight, and a party was held inside, and mostly outside for it was a lovely fine day.

There was entertainment for the children and plenty of food and drink for all the members and any villagers who cared to come along.

I met some former school friends that no longer live in the village, people I had not seen for ages who travelled especially to be there.

Victory in Europe, it doesn't seem like fifty years have gone by since then. I can remember we had a party then in the Village Hall, lots of cakes and jam tarts , and all the flags flying everywhere. I think the Women's Institute were given extra rations for the party, because the food situation was even then strictly rationed, and was to remain so for two or three more years.

Of course the War against Japan in the far east went on into the end of the year until it was to end abruptly with the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan. At that time I found it difficult to understand how two bombs could make the Japs surrender, when hundreds of thousands were needed to subdue Germany.

No one then had any knowledge of the splitting of the atom and the awesome power it could unleash.

Getting back to normal life after the War seemed such a slow process that nothing seemed to change at all, especially to people living in the country. Apart from getting mains water and the electricity laid on I suppose the thing we noticed most of all was the disappearance of all the military activities, we had got used to living in almost an armed camp. First most of the Americans went, then one noticed the German and Italian prisoners of war who had been working on the farms were gone, then the Polish Army who had taken over Grimsditch Camp went home. Of course with living as we do even now between the Army bases on Salisbury Plain and Blandford Camp we still see a fair bit of military hardware, and then there is the flying base at Boscombe Down and the Helicopter base at Middle Wallop.

The shops gradually got new things to sell as the manufacturing industries got going. By about 1947 one could begin to see new cycles and motor bikes and even new cars on the road. I think I mentioned before that I only was paid 15 shillings per week, but I had saved money from when I was at School when I worked evenings and Saturdays for Mr Towell at Swayne's Firs. After I had 30 pounds in savings I spent almost all of it on a new 4 speed Raleigh racing bike, it was my pride and joy, and I used it for almost 20 years.

Dec. 13th 1995

It's almost Christmas and I am ashamed to say my potted history of my life

and times has been sadly neglected.

As one gets older the days and months seem to fly by, and if I don't soon finish this, time will overtake me.

I have told how Mary and I met and became very close and loved with a great passion. We used to meet at every opportunity, evenings and weekends, even when I was playing cricket or football Mary used to come and watch.

Things went on in this way until we were parted by events beyond our control! I will explain. After the War was ended conscription of men when they reached the age of eighteen was continued unless they were in occupations which were considered to be of national importance, such as agriculture, fishing and mining. As I was serving an apprenticeship I was allowed time to finish, and as a result of this I was twenty years old before I was called up.

I wanted to go into the R.A.F. mainly because I had always had a great interest in aircraft, and also because my cousin Joan Savory who had served right through the War, impressed on me that it was the best service to join.

Well I passed the medical tests A.1. and went for an interview where I was informed I could indeed join the R.A.F. and because there was an agreement with the Trades Union I would be engaged during my period of Service as a tradesman in the Motor Transport Section.

As the day of enlistment approached I must say I got more and more apprehensive. I had never lived away from home apart from a brief holiday with relatives, and what was even worse was I had to report to a place called Padgate, several hundred miles away in Lancashire. My sons today travel all over the World and think nothing of it, how different it was then for a shy country boy venturing into the unknown.

My Mother had a cousin May living in London who also happened to be my Godmother, and it was arranged that I would travel to London on the Saturday, and on to R.A.F. Padgate on the Monday where I had to report by 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

I shall always remember that weekend, the last weekend in February 1950. I was made very welcome by May and her husband Alan. On Sunday I was taken by car on a tour around London, and saw for the first time places like the Tower, Buckingham Palace, Houses of Parliament and London Bridge and the Thames. Alan had worked all his life for a Brewery except for the War years when he was in the Army, and on the Monday morning I went to his workplace in the Brewery where he gave me a guided tour. I shall always remember the smell of the Hops which were spread out to dry on the vast warehouse floor. Mid morning Alan took an hour off to see me off on the train from Euston Station, and after that I was on my own.

As it happened I got into a carriage in which there were three other lads travelling to the same destination. We seemed to be drawn together by the common apprehension we all felt. But I must say I felt a lot better when I found out they were just as worried as I.

