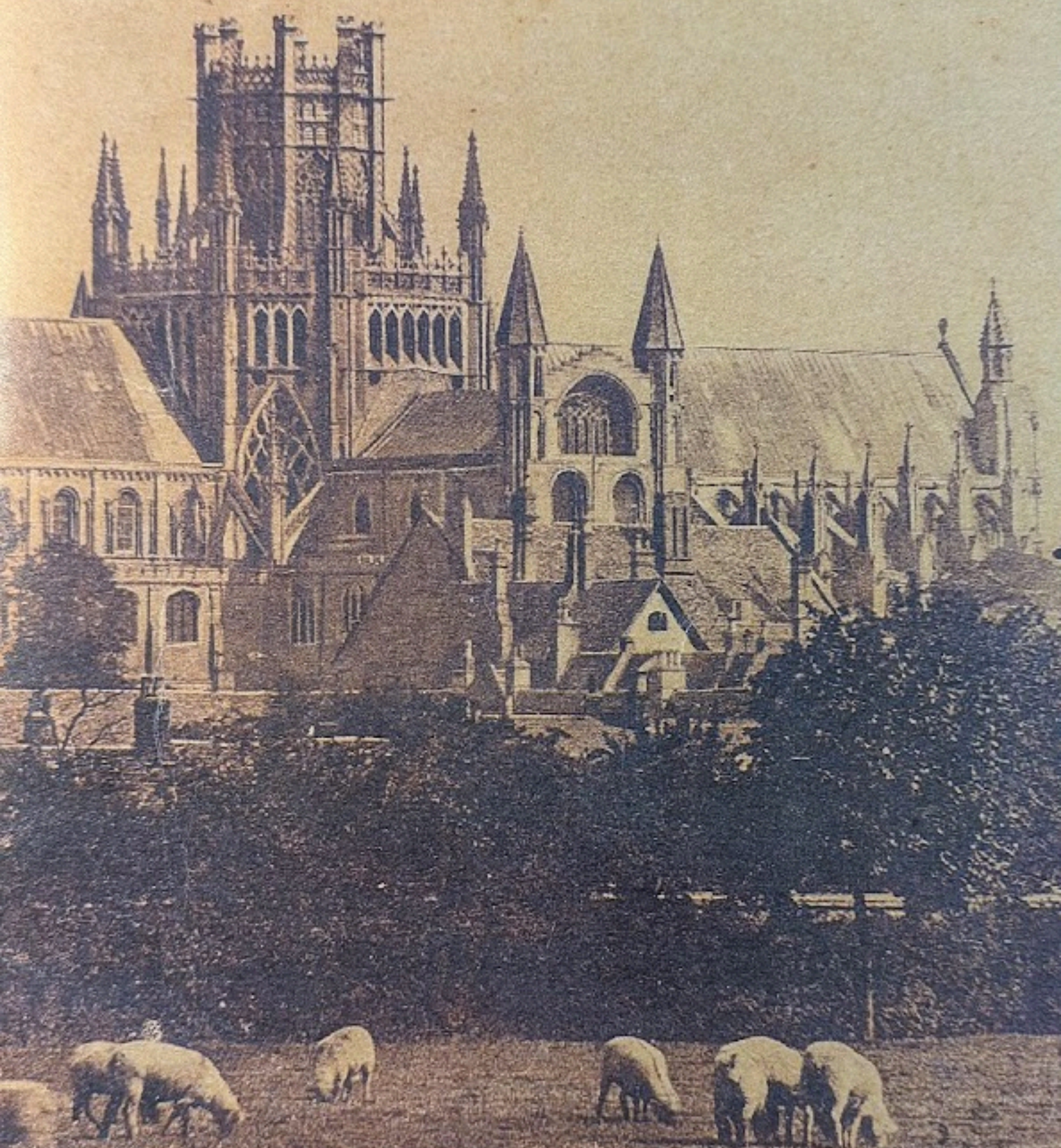


LD

# When I was a Child



Compiled by Lorna Delaney and Barbara Slade

When I was a child,  
I spoke like a child,  
I understood as a child,  
I thought as a child.

But when I became a man,  
I put away childish things.

1 Corinthians 13:11

# When I was a Child

*Compiled by*

*Lorna Delanoy and Barbara Slade*

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the contributors for making this book possible.

The initial idea came at one Friday meeting in Ely when 'reminiscences' were talked about and how they were not being collated and would therefore be lost forever. Members of the group were then invited by Barbara and Lorna to write about their own childhood memories.

Judging from the articles submitted people grew up in different areas of the country and abroad under different circumstances. Their stories make interesting reading.

## History of the Fenland Friday Group

These most interesting reminiscences have been written and published by folk who met while discovering fenland history on Friday.

'Fenland History on Friday' is not a club or society. It's a series of weekly meetings open to anybody who cares to come along to Ely Library between 10.30 and noon. Week after week between October and April the room becomes full – sometimes too full for the fire regulations.

What is it that brings them in from places as distant as Bury St Edmunds, Harston, Littleport or Little Ouse?

The meetings start with a 'Table of Delights' on which are displayed that week's finds – perhaps a new book or old pamphlet, an ancient axe-head, a newspaper article – and people speak of their researches or announce forthcoming meetings. Then there's a talk, a brief break in the middle and the presentation concludes with questions.

The idea came after I was invited to give a 10-week WEA Class on the History of the Fens. So many turned up that the class was oversubscribed and people who wanted to attend were disappointed.

Meanwhile at Burwell Village College a small group of people had been meeting week after week exploring the highways and byways of Cambridgeshire history. There was a waiting list for this group too. It seemed that there was an interest in the local area that was not being met.

So with the support of my colleagues in the Cambridge Heritage Associates Group – archaeologist Alison Taylor, buildings historian Beth Davis and social historian Tom Doig – I launched 'Discover Fenland History with Mike Petty' in February 2004 together with a 'Discover Cambridgeshire History in a Day' workshop. This was an all-day introduction to sources, resources and techniques for local, family, house history and archaeology. Again every space was taken.

Tom Doig gave the first of the Friday sessions, on Folk Cures and Remedies. I followed with Cambridgeshire Books and Newspapers, Chris Jakes spoke on the

'Cambridgeshire Collection', Philip Saunders on the County Record Office, Pam Blakeman on Ely Sources and Mike Young on Printed Maps. They were not lightweight lectures. But what happened on 5<sup>th</sup> March was remarkable, Professor Motoyasu Takahashi made a presentation of his work on Kinship Structure, Inheritance Customs and Generation Continuity, based on his research in Willingham. Here we had a Japanese academic addressing a specialist topic – and everybody was fascinated.

Since then fenland farmers, undertakers, drainage professionals, local historians and Cambridge University professors have made presentations. There have been occasions when the speaker has failed to turn up when members of the group have stepped into the breach. Each has shared their knowledge, stimulating the audience and being stimulated by them.

Now some of the group have themselves added to the published sources for Cambridgeshire history, contributing their memories to this book. Their childhoods were spent in places as diverse as the Black Country, Surrey, Wales and Kenya. Others were brought up in Soham, Wilburton, Caxton and Ely itself.

For many it will be their first venture into print. The next step may be a dissertation, as it has been for others who have kept their brains active by undertaking research and sharing it with those who come together to Discover Fenland History on Fridays.

Mike Petty

2007

## Lorna Delaney

My early years were spent surrounded by animals – both those on the farm and those which were considered 'pets'.

I shall never forget the mournful cry of the cows when, after a few days, their calves were taken away from them to be 'fed' with artificial milk administered from buckets: it was my job to encourage these babies to 'drink' and the texture of calves tongues sucking my fingers has put me off EVER eating sliced tongue from the delicatessen!

We 'hatched' chickens: this entailed putting a broody farm yard hen on up to a dozen warm eggs – and oh the joy of seeing the baby chicks emerge from the shell some three weeks later! How proud the clucking Mums were – and how sad we children were if a chick died: this entailed a proper burial (usually in a Colman's Mustard tin) and flowers put on the 'grave'.

Perhaps my two favourite animals were Polly the Pig and Nell the dog. Polly was the runt of the litter and my Dad allowed me to become its surrogate Mum, feeding it every 4 hours or so with cows milk from a baby's bottle. Yes, Polly survived, at first living in a cardboard box and later joining the other pigs in the sty. She would go for walks with me rather like a dog, often to the post office, and eventually she became Mum to a litter of piglets herself!

Nell was a present for Christmas (makes me think of the modern advert often seen today in car windows 'A dog is not just for Christmas' etc). She was a pure-bred collie but was absolutely useless as a farm dog herding cattle etc. It is very difficult to combine a 'pet' and a 'working' dog – different qualities are needed.

There were always cats around the farmhouse – these were 'workers' and not pets. Their job was to keep the rats and mice population down in the farm barn: they were not allowed in the house and fed with bread and milk on the doorstep. No luxury food from the shops for them – or visits to the local vet! Cats were regarded as vermin-controllers.

My saddest animal story was to try and rear baby owls when their mother had been killed in a collision with a car. I defy anyone to rear adorable fluffy barn owls! Animals also gave me my first venture into the business world. Dad bought me a dozen fluffy yellow ducklings in Ely Market one Thursday: at home they were 'mothered' by a clucking hen: we fixed up an old sink for them to swim in – and eventually I was able to sell them as fresh Aylesbury ducks for Sunday lunches. No wonder, is it, that I am not a sentimental animal-lover!

Today my grandchildren each have a guinea pig, housed in a special cage complete with drinking bottles, hay from the garden centre and check-ups at the vets. What a different attitude there is to animals today:

### Margaret Bate

I was born in Blackheath Staffordshire, an area known as The Black Country.

It was a very industrialised area. I lived with my mother and father and two sisters in a house on a housing estate. I remember how cold were the winters, we had no central heating, just a small fire grate in the sitting room and a black leaded grate in the kitchen, a grate that was black leaded every Friday, a most tedious, dirty job. We had a boiler in the kitchen for washing clothes and a fire had to be lit under the boiler to heat the water. This had to be done early on a Monday morning (always on a Monday) because it took quite a long time to heat the water. A galvanised tub and a DOLLY were used to wash the clothes and a mangle was used to wring the clothes. We had extremely cold winters, always snow every winter. The grate in the sitting room had a back boiler behind it, but it was such an inefficient boiler that there rarely seemed to be much hot water, yet we were always clean and tidy.

My earliest memory is being taken on holiday, in a hired car, to Aberdovey, on the Cardigan Bay in West Wales. There was no holiday pay in those days – the late 1920's early 1930's – but we were always taken on holiday. My father then acquired a car, I cannot remember what make it was, but, to us children, it seemed very good. It had no windows, just celluloid windows, which were not fitted, they just pulled down and if it rained, we did get wet. My sisters and I sat in the back and we had a rug over us to keep warm. We were taken on holiday in this car into Herefordshire. There was very little traffic in those days, but the journey seemed

very long. In the winter, I remember my father having to drain the radiator every evening because of the sharp frosts and it had to be started with a starting handle, no automatic start by turning a key.

