



MY LIFE

by

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TERRY OSBORNE - MY LIFE

Autobiography of an ex London Boy 1939-1962

Chapter 1



Tower Bridge



Guinness Trust Buildings Flat 181

My life began in 1939. October the 10th. I was born in the seaside town of Seaford, Sussex, one month after the Second World War started. Pregnant women in London were sent from the capital from fear of bombing raids. My father, who I never knew, was killed in Greece in 1941. I will come to that at a later time in this story.

Our home was two rooms in a block of flats with the name of Guinness Trust Buildings (picture above), the bottom three windows on the right of the doorway. It was close to Tower Bridge. Everybody must know it. The first thing I remember of my childhood was a bombed site, a feature not uncommon in Snowfields, Bermondsey, which was close to the docks of London, a target for the German bombers.

Kingston, Cambridgeshire - 1944

Some of my first memories were in the summer of 1944. I remember living in Kingston. Evacuees were sent from London and large cities all over England into the countryside to get away from the bombs from German aircraft.

For those people who do not know what an evacuee is, they are children under the age of 15 yrs old who lived in large cities where heavy bombing was likely to happen and were sent to the countryside for safety. Once they reached the village or town they were allocated to families. Sometimes brothers and sisters would be split up causing great upset to these children. I read a very good book called *The Children's War* by Juliet Gardiner, which goes into more detail on evacuees.

I was not an official evacuee when I went to Kingston in Cambridgeshire. It turned out that in the block of flats where we lived one of the neighbours had a son named Ron Burrage who was an evacuee in the village of Toft and we would visit along with Ron's family to the village at weekends. I stayed with a couple that later would be my Uncle Oliver and Aunt Lil and their son Raymond, a year older than myself.

Kingston in 1944 was (and still is) a very small village, but it did have a post office, which sold odds and ends, and two pubs, The White Horse and The Rose and Crown. There were at least four farms. A blacksmith's shop, which I cannot remember seeing.

Most men working on the farms were exempt from call-up to the army, as this work was important to keep feeding the people. One of the farms was Payne's Farm where I would later spend a lot of my working life.

A small village school I cannot remember going to but my Aunt Lil tells me I went there with Raymond and the teacher was the Mrs Marshall who later went on to write a book on education. I can remember going to fetch milk from the farm called Moat Farm (formerly Library Farm). I think it belonged to a family called Rayner.

There was no piped water or electricity in the villages in this part of Cambridgeshire in the wartime. It came later in the 1950s.

A large walnut tree stood in the garden and is still there to this day in 2004. In those days there was a well in the garden where water for washing was drawn by bucket. It was so clear you could drink it. I do not remember drinking but I should think you could have done. Before the days of fresh water, supplied by the council, wells, pumps and springs were the only means of water to drink. Another way to get water was rainwater caught in a water butt from the roof of the house, or from the brook.

One of the things I remember was, summer evenings, the farmer Mr Roberts in the farm next door would call for us and sometimes in our pyjamas we would go to the crossroads, where he would fill his large water tanks full from the pump. He had no water on his farm so he had to collect water every day from the village pump for own use and his farm animals. He did this in a horse and cart with a tank on it. I was told his farm caught on fire and was destroyed. It was said because he had no water they could not put it out.

Also I am told American airmen stationed close by used a field to play baseball. Outside the village of Kingston on the way to Toft was a field with a searchlight in it and an AA gun. Later I found out it was for the defence of Bourn Airfield. Germans wanted to destroy as many airfields as they could before the invasion of Britain. Searchlights were placed in villages around airfields for the purpose of spotting enemy planes so they could shoot them down.

Years later I was to meet a man named Alf Gotts who was a gunner in the Artillery stationed in the village of Hardwick close by, who told me more about the war and his part in it. This is another story.

My Return to London in 1944



September 7, 1940 - the beginning of the London Blitz



I think I must have got homesick for my mother because I remember being in London when the doodlebugs were being dropped on London (1945) at the end of the war. Doodlebugs (picture above) was the nickname for the V1 and VII, a self-propelled rocket bomb. The doodlebug rocket had enough fuel to reach London and then run out and fall to the ground where it exploded causing a large amount of damage to houses and property and killing an awful lot of people, mostly civilians.

One thing I remember was the sound of the doodlebug over the block of flats. My mother told me the safest place was under the table as it was too late to get to the shelter. It fell in the next street on another block of flats. My relations, the Dobner family, lived in these buildings but they were all ok as they must have been in the shelter. I did not know if any people were killed but I would have imagined so. I was going to school at the age of 4 years old. We had to go to another school a few streets away after this same bomb damaged our school.

As with most kids in the late forties, cowboys and Indians were a great favourite game to play on these bombsites among the broken glass. If it were not broken it soon would be.

Saturday mornings for six pennies old money we went to the cinema on the Old Kent road. I cannot remember the name of this cinema. I would think it has been knocked down years ago. When the cowboys and Indians came on the whole audience went crazy. I cannot ever remember anybody telling us to be quiet but we did in case we missed what they said. After we came out we would go to the pie and eel shop for our dinner in Borough High Street where in the window we would look at a tray of live eels soon to be somebody's dinner. I remember eating mash potatoes but I cannot think what I had with it, some sort of pie - not eels.

Chapter 2

The War has finished in 1945



Myself age I think 7 years old

The war finished in the summer of 1945 leaving a vast amount of damage to London and other cities, towns and villages in England. I remember my Uncle Tim coming home from the war. I was playing in the street when I saw this man walking towards me wearing a skirt which later I was told was a kilt. My Uncle Tim's regiment was called the BLACK WATCH, a Scottish regiment. What a Londoner was doing in a Scottish regiment I never did know.

My mother's family surname was Duncan. They lived in an area called Snowsfield in a flat. My father's family name was Osborne. They lived just off the Old Kent Road. My father's and my mother's families both lived in Bermondsey.

Grandfather Duncan worked in the docks. My other grandfather Osborne I was told later carted horse muck from the stables of places like the brewers. Breweries had horses to pull the carts to deliver barrels of beer till well after the war. We boys would hang on to the back of these carts as they went along the streets.

There was a big blacksmith's shop in Bermondsey where we boys would watch the horses being shod. I can still smell the shoes burning the hooves as they were put on.

During the war years my mother would sometimes go to work in the morning to find the building where she worked was a heap of rubble and she would have to find other work. This happened at least three times to my knowledge. The last job she had in London was working in a tea-packing factory. I would come out of school and go to the factory to meet her, crossing the road just below London Bridge at the age of 6 years old, something that would be unheard of today.

My mother's family consisted of 6 girls and 3 boys. The only one I did not know was my Uncle Joe who was killed in the war. He was serving in the navy and died at sea. I was told his name is on a plaque in Westminster Abbey along with thousands of other service men and women who died at sea who have no known grave.

The Duncans, my mother's parents, outside their favourite pub. I think it was in Tooly Street.



Both grandfathers nearly always dressed the same in a flat cap, red scarf tied round their neck, collarless shirt, weskit, dark trousers and heavy boots. Both my grandfathers liked their beer and so did my grandmothers. Many the times I sat outside a pub in the Old Kent Road, where my grandfather Osborne drank, but I did not mind. I would be brought out a bottle of pop and a packet of crisps.

