

A VILLAGE BOYHOOD IN SUNNINGHILL
BY RAY WHITING

1. Most of the village boys wore boots – usually of black leather. The heels invariably were protected by steel plates – shaped like small horseshoes. The roads were generally made of compacted flints so that a vigorous kick from the steel plates produced a stream of sparks which at night were quite something. The village cobbler made a small fortune from replacing worn-out steel tips.
2. Before main drainage was introduced – in the mid-20's I think – every house had an outside privy complete with a bucket (In the more artistic houses the privy was whitewashed in a delicate shade of pink). The bucket was cleaned once a week by the “nightmen”, usually after midnight. I can recall seeing the light from their oil lamps reflected on the ceiling of my bedroom as they came round to the back of the house to remove the necessary. At Christmas they used to leave a note on the seat which read “Happy Christmas with compliments of the Nightmen”. Everyone then left a Christmas Box on the seat for the next visit – failure to do so no doubt would have led to an unimaginable disaster – all up the garden path.
3. One of the village characters was Old Jim alias “The Dodger”. He was an old soldier and although somewhat tatty in appearance his black boots and garters were polished to perfection. When he was drunk (a fairly common occurrence), he would march up and down and drill the school railings.
4. We had a cinema given to the village by the famous Rajah Brooke of Sarawak. I frequently went to the Saturday afternoon children's show at a cost of 2d i.e. less than 1p. I can't remember what we saw except that there was always a serial dealing with the adventures of the most lurid kind – but no sex.
5. One of the village lads sat next to his friend's girl and dropped his cigarette, by accident, into her umbrella which burst into flames. He bought her a new one.
6. The piano was played by Miss Reeves who kept the local stationers shop.
7. Opposite the school was a greengrocers kept by Mr Westmacott. Fruit that had become un-saleable was thrown over the railings for the children to scramble for.
8. The village school closed for Ascot Race Week – the course being only a couple of miles away. The road from Ascot to London passed through the end of Sunninghill and the boys used to sit on the bank at the side by the Victory Field. When the cars were streaming away and call “Throw out your mouldy coppers”. They seldom got any – after all the people were mostly Londoners.
9. For a week or so before the races we played a game called “Pin-a-go”. This consisted of a circular card divided into segments each with the name of a horse and the odds. This was mounted on a short rod with a pointer pivoted on top. The disc was spun after paying a pin and if the pointer stopped at the horse of your choice you got the appropriate odds - in pins. What else?

10. The road to the village church crossed the Ascot road at a point which for years I took to be “the Towbar” – later I discovered it was in fact “the Tollbar” on the original turnpike road. One of the two village gas lamps stood here.

11. At the crossroads was an imposing entrance to a mansion called “Kingwick” occupied by the Earl of Warwick, who was often seen in the village. His son, the Hon. F.S.G. Calthorpe, was a well known amateur cricketer of county standard.

12. One of the big houses in the area was at Sunninghill Park. Two of the tenants (or owners I suppose) in my time, were Capt Wolf Barnado (a well known racing driver) and the Guinness family. Noel ? McCachlan.

The house was being made ready for the Queen and Prince Philip after their marriage, but it was seriously damaged by fire and instead they went to Windlesham Moor – an adjoining village.

Quite recently (in 1985) I was talking to Doug Packman who at the time had gone to Sunninghill Park to pick up some horses. He had to stay overnight and before going to bed was having a walk round when he saw the fire and was the one to raise the alarm. Quite a coincidence!

13. I remember going to a Conservative Fete there and the speaker was introduced as Mr Anthony Eden, “the rising young member for Leamington”.

14. I also recall a tragedy there. My old friend Arthur Bennett’s wife was Grace – (I forget her surname) and her father was gamekeeper. The agent for the estate had a son Kenneth Thorn who was at school with me at Windsor, but a few years younger. Grace’s father had warned people to keep out of the area where his birds were breeding but Kenneth went there and sat down with a book. Grace’s father, thinking it was a poacher or a fox, fired his gun and wounded the boy. He seemed to have recovered but soon after collapsed in church and died.

15. Not far from Sunninghill Park was Buckhurst Park. This was owned by Sir Henri Deterding – one of the truly great names in the oil world. I knew the daughter (Mabel Mew) of his butler and for several years went to a Christmas party in his quarters. Deterding had married a Russian Princess and I remember that the names of her horses over the stable doors were all in Russian – although I don’t remember seeing a Lenin or a Stalin.

16. Apart from the aristocracy, there were some well known people in trade – Burberry (of raincoats), Burgoyne (of Burgundy), Col. Horlick (of malted milk), Machachlan (General Motors) and Guinness.

17. I sang in the church choir for about ten years. We got 1/- a quarter, subject to fines. I cannot recall ever getting a full salary.

The organist was Mr Thomas Clayton – a Lancashire man. With the assistance of local gifted amateurs and professionals (men and boys), from St George’s Chapel, Windsor we tackled quite imposing works – Bach’s ‘Christmas Oratorio’, for example.

Mr C moved to take charge of the music at the R.C. public school at Egham – Beaumont – and adopted the R.C. religion. When he died he had an obituary of some length in ‘The Times’.

There were occasions when we practically reduced him to tears.

18. I remember being guilty of an innocent “faux pas” at the church. The sermon was from a missionary back from China and to show us choir boys of the devotion of Chinese Christians he had a copy (done in ink) of a cross drawn by one of these in his own blood. Yours truly asked “Sir – have they got blue blood?”
Collapse of clergy.

19. I was on my bike when I passed two men, one of whom looked as if he recognized me. I think he was mistaken – he was HRH Duke of Kent, George VI’s brother, killed in a Sutherland flying boat during the war.

20. We had a blacksmith’s forge and I spent hours there. There was an apple tree behind the smithy and I picked up some of the windfalls. The blacksmith (Mr Cooper), a devout Methodist, reported me to my mother for stealing apples.

21. I was in turn both cub and scout. Our Cub-mistress (Miss Ward) took some of us to meet her uncle – a blind old gentleman with two VCs’. Boer War I suppose. The second in command was Lady Margaret Scott – the only thing I can remember about her is that I saw her inadvertently sit on a cowpat. Like Queen Victoria, she was not amused.

The Scoutmaster was George Newton whom I believe later became quite important in the Boy Scout Movement. At one camp one of the boys was throwing an enamel plate like a Frisby is thrown nowadays and clouted poor George on the head with a resulting 6” gash.

The assistant Scoutmaster was the Hon. Lucius Douglas who was not altogether with us – he used to bring Pall Mall cigarettes in boxes of 100 to the camp and we all smoked like chimneys. He could easily be persuaded to hand out badges on the flimsiest of uncorroborated evidence.

The stub of one of his cigarettes turned up in a plum duff pudding.

22. The village school boasted an enormous coal-fired cast iron stove, surrounded by an iron railing. Defaulters booked for the cane were made to stand by it. Furtive efforts to sidle away were in the vogue but Nemesis (in the form of Mr Whitehead, Headmaster) always prevailed. We were caned on the hands – it didn’t half hurt.

23. Just before leaving the village in 1931 I attended a meeting in the school to consider the formation of a society to be called “The Sunninghill Operatic and Dramatic Society” – but the title was dropped on the grounds of inappropriate initials. Later I joined the Staines outfit of that ilk but I can recall no problems there.

24. For its size, Sunninghill had one of the highest casualty figures in World War I – there were over 70 names (including one girl), on the memorial. At the annual service in the churchyard, where the memorial stood, I would stand next to the Best boys who would hear the names of their father and elder brother read out.

25. November 5th was always a communal affair. A bonfire was made in the yard behind the fishmongers – Mr Jones (Incidentally, it was from his daughter, Tilly, I received my first present from a lady - it was a collar stud).