My earliest memories of my school days are of going to the BOARD SCHOOL, as it was called. It was only a few streets away from where we lived and we were able to walk there on our own, no danger in those days. No school dinners, so we walked home for lunch and then back again. We had slates and chalk, later inkwells and pens with nibs. I remember, very vividly, one very hot summer, our teacher, Miss Richards, going to the grocers next door and buying some lemon powder and making it up into 'Lemonade' which we had to drink and then rest, by folding our arms on the desk and then resting our heads on our arms. This is one of my most vivid memories. My sisters and I were firstly in the Brownies and then in the Girl Guides and we went everywhere on our own to these activities, in complete safety. I remember one winter, the snow was three or four foot deep and the coal lorry could not get through the snow. Everyone was nearly out of coal and there was no other form of heating. Eventually the coal lorry was able to drive a path through the snow to deliver the coal but families were only allowed one sack each.

The milkman used to deliver milk in churns, inside the churns were the ½ pint and pint measures, hooked on to the inside of the churn and it was measured straight into one's own jug – and paid for at the same time. Often we children could buy a halfpennyworth of milk from the milkman and it would be measured into our own mug, it was delicious, and always very cold. There was a baker in the High Street, HADLEY's and all the bread and cakes and pastries were made at the rear of the shop. The flour was delivered by A SENTINEL; its engine was never switched off during the delivery which took some time and this steam lorry made such a noise. On a Saturday evening, after the shops had closed, stalls would be opened on the High Street, sweet stalls, clothes stalls, they would suddenly appear and this was in a High Street, no cars to bother anyone. At the top end of the High Street was another bakery HOPEWELLS and the deliveries were made by horse and cart, a closed in cart – and every evening, the driver would walk the horse back. (I do not remember where he parked the cart) and stable it at the back of the bakery and in the morning the reverse, the driver would collect the horse and take it to the cart, then the horse and cart would come back to the bakery to collect the days deliveries. Quite a ritual. The butchers THOMAS'S a few doors away, did its own

slaughtering and the sheep, pigs and cows would be delivered by lorry and unloaded and the animals would be shepherded into the yard at the back. Although there was not much traffic about, whatever there was had to wait until all the animals had been delivered, a gate was put between the lorry and the yard entrance so that the animals did not escape and I don't think there were ever any problems.

In our little estate was a little green area surrounded by iron railings and often a flock of sheep would be driven there for grazing.

In my early years I remember that there was a tram in the High Street and it used to travel to the next 'town' only about 3 miles away, down a very steep road, called The Tump, but the rails were removed in the early 1930's and the buses came. I was 12 years old when the war started, still a child in those days. I remember the Civil Defence coming to each house to deliver our gasmasks. The lawn in the garden had to be dug up so that the Anderson air raid shelter could be in place. The shelter was very damp, but made as comfortable as was possible because we did have to use it a few times. When we went to school we always had to carry our gasmasks, if we forgot them we were sent home to fetch them and by this time I went to school about 3 miles away. Occasionally we caught a bus, but most times we walked and never had any problems.

During the war, we were quite severely rationed, but I can never remember ever going hungry. Sweets and fruit were in very short supply but I don't think it worried us too much. But life was never the same again.

### **Barbara Renner**

Thinking of my childhood, I think of freedom – freedom to play out in continuing daylight (double British summer time). Freedom to ride a bike and play games in the street, to play ball against the end wall of a terrace, to play in a nearby farm (now a housing estate). That is apart from a Sunday when I was not allowed to ride my bike and expected to go to the Sunday School and Church.

I was just three when the war started. My father was away in the RAF in Oxfordshire and Warboys. I have memories of sounds of air raids; sleeping

downstairs, sheltering under the stairs instead of using the concrete shelter in the garden, especially after my sister was born in 1941.

I had a fairy cycle for my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, no stabilisers then – when my father was on leave a few months later we rode around the street. He made a diversion and left me for a few minutes, and I promptly fell off! It was just before my sister's christening day and there I am, beside her on the photograph, with a great scrape across my face!

### Norah Ashton

When the Second World War started in 1939 I lived with my parents in Banstead, Surrey, so we were very near London. My awareness of those years was limited as I was very young, however, there are some memories that remain in my mind.

When I was about 3 years old I would sit on the doorstep in the dining room looking out into the back garden. I was aware that the air-raid siren would sound to warn us that a flying bomb was crossing the English Channel to attack the London area and people would run for shelter until the 'All Clear' sounded. We had a Morrison shelter in our dining room. My hearing was very clear so my Mother was able to do her housework and washing knowing I would attract her attention when I heard the siren so that we would go into our shelter. At that tender age it was a game and I was helping my Mother.

It was not long after that that a bomb landed at the top of the next road to me and my family almost demolishing four houses and creating a deep crater. In one of those houses lived a family with whom my parents had become great friends - they too had a Morrison shelter in the house so fortunately they were unharmed. Later when they were sifting through the debris they found the wife's engagement ring, which had been on her dressing table in her bedroom, and she was so sure that she would never see it again.

The force of the bomb had blown the glass and curtains from our house and neighbouring houses in the road in which we lived. At least these were still standing, unlike the four or more which had to be completely demolished and rebuilt.

## Virginia Watkinson

New Year 1947 and having turned five in December 1946 I was about to start my school career. I trotted off happily with Ma to Folly Lane Infant School and was sent into the hall to the teacher, a Miss Pritchard who had a sweet personality and lots of patience. I was keen to learn to read properly as I'd been started off by Gran and already had a love of books. I think I did reading and handwriting painlessly but the mystery of arithmetic got deeper the older I grew. A great deal of time in those early days was spent making a mess with plasticine. Some of the more arty children produced life like objects from this substance but I never mastered the art of making anything beyond a bow legged dog. We were served a school lunch or dinner as we always called it, at our desks and it was quite an art to stop the rice pudding dish slithering to the floor. Every afternoon, immediately after eating, all the class had to have a nap, arms on the desk, heads down. I doubt anyone actually slept but we all did as we were told and there was silence for a time.

Miss Pritchard left after a while and was replaced by a Miss Cross, described by a friend of my mothers as Cross by name, Cross by nature. She was certainly a shock to us children going to school became much less of a pleasure and more of a survival course. A great deal of shouting and banging around went on in the classroom. We had music lessons in the hall with triangles and cymbals. I never did progress to the cymbals but did get a turn on the triangle. I think the cacophony produced by these so-called music lessons did more to put me off than give me any lifelong love of the subject.

Our headmistress was a Miss Garlick. To me she seemed aged but was somewhere in her fifties. She liked me and I never had any fear of her as many of my fellow pupils did. I remember meeting her on a bus going up Kenilworth Road which was lined with large, posh houses. Miss Garlick alighted here and my mother was much impressed that a schoolteacher lived in such a select area.

Physical education, although we called it P.T. not drill, which was an earlier description, involved a great deal of use of the bean bag and not much else - no expensive equipment, indeed no large items of equipment at all. There was a lot of jumping up and down and waving of arms, mostly to keep us warm I should think. I think we played rounders in the summer, using a green area alongside the schoolyard. This was for both girls and boys. This green had trees around the outer

edge in which lived tree frogs. Our nature lessons were taken on this green, only very rarely did we venture further afield. Sometimes to a pond on a nearby common where we indulged in what seems to be called pond dipping these days, although I never heard it called that in my childhood. I remember being more fascinated by the bulrushes than tiddlers or frogspawn. Whenever we went to this pond the most exciting thing to happen was that someone always fell in the water and had to be taken home squelching and dripping - always a boy.

Playtime involved a great deal of racing around and shrieking. The infant school children shared the play ground with the junior girls; the junior boys had their own yard which they shared with the coke pile. This coke pile played a big part in everyone's life. The school caretaker was forever incensed by the misuse of the coke while it was outside and the amount of work involved in getting it to the boiler. Throwing of coke, sliding down the coke, kicking of coke, all constituted misuse. The job of transporting this coke to the boiler was immense; shovels wheelbarrows and more shovels once the coke had been tipped down the boiler room steps. The caretaker was king in wintertime and the head mistress was not above grovelling to him to keep the school warm. The big girls often took the infants under their wing and organized ring games and skipping. "The farmer's in his den" and "Poor Mary lies a weeping" sometimes involved such large rings they took up almost the entire playground. When a teacher rang a hand bell we all had to line up by class and march swiftly and silently down the corridors, always on the left hand side, back to our classroom. You could be in big trouble for breaking the silence or not keeping in line. Obviously we were all practising for convents! Outside lavatories were the norm then, at home and at school. The girls at least had doors on theirs; the boys had only a protective wall; no doors and no roof. I don't recall anyone complaining and these same lavs were there when I left the junior school in 1953.

What did we learn? We certainly learned to read and write, although a number of us had been taught to do both before we started at school. Paper and books were in short supply so we often read from the black board. I guess chalk was never rationed. I recall threading beads onto shoelaces and coloured thread into card pictures. Did we have paint? Maybe it was rationed or considered too messy. By the time my sister followed me into school four years later they certainly did painting. She excelled at this.

Once into the junior school Geography was my very favourite lesson. Once I started going home for dinner I enjoyed the teacher's pulling down the map of Europe and asking for capital cities or main rivers of the countries and allowing those who got the right answer to leave for home early. I knew them all and was always running across the playground before anyone else. Music was also a favourite once into the junior school as it consisted of singing loudly "The Ash grove", "Barbara Allen", "O Shenandoah" and other songs from sheet music I'm sure must have been consigned to cupboards and forgotten years ago. Miss Lewis would conduct from the footrest of her teacher's desk and woe betides any interruptions in the form of a knock at the door during this time. Our poetry lessons were also fun and robust recitations of "Abou Ben Adhem", "Young Lochinvar" and like rhymes were learned willingly by the girls at least. Years later my father in law and I could work our way through reams of poetry all learned by heart in schooldays forty years apart. History seemed to consist of lots of tests as did "Sums" as we always called our Maths lessons. I could never do these "sums" and failed miserably at learning my tables. In history I fared better and have always retained a love of social history in particular. I was artistic when it came to design work but useless at drawing. Fortunately the boy I sat next to could whip up a masterpiece in seconds, so he would do one for me as well as his own. We had something called health lessons which seemed to consist of instructions on how to clean your teeth and cut your nails. There was certainly no sex education, although we boys and girls who sat in the back rows had our own lessons which consisted of "I'll show you mine if you show me yours". I got on well with my teachers although I was no goody - goody. Miss Lewis once told my mother I was no angel even if my mother thought I was. Mind you, the standards Miss Lewis had made it difficult for anyone to be an angel. If you dropped a pencil on the floor you earned a hundred lines. I was a chatterbox and was lucky enough to be able to take in information from the front at the same time as social chatter from the side or back. I was once "given the ruler" by Miss Lewis, I think for dropping my pencil several times in succession. I loved all my schooldays in junior school and was eager to move on to a new environment.

### Gilliam Peak

In the good old days when Soham had a railway station, I was frequently taken along with my cousins to Hunstanton for the day, and on one occasion for a whole week. I really enjoyed the journey especially as the train was hauled by a steam

engine, but I never enjoyed the actual seaside and I suspect the following story may well be the reason.

Upon arrival at the beach my mother would produce my swimsuit and tell me to put it on. I hated the ghastly thing, it was bright orange and someone had knitted it for me. It was like a pair of shorts with straps and a bib at the front, the straps fastened with rubber buttons and when I wore it I looked just like a woolly Jaffa.

