AT HOME IN THE 1940'S AND 50'S

1 Lilac Cottages was the oldest of four semi-detached cottages built on the lower slopes of Chalk Hill some time between about 1870 and 1910. They occupied sizeable plots of land, the majority of which lay as gardens at the side of each property so the houses were well spaced, and they were each similar in design. The front elevation comprised four symmetrically placed windows representing the two front rooms and bedrooms of each house. The front door was central to the side elevation and opened onto the staircase which separated the front room from the dining room. Similarly at the head of the stairs bedrooms opened on either side. At the rear of the building, set about three feet back, was a further extension which housed the scullery and a further bedroom above, and set against this as a lean-to was a wash-house and outside toilet.

A covered walkway or veranda ran alongside the recessed extension outside the scullery. The whole building was constructed of red brick and roofed with slates with three chimneys. There was also a garage of homemade construction with a sloping galvanised roof. The walls were built of a flexible material like wire netting sandwiched between thick roofing felt which was attached to a metal frame. There was also a shed built with heavy galvanised sheets like those supplied for air raid shelters.

The house was not large. The main living room was the dining room which was about 12 x 11 feet. At the far end of the room there was a chimney breast which created two alcoves with a door giving access to a cupboard under the stairs on one side. At the opposite end there was a sash window giving on to the side of the house and doors giving access into the kitchen on one side and the little hallway and staircase on the other. The furniture of the day was relatively lumpy and space was at a premium. There was an easy chair in each of the alcoves, Dad's chair in the left, Mum's in the right. At the sides of the room was a sideboard and a large square draw leaf table and beneath the window a large radio with a dining chair and workbox beside. As children I cannot think where we sat. I can remember a highchair for meals but beyond this I guess we played on the floor. There was no space for a couch or settee. The front room was of similar dimension with three easy chairs, a piano and music cupboard, a pouffe and china cabinet but it was seldom used. This room was kept for

best and was only used on some Sundays, at Christmas and when visitors came although Dad would escape there fairly regularly on Sunday mornings to play the piano. This was the room in which I was born. The scullery was about 12 feet by 9 and contained a stone sink with an electric water heater above, a gas cooker, a stand-alone cupboard/larder and a kitchen table and four chairs. The three bedrooms above were of exactly the same dimensions and again, once space had been taken by beds, large wardrobes and victorian-type dressing tables, offered little room to move around. There was no bathroom and no sewage system. The toilet was 'round the back' and was a chemical toilet. Each week men would arrive to empty this by tipping the contents into a hatch at the back of a small tanker lorry. Water from the sink was collected in a bucket and emptied into a 'dump hole' down the garden. The wash-house was used primarily to store coal though in the corner was a 'copper' beneath which a fire could be lit to heat water for washing clothes. There was electricity in most of the house but not in the back bedroom or in the loo so candles were used to light the way. Only two rooms were ever heated – the dining room and the front room. At first this was by open fire but around 1950 these were replaced by anthracite stoves which were more energy efficient and cheaper to run. To retain some of the heat a heavy curtain hung over the kitchen door, and as children we had endless fun hiding in its ample folds.

The house was rented from a Mr Smith, who owned all of the cottages, including the much older thatched cottage down the road. He lived in a detached house next

to Grandma three doors down, and I was often given the task of going down to pay the rent each week. Early in the 1950's he decided to sell the houses and Mum and Dad purchased ours for the staggering sum of £350. Subsequently we were connected to mains drainage and a flush loo replaced the chemical toilet. In 1956 a local builder, Mr Woodley, was employed to demolish the wash-house and outside toilet and to build a bathroom and inside loo. At the same time the kitchen was modernised with a built in larder, a Raeburn solid fuel stove and the latest in plastic topped sink units with hot and cold running water. An airing cupboard was also installed in the back bedroom and it was finally equipped with an electric light.

The routines of the household varied very little. Monday was wash day. To make this possible water had to be heated either in saucepans on the gas stove or by lighting a fire under the copper in the wash-house. Either way scrubbing boards, scrubbing brushes, soap and elbow grease were the order of the day. There was no Bio washing powders to lift stains or ingrained dirt so cuffs and collars needed to be scrubbed. The rest was washed in 'soap flakes' and rinsed using 'blue bags' to achieve maximum whiteness. The clothes were then fed through a wringer to squeeze out as much water as possible before being hung out to dry, either outside on the washing line or indoors beside the fire on a 'clothes horse'. I remember winding the wringer handle whilst Mum fed the clothes through. This was an outside job as the water released tumbled through a hole in the wringer board and was collected in a bucket beneath and splashing was inevitable. Under these circumstances we did not change clothes as frequently as we do now and we only changed underwear once a week on bath night. Eventually, about 1952 or 53, Mum bought a Hoover washing machine which was an upright tub about 15 inches square with an oscillator in the side and a wringer attached. This was luxury indeed and lightened the load considerably.

Housework chores were eased by the use of a small, cylindrical vacuum cleaner. Apart from the kitchen which had a brick floor and was swept, the only other area in the house which was beyond the ability of the cleaner to reach was the staircase. I remember as a small boy sitting on the stairs and descending one at a time whilst Mum preceded me with a dustpan and brush. The main household event of the year, however, was spring cleaning. This was a major operation diligently undertaken by most people then. Rooms were completely turned over. Curtains and paintwork were washed, carpets and rugs lifted and taken outside and given a good beating, cupboards were emptied and scrubbed and furniture was given a thorough polishing. It was a task reserved for the better weather of April and May when things could be taken out on the lawn to be dealt with.

Shopping for provisions was a daily event and was purely a local activity. There were no supermarkets and few cars so everything had to be carried by hand or delivered by local shopkeepers. Indeed, delivery services were very much part of the retailing scene then, and any business worth its salt plied a delivery van. The majority of our purchases were made from Fray's, a large grocery and butchers shop at the bottom of the hill next to the New Inn. Service here, as everywhere, was personal and the shop assistant collected and packed every article for you. Very little was

pre-packed and items like sugar, flour, sultanas, raisins, tea and biscuits had to be weighed and packed, and cheese had to be cut, weighed and wrapped in grease-proof paper. In my early days many essential products were only available in exchange for a counterfoil from a ration book specifying your weekly allowance. Later Fray's was bought out by the Southampton Co-operative Society. Most people were then members of the Society and became eligible for dividends based upon a percentage of the money spent in its shops. At the point of sale, therefore, you had to provide your roll number so that your entitlement to dividend could be calculated. Our number, 29525, became stamped upon my memory because I used it so often. I was frequently despatched to get some item or other that was needed. I had a red scooter and I would use this to zip down the hill at breakneck speed. Fortunately the road flattened out towards the bottom so I could cross the main road safely before going over the 'Green' (a large grassy island) to the shop. Bread could be bought from either Emmons the local baker situated on the corner between Ivy Lane and Swaythling Road or from the Co-op bread man who delivered to the door. One of my lasting memories is of waiting at the gate on a Friday morning for the Emmons bread van to arrive, of buying 1d crusty bread rolls that were still hot from the oven, and of eating one with butter and a piece of cheese … lovely! So fond was I of the crust, that when I was sent for a loaf, I would pick the edges of the crust on my way home. Another treat from Emmons Bakery was Lardy Cake with a thick treacle-like coating … just delicious! For a while Mum had a cleaning job there and I recall waiting for her in the little corner shop ogling the fancy cakes all of which seemed to be beyond our financial reach. They were reserved for birthday treats.

