

Interviewer - *I'm speaking to Audrey Kollhoff (née Stevens) in the house of Dawn Crow in Union Road., on the 18th October 2012.*

Audrey, how long have you lived in Bridge?

I was born in Brewery Lane - well Mum and Dad were living there. Whether I was born in the Kent and Canterbury Hospital I don't know. I was born in 1941 and I lived there until I was 21, when I got married. Then I moved to Filmer Road where I lived for 26 years and then to the bungalow in Dering Close, where I've been living for 23 years.

I must just say at this point that four generations of my family lived in the cottage in Brewery Lane. They all rented it. Opposite our cottage was Mr Cobbett's Nursery Gardens and greenhouses which spread the length of Brewery Lane and backed onto the river. In my Mother's childhood all this land was fields, right across to Union Road.

Tell us where you went to school.

Like Dawn, I went to the local Bridge School and Mrs Knight, who was then Miss Seath, was the Headmistress. She was the Headmistress there until I believe she taught my eldest son, who was one of the first pupils in the new school in Conyngham Lane, in about nineteen seventy three. Then I went at the age of eleven to Sturry Secondary School until I was fifteen.

Do you have any special memories of school?

Not really. As Dawn said, it was just every day school things – lessons, then each year a sports days and a Nativity play at Christmas. Different things like that. It was just something we had to do.

Do you still have friends in Bridge who you've known since childhood?

Oh yes lots. There are quite a lot of our age group still here or they've moved away and come back. We're finding a lot of people are coming back.

Where did you play when you weren't at school?

Along the riverbed, out in the road in Brewery Lane. Lots of children would gather in the lane and we used to amuse ourselves with hopscotch, roller skating and skipping. We used to make our own fun.

Tell us a bit more about your escapades on the river.

Well at one stage it was deep enough to go swimming in the Nailbourne where the sheep dip was, through the park.

Whereabouts is that exactly?

Park Cottages - go through Bourne Park and turn right opposite the two cottages. Go down right towards the hop fields. That's where the sheep dip is.

I thought you said the river was quite deep near Bridge Place Country Club.

Yes we went there as well, by the flint wall where there's an archway. It was very deep. We could actually swim there. A teenager could stand in it and the water used to come up to

their armpits it was so deep. I remember we also sailed on a wooden raft made by the older boys from planks of wood and oil drums.

And you told me about a rope swing?

The pond in Long Meadow field was quite deep with the island in the middle and somehow the boys would attach thick ropes to the trees with a big piece of wood to sit on. You straddle the wood and they'd push us right across. If you weren't lucky enough to jump off on the island, you ended up in the pond!

Where exactly is Long Meadow?

By the lodge that you go down to Bridge Country Club as you come up Brewery Lane and round the corner. There used to be fir trees where the bungalows are now and then you go across the fields there and that was Long Meadow right across from Brewery Lane to Mill Lane and going right through to where the sheep dip was on the right-hand side. Every year my mother and I would go to the hop gardens there and pick hops to help earn money.

You showed me a photograph of a tug of war across the Nailbourne.

That was in latter years when we were much older. That was about the 1970s. I don't know how the tug-of-war started, but it was rivalry between the Red Lion and the Plough and Harrow. It started off as tarts and vicars one year. Another time the ladies dressed up as footballers and the men dressed up as ladies - as you can see by the photographs, the men have got handbags. etc.

The water there seems quite deep, so the Nailbourne was quite a serious river?

It was a major part of the village and our heritage really. Sometimes the river is completely dry and at other times it flows well. The river is fed by underground springs and the water flows according to the level of the aquifers. They say if the river dries up for seven years, some bad luck will befall us – and that's why it has been called 'the waters of woe'. It's a tale that's been passed down through the generations. Over the years we've had quite serious floods. Once, there was flooding in the High Street. The Red Lion pub was badly flooded and was closed for some time

We used to have great fun playing in the river and round by the little bridge in Mill Lane we used to go to and fro through the river on our bikes. We used to go as fast as we could, and splash whoever was on the bridge!

Of course we didn't have the recreation ground in those days so we nearly always played in Mill Lane or Church Meadow or in one of Daddy Fagg's fields when the cattle weren't there.

When you left school what did you do?

I left school at fifteen and got a job in Caffyn's the garage in Canterbury. It was at the top of the town where the traffic lights are now and next door to Telephone House where the new block of flats are. I also had a part-time job at the weekends at Highland Court, which was a gynaecological hospital and part of Kent & Canterbury Hospital. It is now privately owned and has reverted to the old name of Higham Park. I was at Caffyns about a year, eighteen months and then an opportunity arose in the butcher's shop in Bridge. I don't know how I came to get it actually. Someone said they wanted a cashier and I thought rather than going into Canterbury every day and coming home for lunch, I'd work there. That's where I was working when Bernard Welch bought the butcher's shop. He took me on and the manager too, but by then the manager was soon to retire. Later on I worked with Dawn when she

joined the firm. I worked there until 1968 when I was pregnant with Rodney and then I left and worked in the house for Dorothy and Bernard Welch instead of in the shop.