We all bought fireworks one at a time for weeks before. For reasons I never understood one of the local drapers sold fireworks – he was a mild and somewhat dithery man and I am sorry to say that while his attention was distracted the odd firework was adroitly purloined without payment. I hasten to add that I never did this. I also recall one disaster. Jack Franklin (who later became one of the church wardens), had all his precious collection in a wheelbarrow, and a spark from the bonfire set the lot alight at one go. He cried.

26. In Edwardian times it was fashionable for ladies personal maids to be German – some of these married local lads and settled in the village. One married the gents hairdresser (Harry Matthews), and another who actually lived in our road – Bowden Road, married one Turner. Her son, Hugh, as a man sang contralto in the choir and it was a lovely voice. Whether he was castrati was never established – or even investigated as far as I know.

27. Near the church lived Brig. Gen. de Sausmerez and his wife who rode round the village on a tri-cycle. This name I believe comes from the Isle of Jersey and was the real name of the cadet in the famous play “The Winslow Boy”. I wonder if there is any connection?

28. Also near the church was a big house called the “Cedars”. Keats or Shelley wrote a poem there. The previous tenant of our house was gardener at the “Cedars” and we took over when he moved to that place. Their cat – Jim – was taken to the new place 2 or 3 times but found his way back and that is how we became cat owners for the first time.

29. This house backed on to the railway and on the other side were the Co-op woods where we boys played. My mother had a cycle horn operated by a bulb and when she wanted me to come home she went to the bottom of the garden and gave a few toots.

30. This house was called Vine Cottage and indeed there was one on the wall at the back but I can only recall the fruit ever getting larger than a currant.

31. I once wrote my name on the wall at the front but made the “Y” look like a “T” – for some time I was known as “The Rat”.

32. The people next door were the Kerleys – he was the village cobbler. Mrs Kerley had been a ladys’ maid and used to go abroad with her mistress to places like Monte Carlo. She must have been used to correct manners – any how I once saw her eating peas off a knife without dropping any.

33. Next door on the other side lived the Taylors. On one occasion Mrs Taylor had got herself worked up for a row with the insurance man and when he called she went for him and he agreed with everything she said – not surprising I suppose as he was the new curate coming round to introduce himself.

34. The choir stalls were solid wooden affairs of the bench type. When one of the choir boys passed wind (and this happened when the apples were not quite ripe), the seat acted as a sounding board and magnified the sound considerably. This used to upset the Vicar, especially if he had reached the high point of his sermon.

35. One of the choirboys fined on the spot during choir practice, is alleged to have pee-d in the choirmasters hat before leaving the church premises. I cannot vouch for this.

36. While I was a choirboy the arch from the original Norman church was found in someone's garden and was built into the doorway of the later Victorian church where it still stands.

37. Next door to us in Lower Village Road lived a boy named Ernie Churches. When he was about 12 years old he went on an outing to Southsea and brought back a present for his Grandma – a miniature china chamber pot inscribed “For me and my girl”.

38. I had the honour of having my name mentioned over the radio – on the Home Service or its equivalent. The Children's Programme was run by “Aunts and Uncles” and parents of a child could write in and get a birthday message read out. My message instructed “Ray Whiting to go to Chapmans' in the High Street” – this was a general ironmongers shop. After some persuasion I went along and collected my first bike!

39. Later a car ran into me and the bike got bent somewhat. My father had some difficulty in finding out whether the driver was covered by insurance – later he paid up.

40. The railway ran right under the High Street – but we had no station. To make up for this we had a gas works, an electric light works, a water works, the main post office and a cinema. Rather odd really.

41. Like most boys I had a pea-shooter and one day managed to get a dried pea stuck in one nostril. This was removed by Dr Matthews at a cost of 2/6d. He gave me a sixpenny piece for being a good boy but when we got outside my mother appropriated it – I think with justification perhaps.

42. During a violent storm a “thunderbolt” struck the railway bridge over the road in which we lived. A lady in an adjoining house ran up the railway line with a lamp and stopped a train. The railway company is alleged to have made her a present. Somehow I acquired a large and very heavy piece of material about the size of a man's fist which came from the spot – it looked like a mass of stones fused together. I gave it to the Chemistry Laboratory at school.

43. I attended the County School for Boys at Windsor from the Summer term of 1926. Windsor was about 7 miles the other side of Windsor Park from Sunninghill. I went by train; as Dad was on the railway I got a concessionary rate and I remember that my first season ticket worked out at 200 miles for the old 1d. Also I left my bike at the station for nothing.

It was a roundabout journey of 17 miles by Ascot & Sunningdale (Berks), Virginia Water & Egham (Surrey), Staines (Middlesex – where I changed trains), Wraysbury, Sunnymeads & Datchet (Bucks) and finally back to Berks at Windsor.

44. My father paid £5 a term which I took on the first day of each term sewed into the top of my trousers by my mother. Books, etc. were extra. £5 doesn't sound much but with books, etc. this came to £20 pa – or 4/5 weeks wages of my father. Quite a proportion!

45. The milkman has just called and has recently returned from a holiday in Paignton (Devon). A tram used to run from Torquay along the coast road and I remember travelling on the top deck when the pole came off its wire, swung round and hit a couple of ladies across the face. Blood all round.

46. A boy named Hermon King made a kind of ballistic missile which I believe he sold for a penny. It consisted of a narrow tube in which a small round stick was inserted at one end; the other end was pushed into a thin slice of potato which plugged that end. The stick was then pushed in and the pressure built up and expelled the plug with a loud plop. The range was a few yards. I cannot recall anyone being wounded.

47. My mother kept a few chicken (always Rhode Island Reds) and they had names but each in turn finished up in the oven – and very nice too.

48. By 1926 we had a radio – 2 valves which stuck out like chapel hat pegs. It had a wet accumulator as power supply and this had to be taken for recharging to the local cycle shop – cost 6d. It was very heavy and usually went by bicycle. A knife placed across the terminals produced sparks.

There was also a dry battery with a wander plug – I think to provide grid bias. At the side was a fixed coil and a moveable coil operated by a handle – they were side by side. By inserting coils of different size various stations could be heard.

There was one set of earphones but a second set could be joined in so that two people could listen

At first we had no speaker but by placing the headphones in a large pudding basin all three of us could hear very faintly – provided we stopped breathing.

My father produced a speaker but I can't remember it working.

While living at Vine Cottage and in Lower Village we did not have an all mains set – the fact that we had no electricity laid on probably accounted for this.

49. Our first dog was a Pomeranian cross called “Podge”. I have a photo of her on my lap with myself in a “Little Lord Fauntleroy” suit. She has a bow and we together make a very pretty picture.

50. Opposite us lived an old lady (Mrs Hunt if I remember). She was a staunch Conservative supporter but on one Election Day my mother got up early and festooned Mrs Hunt's front railing with red crepe paper – I don't think she was very pleased but certainly was very active for a short period.

51. We used to have an annual Choir Outing and one of the choristers asked the Vicar if stops on the journey could be made as (quote), “Some of us men have weak bladders”.

52. I used to score for the village cricket team and when on the return journey from away matches we made a stop at a pub a glass of lemonade was bought to me in the lorry.

53. We sometimes had a concert put on by the Cubs and Scouts. I recall going for song rehearsals under the direction of an amateur pianist – her name was Princess Walenska.

54. One of the butchers – a Mr Fifield – had a delivery wagon. It was a De Dion Bouton chain-driven vehicle, with tiller steering and solid wheels. He took me to Basingstoke once on a wet day – it was open to the skies and the only protection was an apron over our legs.

55. The inn situated in Upper Village Road was “The Carpenters Arms” – known locally as “The Sweaters”.

56. At Christmas the choir boys went carol singing for 4 or 5 consecutive nights armed with a letter from the Vicar establishing our identity as the choir from St Michaels and All Angels. We visited the large country houses in the area and did very well for ourselves as we shared the takings.

One night we were about to start at one mansion when the owner discovered that we were the choir from Sunninghill and not from Sunningdale as anticipated – we were paid to go away.