In the immediate post-war period with no fridge or freezer, an extremely limited range of tinned foods, and virtually nothing which could be described as 'exotic' being imported, meals depended upon what meat could be obtained on ration and what vegetables were in season. Under these circumstances it was difficult for anyone to be creative and the food served tended to be basic and unfussy. At the best of times Mum was a mediocre cook who displayed little imagination or artistry in the preparation of food. The main meal of the week was Sunday roast. Unfortunately she always cooked the meat too quickly with the result that it was invariably tough and chewy, something which Dad never failed to comment upon. Because of my dislike of most fresh vegetables, especially the brasicas, which were the most readily available throughout the year, Mum took to serving baked beans with the roast meal and I was permitted to swamp everything in mint sauce regardless of the kind of meat being served. Lamb and beef were then the cheapest and most readily available types of meat to be had. Poultry was particularly expensive and was reserved for high days and holidays. In the absence of frozen food this was bought fresh and I can remember Mum plucking and drawing chicken to prepare them for the oven. Mondays tended to be 'Bubble and Squeak' day when all the left over vegetables were mixed together and fried, so the cabbage I picked over on Sunday appeared again in a different guise. Throughout the rest of the week the menu tended to be plain and unadventurous. Mum would make a meat pie or a meat pudding, or fry liver, sausages, herrings or eggs, steam cod or, perhaps boil a piece of bacon. In season she

Posed Photographs of the 40's

Posed Photographs of the 40's

would also, of course, prepare salads. All would be eaten with boiled potatoes or mash. I do not recall chips, or for that matter, cooking oil. Mum collected dripping from meat and either fried in that or in pure lard so nothing was ever deep fried. After the main course there was always a pudding. I remember jam and treacle tarts, fruit pies and custard, spotted dick with syrup, and stewed fruit of one type or another, to name but a few. In my early childhood the day always started with a fried breakfast – bacon, egg and fried bread. The school dinner was the main meal of the day and we returned home for tea. Sometimes something like boiled or poached egg would be cooked, but essentially tea consisted of sandwiches and home-made cake or jam tarts. I remember well having 'dripping' sandwiches as well as the more usual fish paste, jam or chocolate spread, At the weekend teas were better. I recall toasting bread and crumpets on a toasting fork over the open living-room fire and of watching butter melt into them and I also remember fruit sundaes for Sunday tea – a real treat! Before bedtime there was a little supper. This tended to be simple, like buttered cream-crackers and cheese, or more often, for me, a bowl of breakfast cereal – puffed wheat being my favourite. For some years we had a pet budgerigar named 'Peter' who was let out of his cage and allowed the freedom of the room in the evenings. Apart from landing on your head and attempting to nest in your hair one of his tricks was to land on the side of my bowl of puffed wheat and then to wade through it as I was eating supper. I guess he must have liked the feel of cold milk on his under-carriage! In retrospect I can't believe that I continued to finish it up, but then, of course, waste was a cardinal sin.

Shopping for clothes and shoes meant a journey to Southampton. On weekdays, when Dad was at work, this entailed catching a No. 50 or 51 Hants and Dorset bus from outside Frays and travelling via West End Road and New Road to Bitterne and thence down over the old steel bridge at Northam, past the Plaza Cinema (now the TV Centre) and the Gas Works to Six Dials and the Bus Station opposite the Civic Centre. My earliest recollections are of trams and bombsites. Above Bargate, Lyons Restaurant stood alone amongst a sea of rubble. This was a 'tea and buns' kind of place, long and narrow with white tiled walls, metal railings and tin trays. I can also remember Edwin Jones (or perhaps Plummers) occupying really make-shift accommodation at the top of the Town. My chief memory, however, is of the Co-op building at the top end of St Mary's Road which owed much of its style to Art Deco. This is where the majority of our things were bought, to collect the divi of course! St Mary's Street and Kingsland Square, having survived the bombing, seemed vibrant and alive at this time. There was an array of shops there and the market itself was quite atmospheric.

Another part of the routine and one of my very earliest recollections is being wheeled in a pushchair 'up' the village to the weekly clinic held in the Parish Hall. Even at this young age I was always happier out and about than I was when shut indoors. My mother always told how my happy and sunny personality gave way to the miseries at the garden gate. The journey to the clinic opened up my little world and at the same time provided, not only lots of coos and smiling faces that took notice of me (always a source of pleasure), but a free supply of orange juice and the delights of Cod Liver Oil and Malt and Virol.

During the war my father gave up crane driving and returned to his trade of Fitting and Turning. He was employed by Harland and Woolf in the Docks repairing ships and began to work long hours. He would leave home at 6.45am to start work at 7.30 and, more often than not, would work overtime and not finish till 6.30 or 7pm at night. On occasions he also worked Sundays. Saturday was his day off and, at this end of the week, there was usually a little something in the pocket for a treat or two. As a family we would sometimes go to Southampton in the afternoon. Dad and I would go to watch 'The Saints' whilst Mum and Alan would wander the shops. I can remember being indulged with sweets bought from a shop on a corner near the Co-op. I can also recall that we usually returned with something special for tea – a pint of shrimps, tea cakes, crumpets, celery or some such tasty morsel. Dad would then settle to the football results on the wireless and check his football pools in the vain hope of winning the fortune that always eluded him. Then it was bath time and the tin bath would be fetched into the living room and filled with just about enough water to cover the vitals. Bath time usually coincided with the 'Luscombes' on the wireless which we would all listen to avidly so there was little scope for bathing antics.