I think you were a member of the church weren't you? Did that start as a young person?

I went to Junior Church and I was in the choir. We used to go every Sunday. You were given lovely pictures like stamps to stick in an album and all round the outside there were places to colour. I think it gave you the incentive to want to go to church. You were always given a lovely book for good attendance every year at a special Prize Giving. And in the summer we had our church outing, when we would go by coach to Folkestone, with the Reverend Gregory. Through his link with Canada, food parcels were sent over and given out by Rev. Gregory in the Village Hall. I remember when I was about six, receiving a food parcel and my photo was in the newspaper.

Were you a member of Young Wives?

Yes, I was a member for many years before taking over from Mrs Cousins to run the Young Wives Group. It was actually part of the church - the younger part of the Mothers' Union. After I gave up it gradually broke away and became a Wives' Club.

Was it there you had a sales table for baby clothes?

Yes. When our babies had grown out of the clothes we took them along and somebody else would buy them and a portion of the money went to the church

The same thing happened at the school didn't it? Outgrown uniforms were sold and passed on. When I was at school, there was no kind of uniform until we went to secondary school. Everybody wore their own clothes. You can tell by that photograph of me in 1948

Can you tell us about your mother and father? What did they do?

My father, I think, worked on the buses as a ticket collector at one stage. After the war a relation got him into BT (it was the old fashioned Post Office in those days) and he was an engineer for 34 years. On Saturdays, he was also the local chimney sweep. He rode his bike to Bishopsbourne, Bekesbourne and Bridge, with the rods strapped to his cross bar. He did this for many years.

He met my mother in Woolworths in Canterbury. I think she was about 18 and she was a junior shop assistant at weekends. They met there and later, they were married. During the war years my Mother, like many other wives, did the soldiers' laundry. In those days there was a large brick copper at the back of the cottage, heated by wood and coal. In return she was given food parcels, which helped feed the family. I think Mum did housework for a lot of people and all sorts of odd jobs. She worked for a long time in the White Horse for Mr Deakin. She remembered (Sir) John Mills, the famous actor, and his family stayed there on the way to Europe. She also told me that the mother-in-law of Mr John Aspinall (late owner of Howletts Wildlife Park), also stayed there, with a live baby gorilla in a basket, which she was allowed to cuddle!

You mentioned Woolworths and this was in Canterbury?

It was the original, old-fashioned Woolworths down the bottom of the town in Canterbury. As you go towards the Westgate Towers there's a chapel or church on the left hand side. The original Woolworths used to be there, before it moved to the upper end of the town.

Was that where St Peter's Methodist Church is?

Yes, it was in a big block there and that's where they met. My Dad went off to war.

Can you remember your grandparents?

Grandma. I only had a step Granddad the latter years of her life. My Grandma worked at the Close. She was in the laundry and she had to work very long hours, until she married Granddad. and lived in Brewery Lane with my Mum and her sister, when they were younger of course.

Can you remember about the shops when you were young and growing up? I gather there were a lot?

Coming up from the church there was a baker's, then Mr Downs' cycle shop, later to become Mr Lewis's grocers. It became a private house after being half demolished by a lorry. Then, on the corner of Brewery Lane, was .a chemist, The Plough and Harrow was on the other corner, and next door was the Saddler's - the Snobbery, as Dawn says - and in latter years that was Bert Flower's barber shop. Then it sold up and became a private house.

Next-door was Hawkin's drapers and outfitters shop. They sold ladies and gents fashions, and I remember buying a lovely dress there once. It was a double fronted shop with a glass door and you walked in for what you wanted. They sold shoes and wellingtons there too as well as haberdashery. A very self-contained shop and next door was the newsagents and sweet shop that Hawkins owned as well. On the other side of the bridge was another little shop. It changed from a wool shop to an electricians and then a sweet shop. All sorts of people have been in there.

Where the Georgian houses are, was Daddy Fagg's farmhouse and yard. (where Londis supermarket is now – previously Vyes and before that Liptons).

Then we went up to the other butchers. At the back of Albert Terrace on the way up there was Beadle's laundry. That must have been running in the 1920s, '30s or '40s. Then after the butcher's shop was Rogers' Garage. 'Sonny' Milne-Spall worked for Mr Rogers and when he retired, Clive his son, took over and is still running the business. And there was the piano tuner, Mr Carstairs, in the next cottage. After that was the Village Hall (then known as The Reading Room, built for the village by the Marquis of Conyngham), and next door, the grocer's shop, which was in my day owned by Mr Prickett. The doctor's surgery was on the corner of Union Road. Dr. Hunter was the village doctor for many years until Dr Russell took over from him, and it is now a private house. Further up the High Street was the Post Office, which is still there, and has combined with a Pharmacy, which is very useful to the village.

Opposite the Post Office, on the other side of the High Street, was Laundry Lane, Conyngham Lane as it is called now. When it was Laundry Lane there were only two houses up there, Copse End and Laundry Cottage, which served as the laundry to the large house, Bifrons, although before that it is said that it was a small school for the children on the estate.

