

Mrs Win Tamsitt, who was 79 at the time of the interview, has lived in the village all her life, and talks about her memories of the village.

Interviewer – *Are you still living in the house that you were brought up in?*

No, the house I was born in and brought up in my early days was demolished after the Georgian houses were built in the village.

You lived on the High Street did you at that time?

It was the High Street but that house wasn't seen from the road. There was a row of cottages right opposite the White Horse, but Beans Cottage where I was born was a house on its own behind those, but it was demolished with the land when the Georgian cottages went up. So, from there, I moved into the High Street. No name to the house but it is right opposite the Garage.

Where did you go to school?

Bridge School in Patricbourne Road.

Have you got any memories of the school?

Very much so, with milk. Now this is interesting, we had the coke burners in the room, just a small fire in the winter, and all the little bottles of milk with cardboard tops were stood round the fire, and it got very hot and warm and the milk used to make me sick and I can't drink milk today.

It used to curdle?

Yes it did, and I have never forgotten that. That's one thing in Bridge School, and another thing is knitting with Miss Bell. We used to have little knitting lessons. That was interesting. Some things were getting wider and then we would drop stitches. You had to unpick it and start again. That's early days.

Can you remember how many children there were in your class? Were they small classes or big classes?

20-25, quite a few for a small village really, but they did come from around the area also.. Two came from right along from Pett Bottom.

Then when you finished at Bridge School, where did you go on?

No, I left school at 14, and that was war time, and my parents said "oh you can't go to Canterbury to work" so I went to Mrs Pussord, the butchers wife, and did her cleaning for a while, and odd jobs all around, helped in the shop. So that was my first job. Anyway, when I became 18, she didn't wish to pay extra insurance, and I went to work for Bridge laundry, which was in the High Street. It was two doors up from the dental practice, and it was Mr Beadle, and a hand laundry. That was there until 1952. Then I left there and went to Canterbury because we were taken over with St Lawrence laundry, and that's where I worked for the rest of my working days until I got married . I became the head packer. So that was my early days.

Now you mention the war and obviously you are old enough to remember what happened around here during the war. Any particular events that you remember?

I do remember one or two planes falling. One up near the Station cottage in the field, even though a person opposite said it didn't happen. But it did, living here we remembered that. Another thing that we didn't really like was going down into the Anderson shelters. We did that quite a lot at the bottom of the garden. I slept down there and I remember coming out in the morning after the June blitz to a fall of brown paper. There must have been a wind that night and it was for books apparently from the library at the Cathedral.

And could you hear the sound of the bombing?

We did hear, yes oh yes. It was a beautiful night, it was a clear night. It was a lovely June day. Going down to the shelter at night, the siren went and you heard planes as well.

That must have been a surprise, because the main activity would have been earlier, during the Battle of Britain, I suppose. Did you hear or know much about that? Were they overhead?

I remember that in the hop fields, which was at the top by Renville, when I worked with my mother. We had to hide there under the vines. When you pull the vines down to pick the hops, you pull the vines over. It was like a hedge and we were all sitting underneath. The planes were low too. It was brilliant weather too, beautiful sun and clear skies.

The plane that came down near the station cottage, was that a German?

Yes, it was a German.

What were the shops like in Bridge at that time, what did you have.

Well, I will start at the top of the village. There was Mr Prickett, he was the baker and grocer. Between his shop and the village hall, there was a shop next door to that, which adjoined Gordon House, run by Gordon Smith. He did batteries and allsorts there. There was a barber shop when I was very young, I do remember that and my father getting a haircut. Then a Mr Turner took it, and he used to do batteries and accumulators, which we used to have to take from the radio to be charged at that little shop. Then still going down a little further, there were cottages just after Gordon House, there was a shop there that sold sweets and tobacco. That was right next to Vernon's Garage. The next big house, Alexandra House, was a hand laundry. A Mr Hunt ran that. Still going down on the same side of the road was Edward's the butchers. Then you go down to what is now the dental practice, that was a tea-come sweet-shop, and that Mrs Ovenden's aunt who had that. Then we come to the Chemist which is next to the Plough and Harrow on the corner, and a cycle shop next door to the Chemist. Then the bakery, which we have lost now, that was the last one on that side.

Then you can cross over and go up the street, where your family is, used to be Vyes more or less. It was Price prior to that. We always used to call it Vyes I remember going into see the Price's with cheeses and things all piled up on the counter, it was a wonderful shop. Willow Brook was a teashop, but it was a fish shop in my very early days. Mr Moyes used to keep that. Then we come up to the butcher, Mr West and Mr Vaughan ran that. Going up further there was Mrs Turner who ran the greengrocer. My father used to grow lettuce and various other plants. There was a beautiful garden at the back of the house. He used to sell the lettuce to Mrs Turner and people kept coming through and asking if there was any more lettuce, beans etc. It was a wonderful shop. Then for a while, when I was quite young (two), there was a double fronted house next to Mrs Turner, Mr Hubbard moved into there as a grocery. Then see on the other side, there is an opening isn't there, big doors which was the garden centre, that was the abattoir for the shop opposite. I always remember Monday mornings killing pigs. They did quite a lot of work there. On Monday morning, you knew that was going to happen. Next to that was a house that was falling down, that was a little shop, which sold papers, sweets and tobacco again. Going up a bit further where Mr Dunderdale lives, that was a grocers shop with Mr Decent and that's the end of the shops.