Sundays also had its routines. My parents were Christians. Mum was a member of the Mothers Union and Dad had a long association with West End Church even playing the organ there at one time. Not surprisingly, therefore, brother Alan and I were packed off to Sunday School at an early age. At first this was at the Mission Hall, a small evangelical free church housed in a green galvanised-iron chapel next to Mr. Bar-Baker's (of the Man in the Trees fame). This stood just inside Telegraph Wood at the top of Upper New Road. Here we sang from the Golden Bells hymn book, said prayers, listened to stories and coloured pictures. At the age of 10 I joined the Church choir and severed links with the Mission Hall. I remember being much impressed with the pomp and ceremony of the Church of England to the extent that I made a cross and paraded around the garden with it. When we returned from Church Dad, when not at work, would be found listening to the omnibus edition of 'The Archers' on the wireless. This was followed by a programme called 'Two Way Family Favourites' where requests were played for members of the armed forces in Germany and elsewhere and this was always on in the background as we prepared for and ate Sunday lunch. This was a family occasion, the only time we all sat down together, and Grandma usually came up to join us! Sunday afternoon was a quiet time. Sometimes, in Winter, a fire would be lit in the front room and everyone retired there. In the evening Dad would sometimes play the piano and we would all have a sing-song. The encouragement to sing on my own came from these sessions when I was helped to sing songs like 'Teddy Bears Picnic', the 'Christopher Robin' songs and some of the classic songs taken from the News Chronicle Song Book. Dad was reasonably accomplished at the piano and could play most things, but his taste was down-the-middle and he enjoyed playing and singing songs from the shows and practising some of the lighter and more popular classics like Claire De Lune.

Television arrived in the home in 1954 when I was 12 years old. It was large, square box shaped object manufactured by Pye with a 14 inch screen. At that time there was only one channel in black and white. I remember it as a temperamental

thing much upset by aeroplanes and passing cars. Prior to its arrival we had to make our own entertainment. We had the radio, of course, but it was only turned on for specific programmes. My earliest recollections are of a rectangular, black, pillar like wireless but around 1950 Dad replaced this with a sleek, upright Murphy with a façade that was beautifully veneered – quite a piece of furniture. For me, at that time, Children's Hour was the attraction that I would often run home from School to hear. I remember being particularly devoted to 'Larry the Lamb', but there were also adventure serials which fired the imagination. From the age of about 10 I became an avid listener to 'Dick Barton – Secret Agent' – a forerunner to James Bond, which was broadcast just before 'The Archers' at about 6.30 each evening. Mum and Dad particularly enjoyed radio plays and magazine programmes like 'In Town Tonight' which was regular Saturday night listening. There were also a number of much loved comedy shows. 'Much binding in the Marsh', 'Round the Horn', 'The Goon Show', 'Educating Archie', 'Rae's a Laugh' and 'The Navy Lark' were but a few of the programmes broadcast each week which made us fall about with laughter. Another regular feature, almost an institution, was 'Worker's Playtime' starring Wilfred Pickles and his wife Mabel who compared variety concerts from factories and workplaces throughout the U.K. at lunchtime. It included general knowledge quizzes which people played for money and the catchphrase 'Give him/her the money Mabel' became almost a trademark for the show. 'Housewives Choice', a music programme based upon dedications, was also popular listening on the Light Programme during the mornings with 'Desert Island Discs' which continues to run to this day.

Amusing oneself did not seem difficult and I have little recollection of being bored, although, being an outdoor type, I must have been a handful during the winter. I was too active to settle to reading. I only ever picked at books and looked at the pictures. It was not until I was about 10 that I read a book from cover to cover and this was when I discovered Enid Blyton's Famous Five series and 'Biggles' books. In retrospect I can see all too clearly why I was so mediocre at school. It has been one of life's hard taught lessons that reading and academic achievement go hand in hand and that if you are not prepared to read and think you do not get very far. As far as toys were concerned we were never overwhelmed with them and the sum total of my indoor toys could quite readily be housed in a single cardboard box. I had a small collection of Dinky models – assorted cars and lorries, a bus and coach, a bulldozer, a tank and field guns that fired matchsticks. I also had a reasonable number of farm animals complete with little fences and trees besides the good old perennials like building bricks, a box of tin soldiers, coloured Tiddly Wink counters, Jigsaws, Snap Cards and a wooden push along train made by Dad. Alan and I also shared a Trix Twin train set which was added to at Christmas over several years so we could create a variety of complex lay-outs. Building, playing with and dismantling this kept us occupied for several hours at a time so it was mostly brought out when we were on holiday from school. I can also remember a static steam engine with a little methylated spirit burner which slotted underneath a boiler. These were the enduring toys played with over and over again. There were others like Bag-a-telle, playing cards, and Board Games like Ludo, Helma and Flounders which were 'family' games which

were regulated by Mum and there were others, like Yo Yos' which came and went in fashion and soon dropped out of use.

Christmases were a highlight of my youth. My parents played well to the magic of yuletide and I have many happy memories of exciting times. The Christmas season was not so prolonged then. Many workers, like postmen and milkmen worked Christmas morning and everyone returned to work on the day after Boxing Day. Our Christmas decorations were seldom put up before Christmas Eve and it was made all the more special because Dad took the lead and we all rallied round to help. Paper chains would be twisted and raised in swathes across the room and the Christmas tree would be dug up from the garden, transplanted in a bucket and placed beneath the window in the front room. I remember the decorating of the tree with tinsel and fairy lights as being particularly magical to young eyes. However, I can also recall, on at least one occasion, importing with the tree a very strong smell of the local tom-cat, which lingered all Christmas, and which took the edge off it slightly! The preparations for Christmas also included a visit to Father Christmas. The St. Mary's Street Co-op always seemed to excel themselves by providing ingenious rides to Santa's Grotto. One year we were all ushered into the cabin of a rocket. The whole contraption rocked and swayed for a couple of minutes to simulate a rocket journey before we were given an audience with Santa in his sparkling cave. I remember being completely convinced by this, though I could not quite make out why the rocket did not return us back to earth. Christmas morning brought the discovery of a filled pillow case at the foot of the bed. This usually contained an orange (then a luxury) a few nuts and some sweets along with a small assortment of presents of the 2/6d or 5 shilling kind donated by some of the more distant relatives. There were also some novelties, like colouring books and crayons, designed to provide something to play with during the day. The myth of Father Christmas was kept alive for some years until, inevitably, one year, I stayed awake long enough to catch Mum and Dad delivering the booty. They had just returned from the midnight service at Church so it must have been about 1am. They were none too pleased to hear the rustle of paper soon afterwards! All the more important family presents were put beneath the Christmas tree and were opened after tea. It was about the one time of the year when Alan and I did the washing up, for after spending the day feeling and sizing up the presents when no one was looking, we had a job to contain our excitement by evening time. It was a salutary lesson in patience. It's difficult to recall specific presents other than the bicycle I received for Christmas 1953. This was a new, straight handle-barred sports bike bought from a shop at the top of Lances Hill, Bitterne for £15. This represented about two weeks wages then and it was the biggest present I ever received. It was my pride and joy and served me well over several years. Other than this I can remember having a Browney camera, the Train Set, Rupert Bear and Eagle Annuals, a Bible, Torch, Dynamo Set, a Crystal Set and various items like gloves, a balaclava and fairisle jumpers knitted by Mum. There was usually just one main present from Mum and Dad with some other less expensive bits and pieces, which included something especially bought by Dad. There was also something regularly from Grandma Upson, Auntie Fay and Uncle Arthur, Aunt Min,

Bathtime 1943

At 'My Home' 1943

At Lilac Cottage 1945

At Lilac Cottage 1947

Working Holiday on the farm 1947

Dad's first car. At Lee-on-the-Solent 1950

On holiday at Looe. My 6th birthday

At Lilac Cottage with Sally (Grandma's Dog) 1950

Swanage 1950

Swanage 1950

Lilac Cottage with David Lucas 1950

Chalk Hill circa. 1954

Auntie Ivy and Uncle Len, Auntie Connie and Uncle Bert and Auntie Jessie and Uncle Ted. Grandad Swift usually sent money which we were encouraged to put in the Post Office Savings Bank. By today's standard we received very little, but our expectations were lower still so we were delighted with the presents we received. In the immediate post-war years even a little chocolate Father Christmas was a very special treat.