If I kept out of the sea it was just about tolerable, but when wet I feel it is better left to the imagination than described.

Each summer it continued to fit, it sort of grew with me. After several years I discovered the power of prayer and prayed as hard as I could that the dreaded thing would get moth and low and behold the following summer when my mother produced it from its winter resting place my prayers had been answered. The moth had had a great feast and the moth had rendered the swimsuit no longer wearable.

A new swimsuit was purchased and we continued to make our trips to Hunstanton but to this day I am not fond of the seaside in the summer months but prefer to visit in the winter when everywhere is wild, deserted and very beautiful and that is when I enjoy being on the beach well wrapped up.

The orange swimsuit is now a distant memory but I cannot help feeling that it has a lot to answer for.

### **Irene Abrahams**

Shopping has changed greatly in my lifetime. As a child shopping within a large town was much as it had been for the previous century. Market, department store usually owned by a local family – specialist shops – haberdashery, millinery, butcher, baker, shoes, dress, tailors, gents outfitters, saddlers, corn merchants, corsetry, chemists, tobacconists, newsagents and hardware stores. Shops, on the whole, closed on Sundays and for the sacrosanct half-day early closing. They also closed between 5 and 6 o'clock in the evening and so the town on Sundays, half day closings and after 6 p.m. was as quiet as the grave. Even the 'pubs' closed at 10

p.m. Peace would descend from 11.00 p.m. to around 7 a.m. when the milk float would 'clip-clop' and rattle out of the dairy.

My first memory of shopping is accompanying my mother to the Co-op store in St James Square, Northampton. We would walk through the park to the square – really a wide road junction where ten years before the tramway turned a half circle around the tram shelter and returned to the town centre. This was a little shopping centre – National Provincial Bank with a branch of the Borough library upstairs, next door a newsagents then a butchers. Across the road was the Post Office, Public House, police, post, two more shops and then the Working Mens Club. Across the road junction and Adams, the bakers and then another shop and then the chapel. Across the road junction again and it was the Co-op grocers and next door Squires greengrocers and a butchers shop on the corner.

Many food stuffs were rationed when my first memory of shopping starts and many small shops closed, but even so the usual tenor of life went on much the same. Mother and I would walk into the shop, mother clutching her 'order book' listing her needs. Every week it read Tea, Sugar, Fats-butter, margarine, lard, Bacon, Cheese and then onto the items that were not bought weekly like flour and soap. This list was not very long because there really was not the choice of food stuffs we take for granted today. On opening the door of the shop the smell of a grocers would hit you. It is very hard to describe – a mixture of bacon cheese and spices. Around three sides of the shop were counters, broken half way around by the accounts cubicle. From this cubicle radiated overhead wires to various points on the counters. Here the counter staff would place your bill for the goods purchased along with the money and note of your 'divi' number into a wooden cup which was screwed onto an attachment fixed to the wire, a pulley was pulled and 'swish' the cup would whiz to the office and change would 'whiz' back to the counter. The 'divi' was a percentage of your purchases which would be returned to you each year in the form of dividend cheques which you could redeem at the Co-op shop, an early form of loyalty points. At intervals around the shop would be placed bentwood chairs at the counter so that customers could sit whilst the order was made up. Behind the counter on shelves would be the goods. Sugar made up into 1lb blue bags from the sack the sugar arrived in. In peacetime there would also be blue bags of currants and sultanas but these were a rarity in the times I speak of. Butter and margarine was pre-packed into half pounds as would lard but cheese

was still cut with a wire from a huge cheese and it was always cheddar. Bacon was cut to your requirements on the bacon slicer and mostly you had a choice of back or streaky. All this took a leisurely time with the grocer in his dark coat and white apron ticking off the items in the order book with his indelible pencil. Ration books would be produced and the amounts carefully weighed and the coupons either cut out or a stamp obliterated the appropriate section. If you were a favoured customer the grocer might produce some extra item like a tin of pineapple. Whilst this was going on I would be sketching patterns in the sawdust with my toe on the black and white chequered floor. When the order was assembled the goods would be packed into a box ready for the delivery boy to deliver by bicycle after school. Mother would pick up her handbag and shopping basket and we would go next door to Squires the greengrocers.

Squires grew most of the fruit and vegetables they sold on a smallholding just outside the town and daily you would see their faithful old pony draw a cart, full of that days vegetables and skips of fruit from the orchard, from the 'field' to the shop. No 'air-miles' there. Here mother would buy potatoes, apples, greens or root vegetables to supplement those that my father would be growing in the garden. Everyone was 'digging for victory' but in reality few gardens were large enough for a family to be totally self-sufficient. Again if you were a good customer you might get one orange out of a rare box of imported fruit. I never consciously ate a banana until after the war. Mangoes and kiwi fruit – what were they? It seems strange to think that vegetables and fruit were only obtainable when they were in season. Great fuss would be made when the first English tomatoes arrived. Certainly we looked forward with great anticipation to the various seasons. Tinned (if you could get it) or bottled fruit were not the same.

My mother bottled seasonal fruit in Kilner jars and made jam. By making jam she could exchange the jam ration for sugar and by doing this could make more jam than the ration allowed. The same applied to the egg ration. This could be exchanged for chicken feed and so my father kept chickens. Of course they produced too many eggs at one time of the year and hardly any at another so the excess was put in a bucket with isinglass and a careful watch kept on them for 'floaters' so that we would have eggs throughout the year. Floaters were eggs that had gone 'off'.

After the greengrocers would be a visit to the butchers. Another place where copious amounts of sawdust covered the floor. Here my mother would buy the small amount of meat allowed on the ration and hope that the butcher might have a little offal or sausages which weren't rationed. After picking up a very light package we would cross the road to the post office.

Today we are familiar with a post office where you can tax a car, buy your foreign currency and numerous other add-ons. In the forties the post office dealt with post, telegrams, saving stamps, postal orders and pensions. When we visited it was usually for postage stamps and a 6d saving stamp to go on my card.

With the shopping done it was the walk home and perhaps five minutes on the swings in the park which was now denuded of its railings. On our walk across the park we would pass the State Nursery. These were built so that mothers with children from new born to school age could safely leave their children and take up work in 'muniton' factories or other vital war work. They opened at 7 a.m. and closed around 6 p.m. As we walked home we would see the nursery section with all the small babies fast asleep in their prams in the fresh air and the toddlers running around playing before they in turn would lay down for a rest before lunch.

Daily the milk float would clop along the road delivering milk to the doorstep and every other day the bread van would call. As a Co-op member both these staples could be purchased with tokens. Whilst at the grocers you would buy the tokens for the amount permitted each week and bread tokens for the week. When you put out the empties each night you would slip the milk token for the day ahead under the bottle. On 'bread' days you would hang a shopping bag on the doorknob with the token wrapped in a piece of paper. The dustcart pulled by a horse visited twice a week. These events and the occasional visit by the coal cart were about all the traffic our quiet suburban road ever got. The only car would be the local doctor on a house call – the district nurse came by bike! The by-product of all these horses meant a quick dash indoors for a shovel and the roses would bloom again.

Everyday life went on much the same for most of the country. It was quite different for the people of large cities and ports. Most of the country was unscathed from bombing with just an occasional rogue incident. What was different were the number of male neighbours and relations who disappeared into uniform. Rationing

didn't only come from the government but also from loss of wages as many families suffered wage drop from civilian work to army pay. It is easy to look back in retrospect but at the time no one knew if the bombers would visit their part of the world that night – whether cousin Jack was alright – he hadn't been heard of for 6 months. Making meals was always a challenge and disturbed nights doing fire-watching, ARP duties, Home guard training, and blackout. As a child I was lucky. I was protected from all these stresses. I was never evacuated and the differences my parents were experiencing didn't register with me because it had always been like this. Nights in the air-raid shelter in the garden wrapped in an eiderdown listening to German bombers following the nearby railway rack up to Coventry. Going to school in the mornings only so that a school evacuated from London could have the premises in the afternoon. Standing in line a school by a pile of sandbags protecting a large window and picking at the Hessian sacking and watching the sand trickle out onto the floor. This was all I had known. I well remember going to a sweet shop the day sweets came off ration and buying about six different varieties of sweets just because I had never been able to do it before, but that was in the 50's and another story.

### Ralph Warboys

I was born early in the morning in the late 1920's, in Oakington. I cannot bear to be late, although this may be because children were caned if late for school.

Many of the houses in the village were thatched cottages in very poor condition and in the 1930's were declared as 'unfit for human habitation' and were pulled down. There was no electricity supply, mains gas, mains water or main sewage.

On a freezing winter morning after dressing in a cold bedroom it was wonderful to come downstairs and stand in front of the blazing fire which my mother lit as her first job in the morning. Cooking was done on a cast iron range, which needed to be polished with 'black lead' such as ZEBO once a week. What tasty roasts and dishes my mother could cook. She would have made a Yorkshire pudding on Saturday. The Sunday roast would be placed on a metal frame just above the pudding. This would be put in the oven just before we went to Chapel. On our return it would be cooked just right, the gravy from the joint having dripped onto the Yorkshire pudding. It should be appreciated the range had to be lit in the

summer as well as winter, when the heat was not so welcome. Lighting was by oil lamps, the one we children had to go to bed was a 'safety lamp' that if tipped over it would return to the upright position. Sometimes when we were put to bed a candle would be used. If I had the opportunity I would take some of the hot wax and mould it into various shapes.

Monday was washday and we had rice and treacle with butter for lunch. Later on we would take sandwiches to school.

Ironing would be done on Tuesday, using flat irons heated on the cooking range, shirt collars etc would be starched. Rainwater that came from the roof of the house was used for all purposes, apart from that used for drinking and cooking. My father fetched drinking water from the village pump with two buckets on the handlebars of his bicycle. The pump stood at the corner of Longstanton Road and Croft Lane. This pump was supplied with water in a 2" cast iron pipe from a well near the Windmill.

The privy was a brick building and had a lavatory bucket, larger than an ordinary bucket and oval shaped, underneath a wooden seat with an oval hole cut in it. When necessary a hole would be dug in the garden and the contents of the bucket tipped into it by my father. Toilet paper was unheard of and newspaper was used.

One day each week the butcher would call and my mother would buy a joint or sausages etc. On one such occasion I had been for a cycle ride to Longstanton, using my father's bicycle which I rode as usual, standing on the pedals with one leg underneath the bar. I saw my mother with the butcher at the gate and thought to myself, "I'll show them how fast I can go!" I came along the road very fast and tried to turn in the gate but going far too fast I went headfirst into the ditch with the bicycle on top of me. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall!"

The baker called two or three times a week with bread and cakes. The grocer, Mr George Moore from the Crossways Stores would come on a bicycle to take an order. He would recite at great speed a list of groceries and my mother would stop him and say 'I'll have a pound of that.' He would write it in my mother's book and start

reciting his list again. A day or so later the groceries would be delivered by one of his errand boys. If items were required from Cambridge the service of the 'carrier' a Mr. Garner of Willingham were used. He had a covered wagon and would purchase items, charging a penny (1d) for his service. He probably also was given a discount for quantity by the Cambridge shops. My mother would tell me to stand by the roadside and watch for Mr Garner, when I saw him coming in the distance I would run in and tell her and she would come out to speak to him.