My grandparents, the Osbornes, lived just off the Old Kent road in a terraced house. It always seemed dark in there and she kept rabbits in a tiny hutch in the very small back garden. I never did know why she kept these rabbits. As pets I suppose.

I remember one day walking along the Old Kent Road with Granddad Osborne when a funeral passed by. We stopped while it passed. My granddad took off his cap and stood to attention. I asked if he knew the person. No, he said. I supposed it was respect for the dead, something they did in the East End of London in those old days.

Both my grandparents and uncles and aunts gave me small amounts of money when I used to visit them, which would be on a Sunday mostly. I would travel by bus or tram on my own at the age of 6 and 7 years old.

I was closer to my father's sister, my Aunt Lily Dobner, on the Osborne side of the family. When I lived in Toft I used to go back to London and stay with them. There were two boys. Ronnie was my age, and Billy, and three girls, Rose, Eileen, and Joan. I have lost touch with so many of my relations from London, which is sad in a way but I am still in touch with Ronnie.

We did not have so many material things such as TV, Computers, CDs, Mobile Telephones, and a host of other things. But we did have the wireless (radio). So we made our own amusements. I remember somebody made a scooter out of two boards and two ball-races. I would think these items were found on a bombed site.

As I mentioned early on, mother and myself lived in a block of flats on the ground floor No 181. It was two rooms. One was a kitchen and living room combined. The other was a tiny bedroom big enough for one bed. It had gas for lighting, cooking and heating plus taps with running water. I mention this as Toft was to be a shock when we moved.

Toilet was shared by four families and was across the landing. When you wanted a bath we would use the public baths. On the same landing as us lived the Burrige family whom I have mentioned early on. At the end of the war there were lots of street parties. Ours was on the bombed site where Guys Hospital now stands. It was a fancy dress party. There would have been plenty of cowboys and Indians, and pirates. I cannot remember what I went as.

My cousin Colin Hook and myself were given an electric train set each. My mother said it came from my mother's brother who worked on the docks. Years later she told me crates on the dockside would break open when they were being unloaded from the boats and the dockers would rescue the contents.



My cousin Colin and myself had models of a Spitfire, one of the aeroplanes, along with the Hurricane, that played a big part in the Battle of Britain. We were given these by our Uncle Bill who served in the RAF and was a prisoner of war. I gave away a lot of my toys to my friends in London when we moved to Toft. Perhaps there was not enough room for them, I cannot remember why.

My uncle Jim would take me to football matches. Millwall was one of these grounds I remember going to. He and his friend would often call in the barber's on the way to football and have their hair cut and singed. That seemed very strange to me at the time. Millwall was local to Bermondsey as was Tottenham Hotspurs, Arsenal, West Ham, and Leyton Orient. One other ground I went to was Dulwich Hamlet. I think it was an amateur club at the time. Uncle Bill played football. One Sunday morning I

went with him. He got knocked out in going for a tackle and they carried him off the field and I wondered how I would get home. It was not as serious as I thought at the time as he got up and we went home.

Bombed sites as I said before were our playgrounds. Nobody seemed to worry about us playing on them. Today they would be all fenced in to stop us going on them. I think bombed factories were a no-go area but we still went in. I remember one day seeing a man with a small fire and he was melting lead he picked up from the site and was making lead soldiers.

Another daft thing we did was after the workmen who were repairing bomb buildings went home we would climb the scaffolding. Something that was rather a silly thing to do.

During our visits to Toft we stayed with the Collett family who later became my family as well. My mother became engaged to the son of the family. His name was Ralph. He later became my stepfather. One-day while I was playing on a bombed site my mother called me to go home. When I got there, Ralph and another man were loading our furniture on a small lorry (it happened to be a coal lorry in the week, belonging to a Mr Hart). We were leaving London and going to live in Toft.

I left behind a lot of friends whom I never saw again.

I often wonder what happened to them.

Chapter 3

Toft - My Early Years



Toft. 1947. Easter. My mother was married to Ralph Collett in the Methodist Chapel across the road from No 1 Council House where I would live until 1962. There were a lot of trees blown down. That was the first thing I remember. There had been a big storm in February that blew down some big trees and men came to cut them up for timber.

I went to school in the village with my new cousins, Keith and Koran Collett. They lived in a cottage in Brookside right next to the brook. Their parents, Uncle Chris and Aunt Violet, kept pigs and chickens in the back garden. Also Malcolm and Peter Collett.

Going to a little village school seemed very strange. In London we sat in rows and never said a word unless we were spoken to. More on that subject later.

The Collett family, plus Wards, Sparks, Clarks, Robinsons, Tebbits, Bones, Barton, Chapman were some of the people I first remember and of course Mr Jack Jakins who mended the bicycles of everybody in the village, a mode of transport that 95% of the village people had at that time. Buses took you to Cambridge. There were a lot more buses in those days.

In 1947, Toft like most villages in this part of Cambridgeshire, had no electricity until 1952, no piped water or gas. A far cry from London. A pump on the village green and wells around the village was the only water for drinking and washing. Everybody used water butts to catch rainwater for washing and watering the garden. In the summer when you got to the bottom of the barrel there would be lots of wriggly insects in the last of the water.

A bath was quite a major effort. First the copper was filled with water and the fire underneath was lit. Then the tin bath was brought out of the shed and placed in front of the fire. Then the youngest would be first and the rest of the children would follow. Our mother would have hers when every body else had gone to bed. I do not think my gran ever had a bath as long as I can remember.

One of my jobs was to fetch water from the pump (that was about 50 yards away on the village green) in two buckets. Each bucket would hold about two gallons and was quite heavy for a small boy. Later a large tank was delivered to the village by the council for fresh water and was filled regularly by the council. In 1954 piped water was put in to the village. Each house had a cold tap fitted. No more carrying water for me.

Lighting consisted of oil lamps and candles. Oil was delivered once a week by a van. On the same van would be foodstuff - not very hygienic by today's standards. Our oil lamp sat in the middle of the table. I read a lot as a child as the only other entertainment was the wireless (radio as it is now known). The wireless had a battery and something called an accumulator that had to be charged once a week. It had an earth wire that was attached to an old kettle or saucepan buried in the ground.

You had to be very close to the oil lamp as it did not show much light. My gran had the best spot near the lamp and close to the fire for her rug making. I read a lot in those days - all the usual children's books mostly from the school library.

The toilet was outside in a shed and consisted of a wooden seat over a bucket, which Ralph would bury in the garden when it was full. All houses would be the same before piped water came to the village. It would be several years before we had flush toilets as there were no sewerage farms in those days in villages. Some people had a septic tank in the garden.

We kept chickens at the bottom of the garden so we had plenty of fresh eggs - something we never had in London. Mr Reg Ward and Mr (Pullet) Clark also had a pig at the bottom of the garden. We always knew when the pig was going to the butchers. It was dragged up the garden path squealing. Pigs and chickens would eat the scraps of food left over, such as potato peelings and cabbage leaves and any other bits of vegetables.

There were often rats where there were chickens and pigs. On Sunday mornings Ralph and some neighbours would have a session killing them, turning over sheets of tin and digging the holes where they would have their nests. Somebody also had a small terrier type dog. We boys thought it great fun.