After Christmas there was usually a crop of Christmas parties organised by various organisations to which we had some affiliation – namely the Mission Hall, Mother's Union and Harland and Woolf. These always comprised a sit down tea consisting of an individualised jelly/sundae, sandwiches, and fancy cakes with a cracker and paper hat provided. Organised games followed and the parties always concluded with a little something from Father Christmas. The Harland and Woolf party was a huge affair with well over a hundred children and Dad must have contributed to a party fund for some weeks before the event. One other party was always included in the annual ritual. This was the family gathering on New Years Eve. Grandma, Auntie Fay and family would always come together with us for an evening of chat, sing-song and a slap-up supper. Apart from Christmas, this was about the only time I ever witnessed Mum and Dad drink anything alcoholic and it was at this time too that I was first allowed a sip of sherry and port, or in later years, Babycham. Near midnight, assuming the weather was clement, we would gather outside on the lawn. As the hour struck there was a cacophony of sound as ships in Southampton Docks sounded their fog horns and steam engines at Eastleigh vented their whistles. We would then return indoors, toast the New Year and join hands to sing Aude Lang Syne. For Dad and Uncle Arthur it was back to work as usual later in the morning since there was no Bank Holiday then, so the Christmas season came to an abrupt end.

The other notable family events were birthday parties. I recall I always regretted being born in the summer because parties in the dark winter evenings always seemed so much more atmospheric. They generally all followed the same pattern with tea and the ritual of lighting and snuffing out candles on a cake and singing Happy Birthday. It is on these occasions that I can most vividly remember rushing the jelly and sandwiches in order to get to the biggest and creamiest fancy cake on the plate first! After tea came the games, most usually hide-and-seek, hunt the thimble, blind mans bluff, pass the parcel and ring-a-ring-a-roses. Alan's party, however, offered a different dimension. Dad was always interested in photography and amongst his photographic equipment was an 8mm, hand operated movie projector and a Magic Lantern. He would hire silent films for birthday parties and we would be treated to about an hour of absolute hilarity at the knock-about antics of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. He also had a variety of magic lantern slides which created patterns on the screen much like a kaleidoscope, and this too would keep us entertained for a few minutes. There were efforts to run films at my birthday party in July, but despite efforts at blackout, it was never possible to keep out the light and they were not nearly so successful.

In 1945 Dad bought a car. He was lucky to get it because there were very few to be had. It was a 1932 Standard 10, Registration Number DE 8710. It was a heavy, black, sit-up-and-beg type of vehicle with a spare wheel and a let down rack for

luggage at the back. One of my earliest memory flashes is of sitting in the back of the car in the newly built garage on V.E. day when the road was festooned with bunting. Cars were then a luxury and very few families had one. Excursions away from home were, therefore, a rarity which involved bus and train journeys. As a result, it was fashionable for all kinds of organisations to organise 'outings' by coach usually to seaside destinations like Littlehampton, West Wittering, Bournemouth and Swanage. These were generally very enjoyable events and there was a real sense of community with a lot of singing on the way home. For us, of course, the car meant that we benefited from additional trips. In the summer we would sometimes take a picnic to Lee-on-Solent. This was the nearest reasonable beach, though the place itself had little to offer. The beach was stony, there were few shops, one small funfair with penny slot machines and a tower with a viewing platform. Nevertheless we took bat and ball and a blow up blue beach ball and had great fun there. The views across the Solent to the Isle of Wight were spectacular and we would frequently glimpse the great ocean liners en-route for Southampton. Highcliffe was also a regular destination. Many day excursions, however, were to visit relations. At least twice or three times a year, for example, we would visit Grandad Swift, at first in Balham, London, where he owned a fish and chip shop, and later in Bath. We also regularly visited Auntie Connie and Uncle Bert who had a fish and chip shop on the Great West Road near Ealing and also Auntie Ivy and Uncle Len who owned a farm near Peasdown in Somerset. These were all two hour plus journeys, interminable for young children, and I can remember trying the patience of my parents by constantly asking whether "we were nearly there", the first time barely a mile from home! Every year we also regularly entertained visitors at home, most usually Uncle Albie and Aunt Agnes from South Wales, Grandad and Auntie Rose, and Aunt Min. That meant additional outings as they volunteered to take us with them on their holiday jaunts. Visitors were always fascinated by the Docks and would head for the Royal Pier and a boat trip around the Port. This would bring us alongside the largest liners in the world, most notably the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. Ryde on the Isle of Wight was also an attractive holiday destination. This involved an interesting trip by Red Funnel Paddle Steamer down Southampton Water. Apart from the shipping and portside activities we also passed the shipyards of Vosper Thorneycroft's and Calshot where the large Flying Boats, like the giant Princess Flying Boat, were moored and repaired. Smaller Flying Boats used to operate from the Royal Pier itself and it was fascinating watching them take off and splash down. Ryde itself was a very pleasant place. It sported a pier with a tramway, a good sandy beach and fine views of Portsmouth across the Solent. For me, a day there was a memorable adventure.

In my early years Mum and Dad contrived to provide us with a holiday of our own each year. The first holiday I can recall was a working holiday on Uncle Len's farm at Shoscombe Bottom in 1947, but it was not the first. Apparently we all went to help with the harvest previously in 1945 and 1946, but I was too young to remember. These were the days of the Reaper and Binder and of 'stooking' the corn for it to dry. Uncle Len kept two cart-horses and I can recall riding on the hay wagon to the rick yard and of larking about amongst the bundles of unthreshed corn as the ricks were

constructed. A far cry from modern farm practices. The following year we had, what must have been, the most extravagant holiday I can remember. This was a hotel holiday with Auntie Connie, Uncle Bert and Colin at Looe in Cornwall. I celebrated my 6th birthday whilst we were there. I can remember being collected by the village taxi in the middle of the night and taken to Eastleigh Railway Station for the train journey to Cornwall. In subsequent years we stayed at a Bed and Breakfast in Swanage and an ancient caravan at Highcliffe – more memorable for having to call the Doctor to diagnose and treat an ear infection than anything else. It was whilst we were there that a group of boys called me 'Cocky Dick', something my Mother overheard and trotted out and embarrassed me with frequently in the years to come. There then seemed to be a lull where we spent our holidays 'going out for days'. I think, perhaps, that the car was, by then, suffering the pangs of senility. Around 1953 Dad bought another car, a green Ford Prefect of upright design, and once again we ventured further afield. I remember holidays in Littlehampton, Tintagel, Babacombe and St. Ives – all of them budget holidays in cheap Bed and Breakfast accommodation. There were also further caravan and tenting holidays. One in Ilfracombe was shared with Auntie Fay and Uncle Arthur and family and I seem to recall it hardly stopped raining all the time we were there, and also a holiday in Conway, North Wales, the year Alan and Irene eloped. Continental holidays were then a dream which few people even thought of and fewer still could afford. The fashion did not begin to develop until the 60's.