When we arrived at Warrington Station, we were met by an R.A.F. Sergeant, and discovered to our surprise that there were another thirty odd recruits on the train. Outside the station two lorries were waiting and without more ado we were herded into the back and off we went the three miles to camp.

R.A.F. Padgate was a vast place used at that time solely for the purpose of 9 weeks initial training or square-bashing as we knew it. There was a huge square, in the corner of which stood a Lancaster Bomber, and surrounding it were row upon row of long wooden huts, cookhouses, mess halls and several large buildings used for various training and administration. Then farther afield were assault courses and at the far end playing fields and a rifle range.

We were off loaded and assigned to a hut and a bed space, the only furniture apart from the bed was a narrow locker cum wardrobe and a small folding table. We were then marched off several hundred yards it seemed to the bedding store and returned with an armful of blankets and two sheets. If I remember correctly there were twenty eight in our hut, seven huts in our Squadron, and in all about two hundred men.

I use the term men, there were a few older ones such as myself, but most were only just eighteen, and as motley a collection of young lads as I had ever seen in my life.

To my surprise some of them were of a much shyer nature and even more homesick than I. Some were of a rough and ready sort and a few were City wide boys. One or two from well off families seemed to have come straight from high school and had no work experience at all. But the majority were ordinary working lads and a few were ex-apprentices like myself, one of whom was a Rolls Royce apprentice, who later on gave me a lot of useful information. My training had been as an Agricultural Engineer and although engines were no problem, I was not very familiar with other aspects of cars and lorries. However this was all in the future, we had this square-bashing to contend with first.

Things began to get moving in earnest the next morning. First we were formed up into ranks of three and had our first attempt at marching in step, this time off to the clothing stores to be kitted out with uniform, kit bags and webbing belts. Back to the billets to change into battle dress and boots, and to stack all the other gear away. As you can guess some of the uniforms were very ill fitting and the rough hairy texture did not make for comfort. Any that needed alterations went off to the tailors and the rest of us got a lesson

to show the correct way to stack our folded blankets and sheets, and how to lay our kit our for inspection. After a ten minute tea break in the N.A.A.F.I. where by the time you had queued you were lucky if you had time to drink your tea and swallow a lump of cake before it was all outside again and form up in threes.

Of course the Drill Sergeant and Corporals made sure they somehow always managed to head the queue.

After lunch, yes I must tell you about food on our first day, for breakfast it being a cold frosty February morning they kindly gave us porridge or what I assumed was the R.A.F. equivalent, a grey lumpy mass flopped onto our plates, as we held them out to the kitchen staff like begging bowls.

With a liberal dose of sugar and milk I managed to get it down, we also had bread and margarine and marmalade which wasn't too bad. But come lunchtime and we held out our plates once more and whack! another grey lumpy mass this time accompanied by two sausages and a hard boiled egg.

I thought surely its not the porridge left over from breakfast! However I was reliably informed that it was mashed potato, although without tasting it one would never know. The boiled egg was not what I had been used to, when peeled the white was sort of edged with green, and the yolk likewise tinged black.

I think they must have been boiled and reheated on several occasions. However it was eat or go without, and after a while hunger got the better of me and I managed over the next couple of months to eat most of the food, although at times I felt sick.

After lunch it was off to the Medical Section there to first of all have innoculations for various diseases, and then have a lecture for cleanliness and the dangers of unprotected Sex and the horrors of Venereal Disease accompanied by pictures showing all the gory details. Several of the lads fainted having the needle and one when the M.O. showed a slide of a diseased organ.

This lad appeared to have all the signs of being a 'nancy boy' and after a couple of days drill and taking a lot of bullying from the Corporals, went sick and we didn't see him again.

Going sick was not reccomended, because if you missed more than about two or three days drill you were left behind everyone else and so you went back to the next intake which were a fortnight behind.

The second day we were issued with rifles, the old Lee Enfield 303 types. They were left overs from the War and obsolete but we had to clean and polish them as if they were brand new. Rifle drill became a daily occurance, sometimes split up with the Corporal in charge of each hut, and sometimes the whole two hundred together with the Drill Sergeant in charge.