One evening, it must have been winter as it was dark, mum went to go to the outside toilet carrying a torch. On opening the outside door there sat a ferret. When she shouted for Ralph the ferret ran off. The furry animal belonged to a neighbour, Mr Pledger, who bred these animals and they had all got out causing quite a commotion in the surrounding area as these animals will kill chickens. I cannot remember if any chickens were killed. Just as well, as chickens were valuable.

Toft in those days consisted of a Church and a Methodist Chapel where I went to Sunday school until I was 14 years of age. The Sunday School teacher was Mr Clifford Tebbit. There were two pubs. The Black Bull run by an old lady called Mrs Allen, which has been converted to a house. The Red Lion was near the village green and is now a Chinese Restaurant. How things have changed over the years.

There were three shops. One doubled as a Post Office. Another shop had a tiny room so dark you could not see inside. I would go and get Ralph's tobacco, some thing called Black Beauty, from a little old lady who was always dressed in black so you could not see whether she was there or not. She also sold cotton and chocolate.

In her back room was where the local doctor held a surgery every week. Dr Winter was our doctor. I think he was a refugee from one of the East European countries due to the war, as I could not understand what he said for years. I thought he was Polish but I could have been wrong.

The last shop was the biggest one. I remember the Balcolm family coming there in the 1950s. It sold groceries where we bought most of ours daily - not once a week. In those days there was no super markets. Tesco's was not in our lives then. My mother worked in the shop as well as taking in washing. She had a very hard life. No washing machines in those days. A copper basin would be filled with about 2 or 3 gallons of water and a fire would be lit under the basin and the washing put in. This happened on a Monday morning. The house would be full of steam from the boiling water. Then it all went in the mangle. In the winter and wet days the clothes were hung in the same room as we sat in having our food. How any of us never had a serious illness I will never know. Then it all had to be ironed.

Two or three times a year the chimney sweep would come. For some unknown reason he always came on a Monday.

My new grandmother went on the bus to Cambridge every Saturday to buy magazines and comics and other odds and ends including fresh fish. The comics she came back with were the Beano, Dandy, Film Fun, Picture Post, Woman's Own and Tit Bits, and a few years later a new comic, Eagle. It was my favourite. These comics were passed around the other members of the family. By the time the last people read them and they were returned they were 4 weeks old.

My grandmother made rugs from old cloth cut up in small oblong pieces. There were two ways of making rugs. One would be to knit with two big knitting needles into squares about a foot in size then

sew them together. The other way was to have an old hessian sack and pull the pieces through. This was called a peg rug. These were sold to people in the village. She never made her fortune but spent half her lifetime working on them. She worked at Orchard Farm in the house. Another of her jobs was to keep the chapel clean. On Sundays she would attend most services.

I do not think she liked me. If she did she never showed it. When I come home from school each day I would go straight to the pantry for the jam tarts, being always hungry. She would always say, Only take one. Why, I did not know because these jam tarts were as hard as bullets and nobody else would eat them, a bit like the jam turnovers my mother made for Ralph's ducky.

Meat was delivered by a man on a cycle from Comberton, the next village. Milk was delivered in a van and coal also came from that village on a lorry. Comberton was a bigger village than Toft. It also had an undertaker and builders. Plus a secondary school where children from the age of eleven went for their education till they left at the age of fifteen to go to work. In those days not many people went on to further education.

In Toft we had three farms of about 250 acres each I would think. Two smallholdings. One market garden. Orchard Farm, owned by Mr Ken Tebbit where I spent a lot of my growing up years. Old Farm, owned by Mr Claude Tebbit and his son Mr Clifford Tebbit. The last farm was Mr Arthur (Smutty) Hart's. My apologies for using his nickname. A Mr Hartley had a smallholding, on which he had greenhouses and kept pigs plus a small orchard. Two other small farmers, both called Barton who were brothers, had a few acres each.

Owen Braysher made sheep hurdles with chestnut saplings from Hardwick wood. He was also the local carrier. Every Monday he would go to Cambridge cattle market picking up on the way any surplus produce people had to sell - rabbits and chickens. He did this with a pony and four-wheeled cart. I remember going once or twice with him.

The Bourn brook runs at the bottom of the village, a favourite place over many years for the village children to play. In the summer it looks so calm and quiet you can walk in it and it will only come up to your ankles, deeper in some places. Winter can be a lot different. It can be a raging torrent in flood. In the old days when the brook flooded it used to go in the cottages close to it.

Fishing and learning to swim, making rafts, swinging across on ropes, and jumping the narrow parts. I never did learn to swim but later as an adult I did learn at Parkside in Cambridge.

The Cambridge to Bedford railway line ran on the edge of the village. In those days the trains were run on steam, so much more exciting than diesel or electric. It was in the same field as the brook. In the summer we boys would often try to swim. Unbeknown to our parents, and not having swimming costumes, we went in naked. When we heard a train coming we would race to the railway and stand on the fence waving at the people on the train. We were only about 10 or 11 years old. One of the problems was when some of the village girls came down along the same field we would have to sit down in the water to cover up you know what.

I do not know how but some of the older boys, Pat Ward, Albert (Dixie) Constable, found an empty fuel tank off an aeroplane. I can only think it came from Bourn Airfield, left there after the war. Anyway some of these same boys cut a hole in the top and turned it into a boat. It had sand in the bottom for ballast but was still unstable. We spent many days in the summer holidays on the brook sometimes getting a wetting.

Another of somebody's brilliant ideas, I think it was Eddy Hunsted, was to make a raft made of 5 gallon drums tied together with string or rope. On dry land it looked good but after it was launched it began to fall apart. The ropes did not hold together and the drums started to float away. Once again nobody was hurt - just wet.

One incident I well remember. We were fishing by driving the fish down the brook into a sack. I do not think it ever worked but I fell in the brook with all my clothes on and got very wet. Some of the girls ran up the village to my mother and told her what had happened and she came storming down to the brook and made me take off my wet clothes and walk through the village to our house.

I remember one evening there was quite a commotion. There was a fire at the end of the village in Brookside. Mr Owen Brasher's house was on fire and it burned out leaving him homeless. So he lived in an old caravan but not one of your modern type. It was an old shepherd's hut with a ladder leading up to it. Like the one in the Orchard Farm chapter.

He spent most of his working hours in an open-sided shed beside the road making his sheep hurdles. He must have been very skilful. They were perfect from what I can remember. He sold a lot to the local sheep farmers including Mr Ken Tebbit. He also made spits for thatching the straw stacks.

Winters seemed a lot colder when I was young. The bedroom windows would have ice on the inside as there was no central heating in those days just a coal fire in the main room, which Ralph would light every morning before he went to work.

Another thing was the ponds would freeze hard enough for us to slide on and play a crude form of ice hockey. Most ponds were not very deep so if the ice broke it would only come up to our knees, but some were a lot deeper and we would keep off these. In all my years living in Toft nobody was drowned which was amazing when you think of all the things we did on ponds and in the brook.

