

3 SCHOOL DAY'S

After we moved to our new home we had to start our new schools. As Jean was over eleven years old she had to travel all the way to Gravesend to attend Gordon School. Peter and I went to Chalk Village School and what a school it was. It was a Church of England school. It was built in 1866. There were only two rooms, a small one for the infants and a large one for the juniors. This had a curtain down the middle to make it into two rooms. They were the teachers. Mr Austin the gaffer (Head master) he was very strict. Miss Senior she wasn't too bad. She taught one class of juniors and he taught the other one. Miss Little taught the infants.

The fireplace was at the front of the class and if your desk was at the front near the fire you were nice and warm. But if you sat at the back of the class you froze. You had to put your overcoat on if you were lucky enough to have one. You had a bottle of milk, it cost half a penny, if you could afford it. If not your name was on the board and you got it free. You had to hang your clothes in the porch on your way into school. There was a cloakroom where you could wash your hands but no hot water. The bucket toilets were outside at the back of the school and they were always so dirty and they always stank. We used to catch mice and put them in the girl's toilets and they used to run out screaming pulling up their draws. The play ground was dirt, with a large field at the side of the school where we would play football and cricket.

I made friends with Derek (Jake) Thomas, Teddy Weeks, his two sisters, Fred (Jammy) Jury, Peggy Stone and her sister. Peggy had a bad leg so she couldn't run about like the rest of us but she was a nice cheerful girl. Birtie Ray and his brother, two brothers Leslie and Bryan Coves, and their cousins Joan and Barbara Hills (??). Jimmy and Malcolm (Curly) Waghorne, Alan Pemberton, Jimmy and Phil Lingham, Frank and Jimmy Shoveller, Kenny Redsill, Ronny Roots. There were two twin sisters. I believe their names were June and Joan Simmons. Rob Winders and his two sisters. They lived down the Landway in a cottage near the rifle range. his Dad was the range Warden Jim Jury and his sisters Daisy and Nora. He had three elder brothers. They lived along the Lower Higham Road Bob and Julia Court. They lived in Church Lane opposite Peter's pal Cecil Smith Joe Waters The rest of his friends were Dick Bolton Ernie and Cliff Exel Joey Waters Harold Page and Tom and John Beanie

In the school holidays Peter and all the big lads played cricket on the field next to the School and I would go along to make up the team. We had a great time. All the girls would come and join in the fun, Rene and Peggy Weeks, Peggy. Randalls One day I went to catch a cricket ball and it hit me on the head. I woke with my head in Margaret Weeks lap. Happy days.

Mum belonged to the Co-op Women's Guild. She used to organise a coach and they would go off for the day. We went to Windsor Castle and another time to Whipsnade Zoo. We always had a great day out,

Dad took us to Chatham Navy Day's, you could visit all the war ships Dad was in his glory talking to all the sailors reliving his past. Three of the ships we visited were to make names for themselves in the next war HMS Sheffield, HMS Ajax, HMS Exeter..

I was in Miss Senior's class which wasn't too bad. Just after we moved to Chalk they were collecting money for a maternity ward for Gravesend Hospital. When all the money had been collected two children were to present the money to the Duchess of Kent. The names were pulled out of the hat and the names pulled out were 'Margery Vane and Robert Paternoster'. Mum was pleased her son was to meet one of the Royal Family. I had to go and practice how to bow to Royalty. Came the great day and I was dressed up like a dogs dinner. I had to wear gloves with flour in them to keep my hands clean. Margery and I walked onto the stage holding hands. I bowed Margery curtseyed to the Duchess and said. 'Your Royal Highness on behalf of the people of Chalk we wish to present these purses for the Gravesend Hospital-Building fund.' She thanked us and I bowed and Margery curtseyed, we walked off the stage and Margery gave me a big kiss. I was a creep even then.

At School we used to celebrate St George's Day April 24, Empire Day and Remembrance Day at 11am on, 11 November. there would be two minutes silence in remembrance of all who died in the Great war 1914-1918. This was the day and the hour that the First World War ended, 11 AM 11 NOVEMBER 1918. Mum always cried on this day. Her elder brother Jack was killed in 1918 in France. Dad would wear his medals. Everybody wore a poppy with pride. As the clock struck eleven everything stopped. Drivers got out of their

cabs, passengers got off the buses everyone stood in silence for two minutes remembering all those who died in the Great War

**“AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN
AND IN THE MOURNING
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.
WE SHALL REMEMBER THEM”.**

We were proud to be British then

Just after this King George V died so we had a new king, Edward VIII. Not for long. He wanted to marry Mrs Simpson, a divorced woman. But the Church and Parliament would not let him, so he abdicated. His brother became King George VI. There was to be a coronation the King was to be crowned.

To celebrate the coronation there was to be a parade and carnival through Gravesend. All the schools had to take part and represent some part of the British Empire. Peter and I were dressed as West Indian sugar workers. Peter received a Coronation watch, I received a pen knife and we both received a Coronation Mug. There was a big party in Woodlands Park. We built a large bonfire on the marsh and had another party. Homemade lemonade and baked potatoes on the bonfire. We held a barn dance in the loft of the barn. Everyone had a great time. To raise the money for the barn dance and the party Mum and Dad held whist drives in our front room.