57. Many of the ladies of the village made Californian Bee Wine – this was prepared from a sugar solution in a tall jar in which was placed pieces of soft white matter about the size of a currant and these slowly floated up and down; some form of yeast, I imagine.

Many of them, of course, were in the home-made wine business. I particularly remember elderberry wine which had a lovely rich purple colour. At Christmas up to 3/6d could be paid for a bottle of sherry.

58. When our dog “Podge” was on heat she used to attract several admirers of the opposite sex, much to my mother’s annoyance. She once threw a handful of pebbles at the assembled dogs but only managed to hit poor Podge.

When Podge died (alleged by my mother to have been poisoned by the Mrs Hunt already mentioned), she was laid out on the floor of the shed and I can still recall looking at her through a crack in the shed door, but not daring to go in. She was buried in the garden.

59. I had a fret-work set which included a drill operated by moving a ring up and down. My father was bending down one day and I applied the drill to his posterior – I have never seen a man stand up so quickly.

60. I had the usual quota of grand-parents – four.

My father's mother was the daughter of a farmer at West Looe in Cornwall – Grace Light. I can only remember seeing her once.

My grandfather was much more familiar to me as in his old age he used to stay with us from time to time. He was in the timber business and at one time had his own saw-mill. He spent long periods in Australia, South Africa and America and once told me that in Australia you could buy a sheep for 6d or 2½ p in modern money. He smoked “St Julien” tobacco and liked a drink. While he was abroad one of his sons was born but the first news of his return was a report that he was in the local. He died at the age of 86 in or around 1926 so he was born in 1840 and so could have spoken to men who had fought at the battle of Waterloo.

I remember seeing him off on a train and when the carriage drew up there was a lady occupying a corner seat – he said to her “Young woman, I would like that seat”, and she obligingly moved over.

He used to shave with his cap on.

My mother's mother was Louisa Talbot and I knew her well as we often stayed with her at Basingstoke where all of my mother's family lived. Her aunt had been in service at Harwell Vicarage in Berkshire at the time when Jane Austen was living there with her father who was the vicar. Her brother was brewer for Baliol College, Oxford – most colleges then brewed their own beer.

My grandfather was James Blissett, a very religious man and very kind to me.

My father's brother – Edgar (my second name) – went to India as an engine driver for the East Indian Railway and was killed in a rail accident. I have looked this up in “The Times” for 1919 and I think about 20 were killed in a head-on collision or derailment.

I have a postcard which he sent to my father, Samuel John like his father, when he got to India. It reads “Sam – arrived safely – Edgar”

My father had 2 brothers and 3 sisters, and my mother 3 brothers and a sister, so I was never short of blood relatives as a boy.

61. In these jottings I have mentioned several people of wealth and/or rank who lived in the village – Lady Margaret Scott (my cub-mistress), the Hon. Lucius Douglas my scout-master), Sir Henri Deterding (the oil magnate), the Hon. Noel Guinness and Woolf Barnato (racing drivers), Princess Walenska and the Earl of Warwick. There were many others e.g. The Burberry family of raincoat fame, The Burgoynes who were once famous for their burgundy sold in distinctive bottles, the widow of General Redvers Buller who commanded in the South African war, Commander Crutchley, the submarine commander who got a V.C. in World War I, and just over the parish boundary lived Agatha Christie.

I don't think that we were ever conscious of a “them and us” attitude and though obviously we did not mix socially I can't remember any incidents or bickering or jealousy by the lower orders.

62. The Sunday services were an illustration of this social divide. At Matins 90% of the congregation was made up of the gentry and at Evensong the congregation was 100% villagers – it seemed the natural way to do things.

63. When carol singing we, the choir, used to get 5/-, 10/- or even a £1. I well remember singing at one house where a dinner party was in progress and the lady of

the house had a whip round among her guests and came back with about 1/3d – to us obviously not what we called gentry; a certain amount of non-ecclesiastical language was used.

Correction: I remember now – she counted us and gave us 2d each! Later we went on to a farmer and local JP by the name of Minehin and in the farmhouse kitchen we were given a jolly good supper. What a contrast.

64. There were only one or two proper farms in the parish but many country houses set in park-like surroundings and with beautiful gardens.

65. My good friend Arthur Bennett's father was head gardener to Capt and Lady Rousden at Wellsborough House. She had the novel idea of letting parts of the extensive grounds grow wild and the rest beautifully planted and maintained by the gardeners.

66. Food

With one or two exceptions the general diet was pretty well much as today. There were, of course, no such exotic foods as Chinese take-away or McDonalds beef-burgers, nor were there many fruit and vegetables out of season. Freezing was an unknown item.

Take potatoes as an example – nowadays new potatoes from Egypt or Cyprus are in the shops soon after Christmas, but when I was a boy I think that the earliest were from the Channel Islands possibly by the end of May.

In the village the men reckoned to dig early potatoes by Ascot Race Week – say about 20th June.

I can still remember the varieties grown in the village where the soil, incidentally, was very sandy – Sharpes Express, Eclipse, King Edwards (of course), Kerrs Pink and one my father always grew – Edsel Blue which was like the modern Desiree.

Many people put runner beans in salt and some buried carrots in sand to prolong 'shelf life' – dried peas (marrowfat I think) were always available and the packet contained a white knob of something, bicarbonate of soda possibly, with which they had to be soaked – I don't remember that they were very nice.

A lot of women bottled fruit – usually plums – in Kilner Jars and they were really very good.

Hens eggs were preserved in isinglass in a bucket and my mother used to paint the eggs with a sticky kind of paint and store them in racks – I think that it was called Mortegg.

Meat was the same as now but rabbit was then commonly available and eaten quite a lot.

67. I can't remember much coming in bottles. The horse drawn cart had a big churn with a tap at the bottom – the milkman filled his pail which had pint and half-pint measures hung on a bar under the lid, and the milk was measured out into the householder's jug on the doorstep.

I was once involved in a serious incident on one of the carts – I used to ride along with the milkman and one day when he had gone off to serve a customer I turned the key at the bottom of the churn – the milk started to flow and to my horror I was unable to turn it off. It seemed to me that the village was inundated with milk before he returned. How much it cost my parents I never knew – perhaps he topped it up with water.

68. In the main village was a branch of the International Stores, but still very much a village shop. While I lived in Sunninghill the Co-op opened a newly built shop opposite. Only two other grocers' shops come to mind – Woollets and Scotts. The latter was kept by a former army officer – Captain Scott – who had lost one eye in the war. He was naturally known as “one-eyed Scotty”. He commanded the Armistice Day Parade for the annual Church Service. He later became my Scoutmaster, and a very nice chap he was.

69. There was very little pre-packaging of food stuff. Sugar, currants, raisins and so on were sold loose. Tea, however, was usually in packets but could be bought loose – maybe it was the other way round – I can't remember.

Butter was hacked off a large block by the use of butter pats which made a kind of flip-flop-flabby noise – I can hear it now. The block of butter was placed on a large china base.

Cheese was cut off the block using a wire cutter.

Some biscuits were in packets but most shops had large tins with the tops replaced by glass lids to reveal the variety. There was always a box marked “Broken Biscuits” – not surprising, considering the handling they got in the first place.

I may return to the subject of food later.

70. The following experience arose from my ignorance of the meaning of the word “ADJUST”.

We used to go to Reading fairly often for shopping – it was the nearest big town.

Many times I stood in the urinal in the toilet on the station and said to myself “I live at Glyn Cottage, Lower Village Road, Sunninghill”, while standing in front of a notice on its wall and then expectantly wait for something magical to happen – it never did, because the notice in full read “Please adjust your dress before leaving”.

71. There were no toilets in the church so we men and boys used the north wall – this was fairly safe at Evensong in the winter, when it was dark, but a bit more hazardous at other times, especially at Matins. Perhaps that was why we had no females in the choir.

Adjoining the church at this well-watered spot was the last of the yew trees which once were there to protect the church on the north wall side. It must have been centuries old and the branches were held together by an immense iron ring.