My brother, who was 18 months older than myself, played happily with me and my mother who was ingenious would tie my toy wheelbarrow to my brothers tricycle and he would tow me around.

When I started school I was taken by my mother for the first day then I went with my brother. I started in the infant class in the 'little room' the teacher being a Miss Everitt. We sat at desks for 2 children, on the desk were inscribed 1" squares 12 x 12. On one occasion the headmistress, Miss Chandler, was talking to Miss Everitt just against my desk. I suppose I was listening to their conversation. To distract me Miss Chandler told me to count the squares, which I did laboriously counting along each row. Miss Chandler asked me how many squares were there. When I told her, she said it would have been much quicker to count the number along the top and down the side and multiply them.

One day when I was swinging on the swing boats where the village sign is now, I heard the school bell. Terrified of being late, (we were caned if late), I jumped off whilst the boat was still moving and received a black eye. At the school Miss Chandler asked me what had happened to my eye, and when I explained, she gave me a penny to hold on it, presumably the cold was intended to stop the swelling. After class I went to give back her penny and she told me I could keep it.

The bus to Cambridge came from Willingham about twice a day, across what is now the disused aerodrome, it was then the B1050 and we could get on at what is now the village shop and Post Office.

One early memory is when my father was at home during the day suffering with a sprained ankle, and the Longstanton Road was being tarmacked, probably for the

first time, with a Steamroller rolling the granite chips on the tarred surface. My father asked the driver if he would give me a ride, which he did taking me as far as the White Horse and back again. I have been interested in Steam Engines ever since.

### Joy Prime

I started Wilburton School as a shy four year old in 1949 and a dear lady whose name was Miss Woolnough taught our large class known as 'The Infants.'

I remember a heart stopping moment one day when it was time to go home. If we took a bag or anything to school with us, it used to be put on the teachers desk at the front. For some reason just as we were about to be dismissed and still standing in our places, 'Miss' was called out of the room and we were told to wait for her return. I thought I would use the time wisely and go to fetch my bag, as I went to pick it up I managed to touch against a full inkwell which was not in its proper place but on the table and over it went. Panic! I crept back to my place and left the ink spreading in a puddle over the table top, but no one else seemed to have noticed. It was the first thing the teacher saw when she came back. Being a calm, kind woman, we all saw another side of her that day. An angry red face demanded that whoever did it should own up but my heart must have stopped, as I have no memory of what happened next. I never did 'tell' and remembered this with a guilty conscience every time I saw her in Ely. She died only a few years ago at a grand old age.

Footnote: Gladys Woolnough was one of the very first girls to be a pupil at Ely High School for Girls when it "opened" in 1905.

### Jane Bulleid

I was born about 6 weeks before D-Day, in Cambridge, and grew up about ten miles to the west, in the villages of Caxton, Longstowe and Bourn. My childhood memories start when I was nearly four; in this memoir I will focus on the years 1948-50, while the rest of Britain recovered from the second World War.

I barely remember when I lived with my father and mother in a thatched cottage in Caxton, not far from my paternal grandparents and the family business; in 1947 we moved to a bigger, newer (built 1907) house in Longstowe, 2 miles south along Ermine Street. We had piped water and basic electricity in Caxton; in Longstowe we started off with well water (Father would bring drinking water from Caxton in large brown cider bottles) and a generator. The 118 red Eastern Counties buses provided a meandering service to Cambridge (no faster today), but Old North Road railway station, on the LMS Bletchley line, was just across the road, with steam trains taking 20 minutes to Cambridge (axed in the 1960s). We had local help in both house and garden (a large vegetable plot and orchard provided much self-sufficiency), and two or three older girls available to baby-sit. Most groceries were delivered from Huddleston's store, and Hagger's bakery, both in Bourn; the butcher Mr Clayton came from Gamlingay, the 'fish man' Mr Wren (or his assistant Maudie) from St Neots; the coalman Mr Webb had his depot next door, close to the station. Sometimes an uncle in Great Yarmouth would send us kippers and bloaters by rail.

Mother, Cambridge-bred and now having to adjust to a very rural situation, found good neighbours and made friends in the Women's Institute; her own family were not too far away, but perforce she saw more of her in-laws. Father, after a 'good war', had somewhat reluctantly returned to the family building business, but had also taken up the opportunity to study for a degree at Cambridge, so was always busy. For me, life was good and the sun always shone.

Then my sister was born, and some clouds gathered as I faced the transition from only child to elder sibling – as so many do! – a situation eased 18 months later when I started school. But there was still much to enjoy in Longstowe. An ice-cream van came round on Wednesday afternoons in summer: my musical appreciation started early when I complained about its repetitive arpeggio. On late Saturday mornings the fish-and-chip van would appear (heralded by a horn) – a penn'orth of greasy chips was a welcome change a respite from those healthy home-produced vegetables. On fine days I enjoyed being out in the garden with Mr Litchfield, our elderly gardener, particularly if it was a bonfire day – did he try to time it when Mrs Hootton had pegged out the laundry? They carried on a cheerful disdain for each other.

Longstowe is a spread-out settlement, mainly an estate village. We lived near one end; Mr Jennings' shop, featuring jars of sweets, was a mile away by road, much nearer across the fields and more interesting because of the wildlife (Mother, not inclined to bug-hunting but remembering her school botany, encouraged my budding interest in natural history). I remember summer visits to friends 2-3 miles away, riding on my tricycle while Mother pushed my sister in the pram. Grandmother sometimes came out from Cambridge by train, and I would 'help' her pick pounds of blackberries from the hedges, for bottling. Harvest time was fun, following the reaper-binders, 'shocking' the sheaves with other children and waiting with sticks for rabbits to appear from the standing corn.

In those transitional 18 months I often stayed with the Caxton grandparents, where village life, with strong characters among the ranks, a confident 'democracy' and a Baptist Chapel, provided a huge contrast to the near-feudalism of Longstowe. The family building business was conducted from behind the house at the 'Yard', as all knew it, in the middle of the village: a busy place on weekdays (Saturday mornings included). Well before 8am each morning 'the men' arrived, mostly by push-bike from up to 7 miles away; the lorry was loaded up and off some of them went, bricklaying, fitting, painting and plastering around the area (there was a lot to be done to make good war damage and upgrade properties). Then I might play in the yard, building castles in the sharp sand, or 'houses' with real bricks; or join the carpenters in their 'shop', constructing more installations with their off cuts while they sawed and hammered away, making window frames, staircases and coffins (for we were undertakers too); or sit quietly in Granddad's office, thick with cigarette smoke, while he pored over his ledgers.

Granny kept some hens up in the orchard, and Granddad had a pig there too. He also had a productive vegetable garden. Every now and then its soil was enriched by the contents of the upstairs Elsan – the bucket was carried out with great ceremony (and care) by one of the men, and its contents buried near the asparagus and rhubarb plots. I found these events deeply moving and looked forward to them. (The upstairs loo went 'on the flush' a few years later!)

Granny would go about her business in the house, while singing 'There is a Green Hill' and other cheerful hymns. She taught me to knit and crochet; we collected eggs from her hens in the orchard. I would accompany her – an accomplished and devious networker – to see her cronies around the village. She did not get on well

with Granddad's sisters ('The Aunts'), three maiden (presumably) ladies, retired after independent working lives (almost *careers*) as dressmakers in London and now living in somewhat urban(e) elegance in a modern house up the hill; they supported the Church, had friends among the hunting set and another sister in America – but still kept hens and, careful with their money, would glean on our field in Longstowe after harvest. Granny preferred the company of another trio of more distantly related elderly ladies, with more village-based backgrounds and 'Chapel' to boot. Over delicate china tea-cups and good cake, their conversations generally followed the theme 'well my dear I've had a hard life'. On Sundays I might attend Chapel with Granny, as well as Sunday School at the Church. Also I remember the small funfairs that would arrive in Caxton at the old 'feast' time each summer; fetes at the Vicarage; cattle herds being walked along the street from field to milking-shed; the Cambridgeshire Hunt Kennels down the road; the gardens of the Manor, once a coaching inn, up the hill; and the Bricklayers Arms next door.

Mr Cox's shop was just across the road, and sold many basic groceries and hardware. And then there was the Miss Clarke phenomenon. The two Miss Clarkes ran a haberdashery shop in Bourn, a real Aladdin's cave. Miss Amy was always there; Miss Ada took the bus into Cambridge once a week to buy any extras ordered by customers in Caxton, and on Saturday mornings in all weathers would walk to Caxton (sometimes she got a lift, but never asked for one) to deliver items to customers. Her coffee stop – you've guessed it – was at the Yard!

I would also spend time with Father, to keep me out of others' hair. He had rough-shooting rights over the Gape estate, and sometimes I and the grandparents' truculent spaniel would join him as pickers-up of game for the pot: pheasants and partridges (lovely), rabbits and hares (ugh) and the occasional pigeon (unspeakable, but very few were about, post-war). [If gentle readers are by now overwhelmed by the number of unaddressed Health & Safety issues mentioned, let me assure you that I didn't handle a shotgun until I was about 15. Or was it 12?] Like Mother, Father wasn't a natural historian, but could identify any game bird or mammal, or raptor, on the horizon, to shoot or spare as appropriate.

The family went into Cambridge now and then, in our small car, shopping for clothes mostly at Eaden Lilley or Joshua Taylor, less often at Robert Sayle or Laurie & McConnell. We liked to park in Sussex Street, close to the Dorothy Café. We also

reached Ely occasionally! From early days I was aware of the Cathedral's wonderful architecture and acoustics.

I also would visit Cambridge with Father. Sometimes this would be on business: to Ridgeons to collect building supplies (or negotiate for them – such were the shortages of materials after the war), or to Mackintoshes, a large hardware store on the corner of Market Square. Or, if he was in student mode, we would walk around the colleges, looking critically at many famous buildings (thus I learned *four Rs* rather than three – including R-chitecture!) or visit the Fitzwilliam Museum. We would often meet his younger student friends. [Reader, I married one of them, four decades later.]

Summer holidays tended to be mainly spent on the Norfolk coast with bucket and spade: Hunstanton and Yarmouth (or, rather, bungaloids in Heacham and Scratby). When I was about 5 we started to visit northern France and Belgium, where Father had served in uniform just a few years before. My memories there mainly feature more sand, but also bombed towns, Rouen cathedral, food and wine such as were unknown in England then (my taste for French unsalted butter has never waned, but I still can't face edible molluscs), and a foreign language – I was taught to say 'Je ne parle pas français' for emergencies.

When I turned five, I went to Longstowe village school for occasional afternoons in the summer term. There I learned how, with a few pencil strokes, to turn a figure 8 into a cat – but not much more, and didn't relate well to the schoolmistress. There was no history of success at 11+ there, so from September 1949 I commuted by train to Cambridge and foot to the Convent in Bateman Street, thus adding a new religion to my portfolio, quickly becoming literate, and realising how wonderfully our country foods compared with grey mince, bullet peas and frogspawn. Best of all, for some, after being away from home between 8am and 5pm, there was no trouble about bedtimes. To start with, I accompanied two older girls from the village at the same school; when I was 7 they both left, so I did the walking bit alone, including crossing Hills Road; not sure when the parents realised this.