I think I was about 10 or 11 years old when I had my first bicycle. At 11 years old I would need one to go to school at Comberton about 1 mile away. It was a nice little bicycle. I kept it till I was about 13 when Ralph bought me a larger one from Mr Ken Tebbit his boss. It was adult size and too big for me, but like a large pair of trousers I grew into it.

All the boys would race around the lanes in the village. One day I got too close to another boy when overtaking. His pedal went in my front wheel breaking several spokes. I knew I was in trouble from my mother if she found out, so off I went to Mr Jakins. I asked him if he could mend it for me without my mother knowing. He put his hand in his pocket and took out a 10-shilling note and said take my cycle and throw it in the bomb hole up the drift as it was not worth mending. I was very worried as to what my mother would say until he started to laugh and said he was joking and leave it with him and he would mend it.

There were allotments outside of the village up the drift. So we grew a lot of our own vegetables. I used to help Ralph with the garden and the allotment. A lot of the village people had allotments.

We never had a youth club in those days but we did play table tennis in Mr Clifford Tebbit's barn - something that would come in handy later in my life. Football was played in one of the meadows. Cricket was played in Mr Bernie Ward's garden which was quite small. If we hit the ball outside the garden or on his vegetable garden we were out. So not many runs were scored but we had lots of fun in his garden. A tennis court in front of the vicarage on the grass was another pastime. A Rev Court was the vicar at the time and he had three sons. We had a lot of exercise in those days and no beef burgers or snacks between meals so you rarely saw plump children.

Scrumpling was another pastime. In a way it was stealing apples and fruit from farmers' orchards but we never thought of it in that way.

We never had holidays. Our holiday was a day trip to Hunstanton, Great Yarmouth, or Clacton. The Sunday School mostly ran these trips. Unlike today. People travel the world without thinking anything about it. My mother would have liked to travel by aeroplane, which we take for granted.

Ralph and my mother had four children giving me two brothers and two sisters: Barry, born in 1948, Anthony (Joe), born in 1949, (died from a heart attack in 2004), Rosemary, born 1952, and Jacky (a late comer), born 1959.

Chapter 4

Orchard Farm - 1947 Onwards

I spent many good years from 1947 to 1955 going and working on Orchard Farm, the home of the Tebbit family - Ken, father; Grace, mother; three children: a girl, Clare; two boys, Paul and John. Mr Tebbit (as I called him in those days) was a livestock and arable farmer as were most farmers in this area of Cambridgeshire.

In the picture, Claire, Paul, John, myself, and the sheep dog, Gip.



My stepfather, Ralph, worked on Orchard Farm from when he left school at the age of 14 till he retired at the age of 65. He received a long service medal at one of the Agricultural Shows for all his time at Orchard Farm.

Orchard Farm was made up of grass and arable adding up to about 250 acres as far as I can remember. He had a herd of about 30 dairy cows. Ayrshires were the breed. Plus about 10 heifer calves as a replacement for the cows at the end of their life. One bull was in a pen on his own as Ayrshire bulls are unpredictable so are not to be trusted.

One herdsman milked the dairy herd of 30-odd Ayrshires. I think when I first went round the farm they had an ex prisoner of war working there called Henry looking after the stock. Later there was an Irishman called Pat Green who was cowman. He became a very good friend to me later on in my life.

Mr Tebbit kept a large flock of sheep, breed called Clun Forest. Geese, chickens, sometimes pigs. Not many pigs, as I did not think Mr Tebbit liked pigs. Sometimes there would be a goat. The milk was for orphan lambs. Guess who had to milk this crazy animal. It was forever trying to kick me, which it succeeded more often than not.

Chickens were free range as I do not think battery cages had come into use in those days. Some people had large sheds where they would put straw or wood shavings on the floor. This way of keeping chickens was called deep litter house. Very good in the winter.

The first jobs I can remember doing - feeding the chickens and collecting the eggs. I was always a bit nervous when a hen was sitting on the nest box. Taking the egg from under a hen always got me a peck from the hen. You should always slide your hand straight under the hen and take the eggs. Washing eggs and cleaning shoes were two jobs I hated the most as a boy who only wanted to be working with the men. Eggs are not washed these days as it is said not to be hygienic as eggs are porous and, after washing a few eggs, the water would be dirty.

One of my first memories was going with Ralph to a field, Lords Meadow, down by the Bourn brook which ran through the farm, to see to the horses. We stood just inside the field and he whistled and the horses all galloped to us. This was quite a sight to a town boy as the only horses we saw were harnessed to a cart on the streets of London.

All fields had names. Home Meadow, Lords Meadow, Barnes, Long Field, Rottedole, Ladies Nook, Gravel Pits, West Fields, Simons Field, just to name a few.

All these fields are a golf course now but I still see them as they were.

A flock of sheep as I mentioned earlier were Mr Tebbit's pride and joy. He would spend most of his time on them, as would I in my early days.

My stepfather, Ralph, in the picture below, was part-time shepherd. Lambing time was quite a chore as somebody would have to be with the flock night and day. So Mr Tebbit and Ralph took it in turns to be with the sheep.



In those days lambing was done in the fields with small pens like in the picture above and the shepherd would stay in a small hut on wheels close to the lambing pens. When lambs are born you must make sure they are breathing by clearing their airways and the mother licks the lamb and lets it suckle. This has to be done with all young animals on the farm. It was always cold at lambing time as they are born in February or March so hurdles with straw in between were stood up in the field to help keep the cold wind from the young lambs.

As the lambs got older and stronger the male lambs were castrated, all but about 20 of the best of the breed. These rams or tupps as the males are called would go for breeding. Once a year Mr Tebbit would take them to sheep sales at a place called Craven Arms close to the Welsh border.

Before that a lot of work went into the preparation for the sales. The wool on the backs of the rams would be clipped to make them look square for some reason I did not know. Next they would be shampooed all over and rinsed. My job then was to put a halter on each ram in turn and lead him all the way down Home Field and back until they would walk calmly and not try to run away. At the end of this and they were all halter trained I would be quite pleased with myself.

As I got older I would help to catch the sheep when they were penned up and do jobs such as dosing for worms they pick up from the grass, and other different ailments that sheep get from time to time. Another job was dagging. This would mean trimming the wool under the tail to keep the flies from laying their eggs in the wool and hatching a maggot that was very uncomfortable for the sheep. Another time of course was shearing time. I never did any shearing but one of my jobs was to roll up the fleece. Ralph and Mr Tebbit did the shearing.

Ralph towards the end of his working life.



Ralph would sometimes just nip the sheep with his clippers when they would struggle and would draw blood. It was only a scratch and did not hurt them so I was told. An ointment called coal tar was applied to the wound which was good as new after a day or two.

Another job with sheep was dipping them in a solution of yellow liquid. I cannot remember its name but years later it turned out to be very poisonous. Sheep would be dipped in a trough of this liquid and pushed under to be covered all over. This was to prevent sheep scab. A policeman was supposed to attend as it was against the law not to dip sheep every year.

One other thing that was my job was to milk the goat as I think I have mentioned before. Goat's milk was good for orphan lambs. Much better than cow's milk. Milking goats was quite an ordeal. They would keep moving about and put their foot in the bucket. Enough of goats and sheep.