72. A friend at school – Fred Hunneman – went with me to sit for the entrance exam for the General Grade Clerkships for the old LCC. We both passed and started work on 16th March 1931. We were in one of the school plays together – “Every Man in his Humour” by Ben Jonson. I can still remember the whole of the lines in his part – they were “Not I, my lord”.

It was through him that I tried my first pipe – but not while we were at school, I hasten to add. I seem to recall that it was at a regatta on the Thames at Windsor during the annual Eton College celebrations.

I was in the cadet corps at school and we used to fire at the indoor range in Eton college.

73. I can also remember being in two other school plays - one was “The Knight of the Burning Pestle” by Francis Beaumont. In this I played a character part – George the Dwarf.

The other was “The Imaginary Invalid” by Moliere. The main part was played by C.S.P Smith who after university worked for the Labour Party in some capacity and later was given a peerage. He died when he was about 60.

74. Another boy was J.H.R Edgar. I had an extraordinary experience with him during the war. He was in the RAF and had been reported missing in action. A little later Brenda and I had gone with Alec Gurney (another school friend at the LCC) to the theatre one evening and had bought an evening paper. At that time Lord Haw Haw (who incidentally at one time lived in Herne Bay Road, Whitstable), used to announce during his broadcast the names of a few captured airmen and the English papers would print these. In that very paper that evening was Johnie Edgar’s name. Now it also happened that I used to go on Saturdays to pay the workers at the LCC temporary office at Coopers Hill, Egham and its clerk of works was a chap named Lovett. He was married to Edgar’s sister whom I got to know well as they lived on the estate. What a pleasure it was, therefore, to be able to ring her up next day to tell her that her brother was safe – a fact she did not know.

75. One of the wealthy families used to come to church in an enormous car – a “Minerva”, of Belgian origin, but now long extinct.

76. When I had my hair cut by the village barber – Harry Matthews – I used to stand behind the chair. The shop generally contained a few regulars who had simply gone in for a chat. It cost 2d and I can remember Harry giving me a message for my father to the effect that next time it would be 6d. I was obviously, in his estimation at least, growing up.

77. On occasion I helped the butcher’s assistant – one Bargent – to make sausages. All I can remember of that process was the considerable number of loaves of bread which were used.

78. The modern participation of parents in school affairs contrasts strongly with the practice in my school days. Parents were allowed on the premises only once a year – on Sports Day – and then under strict supervision. Speech Day and the School Play – both annual affairs – were held at the Royal Institute well away from the school.

79. We had what is usually known as a “village idiot” – poor Bert Crisp. His body was badly twisted and he shuffled along. He was said to have fits and I assume must have been epileptic. He went to school with the rest of us and was simply accepted for what he was. He had flaming red hair. I can’t remember seeing him being bullied but I recall some boys sticking a rabbit’s tail in front of his flies and wagging it about – but only in fun I am sure. He died in his teens.

80. Death among the village boys was thankfully rare. I can only remember one – Robert Irvine – known as “Monkey Irvine” on account of his face. He had a joke – he quoted the last line of an alleged poem followed by the name of its author. It went “I went sailing down the stream”. R .Suppards ?????
Generally speaking none of us boys used bad language – neither come to think of it did the men – well not while I was around.

81. There was very little crime. People felt secure and doors were commonly left unlocked.

I can only recall one crime – a near neighbour named Blanchard got caught shop-lifting in Reading and did a short stretch.

82. At school we learned poems by heart – I don't suppose that is done now – more's the pity.

I can remember with fair accuracy the last verse of Wordsworth's poem on daffodils: it goes something like this:-

“And oft when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils”.

83. I have two such memories which often come to mind.

Firstly, along the boundary of “Kingswick”, the home of the Earl of Warwick, there was a long line of splendid beech trees – going on for nearly 100 yards, I should think.

I can recall walking along the road during a gale, more than once, and the roar as the wind whipped the branches was unbelievable. It would start at one end and sweep along to the other. Not frightening, but really glorious.

Secondly, on a warm summer evening (all summer evenings were warm when I was a boy), the doors at the west end of the church would be left open and the sun would stream in half way up the nave and in the quieter moments during the service the birds could be heard singing their hearts out. I only have to close my eyes and I am back there again.

84. When Mr Westmacott, the greengrocer, died or retired, his shop was taken over by a man named Hure, with an accent on the ‘e’. His shop was invariably referred to by the villagers as “Hers”.

85. One of the gentry had a Japanese butler – the nearest we could get to pronouncing his name was “Taxi Motor”

86. One of the churchwardens was Mr Carlos Clarke – his daughter did a bit of property dealing locally, but eventually the business expanded and in the end became the well-known West End firm of “Mss N C Tufnel”.

His son Peter ran the car over his father's foot outside the church one Sunday morning and the old man is alleged to have used some non-ecclesiastical words. He wore a monocle, I remember.

87. Paynes, the sweet and tobacco shop, made ice cream on the premises using the red wooden machine. Frequently you had to wait until it was ready. At one time I could buy a kind of toffee apple covered with powdered sugar and if on licking it the toffee

proved to be black, then I would then be given a slab of toffee as a prize. I was never that fortunate.

88. I have written the last few items with a fountain pen. At school we had steel pens and very messy they were too. Each desk had an inkwell and sometimes a boy would drop a piece of calcium carbide in another boy's inkwell with spectacular results. Calcium carbide cycle lamps were very common – water dripped from a reservoir at the top and a button controlled the flow. The calcium carbide was in a container screwed in to the bottom of the lamp and the gas came up through a burner. When good they were very good but the burner frequently clogged and had to be cleared with a pricker. The carbide had the habit of losing its strength at unexpected moments.

For some reason it was sold in rather unusual tins – about 2 inches in diameter but about 9 or 10 inches high.

89. Another thought on the previous item – in the late 20's 'Platignum' fountain pens were commonly used at school. They sold for 1/3d I think and must have opened up the market considerably. There must have been a 6d pen at Woolworths, but I do not recall it.

90. I can never remember being other than satisfied with my Christmas presents, but I can recall very few of them:-

- a slate pencil and a glass frame for drawing thereon.
- Father Christmas with a hollow body full of chocolates.
- a Mecanno set.
- a book given when I could have been only 4 or 5. I still have it and can remember the words under a picture of dogs driving an engine:-

These doggies make the engine go
They keep their hair as white as snow
The driver is a jolly chap
He smiles at us and waves his cap.

[I always have been able to remember things of little consequence].

91. After extreme provocation and with every justification my father occasionally tanned my behind. The only incident of this nature I remember curiously was the very last one. It was on an August Bank Holiday in 1926 or thereabouts. The high spot of the village year was the Annual Sports Day on the Victory Field. After it was over I stayed behind to help clear up and stack the chairs. By 9pm my father came to fetch me and that was when I got my last tanning.

92. The Sports Day drew competitors from miles around and its high spot for us boys was the inter-school relay race. I can still see the Headmaster (Mr Whitehead) standing with open arms welcoming the boy from the Sunninghill School coming home the winner. There was always a fair with coconut shies. Once when the roundabout was being erected I was thunderstruck to see one of the fair men put a handful of pennies in the bearing where the main shaft revolved – to compensate for wear, I assume. Electricity was generated by great steam engines which puffed away contentedly for hours on end.

93. One Christmas Day I woke up and there was not a present in sight. My parents explained that Father Christmas had a lot of children to visit and that many were much poorer than I was – tearfully, I accepted the logic. My father then had the brilliant notion that perhaps in his hurry Father Christmas had perhaps gone to the wrong room – I dashed into the spare bedroom and there was a whole sack of toys. Rapture unconfined ensued.

94. Memories of very early years are perhaps not true memories but merely records of what other people have told me since. I am sure, however, that I have two from World War I which are genuine memories:-

Going by train from Waterloo to Basingstoke in 1918 I am sure I saw the preparations on the platform for a train of wounded soldiers to come in. Ambulances and stretchers were laid out in lines on the platform.