Most of the money for holidays came from Mum. From the moment both Alan and I were safely ensconced in school she took part-time cleaning jobs to earn extra money. The majority was squirreled away for luxuries. The first job was with Professor and Mrs Mann who owned a nice house and garden tucked away behind Ivy Lane. I remember that they were not keen on children, and on the occasions when Mum was forced to take us to work with her there was little welcome. She then moved to Emmon's Bakery and finally, after a number of years, to a Mrs Lucas who lived in a large house at the top of the hill. She was a publicans daughter made good and was a millionaire in property. When Mum disclosed that Mr Smith, our landlord, was selling his cottages, she bought the lot (excepting ours)! As time went on Mum became more of a companion than a cleaner and the association eventually provided both Alan and myself with a valuable helping hand at the start of our married lives.

Throughout my childhood I was lucky in being brought up in a stable and happy family background. I cannot ever recall cross words or arguments between my parents. If there were tensions it was sibling rivalry between my brother and myself. This was sometimes extreme and must have been very irksome for my mother, in particular. We fought over most things and shared very little. Even coloured cotton was tied around the axles of our Dinky cars to distinguish who it belonged to and care had to be taken to ensure that we were treated exactly alike in every way. Making trouble for Alan became one focus for my naturally mischievous ways. I can readily recall, for example, having cross words with Alan whilst playing in the woods and of running home to tell tales to Mum, but it was only when I reached the gate that I began to cry. The object, of course, was to generate the maximum dramatic

effect in order to stir Mum to punish him whilst I basked in success. Like most children I also became adept at whining as a method of getting something I wanted. In fact, as both money and treats were in short supply, I think I developed quite a bank of techniques designed to wear her down, particularly if it meant getting the edge over my brother. I seldom succeeded. Rightly or wrongly I sensed that Alan was her favourite and could never do wrong and, in some perverse sort of way, I got my own back in hostility to him and whinging behaviour to her. I certainly did not give her an easy time. She never lost the upper hand, however. The ultimate punishment was the cane around the lower leg muscles. That really hurt and I tried to avoid it at all costs. I seem to remember that when the cane was lifted I would run off and she would chase me round the garden with it. Needless to say she always got me in the end. So successful were her disciplinary efforts that I can never remember being punished by my father, but then, I would not dream of winding him up the way I did my Mother. I seemed to hit it off better with my Dad. I don't know whether it was a personality thing or just the natural affinity between father and son. Anyway, whilst I would not lift a finger to help Mum, except under duress, I willingly lifted some of the chores from Dad, and as I grew older I regularly mowed the lawn and washed the car. But we also did things together. Besides our joint interest in football, every Friday evening Dad did a 'Sick Round'. He was a member of The Most Ancient Order of Oddfellows, a friendly society which, on payment of a subscription, offered indemnity against ill health and funeral expenses. Members who were ill therefore received a weekly sum of money and Dad was employed to visit them and pay their dues. This took him the length and breadth of the village, from the Lodgehouse at the entrance to Townhill Park to the farthest reaches of Moorgreen. He did this by bicycle and I regularly kept him company, often being rewarded with a 3d bag of chips on the way home.

Grandma, down the road, was naturally a close member of the family and I frequently popped in to see her. She was matriarchal, a warm and cosy sort of person whose house was like a well worn slipper – snug, warm and totally at ease with its owner. Her habits and routines were as tangible as the tick of the clock that dominated the living room and regulated her day. 'Mrs Dales Diary' on the wireless was also followed with religious zeal in the afternoons. I can remember the heavily furnished living room, Grandma's armchair by the fireside, a heavy brass fender and a polished brass shell case which held the poker. In the early years Sally the dog was her constant companion. I can also bring to mind a black fur rug set before the fireplace in the front bedroom, a pair of ebony elephants and a picture of soldiers on the platform of a station. Chiefly, however, I can recall a lot of kindness, presents when she returned from holidays and regular glasses of Andrew's Liver Salts which was used as a substitute for lemonade. I can also recall good times when visitors came. One frequent visitor in my early years was Maureen Prince from Gosport who Grandma had as an evacuee during the war. She was a happy-go-lucky teenager who brought life and singing to the house. I can remember her singing 'How much is that doggy in the window' and 'I want to go a-wandering'. Other frequent visitors were Auntie Jessie and Uncle Ted from London. They were mother and son and both were huge in proportion. Uncle Ted in particular had a habit of collapsing beds! Grandma had

apparently befriended them at Netley Hospital where they were visiting Auntie Jessie's husband, a policeman, who was recuperating there. Over the years they were very generous to us all and recognised all our birthdays and Christmases with presents as well as bringing us something each time they came. Grandma also entertained a lodger for some years, a dour and reclusive man called Tom who hailed from the Scottish Borders (I think). He was the manager of the Belvedere Block Company which manufactured breeze blocks on a site opposite Midlands Estate. As the years progressed Grandma became more and more infirm until we had to take to using a bath chair to wheel her up home for Sunday lunch. To some extent her infirmity eroded her good nature and she became less tolerant of us excitable and energetic youngsters. One morning when I was 13 Mum woke me with the news that Grandma had died in the night. Mum had discovered her dead in her chair. She had washed her hair and was drying it when her heart just gave out. She was 76. What a way to go!