## Norman Ridd

My early childhood was spent in London and the things I remember are bombs dropping and spending hours and hours in air raid shelters and moving to various relations. On one occasion we had an unexploded bomb in the garden. One thing that stands out in my memory is seeing my parents clock sliding across the mantle shelf without it falling off but everything else did. A paving slab came through the roof into the bedroom and my father had to roll it down the stairs. Most of the buildings around us had no windows or doors and the only place to play was on bombsites.

We always carried our gas masks wherever we went. School was a bit hit and miss and again you were moved quite regularly. Although it must have been a very worrying and distressing time for my parents, as it was for a lot of people, I am glad to say we survived.

## Pat Ridd

These are some of the things I remember of my early childhood and often think about.

How did my Mother cope so well with rationing during the Second World War. My father, two brothers and I never went hungry we did not get a choice as children do today. My Mother bottled, pickled and preserved everything she could get. My father had an allotment so he grew lots of vegetables etc. We had apple and plum trees in the garden as well as soft fruit, so summer and winter we had vegetables and fruit. You never wasted anything mouldy cheese was scraped and sometimes it was rock hard but it was grated and made into cheese pies which were baked in the range or welsh rarebit. Half a pigs head with a pigs trotter and herbs made delicious brawn. An ox heart would be stuffed made a good roast dinner and would be eaten cold the next day. We kept chickens so that helped with meat rations. If we had a lot of eggs they would be put in an egg pot in isinglass and preserved so we had eggs for making cakes and puddings for Christmas. The egg pot stood on the cellar steps so it kept cool. I do not remember having Easter eggs but my Father would paint faces on our hard boiled eggs. What tin fruit we got was always kept for Christmas and birthdays.

We did not get bored as children do today, we played whip and top, hopscotch and rounders. You could play in the road then as there were very few cars. In the winter I used to knit, sew, help make rugs, draw, read and listen to the radio or should I say wireless. We had a dartboard on the kitchen door and we would all play darts.

My Father made me a beautiful dolls house, it had lights in it and the stair banisters were made out of matchsticks. Conkers and pins were used for some of the furniture. We did not have a lot of toys but what we had we treasured. I had one china headed doll which I broke and she had to go to the Dolls Hospital to be repaired. The other dolls and toys I had were made for me by one of my Aunts.

We always had plenty of pets, dogs, cats, pigeons, rabbits and not forgetting the chickens. My brothers used to breed rabbits and then sell them at the local Auction market. I, of course, did not want to be left out and I had a white rabbit with beautiful pink eyes called Snowy.

We lived in a reasonable size house with four rooms downstairs and three large bedrooms but no bathroom. Our hot water came from a kettle, when we had a bath the hot water came from the copper in the scullery and the copper was my mothers washing machine, and we only had an outside lavatory. We had various people billeted on us during the war and I sometimes wonder how my parents managed. How things have changed.

### Mary Jane Neal

I was born during the Second World War. My parents farmed in Badingham in Suffolk. My father employed two prisoners of war, from the war ag. at Debach.

William and Ernst used to bath in a tin bath, in the back yard after a days work in the fields. They would bring coffee for Mum to make it was in a round tin.

I had a rabbit made for me. The rabbit was a wooden one, red with white spots; it had a green handle of which when you walked along it would hop.

Wintertime the chamber pots under the bed – contents would freeze.

My brother and myself had plenty of fresh air our farm being on a hill. However, we did also enjoy the ice and snow. Great fun starting at the top of the hill, with a small snowball, gradually increasing to be large enough to make an igloo. Snowdrifts would be higher than the car. Skating on the ponds was another highlight. The ice did give way once, but I managed to rescue my brother, by pulling him out by gripping his trousers waist. Plenty of slush about in the yards. In wintertime we'd play hide & seek in the dark, used to call it ghosts hiding in the bushes.

Didn't seem to wear trousers much, as I can remember my chapped legs caked in mud. Usually the treatment for my legs was ZAK ointment, sitting on a rag rug near the York-seal fire.

Dad kept 2 Suffolk Punch horses, 2 house cows, named Bluebell and Jocelyn Red Poll breed, and the calves were lovely too. A few bullocks which were fattened up ready for market at Wickham Market. Some pigs always chickens and laying hens.

We used to look forward to the day old chicks which were transported by train to Saxmundham. Dad had a nice warm hut with heaters in we enjoyed watching them grow.

Summer was the harvest-time, a real adventure. Tea in the fields around the shocks of corn, my legs used to get sore, scratched by the stubble where the corn was cut. I can remember carrying tea in an old beer bottle with a sock bound to keep it warm, also some in an enamel can with a lid, another time we would be riding in the empty wagon, pulled by one of the horses, ready to fill again in the field.

Dad employed 2 men to help with the work. Our friends used to come up to play, we'd slide down the stacks, health and safety wasn't discovered then.

Chase rabbits with a stick in the fields I'd catch one for a rabbit pie, was lovely cold for supper.

Fridays was baking day. - Mum used to make bread in the brick oven which was heated with faggots, bundles of sticks, can remember her red face when getting the cooked food out.

Autumn was again fun, looking forward to the threshing tackle coming, to get the corn from the stacks. We would then look for baby mice which were in nests at the bottom of the stacks. Often they were pink with no fur, still in their nests.

There was an occasion when the deer came in with our cows at milking time

The local hunt came up to the farm. My parents invited them in for a cuppa can remember them sitting around the kitchen table. This encounter resulted in Dad getting a free ticket annually to Hethersett races.

Christmas time my brother Cedric and I would hunt around the farm for greenery ivy etc to decorate the house for Christmas.

We used to get some branches from a copse to make a tree, make decorations for that, paper chains across the walls and Chinese lanterns on the ceiling.

Christmas dinner was just my parents and brother. The cockerel was cooked at the local bakers in Framlingham. Presents opened after dinner in the parlour. Boxing day we'd go to my Aunt, Uncle and cousins for a tea party, and play party games, spin the plate, charades, I spy, spin the bottle, postman's knock, blind man's bluff, pin the tail on the donkey. Consequences. The day after Boxing Day they'd come to ours. It was my brother's birthday.

Another tea party, jellies, trifle, sandwiches, crackers. Not forgetting roasting chestnuts on open fire. Our father Christmas stockings used to be one of dad's big socks, full of nuts orange apple, jelly babies, small books, pencils.

Walk to church with Mum every Sunday. Afternoon go with the dog round the fields to find rabbits. Sometimes cycle rides around Country lanes. We had a few cats also outside, loved to play with the kittens in the nests.

Now I consider myself very lucky, with making our own fun. There is more, but we must finish.

### Christine Kerswell

I was born in March, Cambs, I was born there because hospital places were needed for troops so babies were born at home. My mother had no mother to look after her and therefore she went to my father's cousin at March. Wanting to make a grand entrance I was born during an air raid on Whitemoor Marshalling Yards. Maybe that is why I hate loud fireworks now. When I was a few days old we returned to Ely where we lived in Market Street with my Grandfather Winter (my Dad was in the army.)

Our house was called City Chambers and my Grandfather was Caretaker there. At the front were two shops, one was Chapman's the Opticians and the other was the Bus Office for Eastern Counties Omnibus Company. A long passage led to the back of the building where the house was and rooms on either side of this corridor were offices for the Ministry of Food. People went there to collect ration books, orange juice etc. Sometimes at night we would hear bangs – not bombs exploding but bottles of orange juice that had fermented.

My Mothers father always kept animals and he made sure that I had pets. I had a rabbit called Fluffy, two bantams called Cyril and Margaret and a dear little tabby cat called Topsy. Topsy was a real friend to me. I was an only child and she went everywhere with me. Although an only child I had friends to play with. My mum had a friend called Mrs. Bush who had two sons, Michael and Peter and I also had a friend in Newnham Street called Margaret Peters. She had been born on the same day as me and she used to say. "Do you think that our Mums were coming to tell each other that they had had a little girl and they bumped into each other on the corner?" I also played with Michael Wilson who lived next door. His father was Editor of the Ely Standard. We used to go up Market Street into the farmyard there and watch Mr & Mrs Haylocks cows being milked. People would have a fit if a herd of cows was driven up Market Street now. Incidentally if you go up into the yard next to the Barber's shop you can still see the whitewashed walls of the milking parlour.

When I was three I fell off a swing and cut my chin open. My mum rushed me round to Dr Beckett's surgery in Egremont Street. I can remember him saying "Your Mum hasn't washed your face. Let me do it for you". Obviously he was freezing the area before applying clips. He said "You won't thank me for this when you are older" but luckily the scar is underneath my chin and not on top.

I can remember playing on the Palace Green with the Bush Boys and talking to airmen from the Bishops' Palace. This was used as a convalescent home during the war. The Canon on the Green was a wonderful plaything. It could be a bus, a ship or an aeroplane. Like hundreds of other Ely children I have bumped my head on it many times.

Once a week my Mum would go to the local Rex cinema where Boots the chemist now stands. She had an arrangement with the usherette that if the air raid siren went she would run home and be readmitted when the all clear sounded. She wanted to be with me in case of trouble.

I can remember the celebrations of VE and VJ days.

My Grandfather had a big Union Jack which he hung from a pole near the bathroom window. In the morning it was missing. So were many other flags from the city. The airmen from the R.A.F. Hospital had come down to Ely and 'acquired' them all, standing on each others shoulders to get them down.

When I was nearly five I started school at Market Street Infants School. I couldn't wait to start and had been longing to go for ages. I was not disappointed because I loved it. My first teacher was Mrs McClements and the Head was Miss Hazel. She was a rather fearsome lady who used to beat the door with a stick when she wanted us to come in from the playground. I remember that the toilets were in the playground and left a lot to be desired. I never went to them but went just inside the entrance and then out again. We were all told to 'go' at playtime but I never did. I also remember lining up for a spoonful first of cod liver oil then of orange juice. All children used the same spoon – wonderful hygiene.

I remember my Dad coming home from the war and going back to his job as a printer at Jefferson's in St Mary's Street. I used to love going down there to watch him work and loved the smell of the printers ink.

In 1948 we moved into one of the newly built council houses on the Debden Green Estate. The rent was considered to be very expensive - £1. a week. I still live in the same house today.

I had a long walk to school from our new house. My school then was Broad Street Junior Girls School nearly two miles from home. School dinners were not served so we had to walk home at lunchtime and then repeat the journey, in the afternoon. We used to walk through the Park and often played there on the way home. We also used to play in the fields near our houses and had great fun blackberrying etc.

I can remember being outside playing when we saw an aeroplane flying very low over Ely. It crashed in St Mary's Street. I think that two people were killed, the pilot and a lorry driver whose vehicle was hit by the aeroplane. A house next to 'Brands' shop was also demolished.

When I was nearly eleven years old I went to Ely High School having taken the 'scholarship' exam the previous February. The uniform was a navy blue gym tunic with white blouse and yellow and navy tie. I was not very tall and my gym tunic had a label in it saying 'suitable for aged 8'. I persuaded my mum to remove it. The gym tunics were fine until girls started developing. Then the box pleats took on rather a gappy look.