About this time a new family moved into the village. Mr and Mrs Cooper and their family two girls and three boys. The lad's names were Ernie, Charlie and Johnny. The girls names were if I remember correctly were Barbara and Doreen. Peter and I made friends with Charlie and Johnny as we were the same ages They lived in a very old wooden house with lots of rooms. It was called Nash Cottage. Charles Dickens stayed there at one time. Farther along Chalk Road is another wooden house were Charles Dickens also stayed. Chalk Village Forge is said to be the original of Joe Gargery's Forge in Charles Dickens book Great Expectation. Just after this there was an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease at Edwards Farm in Chalk Village. What a disaster all the cattle, pigs and sheep had to be slaughtered. Every man in the village went to help dig the pits to bury them in. Mr Edwards never got over it.

As I got older I had to help out more around the farm. Look after the baby chicks and ducks make sure they had plenty of water all before I left for school in the morning. We had to walk to school because we could not afford the bus fare one old penny. All my mates went on the bus. When I was older I was allowed to ride my bike to school. The dogs used to follow me and wait for me to come out.

I had now moved up into Mr Austin class. Leslie Coves was always in trouble for talking in class, always getting two strokes of the cane. It wasn't long before I joined him. 'Hold out your hand' whack- whack. Gaffer Austin was a swine to Leslie, and I could do nothing right at school. One day we were walking along the road on our way to school and the local squire and the vicar went by. We took no notice. Next day at school we were pulled out in front of the school and asked why we hadn't raised our caps to them. I said they on the other side of the road and why should we.. Austin went mad. He gave Les and I two of the best and told us to write out two hundred times 'I must raise my cap to my betters.' I refused. I wouldn't because no one was better than me. Another good hiding Dad must have been passing because he walked in the door and told him to leave me alone, that he could punish me for misbehaving on the school premises but outside the gate it was it wasn't' the thing to do with him or the school. Dad must have told Leslie Dad because he came in and told him to leave Leslie alone. But he still had it in for us, and some of the other lads.

But not to worry Good news It was 1937. Chalk Village School was being closed down. We were being moved to a brand new school at the Lion Garage 'West Court School.' I made more new fiends my Cousins Peggy and Stanley joined me. Peter had gone on to Gordon School. It was like being on cloud nine. Plenty of room, nice and warm and an up to date gym, A large playing field with football pitches and decent teachers. I didn't get into any trouble while I was at West Court. There were school trips. We went to Maidstone Zoo, Rochester Castle and Canterbury Cathedral. It was a good school.

On the way to school I would meet up with Johnny Cooper Teddy Weeks his sister Margaret and his younger brother Victor. We would pass Chalk Village Blacksmith Forge. On our way home from school we would spend hours watching Mr Mann the smithy shoeing horses. Then we would all go into Ted's house for a jam sandwich and a drink before I carried on the rest of my way home. I used to get it in the neck for being late home from school as it would be dark before I had completed the jobs I had to do. 'Bob don't forget to make sure all the chickens have enough water and that you shut them in properly, we don't want the foxes or the rats getting them.' 'OK Mum.' The dogs always came with me. One evening Gyp and Scamp were making such a racket. When I got to them I found a hedgehog pushing an egg along the ground with its nose. Another time I found a grass snake in the chicken nest sucking eggs. You had to be careful of snakes. Grass snakes are harmless but adders or vipers were poisonous. The only way to tell the difference was that the adder or viper had a V on its head. It could be very eerie in the dark the wind blowing the trees. One night I got the fright of my life. A dark shape coming towards me, the dogs growling and backing away. I thought the Devil had come for me. I screamed and it went Neigh. It was a horse someone must have left the gate open. I wonder who ?

Gypsies set up a camp in the Landway with their caravans and horses. They worked on the farms, thrashing the corn or fruit, potato and pea picking. They weren't too bad. I made friends with a family called French. They bought a plot of land and set up a wood yard. There were four boys and four girls. We all used to walk to school together. I would go out on the marshes with them catching wild ducks and rabbits for their family to eat. In winter with snow on the ground the ditches would be frozen over. We would go skating on them. We made skates out of old bike wheel rims. The ice would crack and I would go through and get wet. The ditches weren't very deep so it was all ok

It was 1938 everyone was talking about war. Everyone was issued with a gas mask and identity cards. Blackout blinds had to be made. Dad and Mum joined the ARP, (Air Raid Precaution) as Wardens. Everyone over 18 had to register for military service. They called all Army Navy and Airforce reservists to the colours. Girls were joining the ATS. the WAFFS and the WRENS. Air raid sirens were tested, black out tested, air raid drill carried out at school, every child had to be registered for evacuation