To put it mildly he was a 'little bastard' and everyone hated the sight of him. He strutted about with his cane under his arm like a little bantam cock, he was only about five feet two, and he looked up at you with cold staring eyes like a rattlesnake about to strike. He could put you in a cold sweat without speaking.

After we have grasped the rudiments of square bashing we are informed that we will tomorrow, for a change, be allowed to have fun on the assault course. For this we were issued a denim boiler suit, and at the start we were quite enjoying the prospect of running, climbing over obstacles etc. That was until we got to the two foot diameter drain pipe half full of mud and water and twenty yards long. After that there was the Monkey Run swinging from one ring to another over water, and at the end of the course was a small pond with a thick rope hanging from a crossbeam. One of the Corporals stood at the side with a long stick with which he was supposed to hook the rope back for each recruit to leap and grasp as they came running up.

This was of course a great temptation for the Corporal to make sure that the rope was whisked out of reach of anyone who he didn't like, and they got a good soaking in the muddy water. Few escaped this treatment over the two months training and I was not one of the favoured ones.

Once a week we had P.T. for the whole morning, and this started off before breakfast with a five mile run into Warrington and back in P.T. kit and hob-nailed boots.

The sound of two hundred men of all shapes and sizes running along the cobbled streets in the town must have been something to behold, and all the Mill girls on their way to work used to line the pavement and cheer and catcall us on our way. In spite of the presence of the P.T. Sergeant and two Corporals the lads used to respond in kind and I think the Mill girls used to think of it as one of the highlights of their days. They got a visit every weekday morning as the other Squadrons took their turn.

After breakfast it was up to the Gym. This was a huge Hanger type of building, almost as big as a football pitch, and indeed they used to have five-a-side matches between the various Squadrons and Boxing as well.

I used to quite like the Boxing, and when I learned that if you volunteered for extra training in the evenings you were excused fatigues in the Hut, Latrines, and Washroom, I quickly volunteered. Three three minute rounds were the matches and I won four, two by my opponent being counted out. But during the last week of training I was up against a lad from Aldershot who weighed over sixteen stones, and I was then only about thirteen and a half. Well I managed to narrowly outpoint him, by dancing around and keeping out of harms way, but I took several hefty punches and thinking discretion the better part of valour decided that boxing had served its

purpose and retired undefeated.

Another part of our training was a weekly visit to the Rifle Range. I really enjoyed this as I had always kept an air gun, and had many a time potted rabbits with Jack Harris's old four-ten shotgun, so I really enjoyed having a 303 rifle in my hands and did very well.

Some of the lads had never handled a gun in their lives and were scared stiff, the instructors did their best but many were given up as a bad job. During the last week of our training we were driven in lorries to another range somewhere near Manchester. There we were given instruction on the Bren-Gun and Sten Machine Guns. The Bren was wonderfully accurate, but the Sten was a mass produced lightweight with a hair trigger and if you weren't careful the whole magazine would go off at once spraying bullets everywhere but on the target.

Halfway through our initial training on the fifth week this was almost entirely devoted, apart for early morning and mealtime parades, to fatigues all round the camp.

On being detailed to the Cookhouse I was lucky to be sent to the Bakehouse, where if you played your cards right extra rations in the form of nice new crusty bread, dough cakes, and scones were to be had.

This week of fatigues of course ensured that the R.A.F. at Padgate always had a constant captive workforce, as each Squadron did their weeks in turn.

During our initial training we were not allowed off camp in our free time, not that we had much, for the first fortnight. But after that we ventured out in twos and threes on the odd occasion, evenings we were mostly too tired and there was not a lot of interest in a small town like Warrington. On two Saturdays several of us caught a bus into Manchester to see a football match. One of the games I remember was Manchester City and Derby County.

That sticks in my mind because two famous English footballers were playing. Frank Swift in goal for Manchester City and Raich Carter for Derby, both of whom played for England. Carter was one of the best forwards ever to play for his country and his partnership with Peter Doherty the Irish international was legendary. I think Manchester won two to one, but after forty odd years my memory may be false.

After our week of fatigues were over we had our first chance of leave in the form of a forty-eight hour pass.

We were allowed off from after lunch on Friday till eight o'clock Monday morning. As I was so far away from home I hesitated before accepting, but several from the London area decided to go and I thought I would chance it.