I looked after the calves before I went to school and after I came home from school and Saturdays and Sundays. Calves are taken from their mothers a day after they are born and are fed by a bucket with milk. To make them drink from the bucket I would put my finger in their mouth and then put my hand into the milk. After a few attempts they would get the hang of drinking straight from the bucket. As they got older they would have milk substitute. This was milk powder mixed with warm water.

Mucking out, giving them fresh straw and hay, was one of my jobs.

At one time we had a young bull calf. It was my job to put a halter on and lead it down the Home Field to get used to people. As it got older and stronger I had to stop, as I was not strong enough to hold him.

Along with washing eggs, cleaning shoes was the worst job I had as I always wanted to be thought of as one of the men instead of the back houseboy. In the school holidays I would start work at 7am with the men. We would all go up to the house in order. Mr Tebbit would open a sliding window from his kitchen. Ralph was first, then Arthur Jacklin, the horseman, then John Sparks, and me last. I would dread Mr Tebbit saying, My wife has some jobs for you after you have fed the stock. I did not mind cutting the lawns and the tennis court but sometimes on a Friday she would go to Cambridge shopping and the bank leaving me to look after the children.

Looking back it was not a bad time.

I can remember a feed for the cows, which was quite a new thing at the time in the early to mid 50s, - silage. Silage was made from green foliage such as grass, lucerne, or sometimes cereals. It was cut when it was half grown and fresh. A pit was dug to hold several tons. It was brought to the pit and spread evenly all over and molasses would be spread over each layer. Then I would walk one of the

horses up and down the pit all day long. This would press it down solid. When the pit was full after several days' work it was covered up with soil. These days it would be plastic sheet. In the winter it would be uncovered and cut with a hay knife and fed to the cattle who seemed to enjoy it immensely. Strange what animals will eat!

One drawback was it smelt foul and got on your clothes and when you sat in front of the fire at night you was not very popular with the other members of the family.

Harvest Time

Summer holidays was harvest time - my favourite time on the farm. The corn was cut with a machine called a binder. Before the Second World War, horses would usually pull the binder. After this time tractors became more popular.



This is similar to the one I drove first. A standard Ford

Tractors were pretty basic compared to the tractors of today. They run on a mixture of petrol to start with and then you would switch over to paraffin. You would swing a handle in the front which could sometimes backfire and catch your fingers and hand. No power steering and with iron wheels it was difficult for young boys to drive but we did. My first attempt I nearly ran over Arthur Jacklin. He was not impressed with my driving. But with not having a proper lesson I am not surprised at the way I drove.

Before the binder went into the field, a man would scythe round the outside of the field so no corn was lost under the wheels of the binder.



The binder was a machine that cut and bundled the corn into sheaves which we would then stand up into shocks. The corn would then ripen while it stood there for a few weeks. Wheat sheaves were very heavy for boys and we would get behind the men so they would often help us out by picking some up for us.

Carting home the sheaves. I think it was Ralph on the cart but I am not sure if that is me holding the horse. That was my job leading the horse from shock to shock.

Barley was the worst. When you got home in the evening time you would spend a lot of time picking out the thistles from your hands and arms. This was in the days before sprays for killing weeds so the cornfields looked very colourful but not as profitable

as today's farming. I suppose 1 to 2 ton was a good crop, whereas today 3 to 4 ton is expected. I remember one very dry summer I spent several days fire watching. This meant me sitting by the Cambridge to Bedford railway line waiting for the steam train to go by as the sparks would fly out of the funnel and set fire to the grass alongside the railway line and then into the surrounding corn fields. The railway line is no more - gone in the days of Beeching railway cuts.

Harvest time was hard work but so were many times on the farm. We would start at 7am. The next break was 10am for docky. Docky for Ralph consisted of a third of a loaf of bread, a lump of cheese, jam turnover and a bottle of cold cocoa. If you have never tasted cold cocoa you have never lived. Half the bread and the turnover were fed to Bess, his dog, that was always with him. My docky was cheese sandwiches but on Fridays they were jam. I cannot remember what I had to drink.

1pm we went home for our dinner. 2pm we were back at work till 5pm when we stopped for tea. Harvest tea is some thing I will never forget. We would keep a look-out for the car to come down the drift roadway because in it was our tea brought to us by Mrs Tebbit. Hot tea in an urn, fresh sandwiches and home made cake - sitting in the harvest field. It will stay with me for ever.

Unlike today.

Harvest work hours were very different in those days.

Monday to Friday we did over-time till it was dark.

Saturday we would work till 5pm.

No work on a Sunday except for the stockman.

Today, with combines, work carries on day and night if the corn is dry. This has to be 16% or less moisture content. Above this and it would have to be dried in the store.

One other thing that happened at harvest time was going gleaning. This is going to the harvest field and picking up the fallen ears of wheat and putting them in a sack and taking them home for the chickens.

At 14 years old I started working on Saturdays and Sundays feeding the livestock. This did not go down well with my grandmother as I was still going to Sunday School at the time, but I was more than pleased. I was earning money - not much by today's standards but I thought I was grown up.

I learnt to milk the cows, make sure all animals had food and water and clean straw to lie on.

Something Mr Tebbit taught me - care for all the animals must come before anything else.

Those were happy if hard days and they did me no harm.

Chapter 5

My Education Years

Toft Church of England Primary School - 1947

I cannot remember much of my early school days. They were spent in Snowsfield, in Bermondsey, London. The classes were large and we sat in tiers. We learnt our times tables parrot fashion. It worked. I knew up to 12 times at the age of 7 years old.

In the war years children were given a spoon of cod liver oil and a third of a pint of milk every day for food was on ration.

Toft School



As I mentioned earlier I went to Toft village school. It had one teacher. Her name was Miss McCamley. I think she was Welsh but I am not sure if she was. Later she got married and changed her name to Mrs Radford. She could play the piano and sing very well. Must have been Welsh.

With children from the age 5 years to 11 years it must have been quite difficult to teach and amuse all day long. I remember she read a lot of stories to us and we did a lot of singing. Walking in the fields and lanes was another of her favourites.

The school consisted of two rooms, outside loos and a small playground at the front surrounded by a wooden fence.

My new cousins, Koran and Keith Collett, must have thought for some reason because I came from London I would be their champion in the playground. But we came unstuck, as a boy called Dexter Robinson was tougher than we were. Childhood squabbles never lasted long and we were fairly good friends through our childhood, teen years and adult life.



I was reminded of the plays and pantomimes Mrs Radford put on at Christmas. One was Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. I was one of the dwarfs, I think. Koran, Keith, Dexter Malcombe, David Bone would be as well. I cannot remember the other dwarfs. We were dressed in green costumes which would have been home-made by our mothers. And a cotton-wool beard to make us look old. Years later I was to see a photograph of the pantomime and I did not recognise myself or any of the others. I think Wendy Clarke was Snow White.

We played rounders in the field behind the school. It belonged to Mr Claude Tebbit. It would have horses and cows in there but that never bothered us.

Very different from today's playing fields at village colleges with their football, rugby, and cricket pitches, sports halls, tennis courts - and some have swimming pools. We have come a long way since those days and so we should.

