

## **Interview with Doug Harding March 2026**

My father came to Bridge in 1955 to take over the running of the oil depot, it was Hawkfield's originally. It had been the mill originally, then it became a coal depot and then an oil depot. He was the manager. We were in a council house in Blean and he was given the option of having the house that is next door to the yard, or a car.

He said later, he made the mistake of taking the house, with no certainty of work. If he had got set off or upset Peter Hawksfield he'd have been out on his ear. Anyway, he chose the house and of course ever after he was at everyone's beck and call because he was "sitting on the job."

### **When was the mill pulled down?**

We weren't here to witness that but of course there are photographs. It was a different world then. There was Collard's farm which had lots of people working there, especially at harvest time.

### **Which was Collard's farm?**

Well, the one that was Brian Mummery.

### **I knew Brian Mummery**

Yes, he was a nice man, no longer with us of course.

Your wife taught my children. Because I was working, I didn't go to the school much, but my wife did. She dealt with the school side of things. I went to the old school.

### **What was it like? That's two doors away from us.**

I went there when I was 9 so I was there for a couple of years. I remember Mrs Collier with the top class of course, and Mrs Knight who lived there with her mum in the schoolhouse. There was also Mr Williams who was in the Intermediate schoolroom and Miss Seath. There were 99 pupils I think, so going from there to secondary school at Sturry, where there were 400 or so, it was a big change.

When we had sports day or something we used the field. If you looked at the school from the front, the field was on the left-hand side and in the middle of it was an apple tree. The field was marked with running tracks, but when you came to the apple tree you had to run round it.

If we had children from schools like Littlebourne and Barham for football matches, we were rarely beaten because it was our home pitch and we knew which way the ball would go because of the level of the field.

### **We arrived in 1968 and of course the school in that building lasted for 3 or 4 years and then moved up to where it is now. Were the bungalows built there later? There were cherry trees there. I think there's only one left now.**

Yes, I did some gardening there for James and next door was Mrs Roe. I think she's gone now.

**Yes. Her daughter visited her but then she had to go into a home and then she died. I think it's sold now.**

There was also, living along there a man (I think he was Dutch) who owned a nursery garden at Staple. He wanted to put up a raspberry cage and said he needed to take down some trees. He spoke to the Environment people who made all sorts of objections why it shouldn't be done, and I thought it was a mistake to spoil the woodland. He did it in the end though.

**Yes, then farther along is John Corfield's house.**

Yes, and what is now Alan Atkinson's house was then owned by Mr Downs. He had the bike shop in the village. I think it was where Gulvin's is now between the chemist, as was, which was then on the corner of Brewery Lane, and the baker's.

**So, you've seen a lot of change in the village.**

Yes, Daddy Fagg's farm was still there, and I can still see Captain Maslin striding up and down the street with his jodhpurs.

**Where was his stable or whatever he had. Was it on Daddy Fagg's farm?**

No, I don't know for certain, it might have been behind Mrs Turner's.

**We remember in 2014 the Nailbourne flooded badly. Can you remember other times when it flooded?**

1968 was the worst one, it was bad all over Kent. The drainage was nothing like as good as it is today. I don't think we're expecting any major disaster today. The ford level was at 4 yesterday, creeping up.

**I think it's later this year. It was about February when it started flowing from the upper Nailbourne at Etchinghill. Then the spring in Bourne Park started flowing.**

Yes, there's the old wives' tale that it flows strongly every seven years, but that's just a story and it depends on the water table and aquifers and the springs that are dotted around. I think it improved when they sorted out the culvert under the High Street, because it used to get blocked. Where Riverside Close is now, there was a nursery with several greenhouses and that was always flooding. Behind the Red Lion there was Mr Moore's market garden.

In the '60s Western Avenue was being built and there was no security or anything, so we just played on the building site. I remember how the locals would be out in the evenings picking up bricks, blocks, cement and things. Then the police would come round to investigate.

**The very first person I recorded was Wyn Tamsett.**

I remember her and her husband Jim. She must have been one of the oldest of the community. I knew her son Chris who lived on one of the Channel Islands, and they had a daughter.