I can also remember being in the basement of Springfield Hall, Wandsworth Road during an air raid or threatened raid.

95. Since I was 5 or 6 I have, thank God, enjoyed very good health but before then I was a poor specimen and my aunt has told me that at one stage I was not expected to live.

I had some kind of chest trouble and radical cures were applied which I clearly recall. One was being held over vats of tar at Nine Elms Gasworks to breathe in the fumes, and the other was to be held by my mother and aunt (both suitably attired), at the edge of the sea on Chesil Beach, Portland, to breathe in the spray from the breakers. The fact that I survived surely proves something.

96. We moved to Sunninghill in 1919 when I was about 5 years old. I evidently had difficulty in walking and one of the villagers by the name of Brind volunteered to massage my legs with embrocation.

97. In the school playground was a German field gun over which we clambered and fell off. Some of the moving parts could still be charged but I cannot recall any ammunition. World War I relics of this kind were relatively common and somewhere I remember seeing a tank.

98. My first long trouser suit was of a gingery colour which my mother made. She had been a tailoress in Basingstoke before she got moved to the office.

In the early 1900's the rumours got round that Wills the tobacco company, would give donations to charity for those who collected Woodbine cigarette packets. My mother organised the collection in Basingstoke, but it was unfortunately a false alarm.

99. The first set of cigarette cards I collected was one of those issued by Players (a set of 25) – it was called “struggles for existence” – in nature that is. I saw a set recently in a collection owned by Mr Todd who lives near me. If you saw a man smoking, it was quite in order to go up to him and ask “Got any fag cards mister”? Surprisingly, this usually was very successful. I must have been a keen collector because I was known in the village as “The Fag Card King”. They would be worth a lot if I had them now.

100. I was once clearing the snow away from the back door at Glyn Cottage when a length of guttering fell and cut the belt on my mackintosh in two. A hefty thump on

the back was all I suffered.

101. I was bitten only once and that was by the butcher's dog. [A few years ago I was bitten in Whitstable no less than three times in one year – twice in one day in fact, but by different dogs. I have been bitten once since and that was outside a butcher's shop in Tankerton.]

102. Some of the teachers who, with varying success, attempted to educate me over the years were as follows:-

In the infants department of the C of E village school I attended from 1919 – 1926 there is only one person who comes to mind – that was Sister Something-or-other. She was a nun I believe attached to an order based at Oxford. The name “Cowley Fathers” comes to mind, but that does not seem to make sense.

At the village school proper the headmaster was Mr Whitehead, but of the other teachers I can only recall:-

Miss Pope who was a farmer's daughter from Moat Farm F ???? Lines ??. I kept in touch with her for years and the last time I saw her was when she came to see us in London in the early 50's.

All I can remember of another teacher (Miss Pither) was that she did not shave under her arms.

There was also a Miss Brooks, a local girl whose father was manager of the gas works – known as “Gassy” Brooks locally.

Two men teachers were Mr Bradfield and Mr Cooper who played football for the village team.

103. In the Summer Term of 1926 I went to the County Secondary School for Boys in Windsor.

The headmaster was then Mr S Gibson who soon after I went to the school moved to become headmaster of Tooting Bec School – I believe the two events were quite unconnected.

His successor was Mr Gammon who was headmaster for most of my time. He walked with a limp as the result of a war wound in World War I. He was an observant man and was known by the nickname of “Spion Kop” (a South African War battle).

Before I left Windsor he moved to become headmaster of Beckenham Grammar School, but regrettably during the war, he, his wife and two children were all killed in a bombing raid. I liked him and he had an enormous influence on my subsequent life, as one day he said to me “Whiting, you are not bright enough for the Civil Service, I suggest you try the LCC”. Which, I did successfully and have never regretted it.

For my last few terms the headmaster was Mr Fairhurst, but I can't say that I ever got to know him.

104. The Deputy Head was the science master H G Lansberry (alias “Lansbobs”) who was universally much liked and who got a special welcome at the Old Boys functions. He had two special aids to education – a cricket bat and a length of red rubber hose pipe. An unexpected near miss could be terrifying but neither of these aids to learning ever made physical contact – or, if at all, only mildly.

105. Other masters were:-

Mr Palmer (my housemaster) – a short man referred to as “Stumpy”.

Mr Raby the French master – “Rabbits”.

Mr Griffiths the History and English master – of course “Taffy”.
Mr Henry – mathematics.
Mr Hagger – geography; he left to become a parson.
Mr Austin – an Old Boy of the school, for Latin – he left to join Mr Gibson at Tooting Bec.
Mr Wright – his successor, naturally known as “Soapy”.
Major Rae – Handicrafts; always “Johnnie”.
Captain Shardlow – P/T – he appeared in uniform at Cadet Corps activities with a black flash behind the back of his collar. Which regiment is that?
Mr Coleman – a visiting art master.
Mr Baker – the visiting music master; he was organist at one of the local churches, and I believe committed suicide.
Mrs Target ran the kindergarten.

106. The Windsor County School wasn't very old – it began in 1908 or thereabouts. We had four houses named after Old Boys killed in the Great War:- Lambden, Ottrey, Wood and Burnett – I was in the last of these.

107. In the School Hall were photographs of each of the Old Boys killed in the war and a Roll of Honour.

108. I left school on Friday 13th March 1931 and started work at the Old County Hall adjoining the Admiralty Arch on Monday 16th March.

109. On the intervening Saturday my parents took me to London and bought me my first proper hat – a trilby. I wore it the first day I started work but have never worn it since, that is until the day I retired 44 years later, when I was able to produce it when a retirement presentation was made to me. Incidentally, I still have my school cap and an Old Boys Blazer bought in 1933 which still fits me!!

110. We moved from Sunninghill to Ashford (Middlesex) in 1931 and although I paid many visits to Sunninghill up to the outbreak of war in 1939, after the war I have only been there 2 or 3 times and then only for brief visits. I will now try to walk up and down the High Street as I remember it over 50 years ago.

111. Starting at one end and moving down on the right hand side then. After a big cultivated field there were the first houses – about 2 or 3. One of them had a large greenhouse in front and in the summer I used to be sent to buy tomatoes straight off the plants. The man was named Cooper but he lived in the same road as we did – Bowden Road – so he wasn't the owner. Who he was I never knew and never bothered to enquire.

112. The next shop was the International Stores, the biggest shop in the village. My mother paid into a Christmas Club all the year round and it was a great day when the card was cashed – there seemed to be mountains of food. Next door was Drapers the baker, whose bakery was in fact lower down the road on the other side. His daughter, Peggy, was one of my sweethearts and I understand that when I was quite young I passed the remark that when I married Peggy I would put more currants in the buns!

113. There were then about four houses between these shops and a road off to the right named Gasworks Road, as it led down to the gasworks and also the electric light works. People used to go there and buy coke by the sack. The road has since been re-named I believe. Then came the bridge over the railway.

114. The first shop was Stewarts the chemist. In the window at the top were several enormous glass jars each containing a differently coloured fluid. These were quite a common sight and I believe stemmed from the days when chemists were apothecaries. The Earl of Warwick once annoyed the locals by coming in to the shop and jumping the queue. He I recall was a short fiery individual who wore knickerbockers. I never knew of any other incident where the gentry threw their weight about. My friend's father was head gardener to Col and Lady Lamsden and his governor would buy his cigarettes for him when he was in the village – for which he paid of course.

115. Next was Chapmans the ironmongers where as previously recorded I collected my first bike as directed over the radio, and next to that was Weatherills the tailor. His son John was one of my closest friends and his cousin Bernard is now Speaker of the House of Commons. The Weatherill family were originally at Farnham Royal and had a famous shop in the West End. I often went into the workroom at the back, where the tailors sat cross-legged on benches doing their work. John's father did a great business with the local gentry. He bred Cocker Spaniels and I remember a visit there just before the war when I casually mentioned that my dog Judy (a Red Setter) had got distemper – panic all round and I think one of his dogs died as a result of my innocent visit. One dog was named after me – presumably before my ill-fated visit.