The crisis was over. There was to be no war this year. Jean, Peter and I had joined 'The Woodcraft Folk.' It was like the Scouts. We were all given names of animals. Peter was Leo the Lion. I was Bruin the Bear (I was Bobby bear in those days). I can't remember what Jean was called. We had a lot of fun. We used to go camping every other weekend in the summer with all girls and lads. Jean went on a camping holiday to Belgium with them in 1939. She had a good time. Not many working class girls went on foreign holiday in those days. I went camping with Uncle Bill and his family. We went to All Hallows for a week. We all slept in a bell tent. That was all right until someone wanted to go to the toilet in the middle of the night. Talk about back to nature. It was rough and ready but all good fun. Out in the fresh air all day long looking for crabs and when we found them chasing all the girls and putting them down their necks. Then the girls chasing us with them and trying to putting them down our pants and always being shouted at, 'Watch what you lot get up to.' There wasn't a thing at All Hallows in those days a few Caravans a Swimming pool toilets and a small funfair and a Café shop not many houses further along the coast Grain Fort and Port Victoria.

Then it was back to school, except for Jean who at 14 had left school and had a job at British Uralite. It was near Higham on the canal bank about 5 miles from home. She had a racing bike, so she would lie in bed until the last moment then she would dash off to work. She worked with Alma, Joyce, and Irene Williams and Ivy Kervanners. They made friends with the Burton sisters, Joyce, and Kate, who lived near Higham. They would ride their bikes to our house where all the girls would meet, and go off to the Pictures to chase all the lads

We would go to Gravesend shopping with Mum on a Saturday. We would finish at the market. While Mum was getting the meat Peter and I would watch Strongney selling China off the back of his van. 'What am I bid for this dinner service 6 cups 6 saucers, 6 plates, 6 dishes, 6 dinner plates? Not £3 not £2 not £1, but 10 shilling and sixpence, and a tea pot as well!' There were always a lot of people there. They loved to hear his patter.

Sometimes on a Tuesday we would go to Maidstone Cattle market to buy chicks. Catch the Bus from the top of Castle Lane changing at Chatham for Maidstone. I always enjoyed the hustle and bustle of the market, plenty of things to see and do.

I would be out playing with Alan Grewcock and Leslie Dalton and Marjory Loft quite a lot, but if the weather was bad we would go in each other's houses to play, in the School holidays we used to help with the fruit picking in the orchard there was always something to do, We decided to make a boat and float it in the canal. We made it out of egg boxes, painted it blue and took it to the ditches to test it. It floated alright until someone got in then it sank. Never mind start again. Mum found out and we had to break it up. She was frightened of someone getting drowned.

Peter and I would go fishing in the Canal for eels. We had to dig up worms and thread them on to the fish hooks, we had to be careful or the hook would go into your finger. We only had a hand line with a cork for a float and a stone as a weight I can't remember if we ever caught anything but we used to enjoy ourselves with all our friends, Peter was always messing about with anything electric al or mechanical helping Dad with any building work that was going on but I can't remember him getting dirty. I was always getting it in the neck for getting dirty they were the good old days.

Dad had a friend Stuart Baker who had a Dairy Farm. He used to let him graze his cows on our marshland and he let us have our milk for nothing. Ray Crouch helped him deliver the milk with a pony and trap. In the summer holidays they would cut the grass on the marsh for hay. We would all be out their helping to cut and rake it into heaps to dry it ready for loading on to horse and carts for carting to the hay stack that was being built in the orchard. My job was to lead the horse from one heap of dried hay to the next for loading on to the cart. I had to keep the horse still while this was going on. Suddenly the dogs chased a hare. I jumped, the cart moved and the people on the cart nearly fell off. 'Bob watch what your bl**dy well doing or you'll kill someone.' 'Sorry Dad.'

Just inside the gate to the marsh there was a large water tank that Dad had got from the IPM for the cattle to drink out of. One day I was messing about on the marsh with the dogs. I could see Stuart Baker's cows near the water tank drinking. What I didn't notice was the bull. It suddenly started pawing the ground and bellowing and then it put its head down and charged. Gyp and Scamp went for the bull, I ran for my life and managed to reach the gate. I didn't have time to open it. I just managed to climb over before the bull slammed into it. If the dogs hadn't attacked the bull it would have got me. Good old Scamp, good old Gyp. They were good dogs.

Dad had a lot of souvenirs from his service in the Navy. A Turkish rifle, two bayonets, a Turkish officers dress sword and a pistol. Spears, shell cases with details of his voyage up the Amazon River recorded on it and an ivory elephant supporting a globe of the world. There were tobacco jars, a silver fruit dish from a German ship that they captured, and a lot of other things. I used to play with the rifle and pistols.

It was 1939 the year that was to change everyone's lives again. Everyone was talking about war. Uncle Bill, who was in the Territorial Army, had been called up for active service but life carried on as before. On the 1 of September the thrashing machine had arrived at Stan Crouch's Farm. As a lot of the men had been called up we would all come and help with the thrashing the next day Saturday 2, September. Peter, Dad and I went. We worked hard all day long. When we had finished for the day said 'see you all tomorrow' and went home. Mum and Jean were in a state. It had just been announced over the wireless that the evacuation of all children was to begin on Sunday 3 September. Peter and I were to be evacuated.