**She remembered Bridge before the war, I think.**

**There was one son called David who lived in Barham.**

**Now, your family. You have a picture here.**

Yes, that's our middle son. He's in Australia. He went there backpacking and met his girlfriend, who's Australian and they live in Canberra. Their house is about 100 years old and on stilts. It was taken there from somewhere else. It's in a cul de sac. Not like we have

here though. Each house has 5 acres of land with it. He got married there in 2009 and have two girls. When he was backpacking, he earned money cleaning cars. Now he still works for the same company dealing with the logistics of buying and selling cars.

That's our youngest son who lives in Dover. He and his girlfriend lived in Docklands which was very expensive. Our eldest son lives in Staple with his wife. He comes here most days.

**Did they all go to Bridge Primary School?**

Yes, not the eldest one.

**What are their Christian names?**

Barry, Roy and Kevin the eldest. He doesn't work. He just wants to go fishing. Luckily, he's got a wife who's a Primary School teacher so he can do that. It's their life.

**You were here when the bypass was an issue. Our children dressed up for the celebration. Did your boys do that?**

I think they did, but I was working a lot then. I worked tarring the roads. It was long hours.

**I remember someone who did a similar job, and he used to sleep under the truck because the smell of the tar cleared any colds.**

We used bitumen eventually. We didn't know it was carcinogenic. You'd wash your hands and eat your sandwiches having had this stuff on you. It was a long time before we knew that. It's just the day it was.

In 1962 when we had a bad winter, I used to work for the butcher for ten bob a day. We were at Barham in the van and we got stuck on the slope. I got out to push and it was freezing cold and it pushed the window on to the meat.

**In '69, our first winter here, Kingston was cut off and they had to drop food.**

I remember going to deliver meat to an old lady who lived in a kind of shed in the farmyard at Westwood Farm. She used to ask me to tune in her TV, because she had the old box TV with the stick aerial.

It used to take us all day to do the deliveries to Bekesbourne, Adisham, Barham and end up at Pett Bottom. It wouldn't have taken so long but we kept stopping for cups of tea here and there.

**So, you went to what's now the Spires Academy and you left at 16, did you?**

15, I left in 1963.

**Was there National Service in those days?**

No, I didn't do that.

**Just to finish off with, you obviously know Canterbury. What changes have you seen there?**

Oh, marked I should think. I can vividly remember when you could park in the High Street, you can't do that any more. Like every thing else it's changed. It's pedestrianised now.

**Yes, there's a sign as you come out of Guildhall Street, there's still a sign for Chatham.**

Before the bypass, all the lorries and so on used to come and go through the towers. My father-in-law used to work for the Water Board in London and some how or another he became an under keeper at Gorsley Wood. I don't know how that happened. I went for a walk up the Butts with him and he realised he'd been there before. He'd seen people firing bullets into the bank there. When I was young, we used to go and dig out the bullets from the bank. You couldn't get to it now.

**So that's over the railway bridge and on the left.**

Yes, it's all overgrown now. There were hoppers' huts there then. There were left empty most of the year, so we played there and in the tunnel.

**I remember leading a night exercise there and it was freezing cold, so we built a fire in the tunnel.**

Yes, it's closed now, but I think people still break in there sometimes.

Up above in what we call Redhill woods there was an encampment built in the war just before the tunnel on the top of the bank was what we called a sniper's hole. It was a hole in the ground with a metal plate across it. It could have been something like that because it was facing the railway. Up above that, in the woods was a place where we used to play. There were beds in there and it was open at one end like an escape route, maybe 20 yards long. It must have been left from the war but eventually a farmer got tired of us going in there and the army came along and blew it up. That was at Lenhall Farm.

**That's interesting because I met someone in Barham who was fascinated by the Secret Army and he took John Hill, a friend of mine, and me to the place where the Secret Army (just 2 or 3 farmers) used to hide out and watch for German trucks, but you're talking about a different place.**

Yes, all part of the same area. It's all gone now, perhaps people saw us playing there and stopped it. We didn't do any damage which might happen today. It's like the sheep dip on the Bishopsbourne Road, just past the country club and turn right and in the bottom near the bridge was a sheep dip. But all the paraphernalia has gone

**There was a couple in Barham who moved into Bridge. The lady would have been fascinated by what you've said because she knew about the Secret Army place near Kingston, but I don't think she knew about Lenhall Farm.**

It all changes. Mill Lane used to be an avenue of trees. I expect there'll be more houses near here now. I heard it's going to be thirteen.

**Thank you very much.**