In 1952 the King died. Miss Tilly, the Headmistress told us all after she had heard the news on the radio. For some reason the Proclamation of the Queen's Accession was delayed in Ely. When it was decided that the Proclamation should be made we all trooped out of school in St Mary's Street and went to the place outside the Cathedral where the Proclamation was made. Because Ely was so late the Gaumont British News people were there to film the ceremony to show in cinemas throughout the land.

I enjoyed my days at Ely High School and spent the last year at the new building in Downham Road. I preferred the old building. It had more character.

I wanted to go to college to train as a teacher but had to wait a year after I left school because my birthday was in November and the magic date for being eighteen was the end of September. I went to work for a year in the office at St Martins Jam Factory in Brays Lane, Ely then went to St Gabriels College, Camberwell, London where I trained as a teacher. I had five special friends from all over England.

During my 'Gap year' I met Peter who is now my husband. He is from the North East originally and I can still remember the first time that he took me home to Annfield Plain, Co. Durham. The accent was quite baffling and I rather think that Peter's two younger brothers emphasised the accent for my benefit. One thing that sticks in my mind is the day that Peter's Mum said 'Can you pop round to the corner shop and buy a quarter of ham for John's bait?' I thought ' My word they have strange fishing habits up here!' In actual fact 'bait' is their word for 'dockey'.

### Peter Kerswell

I was born in Desmond, Newcastle on Tyne. I spent the first four years of my life in an orphanage at Guisborough, North Yorkshire. I was then adopted by Edgar and Ethel Kerswell who thought that they were unable to have children of their own. Ethel then went on to give birth to two sons and a daughter so I ended up with two brothers and a sister. Edgar, or Ted as he was known, was a coal miner and worked at the Morrison Busty Pit in Annfield Plain until it closed in 1969. Incidentally he said that he didn't want any of his boys to work in the mines.

I went to school in Annfield Plain, first at the Infants School and then at the Junior School. I finished my education at Greencroft School.

I always loved singing and was a chorister at St Aidan's Church. There was a choir festival at Durham Cathedral to which choirs from all over the Country went. Mom washed my surplice beautifully and ironed it. She gave me sandwiches and a bottle of cherryyade for my lunch. Unfortunately the top of the bottle was not tight and consequently my surplice had a big red stain! I had to carry my books so that the stain was covered when I processed into Durham Cathedral.

When I was a lad (and until my twenties) the Main Street at Annfield Plain was nearly all taken up by the Co-operative store. This was later demolished and taken brick by brick to be rebuilt at Beamish Open Air Museum which is only about four miles from Annfield Plain.

Another thing I remember about my childhood in County Durham is the Durham Miners Gala Day, or 'Durham Big Meeting' as it was known. Bands from collieries all over the county used to march through Durham to the Cathedral led by their local banners. If there had been a disaster during the past year then that colliery's banner was draped in black and the usually noisy crowds were silent when it passed. So many people congregated in Durham that day that local householders on the parade route would have notices saying "You can use our loo for a penny!"

### Beth Lane

I grew up in Cambridge, and have more memories than I can ever write down!

My maternal Grandfather was many things, a silver service waiter at Sidney Sussex College and a speculative builder among them. He built my parent's house in Roseford Road when they got married. We were very lucky as it was the last house in the road which was at that time a "No Through Way" road. We had a "ditch" as we called it running right across the end of the road and the full length of our garden, which was very long, then along all the fields behind our garden to Arbury Road, under that, and on to where it opened out into a small pond where we could catch newts. The ditch continued onto Histon and beyond. There were sticklebacks living in it. Many happy hours were spent fishing for them. We had fields on two sides of the house; one of my earliest memories is of horses pounding round the fields in the early mornings. It was a child's paradise! There were greengage trees growing all down the side of the house on the edge of the ditch which we used to swing across on ropes, Tarzan style! During the War, when my father was away in the RAF, my mother who hates heights, would pick the ripe greengages, load them into a wheel-barrow and wheel them to Histon to the Chiver's factory and sell them for jam making to make a few extra pennies. One more memory of the "ditch". My mother made my younger sister a "Siren -suit" so that when the siren sounded she could just pop Valerie quickly into it, pyjamas and all. On this particular day, Valerie

had been left in my care for a little while. The boy next door, Peter and I discovered that the ditch had a blockage and the water was steadily rising, a not infrequent occurrence. We decided to unblock it! A big mistake! Valerie was told to stay on the bank but in the way of small children, she came too close to the edge, there was a huge splash and there in the deepest part and resplendent in her new siren-suit was Valerie! My mother was not amused! Although the siren-suit was washed and used again, it never smelt quite the same again!

There were other children living near us, mostly boys. As there was very little traffic down our road we all played together outside. We played marbles in the gutter; hop-scotch on the pavement, jacks; cricket; and football and when the corn in the fields was high enough, hide and seek. When it came to bed-time, we were all bundled into the nearest house, bathed together and then our respective mothers would come with a towel, wrap us in it and take us home to bed. Sharing a bath is nothing new!

In those days we did not have a car so we went everywhere on our bicycles. To get into Cambridge, we had to ride the length of the road, turn left into Histon Road, then down Castle Hill into Magdalene Street. It was my job on Saturday mornings to go to the Butler Bros butcher's shop which was at the top of Castle Hill to get the meat. On the way home I called at a small shop whose name escapes me, but was opposite the Histon Road Cemetery, to buy the cat his "Felix", it came in a bright yellow package I remember. I also remember with horror the day we had very heavy snow, (we did in those days)! I had been to buy the meat but on the way home I had stopped to play with my friends. I put the meat in a safe place, as I thought, to pick up later and take home. When I went to collect it, it was not there, I had not reckoned with dogs! I owned up to mother, who was furious, but minutes later the doorbell rang and there was a neighbour with the missing meat, unharmed! I still remember the great relief that I felt!

My early schooldays were spent at Milton Road Junior School. The Headmaster at that time was Mr. Varley, we all loved him, he was strict but fair, and he also knew all our names. One clear memory of those days was the singing lesson, taken by Miss Clarke. I was very frightened by her as she shouted at us. One day, during a singing lesson, she informed us that someone was singing out of key, she thought it was me and told me that I looked like a goldfish! As I was then, and still am, very

shy, I was mortified and to this day I have not sung another word! Another clear memory is playing hide and seek in the fog in the playground. I suppose, looking back that it was smog, when it was bad you just could not see far beyond your outstretched arm. We thought it was great fun! Another teacher that I remember was Mr. Leach. He was my teacher in the fourth and last year at this school. He seemed to understand my shyness and helped me a great deal, in later years when I was married and had children, I was able to contact him again and we became great friends, corresponding and meeting each other. He had a steam launch on the river which was his pride and joy. In the summer months he would take a few favoured children for trips on it. He rode to school on a very old motorbike, wearing an RAF type helmet, I can see him now! A most loved teacher.

My father's family lived at Hemingford Road, Romsey town, in Cambridge. My mother's at Union Road, very near the Catholic Church. Every Sunday we all pedalled off to see one family or other and stay for tea. Quite often Aunts and Uncles and cousins would come too. If we were at Union Road we would be sent to play on Parker's Piece. I loved the house there as the sitting room was below ground level, which meant that when people walked past, all you could see were their feet! It also had a passage way down the side of the house leading to the back garden which had a "hump" in the middle with a small wooden trap-door let into it. This was to allow the coal man to empty the coal directly into the coal cellar but could then be accessed from inside the house. There was also another room on the first floor which was kept for "best. I could look out of the window and watch all the girls at the Perse School in the play ground from this room. The next floor housed the bedrooms and then the best of all for a small girl, the attics, dusty, musty and totally fascinating, full of treasures from a bygone age. The Hemingford Road house was very different, the front room, never used, was very dark and very green. There was an Aspidistra, of course and a green chaise-longue to match the green velour type curtains. Down the hall was the living room where we all gathered but there were never enough chairs because the room was not big enough for any more. This meant that we children had to perch on the laps of the adults, never very comfortable. I remember both houses as happy places, filled with loving adults.

Later on when my father came home from the war, he was one of the lucky ones; we would often borrow a punt belonging to my father's brother and spend the day on the river. We would cycle down Grange Road to Grantchester and here my

memory fails me but somewhere there were two enormous black gates behind which were sheds containing the boats, cushions and poles, all with their own numbers so you could identify your own. My mother was very skilled with a punt pole; it was usually she who punted.

I learnt to swim at Jesus Green swimming pool; my mother would take me at 7.00am. before school. We had changing cubicles which had wooden slats to stand on which were always wet and slimy so you tried very hard not to drop any clothes on the floor! The swimming attendant taught you by using a tube attached to a pole so that he could control you. Looking back, I wonder how we learnt, but we did, somehow!

Shopping was not as easy as it is today; we had more tradesmen calling round though, so that made things a little easier. Our milk was delivered by horse and cart, amazingly, the horse knew exactly where to stop and when to move on. One day the horse just would not move so the milkman went round to see why, there under the horse, was my sister Valerie on her little tricycle! The bread was made at Markillies Bakery which was situated down Victoria Road at the Mitchams corner end. The delivery man knew all we children by name and became a family friend. Saturday evenings were the best when Mr. Wiseman from Histon came in his lorry selling fruit and vegetables. We always had a treat, in the summer it would be lovely juicy peaches. I loved to peel the skin off with my teeth, when I had done that I would eat the peach, often with the juice running down my face! In the winter it would be Oranges, sprouts and really crisp celery. After the War, Saturday was also the night that my father would come home with sweets, not too many at first as they were still rationed but later on as more became available we could not wait for dad to come home to see what goodies he had brought home for us!

When I was 11 years old I sat the "11+" and won a scholarship to the Cambridgeshire High School for Girls. My mother also entered me for the Perse School and I won a scholarship to attend there too! My father wanted me to go to the High school and my mother, to the Perse! Luckily for me my father won! In hindsight I know he was right! The High school was situated down Long Road while we lived nearly on the doorstep of Histon. This meant a very long journey twice a day. When I first started I caught the bus that left from Histon and passed by the top of Roseford Road, this would take me to Drummer Street where I transferred to

the school bus for the rest of the journey. After school ended the journey was reversed. When I was older I cycled, I would think twice about it now with the volume of traffic that uses our roads! I have many memories of school days but that would take too long to write!

During the war years, we had as many people did an Anderson shelter in the front garden and a Morrison shelter in the living room. My father came home on leave and was horrified to discover that my mother had become very lax about taking cover when the sirens sounded. He made her promise that the next time she would get us all into one of the shelters. A few nights later she awoke to the noise of bangs and crashes. Thinking that she must have missed the siren, and remembering her promise, she got us into the Morrison shelter. After a while, when she became fully awake, she realised her mistake, it was a thunderstorm!

I trust that you have enjoyed sharing some of my childhood memories with me. These memories are indeed treasures of the heart and mind which will stay with me forever.

### **John Baker**

I was born in Dorking, Surrey, just a couple of months before the outbreak of the war. It was a difficult birth (oxygen starvation resulting in mild spastic paraplegia) so I was in and out of hospital off and on through my childhood years as they attempted to alleviate the condition. My parents Alice and Bob had both been born in Stockton-on-Tees, but my dad had moved south (accompanied by his widowed mother) in the early 1930s, to find work during the Depression, and my mother had joined him in Dorking after their marriage in 1937.