When the new houses were built, I believe Laundry Lane was considered not to be a suitable name, and Copse Lane was suggested, but when the police houses were built on the corner they thought they couldn't have the name "Copse" and changed it to Conyngham Lane after the Marquis of Conyngham. Now it has both names - Conyngham Lane, and Laundry Lane, which has been reinstated by the Parish Council.

When were the newer houses built?

End of the fifties, early sixties I should think. It was all bluebell woods up there until the houses were built.

We digressed. Getting back to the High Street, what were the shops on this side of the road?

First of all there was Hubbards the grocer's shop, where Mr Dunderdale lives (at no.37) opposite Alexandra House. Further down, was Mr Hawkins' sweet shop and Mr Bert Flower's gents hairdressers, before moving to his other shop next to the Plough & Harrow. After that was Mrs Turner's greengrocers; then Maudsley House which, before it was privately owned, was a grocer's shop. Mr and Mrs Turner later moved to the Old Forge house, where Mrs Turner ran their greengrocer's shop for many years.

They were already using the ground behind, to grow all their vegetables where the land is now built on. An extension to Forge house was where Len Turner ran his radio shop. Behind the Turner's, Mr Beer had his farm implements workshop and forge..

So what came after that?

Further down was the White Horse pub and then the butcher's, now run by Laurie Wakeham. Behind the butcher's was Ray Andrews' car paint and body repair shop. Later, there was Mr Robson's builders' yard and after that, it was John Knight's builders. Then came Anne's Pantry, which originally was a tearoom and then a restaurant, before it became a private house. Beyond Anne's Pantry was the garage where Dawn worked, and then there was a grocer's shop, which later became a delicatessen called Golds, run by Mrs Whigham and after that, Skippers, a very popular restaurant for many years and famous for its chocolate cabbage!

Now the shop is empty, and we're waiting to see what will come next.

Beyond that, was the Red Lion pub. When I was at school there was a young girl called Toni Gardner, whose uncle was the publican and she used to stay with him during the summer holidays. I remember her being in a concert with us in the village hall. Later we heard that she had married King Hussein of Jordan and became Princess Muna. It was the talk of the village!

Further along, there was Mary's Dairy, nearly opposite the church. Mary used to deliver the milk on a cart. 'Mary in her Dairy', as she was known. And there was row of cottages on the corner of Patrixbourne Road where there are flats now. Behind the dairy, was Mr Taylor's coal yard. Access was up the alleyway by the chapel.

Didn't the chapel in Patrixbourne Road function as a children's clinic as well?

Yes, I used to take my babies there to be weighed, and you were also given cod liver oil and orange juice in a bottle. It's a shame it has been closed down now.

It has been sold now to a private investor, who's going to convert it into a home and studio. As far as we understand, the chapel from the outside will remain much as it is now. The Parish Council had put a preservation order on it.

Do you remember anything about the War?

No. All I remember is my father coming home after the war in 1946. I was five years old and apparently I said, "I haven't got a Daddy", and hid under the table!

Did any bombs fall nearby?

Audrey Kollhoff – interviewed in 2012 by Joan Hill

Old England's Hole we call it - past the church on the right hand side up in the field near the road. Then there was another one up at the Butts by the railway, so obviously they were aiming for the railway, with the big gun being at the other end of the tunnel.

Tell us a bit about the gun.

Big Bertha it was called apparently and it was stationed in the end of the tunnel facing towards Dover. They used to bring it out on the rails and fire it.

My Mum had a large picture of it on a card but I don't know what happened to it.

We used to play in the tunnel. It was very dark, and you couldn't see the end, because it had a bend. The older boys used to go in and hide in the recesses at the side, where the guards used to stand, and then they'd leap out at us as we were walking past. It was so scary.

What do you think about village life then and now?

I think it's like life itself today. People sometimes haven't got time for anybody else but in our day all our mums and dads were friends and if one parent wasn't available we'd all go to the other one's and vice versa and you just felt it was a tight community. Over the years I think it's phasing out and family life is not as we used to know it.

Audrey you were talking about making your own fun?

Yes. My sister and I did a lot of embroidery. That was something we had in common. I didn't spend a lot of time indoors as I recall. At Christmas we were lucky if we got a few nuts and an orange and a piece of chocolate.

And you were happy with very little?

I remember I had prams and things passed down from my sister. Then we had bikes, and gradually progressed from a small bike to a larger bike that was also handed down the family. My sister had one of these sit up and beg bikes. With them being older than me I was allowed to tag along, because they were looking after me.

It sounds as though you had a really nice, happy childhood. You made do with very little. You were saying how good the community spirit was in the village.

There used to be regular flower shows in Daddy Fagg's field and once a year either a fair or a circus would come. They would either be in Church Meadow or Union Road. It was Penfold's fair and generation after generation used to come. That was when I was much younger. Nowadays, we have the combined school and church summer fete in the school grounds, and this year we had a Jubilee Picnic in the recreation ground, celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. That was a time when all the village got together.

Thank you very much Audrey, for all those memories, and we look forward to seeing them in print as part of Bridge history.