116. We became owners of Judy in an odd way. When at Ashford we bought a black Alsatian – Prince – from a kennel at Sunninghill. I went by the Greenline coach to collect this dog and the owner assured me that the dog was OK to travel – to my horror on the return journey it was sick on the coach and brought up the meal it had clearly enjoyed not long before. Anyhow, Prince who was 9 months old had never been outside the kennels and was terrified in the road when I took him for a walk and, on the other hand, he went for my father when he came in late one night. So Prince had to go back, but whether by Greenline coach I can't remember. He subsequently went to a butcher – as a pet I hope. In exchange we had Judy, a pedigree Red Setter but not up to Kennel Club standard – she cost 30/-. She died when I was in the Army and the news broke my heart.

117. After Weatherills there were 4 or 5 houses and then a wool shop – Majories – kept by Miss Searle, who had been one of my teachers in the village school. My mother was taking me to a dentist at Sunningdale – we did not have a dentist in the village – and I was in a push chair when we passed Miss Searle who said to my mother that it was a change to see me still for once.

118. Next on the corner was a branch of Drake and Mounts who sold agricultural and building materials and corn of various kinds. Incidentally, behind the shop window were sheets of board leaving a gap of say 2 inches. Corn of different colours were then poured in to make an attractive pattern of slopes and diamonds. I can't remember the name of the road which went off to the right.

119. On the opposite corner was Bon Marche – the drapery shop. I sometimes was sent for a packet of pins and I can still feel the embarrassment of having to go into a shop full of female assistants.

120. Next door was the sole bank – Barclays. The manager and his family kept completely aloof from the villagers. They must have lived in a state of limbo – above the villagers but below the gentry. Their son went to my school at Windsor, but I hardly ever spoke to him and can only recall going to the house once. I certainly never saw him with any other village boys. What a lonely life he must have led – poor boy.

121. Harry Matthews, the barber came next. As I have recorded earlier this was a centre for the village gossip.

122. The shop adjoining was Robinsons the jeweller and watchmaker. All the time I was there the shutters were never taken down and it was very gloomy inside. Mr Robinson played cricket for the village side.

123. Paynes the tobacconist and sweet shop was next, then Fifields the butchers, both of whom I have mentioned earlier.

124. There my memory fails – I think it was a fruit shop, but there was also a shoe shop – the name Pocock comes to mind, but I can't be sure.

125. I am however quite sure about Millers the old fashioned drapers. He was a small man with a small shop – hardly room to move inside.

126. That was the lot I am pretty sure – then there were a pair of houses and the cinema already referred to.

127. Finally, there was the Cordes Hall (ed. 8 High Street) which I believe had been given to the village by Mrs Cordes. Every conceivable event took place there – concerts, sales, plays and so on, and the Wolf Cubs met there every week. After the hall was another turning to the right – Queens Road, which contained the local district post-office, built while I lived there.

128. Returning to the top and opposite the point where we started were a few houses on the left before you came to the Comrades Hall, used by the old soldiers; probably built just after the end of World War I.

129. Next door was the Co-op, built while I lived there – in fact it was dead opposite the International Stores. There was then a turning to the left and the railway bridge followed.

130. After the bridge there were 4 houses and then Jones the fishmonger; his daughter Tilly I have referred to already as the first girl to give me a present – a collar stud. The shop was in two parts – wet fish and a fish and chipper. All I can remember is that I heard someone say Mr Jones' hand was worth its weight in gold – inferring that he put his hand on the scales when weighing fish.

131. Then came Bowden Road where we lived, and on the opposite corner to the fish shop was a small vacant plot on which a tiny sweet shop was erected called “Eves” after Eve Hunt, the owner. Next to her was a second hand shop, and I recall my parents bought a second hand set of the Encyclopedia Britannica for me. I think it was a late 19c edition and filled a tea chest and was very heavy. I don’t think I used it very often – if at all.

132. Our other barber (Snooks), stood next. When Harry Matthews (the other barber), retired his son took over but turned the business into a ladies’ salon, and we all (men) had to transfer our custom to Snooks.

133. A house stood next to Snooks occupied by one of the Chapmans (ironmongers). Behind was Mr Draper’s bakery – the bread was baked on bricks but I seemed to remember that they were made hot by a fierce flame from a burner – the colour of the flame was an intense white and the machine roared away. Could it have been Calor gas or propane? I thought that these were post-war developments.

134. The house adjoining was set back up a short slope and in front of it was built a shop used as a stationers run by Miss Reeves; she also taught music and played the piano at the cinema.

135. The penultimate shop was the post office which I believe continued to be used even after the new district post office was built – but this doesn’t seem to make sense. The maiden ladies Miss Cuss and Miss ??? ran it and to me they seemed excessively ancient.

136. Finally, was Westmacotts the greengrocers opposite the school playground which stretched way down until opposite the Cordes Hall. Only one shop was placed after the school boundary – this was Burkes the undertakers, although that can be hardly called a shop – after all, what can you buy there.

137. The adjoining establishment was the village smithy under Mr Cooper. I think I have already mentioned that I often went there. It seems odd, on looking back that I seemed to be able to go into these places without getting a thick ear. Mr Cooper made iron hoops for us boys complete with an ‘s’ shaped contraption for bowling them along. They were good fun but were a menace on a wet day when they quickly acquired a coating of sticky rusty mud and were unpleasant to handle.

138. We also had tops with a whip and marbles, of course. There were at least three varieties of these – “Spick and Spans” – rolling them along the gutter and rolling them into a hole cut in the sand on a sloping on a sloping part of the playground. We also played with cigarette cards – “Flicks” to see who could go the furthest and “Drops when they were allowed to drop from about 4ft up on a wall with the object of falling on your opponents card or cards already on the ground – in this game we had alternate go’s.

139. I must have used quite a number of school books while at the County School but I can recall only a few. I believe we had Halls “Algebra”. I well remember the set books for the London General Schools Examination for which I sat in the summer of 1930. For Latin we had Book V of Caesar’s Gallic Wars and also poems by Livy; for

English we had Macbeth, Boswells Life of Johnson (a much shortened version) and Poems for Today which included many of the poets of World War I – Blunden, Sassoon, Brooke etc. All have now dropped away but I have remained a devotee of Dr Johnson who is my literary hero.

140. I had been at Windsor for a year and a term when I jumped a form. The forms always sat in form order based on the results of the previous term, with the result that the bright boys congregated against the wall furthest away from the form master and the bottom lot in the row under his nose. I do not know whether educationally this was a good or a bad thing.

However, following my promotion I naturally had to sit in the front row among the lower orders and this together with the abrupt jump of the year, resulted in my getting a rocket at the end of the first term. This had a salutary affect as by the end of my first year in my new form I had got near the top – I can't ever remember coming top but I was consistently between 2 and 6.

141. The results of the exam were not sent to the participants by post and I had to make a special trip in the August holiday to the school to find out what had happened to me. I was on the way down Pescod Street when one of my form mates passed me and told me the good news that I had matriculated – i.e. got at least 5 credits – I think Latin was the only subject in which I had only got a pass.

142. I got the History and English prizes for the Upper V form – one of them i.e. Bartholomew's Atlas, with half the world in red, I still have.

143. Another game we played was "Bung the Barrel" which is known by other names to boys all over the country. There were two teams of say about six apiece. The first boy of one team held on to, say, the railings and bent over to form a back and the rest of his team lined up one behind the other in a similar position each boy holding on to the boy in front of him so as to form a line of bent backs. One boy from the other team took a running jump to land as far as possible along the line of bent backs and then scabbled forward – one by one the other boys followed until the first team collapsed. End of game.