My father's work as an electrical draughtsman with the Henley Telegraph Company needed him to move to various parts of the country during the early war years, and my mother and I accompanied him to places in Greater Manchester and Tees-side, making long and complicated cross-country rail journeys in the blackout, avoiding London because of the bombing risk, and accompanied by our luggage and gas-masks. My gas-mask was initially a thing like an enclosed carry-cot, but when I

outgrew that I had a Mickey-Mouse one. In the north-west we had lodgings with a friendly family called Clayton, but on Tees-side stayed with my maternal grandparents in Billingham (my grandfather was a foreman at the large ICI chemical works there), and back in Dorking stayed with my grandmother in her rented semi on the Reigate Road opposite the cemetery.

My earliest memories date from my starting school (Pixham C of E Infants) on the edge of Dorking, next to the playing fields and under the shadow of Box Hill. Part of the playing fields had air-raid shelters buried in grass-covered earth mounds, and when the siren went (this would be around 1944, when the doodle-bugs were coming over) we all had to troop over to them till the all-clear sounded. But after only two or three weeks (I started before my fifth birthday on Friday afternoons only) I caught scarlet fever and was taken to the isolation hospital deep in the woods several miles west of the town, where I was kept away from the outside world (including of course my parents) for about six weeks. The scarlet fever wing was thriving (if that's the right word) but the diphtheria wing was unused and ruinous. When eventually my mother came to collect me I hardly recognised her at first, as she arrived in her best clothes and I had built up a mental picture of her over the weeks in her working clothes at the kitchen sink.

The infant school was a good half mile away from my grandmother's house, but once my mother had seen me safely over the main road I made my own way (alone or with other pupils) down a long cul-de-sac and along pathways between allotments to the school. When I graduated to St Martin's Junior school at the other end of town I would catch a bus there, having been seen safely to the bus stop on the other side of the bypass. It never felt dangerous, and there was comparatively little traffic then. In fact, on holiday weekends we used to make a special trip to the bypass roundabout to marvel at the rare sight of traffic queuing up there on its way back from the coast. Only one of my school friends' parents had a car, and it was a rare treat to be taken for a short ride in it, perhaps to the top of Box Hill on the zigzag road, and down via Pebblecombe Hill. Otherwise we walked locally - there was beautiful countryside on our doorstep - caught the bus for shopping trips to Guildford or Reigate, or used the train for longer journeys for our seaside holiday each summer (Hove, Bognor & Cliftonville spring to mind) and the trips up to Tees-side to visit grandparents and assorted relatives.

Eventually my parents found a flat to rent in the centre of Dorking. Life had become very cramped in my grandmother's 3-bedroom semi, with my grandmother sleeping in the smallest bedroom, the lodger (always necessary to make ends meet) in the middle bedroom, and my parents & me in the largest bedroom at the front. The lodger also had use of the dining room, and the rest of us made do with the living room and kitchen. So it was with relief that my parents, after much searching, found a flat in West Street above White's the drapers. Entrance was through the shop, and one room of the flat was retained by the shop's owner as an office. The staircase at the back of the shop was steep and twisty, and arrived firstly at our kitchen (overlooking the back yard and the iron foundry), then at the passageway leading to our big living room and the shop office, then to the bathroom (bath & w.c. but no washbasin, just a jug & basin on a stand) then finally up to two bedrooms. For the first time I had the luxury of my own room, which had a good view over the rooftops to the North Downs.

The living room overlooked the narrow West Street, which at that time took two way traffic including lorries and buses. It was often congested, and seeing the traffic edging past and getting stuck (on one occasion ripping a panel from the back of a bus bearing the admonition Mind Your Step) was one of life's little pleasures. So was playing ping-pong in the living room (the back yard being far too small for any recreation) and the ball flying through the open window to land in the hat of my aunt's aunt, who returned it to us with some amusement. But the presence of the shop below meant that my parents were concerned not to invite my noisy fellow pupils in to play, so I was limited to asking them only on Wednesday afternoons (the shop's early closing day) after school.

Which is how I came to join the church choir. The new headmaster at the school announced in assembly one day that he was shocked to find so few of his (church school!) pupils in the parish church choir. So about half a dozen of my best friends joined. It was a good choir (those were the days when most town and village churches had a men-and-boys choir, and St Martin's Dorking was of cathedral standard, its organist being Dr William Cole, a close friend of Ralph Vaughan Williams, who lived in the town) and the rehearsals for the boys were on Mondays and Wednesdays at 5 o'clock, and on Fridays at 6.45 before the full practice at 7.30. So suddenly my friends were not available to come and play on Wednesdays. On the principle of 'if you can't beat them, join them', I joined the choir too, and was

immediately 'hooked' with an enthusiasm that has lasted to this day. At first we were probationers, and sat in the six stalls by the screen in front of the clergy desks, wearing only our black cassocks, but once we had past our tests a few months later we were given our surplices and promoted to the main stalls in front of the choir. We sang two services on Sundays, either Matins or Sung Eucharist at 11, and Evensong at 6.30. I couldn't believe it when I discovered we were paid for what we all loved doing, and extra for singing at weddings! Another joy was to sing the chorale and *ripieno* parts in the performance of Bach's St Matthew Passion given every year in the Dorking Halls, and conducted by Vaughan Williams.

At the age of eleven I passed the 11-plus exam and went to Dorking County Grammar School, on the edge of the town beyond the recreation ground and the Guildford to Redhill railway line. But I continued to sing in the church choir, which meant that I could not join the Junior Choir at the school, which also rehearsed on a Wednesday after school ended at ten past four. It appeared that the music master at the school had a very simple method of report writing - grade A if you had private instrumental lessons with him, grade B if you joined the school choir, grade C for everyone else - so (as I had no instrument to learn, my parents having had no musical training) I was a grade C pupil until I was able to join the Senior Choir (which rehearsed on a Tuesday) and took music to O and A levels.

But this takes me beyond the cut-off date for these ramblings, which I suppose must be around my thirteenth birthday. By that time I was on the point of deciding to make architecture my career, having been to a careers exhibition at the school and meeting Donald McMorran, our local well-known architect and Royal Academician - and I don't think it was just his bow-tie that impressed me! I was also (in common with many boys of my age) interested in steam trains, and had taken up railway photography, firstly with my dad's Box Brownie and later with a folding camera and a simple twin-lens reflex. Before my fourteenth birthday I can remember going by train, and accompanied only by a friend of similar age, not only to Guildford and Redhill but further afield to Reading and Willesden Junction in north London on train-spotting jaunts. I soon grew out of that (as one does), but the thought remains that our parents were much more willing to let us take risks on our own than is the case nowadays. I shall have to stop there before I get into Grumpy Old Man mode!

## Eirian Bennet Jones

I have lived in the East Anglian Fens for the past thirty-four years and am well accustomed by now to the flat scenery, the lack of trees, the wide sluggish rivers, deep ditches and enormous skies of Fenland.

I was born and brought up in a village of stone-built houses on the shores of Cardigan Bay in North Wales.

I took the beautiful scenery there for granted. After all these years in East Anglia it never ceases to amaze me now when I go back, how majestic the mountains are and how beautiful the sea, in all its different moods.

My sister and I were brought up to be bilingual as it was a Welsh speaking village. We spoke both languages at home and at school. I went to school at the age of three as I was the Headmasters daughter and lived next door in the School House.

In those days of the 1930's and 40's children stayed at school till they were fourteen. There were several big boys at the school who had failed the 11+ exam, known then as the 'scholarship'. We infants were afraid of the big boys and kept well away.

There were two playgrounds, one for girls and infants and one for the boys, so we were segregated at play.

The school bell rang at 5 minutes to 9 and kept on ringing. Woe betide any child who arrived after 9 a.m. The cane awaited them!

It was a three-teacher school of about 60 pupils. Miss Jones taught the Infants, Miss James the Juniors and Mr Rowlands (my father) taught the older pupils.

I quickly learned to read English and Welsh without difficulty. Written work in both languages was easy for me too.

I found Maths, or 'Sums' as we called them, more difficult as there were few teaching aids to help children understand the concepts of number in those days. When I left the Infants we were taught to use pen and ink and woe betide anyone who blotted their copybook. It happened to me one day and I was sent to the Head (my father) for the cane.

As the cane descended on my hand I shouted "I'll tell mother about you," and so I was given two whacks!

Everyone went home for dinner except the ones who came by taxi from outlying farms. They brought sandwiches. We were all given 1/3 pint of milk at morning break.

My greatest fear was the arrival of the School Dentist. He came to the school once a year. When the dentist's chair was carried into the Infants Classroom I became panic stricken. This fear has remained with me all my life!

The classrooms were heated by coal fires which gave out some heat to those sitting near by. The ones furthest away fared less well.

We started each day after Morning Assembly by chanting our multiplication tables. After that came:-

12 inches	=	1 foot
3 feet	=	1 yard
22 yards	=	1 chain
10 chains	=	1 furlong
8 furlongs	=	1 mile
1760 yards	=	1 mile

We stood on our chairs each day to chant these tables. I have never forgotten them!

In the evenings we went to the 'Band of Hope' where we learned 'Tonic Sol Fah'. We also went to the 'Welsh League of Youth' where we sang in a choir and took part in pageants and plays.

There was of course no TV in those days but the occasional 'Magic Lantern' show would visit the village. A conjurer appeared annually at the Village Hall and Welsh Choirs held concerts to entertain us from time to time.

Each Saturday we were given a penny to spend at the sweet shop. We used to buy a ha'pennys worth of one sort and a ha'pennys worth of another.

Dancing classes were held at the Hall on Saturday mornings and we went pony riding in the afternoons. The pony called Belle was very temperamental and would often buck and try to throw us. We paid a shilling for an hour's ride.

In the Summer holidays we took a picnic and bottles of 'Dandelion and Burdock' and went off for the day into the hills and woods behind the village.

On hot days we swam in Cardigan Bay where sometimes we would see a school of porpoises near the shore. They had dorsal fins like sharks and strangers to the area would run screaming out of the water thinking that they were sharks. How we local children laughed!

Each New Years Day it was the custom for village children to knock at people's doors to wish them a Happy New Year. They would also sing some carols and would receive money in exchange for their good wishes.

Our parents would never let us participate in this old custom as they felt it was begging.

The Headmaster in the next village used to force his children to participate as he wanted to keep up this old Welsh custom which was called 'Calenig.' His children cried because he forced them to go. My sister and I cried because we weren't allowed to go!

Our friends would brag about how many pennies they had earned.

We went to the Welsh Presbyterian Chapel on Sundays. Grandfather was a retired Pastor and he and Grandmother lived in our village.

Grandmother was very religious and insisted that my sister and I went to Chapel twice each Sunday. We went to Sunday School in the morning and to a sermon in the evening. Welsh sermons are long. It was hard to sit still!

Grandmother also called for us one evening a week to accompany her to a Prayer meeting. How we hated chapel! But there was no getting away from it. We had no choice!

Knitting was forbidden on Sundays as were card games, jig-saws, ludo, snakes and ladders etc. which were all our favourite games. All we could do was to read or go for walks.

A girl we knew broke her arm on Sunday whilst playing on swings and slides in the Playing Field. Grandmother never let us forget it. She said it was a punishment from God for playing on Sunday!