Dinner for those who had it at school came in containers from a central place where it would be cooked for lots of schools. I think I had free school dinners because Ralph was on a low wage. In those days farm workers were not paid a great deal. At the end of play break a bell would be rung and we would get in line to go into school in an orderly fashion. This bell is still in the school, which shut down as a school in 1959. It has now been turned into a Village Hall and is used for many functions including a bar where they can sell beer and soft drinks.

At 11 years old we took a test, the 11 plus, to see if we should go on to higher education or go to Comberton Secondary School. The majority never passed. The only one I knew was Peter Court, the local vicar's eldest son.

Looking back now, even though we never passed any exams, a lot of those boys and girls haven't done too bad for themselves. Such as running their own business, owning their own houses, something that never happened in early generations or rarely.

In 2004 there was an open day in the old school organized by the Toft Historical Society. A lot of people attended. I could say I recognized everybody but I am afraid I did not. Not surprising after 55 years.

We could not wait to go to the big school in Comberton where I went in 1951.

Chapter 6

Comberton Secondary School

1950-1955

At 11 years old the children of Toft, Hardwick, Comberton, and Barton went to Comberton secondary school until they were 15 when they left school to go to work. Any children that lived 2 miles or more were supplied with a bicycle to go to school on. We who lived in Toft lived within 1 mile so had to supply our own bicycle.

We would often wait at the bottom of Hardwick Road and meet with Hardwick children and a large gang would cycle from Toft to Comberton. As you can imagine, quite a lot of messing about would happen with people falling off bicycles. As there were not many cars on the roads at that time we never had any serious accidents as far as I can remember.

Cycling in all weathers we often got wet and cold.

I saw my first jet aeroplane cycling from school. It was a Meteor. Very exciting for a village boy as we did not see many aeroplanes in the 1950s.

One friendship that was to last through childhood, teenage and adult years was Roy Wilson. We met when our mothers picked fruit for the Chivers Farms in Hardwick before we went to Comberton School. Derek Oxer, Michel Mace from Comberton, David Worship, and the Pratt twins from Barton - just a few names of boys I got to know. Funny at that age how you remember more boys' than girls' names. This would change, as I got older. I suppose boys played together more, such as cricket and football.

It was at Comberton that we learnt more about team sports as we had school football and cricket teams. Mr Staff was our teacher for the first two years at Comberton School. He was a music teacher. Classical music was his favourite, which did not go down too well with most village children. He also took us for sports, which he was not very good at.

Football was rather hilarious. He would referee in his suit with his trousers bottoms tucked in his socks. I do not know if he knew all the rules, but he knew some of them, which was more than we did. One thing I remember was having Farmers' Weekly magazines for shin pads.

The two best players at both football and cricket were Roy Wilson and Derek Oxer. I was only a medium player at both sports but played for the school teams in both sports and went on to play for the local village teams - wicket keeper in cricket, defender at football. The other defender was another cousin, Malcolm Collett. He was a good player at football. Another lad from Barton, Paul Arnold (Porky), a strange nickname as he was a tall thin boy, was in goal.

We played other schools at both sports. I remember playing Melbourn and Haslingfield. We would cycle to Haslingfield as it was only a few miles but went by two cars to Melbourn. Mr Staff I think had an Austin 7 and the headmaster, Mr Clamp, had a Ford of some description.

A sort of physical fitness was done in the school playground about twice a week. I think it was quite primitive compared with today's sports.

Mr Clamp was the headmaster. He taught us in the second two years. His subject was science and maths but he had other subjects. Technical drawing was one. He once gave me the cane for being rough in the playground, which I always thought was unfair as it was an accident. I happened to bump into an older girl, Betty Robinson. She turned round and thumped me, which I deserved, but Mr Clamp only

saw half what went on and blamed me for not taking care and made an example of it for the rest of the school.

Once a week we went by bus to Bourn School, which happened to be ex RAF buildings left over from the WW2. Here we did a woodwork class all day. This was a large slice (one 5th) of our school life. Not surprising, a lot of boys became carpenters. I often wish I had done a carpentry apprenticeship but I was more interested in farm animals.

In my last year I would go to work at Orchard Farm before I went to school in the mornings. I would start at 7am and finish between 8 and 8.30. Then change, have my breakfast, and cycle to Comberton. As you might have guessed I was always late for assembly. I think in the end the teachers got fed up with telling me off and never said anything to me about it.

I really liked carpentry more than any other lesson. I made a number of items including a pastry board, meat safe, two stools, and the last thing was a small table with a drawer, which is still going strong about 50 years later.

In those days most boys wore short trousers until they were about 14 years old. Why, I did not understand. My first pair of long trousers was grey flannel and I felt grown up.

In my last term I think I worked harder than all my time at school. To this day I do not know why, but I think, looking back, I wish I had worked harder all my school time. But it is no good looking back.

My school days were quite good. I made a lot of friends, learnt some things that I took with me through life.

Chapter 7

Starting Work 1955 onwards

I left school at 15 and started work on a dairy farm in Dry Drayton. I was to take over from a lad called Bob Church who was going to do 2 years national service, something I never had to do as it finished a month before my 18th birthday. There were 5 cowmen milking about 100 cows. It was too big for my liking.

I bought a brand new cycle, a green Raleigh, costing £9. It came from Mr Jakins. I paid him 10 shillings (50p) a week over the next 18 weeks, a lot of money for someone who only had £1 a week to spend after paying my mother £2 pounds for my keep.

I went into lodgings that were nearer, as I started at 5.30am, but this did not last long. I was soon back home.

After 6 weeks at Dry Drayton I was offered a job closer to home at Jack Sadler's in Hardwick with an old friend Pat Green whom I meet at Orchard Farm when I worked there as a boy. This was milking 30 or more cows plus looking after calves and heifers. We worked 6 days a week, which included weekends. My day off was on Fridays. This put paid to any sports, cricket or football, as these were played on Saturday afternoon. Pat had Mondays off.

On Mondays I would start at 5.30am instead of 6am on a normal day. Mr Sadler was supposed to help me but he would come when I had finished as a rule but I did not mind. I liked doing it on my own. One of the perks was 2 pints of milk a day. I carried it in a can - rather difficult on a cycle and, later, a motorbike.

I bought my first motorbike at 17 years old. A very old BSA 250 cc which I bought for £30 (no picture - just as well). All I can say about that machine was it was better than cycling to Hardwick and back 3 times a day. I do not think it went faster than 50 miles an hour, but I still fell off once or twice. Luckily I did not hurt myself. My mother was not very pleased with me, but like all young people, I knew best.



My second motorbike

I later traded my old BSA for a bigger bike, another second hand one. My next one was an ex police bike, an AJS 350cc (picture above). Not many cars about at that time, as most people could not afford

them. Roy had a Matchless 350cc. Later he and Albert Constable bought a brand new 600cc Norton. These motorbikes were fast.

I can remember one incident when Roy's battery was flat so I towed him to Hardwick. The only means was by tying our two scarves together. I do not think we ever got the knot untied. To add to the problem it was dark as his bike had no lights. It was a little bit hairy.