144. Occasionally nowadays there are locust beans in the shops – these were very common when I was a boy.

145. Both my parents were Congregationalists but the only non-conformist church in the village apparently was not to their taste so they went to the parish church and we used to sit at the back on the left as we went in – only of course, to evensong. The organist – Tommy Clayton of whom I have already made an entry, always played a voluntary after each service and quite a large proportion of the congregation stayed for this. When we got home my mother frequently played and sang the hymns from the evening service.

146. One day when I was about 8 – Mr Clayton came to the school to pick up any likely choristers. I remember distinctly going home to announce that I had joined the choir and carried on until we left in 1931, when my parents reverted to the Congregational Church on the corner of the road where we lived at Ashford,

Middlesex. I joined the choir at St Hilda's, a modern church – not the parish church which was St Matthews.

147. All the time we lived in the village the vicar was the Rev. Arthur Ingram. His curate was the Rev. Grant who I think had been a padre in World War 1 – he rode about the village on a motor cycle and wore an old Army greatcoat. I think this shocked the purists in the village but he was very well liked and was reckoned to preach a better sermon than the vicar – but on that point I was not in a position to judge. At one time there was another curate – the Rev. Coates – but all I can remember of him was that he wore large black boots.

148. Mr Grant was at one time my Scoutmaster. Mr Ingram had been vicar during the war and must have known most of the 70-odd village men whose names he read out at the Remembrance Day Service.

149. I can remember precisely the occasion on which I became aware of classical music. Before this I had, through being a choir boy sung in several oratorios – The Crucifixion, Olives to Calvary, Bach's Christmas Oratorio, The Messiah and so on, but had had no contact with orchestral music – not even on the radio. In the late 20's I went to a Scout camp at Hythe and one afternoon we all went to the pictures when I heard Schubert's "Moments Musicales" and from then I became hooked. My mother had previously attempted to teach me to play the piano but abandoned the project, although I got as far as being able to read simple pieces by sight.

150. The Hallelulia Chorus ends with a series of Hallelulias sung by the whole choir fortissimo. After the penultimate Hallelulia there is a long pause followed by the final one. We did this several times as on each time a single piping Hallelulia from some wretched boy filled this pregnant pause.

151. We boys got 6d I think for weddings and funerals, and when the father of the Hon. Lucius Douglas (my Scoutmaster) married a second time the whole of the choir was invited to the reception on the spacious lawns of his house. Ice cream was ad lib I recall.

152. I am writing this at my daughter's house on Christmas Eve. The rooms are tastefully decorated in many ways including coloured electric lights, but in my childhood these latter were quite unknown, but we did have small candles on the Christmas trees and we children used to make paper chains from coloured strips which we glued together – I doubt if they are available now.

153. As mentioned above (item 149) my mother tried to teach me to play the piano and the manual she used was Smallwood's Piano Tutor. I recall other books;- there were a couple of volumes (very flimsy), which I think were called Star Portfolios and bound volumes of the Music Lovers Library containing piano pieces and songs. In them were piano versions of Beethoven's 5th Symphony (1st movement) and Tchaikovsky's Symphony Pathetique and these, believe it or not, I learned to play because despite my mother's lack of success I continued to learn on my own. There were several copies of the Strand Music Library which were 9d each.

154. I mostly played slow pieces as I never mastered the art of fingering. My ability to play Chopin's Funeral March once led me to drop an almighty clanger, although quite innocently. At a Scout meeting I was giving a rendering of this famous piece before we got down to the evening's business, and had only played a few bars when the Scoutmaster – George Newton – rushed up and unceremoniously brought the recital to a stop. At the other end of the room was one of the Scouts who was in no condition to appreciate my performance as his father had committed suicide on the railway earlier in the day!

155. I once had an ocarina – I have not seen one for years. It was made of clay so did not last long. I think I also had a mouth-organ and a penny whistle.

156. All of us village boys mucked in together but naturally we divided into groups largely influenced by the fact that we lived close to each other. Some of my special mates were:-

* Jack Franklin whose real name was Wilfred – he was nearly always called Toby as was his father, who had been gassed in the war and was a nasty yellow colour. I don't think he was capable of work. Jack or Wilfred or Toby became a Churchwarden, I believe.

* Jim Searle – an ungainly lad known as Jumbo.

* The Best boys – there were five of them but the elder brother and their father had been killed in the war. My classmate was Eric, the youngest but one. All of the younger three boys had fine treble voices and in turn all took the solos at church.

* Arthur Bennett who came to the village from London when he was about 12. His father was head gardener to Col. and Lady Ramsden at Wellsbridge House.

Incidentally, the estate adjoined the Wells Hotel which got its name from the fact that in the 18th century there had been a minor spa there. The local streams were muddy affairs but the odd thing was that the mud was a bright red in colour – perhaps more ochre colour and I have often wondered whether some chemical in the water gave it that colour and gave the water some special healing property – on the other hand the water at the spa was drawn up from a well and obviously was at a much lower level. The mud was very slimy and was known as “red ruddle” [since writing this I have looked up “ruddle” in the dictionary, and it is in fact “red ochre”]. What d'you know!

157. These groups remained as they were over the years but there was never any rivalry – no gang war.

158. I had two sweethearts – Peggy Draper (the baker's daughter) and Tilly Jones (the fishmonger's daughter) – unfortunately the butcher did not have a daughter in my age group. There was no physical contact and love-making was restricted to the passing of notes surreptitiously in class.

159. Few of the boys went to secondary schools – a half dozen at the most. There were 3 such schools in the district – my school at Windsor, Ranelagh at Bracknell and Strode at Egham. For the girls there was the one school in Windsor.

160. We used to write our names on yellow laurel leaves using a matchstick. The leaf was then stuck into our stockings and after a few minutes the name was revealed in brown colour.

161. While I was still at the village school i.e. before June 1926, there was an eclipse of the sun, but whether total or partial I do not recall. My grandmother came to the playground during the break and handed over a piece of glass which had been smoked over an oil lamp, so that I could look at the sun.

162. Several times we spent our summer holiday at Teignmouth in Devon. We stayed with a Mrs Akenhead in Second or Third Avenue. She had been in Mafeking during the famous siege. She gave me a clip of five brass cartridge cases – these later disappeared.

163. One year my cousin Roy came with us. During the train journey he got his thumb squashed in the carriage door and later on I got a cinder in my eye. So that when we arrived duly at Teignmouth we went straight from the station across the road to the local hospital.

164. Complete with luggage we went to Mrs Akenhead's house in a horse-drawn four wheeler. That must have been a pretty sight.

Correction:- the luggage went separately by an outside porter pushing a barrow – but that doesn't seem to make sense. Perhaps that happened when we went on foot from the station – it wasn't far.

165. Public parks are rare in the countryside – after all there is little call for them as there are plenty of places to which the public has access. Within 3 or 4 miles of Sunninghill we had three golf courses – Sunningdale, Ascot Heath and Swinley – one race course (Ascot) – at least 3 privately owned parks (Sunninghill, Tilness and Silwood) and finally Windsor Great Park. The Blacknest Gate entrance was only a couple of miles away and just inside was Johnsons Pond where the locals fished. The pond eventually widened becoming Virginia Water.

166. I have eaten some good meals in my time, but the one which sticks in my memory was a very humble one. My Scout Troop had gone on a visit to Portsmouth Dockyard and we had got very hungry, but we were let into the NAAFI or some similar establishment where I had sausages and chips – as the saying goes “Hunger is the best sauce”.

[On Friday 19th February 1988 I used these jottings for a talk given to the Herne Bay Fortnightly Club – I used about 80 of the items. Chance remarks there reminded me of the next two items.]

167. When I was no older than 5 while still living at 8 Cowthorpe Road, South Lambeth I was playing with a flower pot in which was a dormant bee or wasp, which promptly stung me. This must be my earliest genuine recollection.

168. The Kerleys next door had a phonograph with cylindrical records which fitted on a drum. The only tune I can recall was the old music hall song “When father papered the parlour, you couldn't see pa for paste”.