It was a happy carefree childhood. Apart from the strict Sunday rules we were allowed to do pretty much what we wanted and were allowed to go anywhere unsupervised. Today's children have lost that freedom and seem to be accompanied by adults wherever they go.

Today the two village water-mills of my childhood have long been converted into dwellings and their great water-wheels are still.

Three out of the four chapels are closed and only two out of the ten shops remain. The Railway Station from where we caught a train to the nearby Grammar School, is now a 'Request Stop' and father's old school has become the 'Village Community Centre'. The new school shares a Head teacher with the next village.

The Smithy where we used to watch the great shire horses being shod has long closed its doors. The cobbler in his leather apron has gone too.

The village, once so busy with its various craftsmen, shops and activities, has changed almost beyond recognition. Many new houses have been built and it has become a commuter village.

The scenery, however, is unchanged. The mountains of Snowdonia remain steadfast in the background and the waters of Cardigan Bay still sparkle in the sunshine as they did in those far-off days when I swam with the porpoises.

### Betty Gooch

Home was thousands of miles away from Cambridgeshire. My father fought in the East African Campaign during WWI and later settled in Kenya Colony. Kenya born children are so lucky to have been part of such a wonderful country. It was all taken for granted simply because we knew no other life.

My main childhood memory in 1930's was of freedom. Lots of space to wander off with my brother into the 'bush', our only danger came from snakes, and these would vanish into the long dry grass unless we were stupid enough to step on one. We knew better than to pick anything up as most wildlife had a nasty, if not fatal, bite or sting. Africans would kill snakes especially deadly black mambas, and there were plenty around. The dead snake was never touched or buried until after sunset in the belief that its spirit remained and retained the power to harm until then. I too believed this and kept well away from any dead snake.

The annual swarming of locusts, which arrived from the north, was an event. Empty four-gallon petrol tins were used to bang with sticks in a vain effort to make the swarm move on. Great fun for children, but generally no use to save my mothers garden as these insects had voracious appetites and were quick eaters.

A travelling Chinaman called about once a year his wares wrapped in an 'American' cloth bundle carried on a cart and looking like an oversized Xmas pudding. A young African who always looked happy to stop and catch his breath pushed the cart. Unlike the Fens, Nairobi suburbs are hilly. The bundle's outer cloth was untied to reveal many smaller cloth parcels each containing different hand embroidered articles – silk slippers, kimonos, and table linen. I longed for a kimono and was given one for my sixth birthday.

Starting school at 6 years of age was an unwelcome event in my life sweetened somewhat by the purchase of my first bicycle – a necessity to reach school. My

brother taught me to ride promising not to let go as I wobbled along. He did and I ended up in a hibiscus hedge.

I attended the Nairobi Government School, a double storey building accommodating the mixed primary school at ground level and the Kenya High School for Girls above. Years later when sitting the Cambridge School Certificate during WWII we wrote our exam papers in duplicate. This was a precautionary measure in case the ship carrying the originals to England for marking was torpedoed. Our Headmistress, Miss Stott, held the duplicates locked in her office safe.

My father's job necessitated one month's sojourn at the coast each year. How we children loved the overnight train journey. There was an abundance of wild animals to watch before nightfall. The animals kept to the right side of the track as hunting there was prohibited, whereas the left side was permanent open season. This was before National Game Parks existed and animals seemed to sense which side was safest. The steam train stopped only to take on water and wood, no passengers alighted. This was an opportunity to open the mosquito proof mesh shutter and hang my head out to see the African children gathered along the side of the train hoping for money or sweets. Dawn brought the first glimpse of the sea, mango, cashew nut trees and coconut palms, as well as that special smell of Mombasa!

Home for the month was a bungalow overlooking the entrance to the old harbour still used by Arab dhows, their arrival coinciding with the monsoon season. Dhows in the 1930's relied on sail. My Mother seemed to 'collect' friends children and if any happened to be staying when we went to Mombasa, they came too. All children slept on the veranda, boys on the left side, girls on the right. 6 a.m. was morning teatime which we drank sitting on the front steps. There was no fresh milk, as dairy cattle could not be kept at the coast because of tsetse flies. Condensed milk was used and one child was allowed each morning to scrape out the tin.

Mornings were spent hunting for shells on the coral reef. At 4 p.m. we went swimming at Beacon Hut which was about one mile along the cliffs. Generally there were too many children to fit in our small car and a few started walking until the car returned to pick us up. The order was reversed on our homeward trip.

At weekends we crossed to the mainland, to spend the day on a beach – miles of white sand and nobody else in sight. The crossing was by ferry, always an adventure, its ancient motor generally having a seizure half way across the channel. Whilst the ferrymen tinkered, ferry and passengers drifted gently towards the open sea to be saved when the motor was resuscitated, sometimes by a swift kick from the 'mechanic'.

The Mau Mau revolt against the British Colonial Government in the 1950's was a sad time for Kenya. So many appalling atrocities were committed against 'loyalist' Kikuyus and Whites. Children of every race lost that treasured freedom, and the many thousands forced to leave still retain love for their country. You can leave Africa but Africa never leaves you.

### **Barbara Slade**

I was born in England but my memories of my childhood here are very sketchy. I can remember going to the bakers at break time and getting a lovely hot bun and my supply of milk.

After the war my father was unable to settle back into his routine and decided to emigrate to Kenya. So he and my elder brother set off. Dad to find employment, and John to go to school. The school year started in January so it was important that John did not miss too much schooling. My mother and younger brother, Derek, were to follow later. This we did in the March.

On leaving, our neighbour had given me a fountain pen and a snakeskin handbag, a treasured possession for an eight year old. The journey to Kenya took three days. We flew by day and stayed in an hotel at night. Our first stop was in France and the second night was in Egypt. Whilst in Egypt on our overnight stay I had left my handbag on the seat of the plane. The next morning it was not there. I was so upset. To make matters worse there was a needle in it which had been used to sew up my eyebrow, having cut it whilst being naughty and jumping from desk to desk, slipped and fell on the metal bar joining the desk and the seat.

We settled just outside Nairobi, at a place called Kiambu and then Derek and I had to go to a boarding school in Nakuru and we travelled there by train. The journey took some time as it was 100 miles away. We were allowed out at half term if ones parents were able to collect us, or we were invited out to stay with other children.

When I went to Limuru Girls High school for the first time it was quite an experience. As it was the time of the Mau Mau in Kenya and there had been a massacre in a nearby village, our school had to be relocated to Nairobi. I became a day scholar at the local Government school called the Kenya High School. This was so that the Limuru school could be made secure with barbed wire fencing as an outer perimeter and an inner perimeter with look out posts. When the school returned to Limuru I was then a boarder. During the day, at break time, we were allowed into the ground surrounded by the outer perimeter to lounge around. This was where we had the tennis courts and the hockey field. We also had a netball pitch. I was in the hockey team and we went to play other schools. Our pitch was grass but the schools in Nairobi were 'murrum' a kind of pebble surface. We were not allowed this as the pace would have been too fast and was bad for our health as we were at too high an altitude. When we returned from our matches it was traditional to sing the school song if we had won. This was rendered out with great gusto, but if we lost then anything at all was deemed appropriate. Therefore the reception was geared by the singing.

Soon after moving to the High school my parents had moved to the coast, to Mombasa. This meant that the journey to school was going to be even longer. It meant an overnight journey by train and I do not remember having an adult with us for supervision and it was known as the school train. The train left Mombasa at 6 p.m. and arrived in Nairobi at 8 a.m. the following morning. This was very exciting. We would be met by the school caretaker and taken to school in the school bus. At the end of term we would travel back to Mombasa. When we awoke we would all look out of the train window to see who would be first to spot the end of the train. It had to lose gradient and therefore made a large circle to go under itself. We did not do this on the way to Nairobi, as it was dark soon after we left Mombasa. The other thing we did was to find out who could smell and see the sea first. It had a distinctive smell and we knew that we were nearly home.

On one occasion Princess Margaret was visiting Kenya. She arrived in Nairobi and then travelled to Mombasa to board the Royal yacht Britannia where she spent the next two and a half weeks cruising in the Indian Ocean. A friend Brenda had her own boat and as we belonged to the local yacht club we were to be included in the 'fly past'. This meant special permission from school to arrive back later. Unfortunately on that day the wind did not blow as it should have so the boats travelled at a much slower pace than expected.

### **In Conculsion**

Reading through the scripts one is reminded of the apparent FREEDOM experienced by children in earlier years. Walking to school, shopping and travelling on buses solo even at the early ages of seven; the rough and tumble without adult supervision. In fact as one contributor remarked "it is rare to see young children on their own these day, there always seems to be an adult with them". Signs of the times of modern living in the twenty first century?

Another observation is the importance of church and chapel in the weekly pattern of family life; today Sundays often equates with a trip to the supermarket.

People in authority, whether in schools or the community at large, were treated with courtesy and the obligatory Mr., Mrs. or Miss. Christian name terms for the Vicar, schoolteacher or GP were never used. Children "knew their place "even if they were seen and not necessarily heard, they had the innate ability to amuse themselves and have great fun in doing so. The word BORED does not feature in their vocabulary as it does with so many children today.

What these reminiscences really show is that in spite of poverty, food rationing ("eat what you are given") and lack of luxury entertainments (think of radio, TV, computers, cameras etc. available for today's youngsters), almost without exception "a happy time was had by all" and as scripts have stated, when one starts thinking back, one cannot but agree that there were "some good old days".

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# Book full of wartime memories

ES Oct 25 '07



**Lorna Delanoy and Barbara Slade, who compiled the book.**

Photo: SUPPLIED

A GROUP of local history enthusiasts has written a book of about their childhood memories.

*When I Was a Child* has been written and published by people who meet at Fenland History on Friday meetings at Ely Library every week.

The book has 20 contributors, who all live in the Ely area, two of which, Lorna Delanoy and Barbara Slade, put it together.

Mrs Delanoy said: "The stories highlight some of the fundamental differences between our memories of childhood and the way children behave today."

"Children enjoyed a lot more freedom back then than they do now. The book contains stories of six and seven-year-old children getting on buses on their own and travelling to school, or going off with a packet of sandwiches and exploring. These days, parents don't let their children out of their sight.

"There are stories of growing up in wartime when children had very few material possessions but the word 'bored' does not feature in their vocabulary as it does with so many today."

She added: "Some contributors observe how Sunday was

once an important day with most people dressing up and going to church, where as the ritual for many people nowadays is to go to the supermarket."

Mrs Delanoy said: "We had a great response from people who attend the Fenland History on Friday meetings, we've had a lot of fun putting it together."

■ *When I Was a Child* is priced £4.50 and available from Burrows Bookshop, High Street Passage, Ely and Soham Books, High Street, Soham.

■ Fenland History on Friday is on at Ely Library every Friday from 10.30am-noon.

## Mixed memories of childhood published

CHILDHOOD memories are the subject of a new booklet published by members of an Ely-based history group.

Entitled *When I was a*

Country and Kenya as well as Soham and Ely.

With a foreword by local history expert and club member Mike Petty, the booklet can be purchased

KW

Oct 11th

'07



Compilers  
Lorna Delanoy and Barbara Slade  
Both aged 7



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