As it happened it was midnight before I got home, I missed the last bus from Salisbury, and just about scraped up enough cash for a taxi to East Martin. I knew Dad would see me all right for a few pounds to get back. The

R.A.F. pay was only twenty eight shillings a week, only a quarter of my apprentice wage when I finished at H&L Farris.

Anyway I had the whole of Saturday to spend with Mary, and that made the journey well worth the effort as far as we were concerned. Sunday morning I spent at home, and Mum's roast dinner after weeks of R.A.F. food was absolutely wonderful.

Sunday soon after tea it was time for goodbyes and start the journey back. Mary came to Salisbury Station to see me off, and I remember getting the 11.5 train from Euston and arriving in Warrington at 5 o'clock in the morning. I met two other lads from my hut and we managed to get some sleep on the train, but were faced with a three mile hike back to camp.

After the visit home things didn't seem so bad. We gradually toughened up, the training went on, life in the R.A.F. seemed to be not quite so demanding, and we began to feel more like old hands. When we saw the new recruits arriving, we watched their early attempts at square bashing with great amusement and realised how stupid we must have appeared so few weeks ago.

Well came the great day, our passing out parade, all dressed up in our best blues trousers with knife edge creases and boots polished until the toe caps shone like a mirror. Up and down we marched, went through all the drill and finally were inspected by the C.O. Then we had our photos taken, 'the whole Squadron'. I have mine to this day! Then we were all told individually where we were to report to next. As expected the Rolls apprentice and I were to go on an M.T. Fitters course at R.A.F. Weeton, which was about five miles inland of Blackpool.

We all went to our N.A.A.F.I. that last evening and had a bit of a farewell party, and in the morning we handed in our kit which we no longer needed, rifles and webbing belts etc. and all our bedding. After that we were free to go home on leave until Tuesday morning, three and a half days! We didn't waste time and caught a bus to Warrington as soon as possible, and luckily found the London train was soon due. And so ended my first experience of life in the R.A.F., I was nine weeks older, but a lot wiser I think.

R.A.F. Weeton was entirely given over to Trade Training of various kinds, and the atmosphere after Padgate couldn't have been more different. The Motor Transport Section where I was, taught everything from the very basics of the trade, right up to highly skilled fitting. After the first day of settling in, and registering at every establishment on the camp, the second day was given over to a trade test to find out, as ex-apprentices, the level of skill you had attained in civilian training. The whole course was of sixteen weeks duration, and the result of the trade test determined how many weeks, and therefore at what level you entered the course. Everyone, even my Rolls

Royce pal from Padgate, had to do a minimum of six weeks, to train them in the ways of the Air Force. As a result of my test, I was informed ten weeks would be sufficient.

Apart from being such a long way from home, I really enjoyed my time there and the weeks just seemed to fly by.

It was springtime and it was easy to get into Blackpool, a frequent bus service ran past the camp, and we made many excursions into town. We went to see Blackpool play on several occasions. Stanley Matthews was playing then and Blackpool were one of the tops sides. The Tower was another big attraction, and we visited several times to enjoy watching the famous dance bands of that time who used to play in the Tower Ballroom. There were Geraldo, Ted Heath, Joe Loss, Bill Cotton and many more, and of course Sandy Dixon playing the famous Ballroom Organ.

After my course ended and I had successfully passed my trade test, I then had to wait for a posting to an R.A.F. base which could be anywhere. Naturally I hoped it woud be somewhere down south where I could get home to see Mary as often as possible.

Over the main road from the Training Camp was an R.A.F. Hospital, and whilst waiting for my posting I spent several weeks working there. I was just a general dogsbody really, I did some cleaning, mainly polishing the lino along the corridors every morning. I did a bit of portering, helping the nurses pushing patients on trolleys to and from the wards and ambulances. Another job was to collect the pills and medicines from the pharmacy every day and deliver them to the various wards. None of this was hard work and it left plenty of time to chat up the nurses, as long as one kept an eye open for the Matron, who once caught me in the laundry room with one of the young nurses, and gave me a dressing down which I didn't forget in a hurry.