169. We used to go birds nesting but used to follow a code – a robin's nest was never touched and only two eggs at the most would be taken from other nests. A pin hole was made at the end of each egg and vigorous blowing would remove the yolk. They

were usually then put behind the peak of the caps we all wore. The eggs were kept in cotton wool in boxes at home. A dozen different eggs were reckoned to be a good collection – 20 would have been exceptional.

170. I once saw a young cuckoo in a thrush's nest.

171. I went to the County School for Boys at Windsor in the Summer Term of 1926 i.e. just before I was 12. The school year ended with this term and I never found out why I started at that particular term. The village school year ended with the Spring Term and boys left at 14. There were, incidentally, boys younger than me at Windsor and I went into form 2. Some time later I jumped a form, initially with disastrous results as we sat in form order, so I was put at the bottom with the not-so-bright who tended to mess about. I got a rocket from the Headmaster but later climbed to the top. We may well have been a dud year as I believe only 3 or 4 of us got Matriculation. Dick Tester joined me in form 2 when I started and two boys – Martin and Owen – went to form 1 – both came from Datchet.

172. There are many signs of the end of boyhood and one is when you start to shave. In those days I suppose the most common form of razor was the cut-throat, which is very rarely used now. It was the most popular razor then but when I was in the army and saw hundreds of men shave (in the 1940's) they were even then a rare sight. The double-edged Gillette was the most common one and the single-edged Ever Ready followed closely behind.

The up-market razor was the Rolls – a sturdy single-edged blade which was honed by moving it up and down in its case in a sort of holder – there was also a carborundum stone for sharpening. The really posh ones were accompanied by a case with seven blades with a slot for each day of the week.

My old school friend Fred Mulford gave me his some years later. He and I had a wonderful holiday together in Germany in the late thirties – sadly he was shot down over the North Sea while serving in the Fleet Air Arm.

173. I recall a vulgar local story. If you walked along one side of the lake in Windsor Park, called Virginia Water, on its opposite side was a building on its shore-line called the Fisherman's Temple and it was held locally that at this point there was a remarkable echo. The story goes that a chap walking at this point was telling his girl about the echo and she asked him to call something out – so he said "What are you doing there?", and a voice came back "Having a shit, but not in peace".

174. Every Monday afternoon at school we all indulged in Cadet Corps activities, and the school was part of the PCSSCCA – the Pulse County Secondary School Cadet Corps Association, which held an annual camp in August (I never went).

We all had a uniform consisting of a peaked cap, tunic, breeches, ???? and black boots. As there were no changing facilities at the school I had to wear this uniform all day and I remember feeling a bit of a nana on my way to school and took steps to disguise my appearance – such as wearing a mac on a hot summer day.

175. The arms we had for drill purposes were carbines mostly but there was one or two Lee-Enfields and a Ross rifle. These were kept in the armoury which was never locked and was used as a recreation room, especially by those of us who took sandwiches for lunch.

The rifles had the letters “DP” stamped on them which I believe meant for drill purposes only, and were incapable of being fired – or so we were given to understand. There were also incredibly some live cartridges lying around and one day one of the chaps put one in a rifle, pointed it out of the window between the heads of two or three boys standing outside and looking in, and off it went. Never in the history of warfare had a position been evacuated more quickly. A master (Taffy Griffiths) came to see what was going on but soon went away and nothing more was ever said, and we continued to use the room as before.

176. We had an annual field day in Windsor Park and at the end we were met by a van of soft drinks. I remember drinking from a bottle of lemonade when someone jogged my arm and chipped a bit off a tooth.

177. My parents were Labour Party supporters so that when we had a mock election at the school I stood as the Labour candidate – and lost. I remember the hilarity among the masters when in my speech I used the phrase “Making the country a place fit for heroes to live in”.

178. The railway ran through much of the village in a cutting on which we boys played; the sides of the cutting were known as the “Carters”. I always thought that this was the local name, but in Chambers Dictionary the definition is “a slope inward”. Perhaps it was a term used by the navvies when the cutting was made and has been handed down over many many years.

179. We had a village policeman – a very severe man who rode around on a bicycle. I remember making his son laugh when I told him that I had saved my mother’s life (from electrocution), when she was about to put a knife across the terminals of the accumulator which was part of every radio set in those days – about 4 volts were involved!

180. Every Sunday in the summer the Southern Railway ran excursions to various seaside resorts – we could get to Brighton (about 80 miles away) for the present day equivalent of 25p. Another trip was to Southampton Docks including going on the trans-Atlantic liners for which Southampton was the main port. I remember on one occasion seeing the Majestic, Leviathan, Aquitania, New York all tied up on the same day.

181. One very hot day we went on one of these trips and in those days every station had a penny-in-the-slot machine for sweets and chocolates – the latter included a thin bar of Nestles chocolate. The heat had melted the chocolate in its packet so for 1d out came two bars stuck together.

182. You could also buy a single Churchmans No.1 in a packet for 1d.

Here the itemized entries end.

ON WATCHING TRAINS GO BY

For how long does childhood last?

I suppose it can roughly be estimated as ending at 14, but when that all too brief period comes to an end and we re-live the memories associated with it, then the period shrinks somewhat alarmingly. We have to write-off the first five or so years of which we recall practically nothing – except perhaps for such world-shattering cataclysms (as they appeared to be at the time), as being stung by a wasp.

So, we are down to nine or so years, say 10 at the most.

And how many events – trivial or otherwise – do we recall in any detail from those precious years?

Ten?, Twenty?, a hundred, two hundred? I doubt it.

My own tally is about thirty – forty at the outside.

Some inevitably are sad – even painful; others less so and even enjoyable; like when I saw my Cub Mistress sit on a cow-pat (not by design I hasten to add).

But high on my list is one oft repeated event which is filed in my memory under the heading “Carrot and King Arthurs” with a cross reference “King Arthur’s Carrots”. My mother came from Basingstoke (the former Country town), and we often spent part of our summer holiday with my grandparents. My grandfather worked on the Great Western Railway, which had a branch line to Basingstoke from Reading but the Southern Railway had the main line from Waterloo to Southampton, Bournemouth and the West of England – without doubt that company’s premier express passenger line.

Adjoining the line just outside the station were some allotments and, by the Grace of God and the Basingstoke Town Council, my grandfather had a plot next to the boundary fence. A few feet away ran the four-track main line with an uninterrupted view both north and south, except for a felicitously placed signal gantry which gave advance tidings of possibly glorious events shortly to follow. None of this modern nonsense when a green light only means the signal can be passed by a train in the next minute, the next hour, the next day or next week (or even just never). When the signal dropped in those days it meant business.

But what would it be? – a fast train (12 coaches) at 70mph ?, a tank engine with a few trucks (or even none at all)?, or the rare appearance of a visitor from another railway headed by an engine of peculiar shape, drawing coaches of remarkable colour?

A time-table would have reduced this uncertainty (particularly in view of the tendency of trains to run on time in those days), but it would have destroyed utterly the glorious chance offered by the Gods ????????????

Page 3 of these notes as written on loose sheets seems to be missing.

Page 4 continues as follows:-

At 11.55 my grandfather would stand at my side with his trusty time-keeper in his hand - nothing could be heard except the steady munch of carrots by one of us, but on his face would be a growing anticipation. If the express roared through on time the watch would be put away without comment. He was a devout Christian of the Wesleyan persuasion and his Christian charity came in evidence if the train was late – not until a full minute had elapsed with no little satisfaction he would turn to me and say “She’s late”.

I can still see and feel those trains or rather feel and see them. The first sensation was of a tremor passing through the ground – a promise of something large and heavy moving at great speed; then the sound – faint at first – of a throbbing roar growing in intensity; then the engine belching black smoke which rose but very little in the air but swept back along the top of the boiler like the ears of our dog Penny at speed; then in a matter of seconds the roar had reached to crescendo and the engine and train had gone. So have all “King Arthurs” now, and carrots don’t taste the same.

Mid-Summer Day
1987