Relationships with our neighbours were also good and free from antagonism. Mr and Mrs Sillence, in the adjoining half of the house, were a pleasant, elderly couple who enjoyed a quiet life. He was a white-haired gentleman who drove a small tanker lorry delivering fuel oil. On the other side, next door to Grandma, was Mr and Mrs Weeks and their grown up daughter Goldie. Mr Weeks was the village Postman. He was especially attached to a little mongrel dog called 'Chummy' who he trained to sit on the rack of his post-bike. He would often be seen cycling round the village with Chummy up front viewing the countryside from his perch. He was also a keen gardener and kept chickens. Apart from trading vegetables across the garden hedge I recall being given a fresh laid egg as an Easter Day treat. Opposite was a terrace row of 4 cottages, little more than the two up and two down variety with a front door opening directly into the living room. Occupying the end house, directly opposite our gate, were the Clarks. Nobby Clark was something of a wide-boy who drove a tipper lorry and was into everything. His wife was a large woman who had 3 or 4 children. There was something of the gypsy about them for they were not too clean and the children would often run around shoeless, partly clothed and dirty, if not soiled. Wendy, the eldest child was my age and I can remember rolling marbles back and forth across the road to each other. But that was about as close as we got for my mother did not encourage any association and we were told to keep our distance. That apart there was little harm in them and the sound of Mrs Clark's hollering was just as frequently matched by hoots of laughter and merriment. One of the sidelines, I remember, was a gaggle of geese at the side of the house.

In these days everybody seemed to be well into gardening – a legacy perhaps of the war. Certainly my father was very diligent about digging and planting up the vegetable plot each spring and also of maintaining a border of annual flowers alongside the lawn. Grandma, who also had a large garden, relied upon Uncle Arthur to cultivate the majority but we were frequently called upon to mow her lawn and clip the three or four topiary bushes which she had beside her front path. She gave me my first taste of success in vegetable gardening. She made available a small plot of ground at the very back of her garden and I toiled here to produce salad crops.

I recall, in particular, real success in growing beautiful huge radishes which were proudly carried home and eaten.

Dad's interest in photography brought about some amusing incidents. He learned the basics from Uncle Albie who used to teach photography at a night school in South Wales but he never reached any degree of competence. The kitchen was converted into a darkroom. Blackout material was hung at the window and the heavy curtains which hung on the inside of the dining room door were pulled with additional material laid along the bottom to prevent any seepage of light. Then started the fumbling! He had no photographic equipment of any sophistication and results were achieved using chemicals and an assortment of crude vessels. The first stage was the production of negatives and this had to be done in complete blackout. Films in those days were backed with opaque paper. On this was printed the frame numbers which appeared in the window of the camera as it was wound through. The first task, therefore, was to separate the paper from the photographic negative. The negative was then bathed in developing fluid for a given period of time, then rinsed and pegged on a line to dry. It was all such a palaver that he would develop several films at one sitting. To progress to the photograph stage necessitated another session. Once again the same attention had to be devoted to blackout but this time a red light could be used and I could watch, not just listen to, the mystery unfold. First the negative was exposed to a piece of positive photographic paper by directing a strong light through it for a given number of seconds. The further the distance between them the larger the photograph and the longer the exposure. This involved switching a light on, counting seconds, and switching it off. The positive paper was then dunked in a tray of developing liquid and sloshed about until the image appeared. This became increasingly darker, so when you were satisfied with the degree of blackness and contrast, the photograph was taken out, rinsed in water and then rolled on to a piece of plate glass to produce a glaze. The idea was that when the photograph dried it would drop off the glass. That was the theory! In practice the procedure of dealing with one photograph at a time was lengthy and often the end product did not live up to expectation. In the first instance Dad had the habit of inverting the negative so the exposures were round the wrong way and the process of glazing proved so unreliable that instead of photographs dropping off the glass, they had to be scraped off which usually ruined them. Our albums are therefore full of rather inferior photographs.

Taking everything into consideration, and comparing my family experiences with many of my contemporaries, I was very fortunate. My home background was stable, and whilst I was never over-indulged with material things, I was loved and well cared for. As a family we seemed to be ahead of most in possessing a car, washing machine and television. Much of it was due to my mother's ability to manage money. No matter how pressed we were financially Mum could save the pennies and they mounted enough to provide some of the luxuries. She was the family banker and knew how to say no to the constant demands of her children.

THE VILLAGE AND VILLAGE LIFE

The village of West End was vastly different in the mid to late 40's than it is today. It was then essentially rural in nature with buildings dispersed 'ribbon-like' along the major routes. As far as I know there is no evidence of occupation before the 17th Century and no semblance of a nucleated centre like Botley, but rather a vague intensification of buildings around the Parish Hall. The suburban sprawl which was to engulf the village had barely begun. Orchards Way and small groups of council houses in Chapel Close and in Swaythling Road were the forerunners of council developments in the 50's – Midlands, Barnsland and Harefield, whilst private developments in Telegraph Wood foreshadowed the 'Trickets' Estate, opposite the School, and the further intensive infilling which has taken place since.

From my perspective, living in Chalk Hill, the village of West End fanned out along four axies emanating from the junction between High Street, Church Hill, Swaythling Road and Chalk Hill.

Chalk Hill itself was a microcosm of the social structure of the village. At the foot of the hill, on the lower levels, lay a small community of cottages designed for and occupied by working class people. At the top of the hill was a similar collection of 'designer' properties occupied by the more monied classes. Mr and Mrs Russell, the proprietors of the Russell and Bromley Shoe Shop chain, were, for example, in residence there. Between the two groups there was very little, just one reclusive bungalow well hidden behind thick laurel hedges.

West End was clearly a fashionable area for the rich entrepreneurs of Southampton during the 19th Century. Substantial Victorian properties, well concealed behind barriers of laurel with large sweeping drives, were built in Church Hill and Moorhill Road. Those in Church Hill were 'colonial' in style with white rendered walls and green roofed verandas, whilst those in Moorhill Road tended to be more 'classical' in type with imposing front façades. Between the two, at the junction with Cemetery Road lay the Church built in 1890 with generous endowments from the community and beside it was a Church Hall built of wood with a car park in front and Tennis Club courts behind.

Just where Church Hill became Swaythling Road I cannot remember but there was almost a separate community around the junction with Ivy Lane – a knot of

cottages with a Chapel, Bakery (Emmons), the 'Crown and Thistle' Pub and a sweet shop and tobacconists amidst a terrace of cottages opposite. At one time my parents negotiated to buy this shop but backed out before completion. Beyond this, towards Eastleigh, there were a number of 30's built houses set well back from the road culminating in an isolated shop which Stubbs the Newsagent occupied from about 1955 onwards on one side of the road and two 'bays' of council houses opposite where Barnsland Estate was built. This was then open fields. Further down, in a dip where the road veered to the left, stood a garage and beyond open fields and one or two isolated houses before the junction with Allington Lane.

The major axis for development was, however, the High Street – the main route from Swaythling and the A27 to Botley and Curdridge. It began by the New Inn, at the foot of Church Hill and proceeded in the 40's to pass the Belvedere Block Works and Dunsford Garage to the entrance of Hatch Grange. There stood a gatehouse with a garden which stretched to the top of the rise, whilst opposite was a smithy about a small courtyard, a line of terraced cottages and the appropriately named Blacksmith's Arms Pub. As the road flattened out at the top of the hill there was a further detached cottage with a large garden on the right hand side of the road before the Fire Station and the broad access to Orchards Way. On the left was a similar property occupied by the Frays and a terrace of cottages culminating in a small grocery shop on the corner of Chapel Road.