Two things always come to mind when I think of my time at R.A.F. Weeton, the first was when the clothing store burnt down, and the duty firemen in their eagerness to get to the fire managed to overturn not one but both fire pumps, leaving us to try and cope for ten minutes with nothing more than buckets of water. Needless to say we may have just as well stood and watched for all the good it did.

The second is something that makes me smile even today, forty and more years on. In our billet was a chap from London who seemed to have an unlimited supply of cash, and spent almost all of his off duty time in Blackpool from which he used to return the worse for drink, blunder through the hut until he found his bed, flop down very often without bothering to undress, and proceed to snore away for the rest of the night. Well naturally the rest of us were getting fed up with this behaviour and we hatched a plot to get our own back as nothing else we did or said seemed to

have any effect.

What we did was to wait until he was sound asleep and snoring his head off as usual, then eight of us carefully picked up his bed, carried him on the bed down between our hut and the next, out across the grass, through the fence which had been opened in readiness, and out into the cornfield next to the camp. It being summertime now the corn was almost waist high and coming into ear, and after we set his bed down about a hundred yards out it was unseen from the camp. It was a fine night and he came to no harm, but what a cheer went up when he staggered into the hut in the morning, covered in dew and cursing everyone in sight. We did of course help him return his bed.

At last my Posting came through, and so it was goodbye to R.A.F. Weeton and the Nurses at the Hospital, and on to somewhere called West Drayton in Middlesex. I had never before heard of the place but eventually I found it was very close to Heathrow, in fact it was only one and a half miles from the Airport on the Uxbridge side.

R.A.F. West Drayton was at that time just an Admin. Headquarters for the London Area. The American Services had part of the camp mainly as a Storage Depot.

The M.T. Section where I was to work was situated in one of the two aircraft hangers at the far end near the railway line into Paddington, the other hanger was the Stores.

There were about thirty vehicles to maintain, ranging from Hillman Minx saloons and pick-ups to the large twin-axle Ford Rations lorry, with a closed insulated body. There were a staff of seven on the garage side and a dozen or more drivers both men and girls on the driving side. Over all in charge was an ex-aircrew Canadian and in charge of us an ex-aircrew Sergeant.

The Canadian was a Flight Lieutenant whose name I can't remember, but both he and Bill Forgarty the Sergeant were as most aircrew who had served during the War years, regarded as being a bit crackers! Neither of them cared much for authority, and as a result the Garage was run in a fairly free and easy way, and as long as the work got done no one bothered you much. We always had a lot of free time on our hands and we used to organise test runs out into the country which usually ended up in a cafe somewhere for tea and a sandwich. Peter Rose and Bert Lewis were the other two fitters apart from myself and then there was an auto-electrician, and a fitters mate whose name was Arthur Graham. Arthur slept in the bed next to me, and as I was two years older I think he looked upon me as a kind of father figure. He used to follow me everywhere, a bit like a dog. I don't know who he attached himself to after I was demobbed, but when I said cheerio he was almost in tears.

There was plenty of time for sport and recreation and Fogarty, Bert Lewis, Arthur and myself used to play for the M.T. Section together with the rest of the team from the drivers, in the Inter Section League for Cricket and Football.

During my time at West Drayton one of the lads doing his National Service was Freddie Titmus who later was to become a famous cricketer for Middlesex and England. He worked in the Sports Store and played for the Stores in the League. We had more than one encounter and needless to say he usually got the best of it. Though I did strike a boundary or two off him.

The girls who worked in the N.A.A.F.I. used to come and cheer us on during the Sports afternoon, the garage staff used to get on well with them especially the drivers as they used to cadge lifts into town. So we always got a good helping when we went over in the evenings for our egg and chips.

Most of the garage lads, apart from Bert Lewis who was married and lived off camp, were billeted in one of the six brick built H blocks that lined one side of the main street. H because that was the shape of the block, and they were much of an improvement on the old wooden huts from the training camp.

The bathrooms, showers, and toilets were also very good, and what with the much better food in the Mess life in the R.A.F. was a great deal more pleasant. And that's not all because now I was within commuting distance from home and I took full advantage, managing to get home almost every weekend, very often from Friday afternoons to late Sunday night. During my eighteen months at West Drayton I think I spent no more that three or four weekends there.

As I mentioned, the Americans had part of the camp and although we were segregated from them we did manage some contacts with them.