After about 2 years I thought I would have a change in jobs. As it happened somebody my mother washed clothes for was a manager on a chicken farm that had just started up in the village and he asked if I would like to work for him. The company who owned the chicken farm came from London so they paid larger wages than country businesses so I joined them. This was the first time I had seen a broiler chicken. It was a chicken that at 12 weeks old was 3 lbs plus and big enough to eat. It was unheard of locally, as chickens would be near 9 months before they would be eaten and then mainly at Christmas. Six buildings split in half each holding 500 birds. 500 hundred day-old chicks a week were delivered with a spare shed kept clean and sterilised for new chicks to come in to. Stuart Wilson, another friend of mine who worked there, and I would kill and pluck 500 chickens each week.

Fridays and Saturday mornings Stuart and I would have to go to Cambridge to the cold store where the chickens had been dressed (oven ready) and frozen. We both had a Lambretta scooter. They were made in Italy. They had cold boxes attached because the chickens were frozen. We were then sent all over Cambridge delivering the orders. We used to enjoy riding all about Cambridge in this fashion.

But all good things come to an end. The company decided they wanted larger premises and bought land nearer London and moved lock stock and barrel. It was too far to travel every day so I found another job making concrete products locally. In the winter they laid several people off. I was one of them.

I was offered a job picking up potatoes at Payne's Farm for a couple of weeks. That lasted about 25 years.



Working on the chicken farm I was able to buy my first and only new motorbike. An AJS 500cc Twin cylinder. I paid £250 for it. Now I am up to 80miles an hour.

Chapter 8

Payne's Farm - 1957



My first memory of Payne's Farm was scrumping gooseberries and apples - as small boys from Toft did. A Mr Chris Howard owned it at the time but in 1954 sold it to Mr Cyril Miller who came from Orwell. The Miller family consisted of Mr Miller, Mrs Joyce Miller, and two daughters, Valerie Miller and Diana Miller.

My first encounter with Mr Miller happened when a group of us boys from Toft went to Kingston looking for jackdaws' nests in doddle trees. We happened to be walking close to his gooseberry bushes when he stepped out of the orchard looking quite fierce and wanted to know what we were doing on his land. As young boys do, we said we was not doing any thing, and run off back to Toft on the footpath. We still carried on scrumping but kept a good look out for Mr Miller. (Little did I know at the time he would be my father-in-law one day).

If anybody is interested, doddle trees were elm trees with the top cut off. They would then grow new growth and this would be cut after a few years for spits used in thatching hay and straw stacks. Hazel was another tree used for this purpose.

I started seeing Valerie at Bourn youth club when I was about 17 years old and we started courting (now there is a good old fashioned word.).

My first and only brand new motorbike outside Payne's Farm.

It was an AJS 500cc twin cylinders. Cost £250 in 1958.

No it is not me just in case some bright spark starts to spread rumours.



On my day off from milking the cows I thought it might be a good thing to earn a little extra cash by picking gooseberries at Payne's Farm. Picking gooseberries is not the best job on a fruit farm. We were paid per lb for what we picked. As you might have guessed, I did not earn very much money. Some of the older women could pick four times as much as I could. Mrs Curtis, Mrs Richmond, Rose Custerson, an Italian lady, Mrs Fachenni, are just a few names that I remember. That's enough about gooseberries.

A lot of people worked picking fruit for Mr Miller for a little extra cash. I would think it came in quite handy in those days.

In about 1958 I was between jobs. Mr Miller asked if I would like to help picking up potatoes. I went for two weeks and finished up staying for about 25 years.

The farm consisted of 120 acres - about 60 acres orchards and 60 acres of corn and potatoes.



FERGUSON TEF20 DIESEL 1956 V5.

The famous Grey Fergy
We had one at Payne's Farm

In those days there were two tractors on the farm, both Fergusons - the one in the picture above and a larger Ferguson 35 for the heavier work.

The orchards were made up of apples, plums, pears and strawberries. Plus 10 sows and 1 boar (pigs) and about 80 fatteners. 100 or so chickens kept in a deep litter house for eggs.

Two other workers worked there already. Bert Chapman who was the pig man and he also sprayed the fruit. Fred Garner was a general farm worker.

A large amount of casual seasonal workers were needed for picking the fruit and picking up potatoes. Fruit picking started in June with strawberries and finished in November with plums in those days. Plus there would be harvest in August on top of the fruit picking. Strawberry picking lasted about 3 weeks - every day of the week of course. So you would hear the church bells ring at least 3 to 4 times. One year I heard them ring 5 times - that was 5 weeks. I was just about fed up with strawberries by that time. We sold them on a stall on the old A45 road. There was an old disused Methodist chapel next to the stall and Mr Miller bought it in about 1957. It made a useful store.

Dozens of stories could be told of the times we spent on that stall over the years. Here are a few. Mr Miller always had a good car. Jaguars or Daimlers were his favourites, always black. Anyway, one day a customer comes to the stall and says the man down the road was selling sixpence a pound cheaper. Mr Miller tells the customer the man down the road only has a small Ford car to keep, his was a Daimler a much bigger car. The customer bought the strawberries and come back for more.

Cambridge Evening News ran an article on farmers' short weights in the strawberry season. The next day the first customer, a lady, demanded we weigh her pound of strawberries in front of her. Now this did not go down very well with Mr Miller who said he was an honest farmer. Anyway this went on for

several minutes. In the end we set the scales up in front of her. I placed a pound punnet of strawberries on them and they went down. So Mr Miller took one off and ate it. The scales stayed down so he ate another one. The woman started to get agitated saying he was eating her fruit. He argued the scales were still down and proved his point. But when the customer had gone I got a hell of a telling off for over-weighing and had to reweigh all the punnets we had in the stall, about 500, so nobody was very happy that day.

We later started to sell plums in the early 1960s on the stall as we could not sell them on the open market at profit. Then apples, pears, and potatoes. So started long hours every day for somebody on the stall. Without it we would not have survived as long as we did.

One of my favourite stories. Just a few days before one Christmas I had just opened the stall and had some customers. One was a long-distance lorry driver on his way back home up north. He must have bought quite a lot of boxes of apples and pears. It came to several pounds. He went to pay, found he had no cash on him, and said he would have to leave the fruit behind. With that I said take the fruit and pay me next time you come this way again. Of course I never told my father in law. When he had gone the other customers said, You can wave good-bye to your money and fruit.

After Christmas, tucked under the door was an envelope. Inside was the money from the lorry driver. I never doubted my faith in human nature but I did wonder at the time if I had done the right thing.

We had about 55 acres of barley to harvest in August. A contractor from Orwell, a Mr Essy Flack, came with a combine with an 8 ft cut - very small by today's standards. The corn came out of a spout and into a bag, which we would be holding. You can imagine how dirty and dusty we got. Then we weighed and carted back the 12 stone (75 kilo) sacks to the farm and put them in barns till it was sold to the local grain merchant, a Mr Saunderson. All this was very hard work but nobody thought much of it at the time. At night after a hard day's harvest work you would go home to wash down, no showers or bath. Occasionally if you were lucky you would get a bath round a friend's house.

After the corn was cut we baled the straw into small bales and carted them back to the farm, making a stack of them. This would last the pigs till the next harvest. Any wet bales would be put round the fruit trees and of course put up the strawberry rows to keep the strawberries from getting mud on them.