The Parish Hall dominated one end of the High Street. This was a large greyish looking building with a car park at the side adjacent to Chapel Road. Originally used as a School it appeared as if the Hall itself had been added to the rear of a cottage. The façade itself was certainly cottage-like, set back from the road and separated from it by two large trees. The front porch gave access to a narrow corridor with


A SKETCH MAP OF
WEST END CIRCA 1948
TO SOUTHAMPTON 4 MILES.
TO BURSELDON
TO EASTLEIGH 4 MILES
TO FAIR OAK 2½ MILES.
TO HEDGE END AND BOTLEY.
A27
WEST END RD.
CHALK HILL
CHURCH HILL
IVY LANE
UPPER NEW RD.
CHAPEL RD.
BOTLEY RD.
SCHOOL
MISSION HALL
CHAPEL
CROWN + THISTLE
MOORGREEN HOSPITAL

back and sides to well above the ears. Unfortunately this did not flatter me. My ears

small rooms either side. One was used as the kitchens. Beyond, on the right, rose a staircase to the upper room which stretched the entire width of the building. This was the meeting room used by various organisations. My father attended Odd Fellow meetings here and for a while he also attended Parish Council meetings having been elected in the early 60's. The main hall was 'T' shaped and could be divided with rigid concertina-type partitions, though it seldom was. It was used for many purposes. It was here that I was wheeled as a baby to attend the weekly clinic and it also functioned as the village library. Four lock-up book shelves at the side of the hall contained the books – one devoted to children's books, one to non-fiction and the remaining two to adult fiction. The hall also served as a base for the Boy's Club and was available for private hire so it housed many social gatherings including my parent's 25th wedding anniversary in 1962.

Next to the Parish Hall, between Chapel Road and Lower New Road, stood a cottage which was converted into the village Post Office some time in the late 50's and beyond a row of terraced cottages preceding the West End Brewery Public House. On one end of this building was, what appeared to be, a dilapidated shop. I can vaguely recall vegetables on sale here, but I particularly remember buying 1d home-made ice lollies there during the summer months and of picking up bags of fallen apples during the Autumn.

Opposite the Parish Hall stood the original Post Office complete with a pillar box and phone box outside. I have been stretching my mind to recall the name of the postmaster who was a happy and jolly chap with a withered left arm. He was certainly a breath of fresh air. Later he was to employ me as a Christmas Postman whilst I was at College. Next to the Post Office, towards Orchards Way, was a narrow lane and, set back, an imposing Police House, the symbol of authority for us youngsters in the village. Occupying a tiny site next to this was a small garage with one or two ancient looking pumps, and besides this, on the opposite corner of Orchard's Way to the Fire Station, was a long single story building which for a while served the village as a Fish and Chip shop. It was later bought by the proprietor of the grocery shop opposite to become the first self-service mini market in the area.

If there was a commercial centre to the village it was Stubbs the Newsagent. Although the proprietor, 'old man Stubbs' was a bit of a misery, his two sons-in-law, Jim Edwards and Bert Misslebrook, brought life and humour to the establishment. The shop sold a wide variety of goods besides newspapers and magazines – sweets, stationery, ice-cream, gifts, jigsaws, toys – all crammed into a small space. I have happy memories of Lyons Maid ice creams, gobstoppers, liquorice sticks, aniseed balls etc. bought here as well as colouring books and comics like the Children's Newspaper and the Eagle. It was to this shop I came most Saturday evenings during the winter to collect the Football Echo for Dad and Uncle Arthur, and it was here that I got my first taste of paid employment when I took on my brother Alan's paper round just before my 13th birthday.

Next to Stubbs was Ron Beale, the barber. For years, as a young boy, I regarded him as the butcher. He was a short back and sides merchant with little patience with young ones and I remember him holding my head in a vice-like grip whilst he shaved

were the first part of my body to reach maturity and by the time I was eight they were of adult size. Ron's unsympathetic treatment made me look ridiculous. Thankfully little boys do not spend too much time gazing into mirrors so he did not dent my ego too badly, and happily, by the time I reached adolescence my head had caught up with my ears! Nonetheless as soon as I had a bike I escaped his clutches and transferred my custom to a hairdresser in New Road, Bitterne. By this time the cost, originally 1/- had inflated to 2/3d or 2/6d. Ron's shop was a converted house at the end of a small terrace. Beyond was a walled yard with large wooden gates and finally a large grocery shop and bakery on the corner of High Street and Upper New Road. I can never remember entering this shop and I believe the bakery did not survive long into the 50's before it closed. Round the corner, however, in one of the half a dozen or so cottages where Bob Moody lived, was a cobbler who we regularly patronised for resoling and heeling boots and shoes.

Beyond the junction with Upper and Lower New Road, towards the school, there was very little. There was an office-type building on the corner of Lower New Road with a garage a little further up whilst opposite there were two, perhaps three, houses set amongst the laurel trees, one of which was occupied by Doctor Bamber, one of the village Doctors. Up the hill and around the corner in Cemetery Road stood a small number of more substantial properties, one of which was occupied by a Dentist and another, a little further up towards the Church by a Doctor who was affiliated to a practice in Bitterne. The remainder of the population of the village was fairly well dispersed. There were a number of 30's built semi-detached properties by the junction of Moorgreen Road with Botley Road, opposite to where the Sportsman Arms was built, and some more extensive infilling in Telegraph Wood, but apart from this, property was strung out along Chapel Road, Moorgreen Road, Telegraph Hill and the top part of Botley Road. The only other commercial activity I can recall is the garages of Barfoot's Princess Coaches and Colliseum Coaches opposite Moorgreen Hospital in Botley Road, the Scaffolding Great Britain house and yard at the foot of Chalk Hill, the Belvedere Block Company near the New Inn and also a thriving Market Garden with a shop which existed at the Moorgreen end of Chapel Road between the bends.

The social life of the village revolved around the meeting places where people gathered – the six Pubs, the two Halls, the Church and Chapels, the Scout Hut and the sports venues – the football pitch at Hatch Grange, the Cricket field in Moorgreen Road and the Tennis Club behind the Church Hall. My personal experience of the swathe of activities on offer is, of course, somewhat limited. I was drawn into the social circle of the Church, the West End Little Theatre Club and the Choral Society. In many ways these were interconnected and reflected the social traits of my parents.