The Yanks were always better equipped than us and very wasteful. They had their own M.T. Section and on several occasions we borrowed some of their tools. We became quite friendly and as a consequence had a source of supply for cigarettes, candy and nylons for the girlfriend, things that were unobtainable in the U.K. at the time. They also had a magnificent Canteen or P.X. as they called it, and we used to get invited over sometimes.

Smoking today is socially unacceptable and very much discouraged on health grounds, but at that time almost everyone indulged and I was no exception. I remember having a whole drawer full of American cigarettes at home, dozens of packs of 200 of all sorts of makes, Pall Mall, Camels, Phillip Morris and many more. They lasted me for many months after De-Mob.

One inccident always sticks in my mind that was to do with the Yanks. As I mentioned their part of the Camp was mostly for storage and they were always in and out with Lorries loaded with large packing cases and crates.

Well one evening one of their lorries swung in to the Camp entrance a little too fast and a huge crate fell off practically blocking the road. The American M.T. tried and failed to lift it with their forklift, and asked if we had a crane. Well we had a very tall old hoist which I think was originally made for lifting Aircraft engines. Anyway Pete Rose volunteered to go and fetch it, and as mad as usual raced back down the main street towing it behind a Ford 15cwt truck, completely forgetting about the mains electric cables which were crossing the road from the H.Q. building one side to the W.A.A.F. H block on the other. The end result being the top corner of the W.A.A.F. building being completely pulled away, one girl's bed exposed to the elements, a failure in the electricity supply, and Pete Rose on charge for acting without due care.

The packing case was successfully lifted back onto the lorry, and Pete Rose got off with a severe lecture from the C.O.

On another occasion one evening there was a shout of fire, and on seeing smoke issuing from the first floor windows of the W.A.A.F. block next door, you can imagine the rush of volunteers into hitherto forbidden territory. The fire turned out to be mostly smoke, one of the girls had left an iron switched on and some of her undies were burning.

We took our time making sure the danger had passed, enjoying the sight of half-clad girls running about in a panic.

Some months after I had been at West Drayton, a fitter by the name of Norman Coxhead was posted to our M.T.

He came from a very similar background, a village called Enborne just outside Newbury, he also had an agricultural engineering start in working life and then trained to be an M.T. fitter on being called up in the R.A.F. The only difference was he had signed on for five years instead of just doing National Service which when I started was just eighteen months, but after I had done six was increased to two years because of the Korean War.

Norman and I became firm friends, and still are today. Through all the years since, marriage, families growing up, and all the ups and downs of life we have always been friends. He still lives in Enborne and I at Martin, but we visit as often as we can, and Mary and Dot, Norman and I are as close as most sisters and brothers. In fact I suspect we get on better than a lot of families.

Norman was posted to the Suez Canal in Egypt after a few months, so we didn't have a great deal of time actually working together, but Mary and I kept in touch with his wife Dot, and with him by letter until his return a year or more later.

At West Drayton we used to get a regular supply of complimentary tickets for sporting events in London, Football matches, Ice Hockey and Speedway. We even had a coach layed on, and I and several of the M.T. Section used to

go regularly. I got to several of the main football grounds and also visited Wembley for the Ice Hockey and Harringay to the Speedway. I could never get Norman to come as sport was not one of his interests, but I did persuade him to watch some of our football games during his stay with us at West Drayton.

Here John's account of his life is left.

He also wrote this about the village...

The Village of Martin is the most westerly Parish in Hampshire. It was part of the County of Wiltshire until 1895, at one time it was known as the village that no one wanted.

Situated on a winterbourne stream which becomes the River Allen, a tributary of the River Avon. Martin village itself is central in the Parish and is almost surrounded by downland, much of this is now controlled by Hampshire County Council and the Nature Conservancy Council. A lot of the property and farms in the village have grazing rights on the downland, but few exercise these rights today. There are many prehistoric sites on the downs, including the massive Bokerly Dyke and an earthwork know as Soldiers Ring. The northern boundary of the village is formed by Grims Ditch which extends into Wiltshire and Dorset.

The Church at Martin dates from Norman times although much of the fabric is from the fourteenth century. Mostly of stone and flint construction with a tiled roof. The steeple was added to the Norman tower in 1787.