

Memories of a boy living in Bridge from 1945- 1957

My name is David Roberts, I arrived in the village of Bridge at the age of 4 in 1945 with my mother, father, sister Audrey 14, and my brother Alan 8. We were to be the Post Office family. My father was a retired Naval Master at Arms who had served in the Royal Navy in both world wars; we had travelled from Lee-on-the-Solent in Hampshire.



The Post Office was a very strange house with none of the floors on the same level, there was a two-storey coach house at the back and a small flintstone cottage and two large mature gardens full of fruit trees of all kinds.

Living in the cottage was a lady called Mrs Carpenter; the cottage had no electricity or water supply so she came to our house every morning for buckets of water. She had raised 11 children there; her rent was 2/- a week. Half the large garden was hers. My mother raised her rent to 2/6 which wasn't received very well. Her radio was powered by a large battery called an Accumulator which we took to Mr Rogers Garage to be charged up.



Rear of Post Office, showing the outside toilet on the right which was flushed by buckets of rainwater captured in an old bathtub, the waste went to a Cesspit in the garden which had to be emptied by the council when required.

My 4th birthday was in October and so I could get to know some of the village children my mum arranged a party with a Lantern Slide show, my memory of that is hearing a lad called Gerald Hogbin shouting out in the dark "I can't see to eat my nuts" never forgotten by our family.

My Dad's wage at the time was about £11 per week and for that he had to oversee two postmen who sorted mail every day in a long side room (probably originally a tack room) then go out to deliver all around the local area. He also had to take down and deliver telegrams on the Post Office telephone which we were not allowed to use personally although people could phone us (the number was Bridge 201). When we got older we delivered the telegrams for him.

My Uncle Bill who lived in London was a Post Office Detective and he told me how to phone from the post box outside for free, I had to tap the receiver twice, dial 0 then tap twice, my mum would answer and I would say "Can you let me in mum?" She reluctantly let her youngest in every time. (Thanks mum.)

On some Saturday mornings if you had the money you could go to Saturday morning pictures in Canterbury to the ABC cinema. If you spent your bus fare on sweets it was a long walk back (only three miles) but country mile always seemed very long!

On Saturday afternoons my brother and I were banned from the house as after the Post Office closed my Dad had to do his accounts for that week. If they didn't balance and there was a deficit it would be reimbursed from his wage. (No change there then)!!

There were two rainwater wells in the back garden and my mum drew water from one every week when she did the washing. She knew that the carbolic soap would bubble up much more easily as Kent water was very chalky and hard.

There was no TV then so my brother and I would listen to Radio Luxemburg for latest music also Dick Barton Special Agent. We had to keep our ears close to the radio as Dad didn't want to hear our rubbish music

As we were on rationing after the war my mum made all our Jam and bottled fruit (all from our garden). Apples were also stored in the cellar on wire netting cradles. We always had fruit all year round. It has stood me in good health in later life. (Thanks again mum).

The children I grew up with from round about were the Wrights, Elvin Stanley & June. Mickey Dawes, Gerald Hogbin, Franky Swan, Jimmy Uphill, Barbara Hawkins, Audrey Stevens and Philip Hogbin, there was a much older lad called Jack Hopkins who was special needs. He always liked to play with us, he had the gift of being able to predict the weather, very accurately too. These are all the children I can recall.

It was a grand upbringing. We were able to roam all around the local area, in the woods and fields but the ford was the most frequently visited. We all had bikes and loved to ride down Mill Road hill at a fast pace through the water at speed with legs up on the handlebars, water splashing up everywhere.

We would ride our bike up to Mount's Orchards on Bifrons Hill and do some scrumping. We had to be very alert because the village Bobby had a Velocette motor bike which was quite silent.



Velocette LE

He never caught us though, going back across along Station Road the other way towards the Hardres there was a very large oak tree we called the 'look out tree'. If you climbed up into it, you could see all over the village. (I wonder if it's still there). It was great for seeing if the Bobby was on patrol!! If you took him a Grey Squirrels tail, he would reward you 1/-.

During the summer holidays a girl called Toni would come to stay at the Red Lion pub with her uncle Mr Gardiner (later she became Princess Muna of Jordan).

All children who were C of E went to the village school on Patribourne Road and I do remember children from Dr Barnardo's came too. It was always a big event in the village when after Harvest Festival at St Peter's Church we would load a flat bed lorry up with all the produce then we all got on to deliver it to the home.

The Vicar then was The Reverend Savage who lived just across the road from the Reading Room – the Village Hall. You could get a job from him pumping the Church organ which paid 2/- . There was a weight on a string hanging on the Vestry wall which you had to keep above a line. If you didn't, the sound of the organ would wane, and the organist would kick the wall next to the organ to wake you up. You then had to pump like billio to get the weight up again. It did happen to me a few times, so I lost the job.