It's incredible the number of shops that were in Bridge, and obviously people would come from other villages to shop here?

I have got an account of where in the late 1800s of the services in this village, quite remarkable.

I guess there must be photographs around of that time?

I have got some photographs.

When you married did you stay in Bridge, or did you move and then came back?

We moved to Bekesbourne and lived in a house opposite Cobham Court. We lived there until the summer and moved, must have been in the January, because we didn't get the house immediately. We had Mrs Friend's house which is in Dering Road, my mother used to work for them, and this lady used to be away over the Christmas period, and she said we could keep the house aired, so we lived there but we moved immediately to Cobham Court in Bekesbourne. My first son was born there. Then we came back to Bridge, here, and have lived here ever since.

So, actually, did your mother and father go to Bridge School?

Saying that, yes my father did, and I think on my mother's side. I have got that in the family history, which is in my front room should anyone visit.

So that's three generations at Bridge School. That's quite something isn't it? Going on, the Nailbourne obviously is of interest to everyone in Bridge. Did it flow more frequently then, back when you were a child?

There seemed to be a lot of water at times because we used to go with Wellingtons and I even remember going down in a swimsuit once. My mum didn't know because I had a dress on top but came out very wet. There was a lot of water, I do remember that.

Photographs I have seen do indicate that it used to flow more fully.

There was a flood through Brewery Lane when I was 6 or 9, I can't tell you which year but the records would. I remember my father lifting up the floorboards to see what was underneath.

Yes, because that was right in the flood area wasn't. As a child, did you go into Canterbury much? Obviously when the war came, probably not, but before the war?

Not a lot. One thing I do remember is being in a pram. I must have been 4 or 5 and my parents used to walk on Saturday afternoon in Canterbury to buy groceries and things in the market, because you could buy meat. They sold it cheaply if you went in the afternoon because there were no refrigerators. Walking home, I imagine it must have been September time, it was getting very dark, I saw the aurora borealis, and that was as you were coming up the New Dover Road, coming up towards the Gate Inn, looking across to Polo Farm. It was over to the North, brilliant. It has never come back. I can see it today and I was only in a pram. That was my first memory of being really small. But I did read something about it when it came here. I would like to know the actual year

Well may be when we continue doing these recordings, we might find someone who remembers that. Now, I have got four more questions suggested to me here. Question one was when did you last hear of a horse and cart, baker, butcher, milk or coal? Were there horse drawn vehicles in Bridge?

Miss Stone used to come along with the milk on a push-barrow. Goodman's from Canterbury used to come out with paraffin on Saturday afternoons around here, that was horse and cart.

Were you on mains water? You didn't have a well.

We were on mains water. We didn't have electricity in my early days. We had gas on the mantels and my mother used to say "oh that's broken" because they were very delicate. Mainly gas lighting in the earlier years.

What about street lighting?

That was gas. I do remember someone coming round and lighting up. There was one right opposite our house, next to where the garage was.

Also, there used to be the windmill where the oil depot is now. What happened, was it knocked down or just taken down?

It was taken down, I think in 1952. It seems a long time ago but somehow it isn't. Our lives have just gone by and we don't realise how many years ago it was.

I agree. Now the Close, which obviously was the workhouse. Did you know anybody in the workhouse at all?

I knew a lady and it was her daughter who was there, and I think she was in there from a child. She was in the far end having a room looking out onto Union Road. She had a budgerigar up in her window. It was very sad, and she lived there all her life. I think she was a Miss and her mother was a Miss, so that perhaps answers your question. Because we had news of a cousin we lost in the family, born into a big family. But the younger girl became pregnant. She was put into St Augustine's, had a little daughter, and the daughter was adopted. But that daughter has just found where her family was, and she belongs to our family. She has really worked on it. She lives in Ashford and we are meeting.

It must have been dreadful to send people to St Augustine's?

Yes, but that's what happened, very sad.

Now I have a question, did you know anyone who lived in Primrose Alley?

Yes, my grandmother, Annie Kennett!

Which was Primrose Alley?

Opposite The Ship there were four cottages. The first one, the front door has been taken away, and I remember the chap who became our coalman got married and he lived there, Arthur Hawkins (not to do with Eric Hawkins). My grandmother was the next one. There was another family called Terry, and Mrs Moyes who was the wife of the man who had the fishmongers.

That was at the side of the Old Ship?

Well, it went straight up where the garden is. I always remember my grandmother, she had a sitting room and a little tiny kitchen with a very old fashioned stone sink, and you went down a lot of steps to the cellar and that was another living area, it was horrible, and little steps to come up the other side. I never did find out what he done with it. He said when I get straight you can come and have a look, but he never got straight. He was a wonderful man wasn't he?