For our family the Church was a focus for social activity. Mum was a regular member of the Mother's Union and as a small boy I can remember garden parties held on the vicarage lawn. She was also on the Church cleaning rota and I would spend time in the school holidays sidling around the Church whilst she swept, dusted and polished. Indeed in my youth I spent a great deal of time in Church. As a member of the Choir between the ages of 9 and 15, I attended choir practice on one evening

each week and sang at three services each Sunday – Sung Eucharist at 9.30am, Matins at 11 and Evensong at 6.30pm. At one stage when I was 14 or 15 there were sufficient choir boys to form a football team and an interested Curate arranged games with other village teams. I recall that for two seasons I marked out the pitch at Hatch Grange, which by that time had been abandoned by the village team, using creosote, brush and string. Beyond this there were Church 'Socials'. The Social was a popular event in the pre-television age. It comprised a mix of ballroom, old-time, and what they would now call barn dancing with team games like passing balls under the chin from person to person or passing balloons between the knees or keys on string down through the clothes of one person and up through the next. Musical chairs and pass the parcel were also sometimes included, the latter with forfeits rather than prizes which added further to the merriment. Whilst much depended upon the quality of the Master of Ceremonies to organise and maintain pace these were fun evenings. The games and progressive dances like the Gay Gordons, Valetta and St. Bernard Waltz forced people of all ages to mix and produced the common experiences upon which social cohesion is based. So popular were they as a form of entertainment that most organisations ran socials. Some of the best I remember were run by the West End Little Theatre Club where thesbian extrovertism and exhibitionism lessened inhibitions.

In time, as rationing lapsed and food became more plentiful, fashion changed and the Social gave way to the 'American Supper' where party food was donated on a bring and share basis and the focus began to shift towards social eating. Also as the first post-war generation of teenagers began to express themselves through the medium of rock and roll and television took hold in the mid to late fifties, social events began to segregate according to age. For the young the 'hop' began to dominate the social scene. Adults had great difficulty in understanding the new emerging pop culture and with the pull of the television their interest in and attendance at social events declined sharply.

There were a number of 'whole village' events which drew people of all interests and all walks of life. By far the most prominent of these in my youth was the Remembrance Sunday parade. Not only was the afternoon service at the Church packed but there were lengthy parades both to the Church from the New Inn and afterwards down Cemetery Road to the Cenotaph. Almost everyone involved in the war attended bedecked with their medals and there was a contingent of servicemen complete with a bugler who sounded the Last Post after the names of the fallen had been read out in Church. As a choir boy we led the procession to the Cenotaph and watched solemnly as wreaths of poppies were placed by representatives of many organisations. Two minutes silence added to the poignancy. On Remembrance Day itself at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, the whole nation stopped for two minutes. So high were emotions so soon after the war that even the traffic stopped on the roads – all to honour the millions who gave their lives for freedom. As the community pulled together during the conflict, so they pulled together to remember the sacrifice and celebrate the victory.

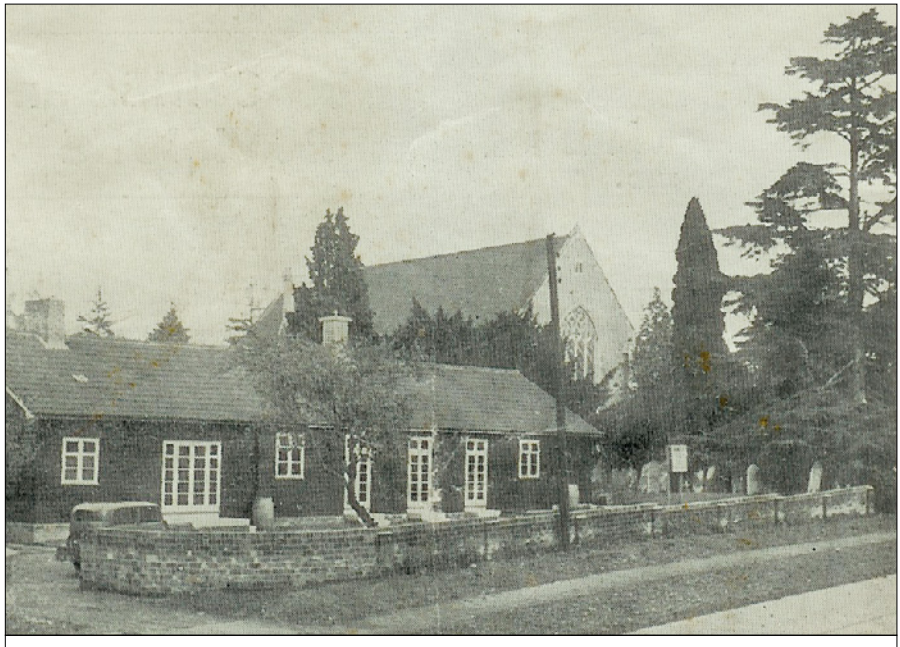
There was only one event of similar impact that I can recall and this must have been a one-off occasion in either 1950 or 1951. This was a village Carnival. I remem-

ber being dressed up as Wee Willie Winkie (typecast even then!) and of riding on a float entered by Mr Woodley the builder. He used his lorry and erected scaffolding on the back to create two tiers. I cannot recall what it was all about, only that I was disappointed at being refused permission to ride on the top deck. I believe the procession assembled at the New Inn and proceeded through the village to Moorgreen.

There were also summer Fetes although I can only remember one organised on a field in the corner of the Wilderness Estate opposite the Church, though there were certainly others. I recall that at this one there was a magician who kept a large number of children spellbound by his tricks and patter. As part of his act he hauled me and a girl out of the audience and performed a mock wedding weaving his magic to produce a bouquet and rings etc. as he went along. I guess the resulting embarrassment imprinted the event on my memory for I was at the age when association with girls was definitely not on and was the root of a lot of silliness.

Jumble Sales, Bazaars and Summer Fairs were part of the routine way of raising money to support local charities and organisations. My parents were members of the local Labour Party and regularly helped to organise Jumble Sales at the Parish Hall. On more than one occasion, before I started my Saturday job, I was hauled in to help man the counters against the initial stampede of bargain hunters. The Church too ran Jumble Sales. I remember that at the end of one the Vicar asked Mum if she would like to take away a bronze statuette which was left unsold at the end. For years she used it at home as a door stop until Alan pointed out that it might have value. It was subsequently sold at a Sotherby's auction for £850! Unfortunately our luck did not run to Rembrandt's in the loft!

As the fifties progressed and the village population exploded the culture inevitably changed. The sense of community and cohesiveness which thrived where everybody knew everyone else and where the gossips kept alive interest in each others affairs slowly ebbed away. In its place began to develop the culture of modern suburbia giving precedence to family privacy and the acquisition of material things. Over time home grown entertainment became all but stifled by television and the sophisticated attractions of the City Centre – Nightclubs, Bars, Restaurants, Ice Rinks, Bowling Alleys, Theatres etc. – all increasingly affordable and increasingly accessible with universal car ownership. Now, half a century later, only a few hard-working and dedicated individuals in the local community carry the torch and organise social events, fairs and fetes for the benefit of others and they have to fight as hard to attract a worthwhile clientele as they do to run the events!



The Church Hall, West End, where Jenny and I stole our first kiss! (January 1961)