Sunday school was held in the Reading Room. You got a stamp in a little book for attending. When the time came for the Sunday school outing to Folkestone on a charabang for the day, if you didn't have enough stamps you were left behind. (Tough justice).



On the far right is a lad called Valance to the rear of him is Jimmy Uphill



I think it's Audrey Stevens on the right; I have got my head down (given a tambourine instead of a drum)



HIGH STREET, BRIDGE.

Before the War, not so many telephone wires



BRIDGE STREET, SOUTH VIEW

White Telephone box indicates during the War



UNION ROAD, BRIDGE



As I grew up, I had various jobs to get pocket money. (No family cash for that). I worked as a stable boy for Captain Maslin (ex-Hussars) who ran a Pony riding school. At times I remember I used to take the ponies to a local blacksmith's for re-shoeing. (Bishopsbourne, I think).

I had a really good job working Tuesday and Friday nights after school, then Saturday morning, for Mr Price the local grocer. He had three nephews working for him, Ray Price, Maurice Price & Titch Price. Ray & Titch delivered groceries to all outlying farms and houses. There were two vans and I had to load them up in reverse order of delivery. They also delivered paraffin and I had to fill tanks behind the front seats. Lots of properties' only lighting was paraffin lamps. I would go with either Titch or Ray on Saturday morning to make deliveries. One family I remember had 10 children and the order was a struggle to carry.

In the summer holidays Dad would get me jobs helping out on farms. One time they asked me to drive the tractor then more men could load the straw bales more quickly. I let the clutch out too quickly and heard a lot of expletives coming from the rear. (Driving job over).

You could also go beating for Sir John Prestige at Bourne House; you reported to the gamekeeper and had to walk through woods and fields beating with your stick so the pheasants and partridges were driven towards the guns of shooters, who had mostly come from London for the weekend and paid a princely sum for the privilege. If the shooters were poor shots the gamekeeper would ensure they returned home with at least a brace of birds. For a day's beating we were paid 11/-. You had to take sandwiches for lunch when we all gathered together. I have never forgotten the smell of sweaty, wet dogs. There would be a raffle for a rabbit which you hoped to win so to take Mum home something to cook. We were all on rationing after the war

SC/V



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Page 1 See Instructions overleaf.

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HOLD Pages I-VIII in one hand and
TEAR ALONG THIS LINE

PAGE 1

If you went up Laundry Lane to Bifrons Park, you could collect large field mushrooms. Bifrons House was partly demolished, but the squash court was still standing and a good place for playing around in.

We made go carts (called grollies then). 100 yards up Canterbury Hill from the Post Office was Aunt Betsy's Hill and it was very steep - just right for a grolly. They were all homemade using old pram wheels. You had to manufacture your own



David's Grolly

On the opposite side of Brewery Lane from The Plough and Harrow was a Chemist run by Daddy Stockwell. He was a miserable old blighter, and we always had great fun sending the much younger

children in to ask for Sky Hooks and Wattle Gate Seed, which had also been played on us when we were younger. No wonder he was miserable.

In the autumn, Daddy Fagg's hay had been stored in his barn which was good fun as we children were recruited to jump up and down on it after it was pitch forked in. He got more in then.

Penfold's Fair would arrive and enter through a large five bar gate into his field at the junction of Union Road and Dering Rd for the annual Village Fete and Flower Show. Large marquee tents would go up for show. Vegetable produce and flower arrangements were hotly contested. There was also a beer tent. Children made miniature gardens on small trays for competition. Everything was fiercely contested to get the best prizes and there was a lot of tension while they waited for the judges to announce the first, second and third prizes. Each villager trying to outdo the other and try to get a better position than last year.

Old Mr Penfold would sit in an armchair overseeing his fair equipment being erected. If you went to him and ask for a job and he gave you one, your reward was a free ticket for one of the rides. Then you were really pleased.

Another activity at harvest time was when the large field opposite the farm at the bottom of Pett Hill had the corn cut. We children would go with large sticks and wait for the harvester to cut the corn back to a small area in the middle. When the rabbits ran out, we would chase them hoping to whack one to take home, usually they were too quick for us. The corn was threshed there too, the thresher was driven by a large traction engine with a long, large belt connected to the thresher.

In the field there were large clamps full of potatoes covered in straw and earth to keep them over winter. Pett Hill was another good place to go down on your grolly, but a bit too fast for some.

When it was hop picking time whole families would come down from London. They lived in corrugated sheds with a rough a wooden bench bed which the farmer had put a large straw filled paliases on. Luxury living for a couple of weeks. They were rough and ready folk and different from us country types, but good fun was had by all while they stayed.

The Fire Station on Brewery Lane was quite exciting at times, if there was a fire the air raid siren would sound loud and clear across the village, the volunteer fire-fighters would appear from all over the place. I do recall one time the fire engine had left and was starting up Bridge Hill, a chap chased after it on his bike caught up and threw his bike in the hedge then jumped on the back of the engine.

In the school half term before bonfire night all the village children had to build a huge village bonfire on a field near the ford. We collected large trees, branches that had fallen in the woods. The ones too big to carry by us we used to borrow the handcart of the village painter and decorator who lived on Union Road, opposite what we called the Workhouse. He had two sons. One I remember well was called Charlie. He was a real character. We also got lots of waste oil from Mr Rogers' garage and old tyres. There was also a little garage on the track alongside the Fire Station who gave us stuff as well. We collected loads of old newspapers by knocking on doors around the village. When the bonfire was built a Guy was put on top, usually someone's old overalls stuffed with straw and papers.

On the 5th of November we would parade round village with fire torches (old tins on sticks with paraffin rags stuffed in them), up Union Road to the old windmill then down to the ford and into the field. All the villagers would be gathered there and the fire was lit, all the fireworks were let off (bangers, squibs, Catherine wheels, and rockets, nothing like the loud fireworks you get now. When the fire died down, we put large potatoes in the ashes for all to eat. The villagers did everything together, not like today, that's what made it a village. As we got older and after the 11+ exams we left the village school and depending on your results you were allocated to Grammar or Secondary Modern. I went to Sturry Secondary Modern near Chislet Colliery. We would all wait by the Red Lion Pub on Patricbourne Rd in the morning and catch the Banks Bus which would

then go on to Bishopsbourne to pick up more children then back through to Patricxbourne, Bekesbourne and other small stops along the way. Then through Fordwich and onto Sturry. Banks Bus brought us back home after school.

In the winter the bus could not get through when it snowed a lot. Kent was always prone to lots of snow then. I remember in 1947 we were snowed in for a long time which we enjoyed as we could go sledging. There was a steep field next to Pitt Road where we could all go with our homemade sledges. One lad called Squib Vinton who lived across the road from the Windmill had an alpine toboggan which was the fastest one on the slope. One much older chap who lived next to Squib would produce a flat sheet of galvanised steel bent up at the front. With a few of us on it we compacted the snow on the slope. No health & safety in those days. He also had a very large, very heavy wooden sledge. If you hadn't been able to make your own sledge it would hold at least three or four children. It had two large handles, one each side which you pulled to break your speed at the bottom so as not to career through the wire fence.

In 1948 the Olympic Torch was carried through the village and we all congregated at the top of Canterbury Hill. My brother went to cross the road and was hit by a chap on a motorcycle going home from work. My brother ended up in Canterbury Hospital with concussion and wore glasses for the rest of his life. I remember running down the hill with June Wright crying my eyes out to tell Mum and Dad.

When we became teenagers, we could go to a youth club held in the Reading Room, boys and girls together. That was fantastic. The Vicar, Rev Savage would pay surprise visits to make sure nothing untoward was going on. Jack Hopkins always wound the gramophone up and put the records on (mostly Victor Sylvester). In the late 50s came Lonny Donegan's Rock Island Line, Bill Haley's Rock Around the Clock then Elvis Presley's Heartbreak Hotel. Stanley Wright's Dad bought him an electric gramophone so then we had our own music to dance to and Jack was out of a job. With the advent of skiffle, we all tried to form a group. I had a double bass made from an upturned tea chest, a broom handle with string attached to it and to the corner of the tea chest. You could also pinch your mum's washboard which made a good sound, we always made your own entertainment in those days.

In 1957 just before the age of 16 I took an Army exam to join up as an Apprentice tradesman. Having passed that it was time to leave Mum and Dad and find my own way in life.

Mum and Dad advised me to get a short back and sides before I went so I went to Bert Flowers the village barber. At the time I had the full Teddy Boy cut, a Tony Curtis with a Boston at the back combed into what was called a duck arse it cost 2/6d. It was very traumatising for me, but would you believe it as soon as I got to the Army camp, I was given an Army short back and sides. That experience stayed with me all my life. I went with Mum to Canterbury Railway station to get the train to Wokingham, after waving her goodbye at the tender age of nearly 16. I would not see her again until my first leave at Christmas when I travelled by train to Portsmouth Harbour as they had moved back to Hampshire. Another new start in life at a town called Fareham, where I also knew no one.

On leaving the Army in 1968 I grew long hair and a beard (free choice to go my own way at last)!!! The trade I learnt as an Army Apprentice served me well all my life as I always had work until I retired.