Another contractor, a Mr Bill Pierce, would then plough the land and it was left till the next spring before drilling with barley again. We never had many break crops so we got less and less corn per acre until I suggested we grew beans as a break and then wheat. From 1 ton of barley we went to 2/3 tons of wheat per acre.

In 1962 Valerie and I got married and we lived with her mother and father while our bungalow was being built in Bulls Close. We nearly called it by this name but decided on Meadowland. A sitting room, kitchen, 2 bedrooms, a bathroom, and of course a flush toilet - but still no mains sewerage so we had a septic tank in the garden which still works to this day, 40 years later.

While I was living at Payne's Farm, Bert Chapman died. He was 64 years old and about to retire. A great shame as he was looking forward to retiring. Bert told me many tales about Kingston. I wished his tales had been written down at the time but I have forgotten so many: A man named Mott Allgood always getting drunk in Eversden and falling in a ditch on the way home and sleeping there all night. This would happen every weekend. A family living in a cottage next to Payne's Farm had one room downstairs and one upstairs and raised 7 children. Whether this was true or not I never did know.

One incident happened. We had a lady (no name mentioned) working on the farm who used to drive the tractors on the road so we decided she should take a driving test. Along came the testing instructor and asks the lady to drive to the crossroads about 100 yards away and turn around and come back. On being asked to do this she replied she was not able to do so. A puzzled testing officer wanted to know why. Her reply was it was nearly 10 o'clock and a bus due so she would have to wait till it was gone. You can guess she failed her one and only driving test.

There is so much more that could be put down about Payne's Farm but it may come in another book, who knows.



Chapter 9

My Father

**Regimental Number
6848139**

**9th Battalion KRRC
Rifleman**

Killed on the 12th April 1941 age approx 21years old

I never knew my father. He died in 1941. Killed in the Second World War.

I was always lead to believe he was killed on Crete. This was not quite true as I was to find out later.

It all started on the 50th anniversary of VE day. It was held in an old barn on Payne's Farm along with a BBQ. Tables were laid out for memorabilia from the WW2. I put out my father's medals (which my mother gave me many years earlier) along with other people's items. A gentleman by the name of Mr Alfred Gotts, who hadn't lived in the village many years, asked me whose medals they were. I said they were mine, or rather my father's, who was killed in the war. Alfred (as I will call him from now) told me he came from London and said my father must have been a Londoner and was in the Rangers part of the Kings Royal Rifles. He said he might have been killed in Greece or Crete. Some of this I knew and wondered how did he know.

Alfred, who was about 70 years old, was in the Artillery along with his brother and they served together through WW2. At the beginning of the war Alfred was stationed in a village a few miles from here called Hardwick - part of the defence of Bourn Airfield. Alfred and his brother were then sent to North Africa, then to Greece.

My father's battalion, the 9th, was sent to Egypt in November 1940. In March 1941 they were sent to Northern Greece. One month later he was killed.

It was in northern Greece that Alfred's regiment was retreating from the Germans when he tells me the Rangers from KRR were heading the other way. He told me soldiers from his unit were shouting there was a retreat on and to join them. But they were told by the Rangers that the guns were to be protected at all costs and they were to hold up the Germans' advance as long as possible.

It was in this battle my father was killed.

Ironically, when the artillery guns reached Athens, they were destroyed as there was no means of getting them back to North Africa.

After being told this story I wrote to the war graves commission who put me in touch with somebody in the Regimental records office who gave me some more details. An extract from the book Swift and Bold, the WW2 History of the KRRC, was sent to me relating what happened on the day he was killed. I do not think he has a known grave. His name is on the War Memorial in Phaeleron, Athens.



Valerie and I went to Crete and met Alfred and Doreen Gotts who showed us around parts of Crete where Alfred fought the Germans in the battle for Crete. We also visited the military cemetery in Souder Bay. Many young men, no more than boys really, 19 and 20 years old, were buried there along with soldiers from New Zealand and Australia. Beautifully kept - but what a waste of life. I laid a bunch of flowers on the grave of a young soldier from the same regiment as my father.

I know very little of my father because when I come to write this story most people who knew him are dead. I often wonder if my father and Alfred passed each other in that far off country. I hope so as it might have been another link with my father.

Alfred also died while I was writing this so I never learnt any more of the war in Crete and North Africa. It was a sad loss. He had a lot of stories to tell but as far as I know they never got written down.

I never asked my mother enough about my father when she was alive as it was before I started this story and you always think there is plenty of time, but I am afraid there is not as much as we think there is.

Chapter 10

My Sporting Years

I liked playing football and cricket. As I have mentioned in some of the earlier chapters, we played these sports in the village and at school. I was only average at sports but I liked playing.

At school I was wicket keeper for the school team and right back at football. Derrick Oxe played for the county at football while at school. These were the only sports for boys. Girls played netball. At Toft school we did play rounders so everybody could join in.

On leaving school I worked on a Saturday so could not play the usual sports, but when I changed jobs I played cricket for Hardwick with my old school friend Roy Wilson. Hardwick CC was made up of Wilsons, Jacklins, Blackwells, and one or two others. We played our matches on Parkers Piece in the centre of Cambridge.

I played football for Toft. The team was picked on a Monday night and I would always look on the Toft notice board to see if I was in the team. I was often 12th man so I was always hoping someone would drop out on Saturday so I could play in his place.

I remember one particular cup final. We were playing a side from one of the fen villages at Histon Football Ground. The first match was a draw. I was 12th man again but Albert Constable hurt his leg and could not play in the replay so I was in the team for the final and received a cup-winning medal. So did Albert.

In those days with little personal transport we went to away matches by coach. A 32 seater was always full.

This incident happened towards the end of my playing for Toft when more people had cars. Myself and two other players went to play in another village. We started to change when we noticed there were three different coloured shirts in the dressing room. On asking who was playing there we found out we were in the wrong village. We said, Not to worry. We were the village idiots, and left. It was a good story for a long time after that.

I later went and played for Orwell where after about 5 games I broke my ankle and ended up in hospital having a screw put in it - still there to this day. I never played much after that.

In about August 1959 I was working getting in bales of straw with Roy Wilson on a Saturday morning when Trevor Kitson came and asks us if we could play cricket for Eversden as they were short of players. We said we would, but what we did not realise was as we had played for Hardwick all season we were not eligible to play for Eversden. Somebody reported Eversden to the CCA, the governing body. Even though Eversden had won the League, they were deducted points for playing non-eligible players. So started my long association with Eversden Cricket Club.



Back Row: Fred Wick, Brian Reed, Roy Brown, Albert ?, Buff Hagger, Roy Wilson.
Font Row: myself, Malcolm Custerson, Jeff Clarke, Roy Course, Cyril Course, Trevor Kitson.

I joined Eversden cricket club after I was married and moved to Kingston in 1962. In those days we struggled to find 11 players and would sometimes pick up somebody in the pub on Saturday lunchtime. When I first started to play we played in Eversden in a meadow we shared with some cows which often stayed in the field with us while we played. This field belonged to a Maise Banks, one of a well-known farming family in Eversden. We were later asked to leave and find somewhere else to play. Rumour has it one of our players happened to pick some mushrooms without permission. So we went and played on Jesus Green in Cambridge for a few years.

A Sporting Postscript

In the early 1970s Eversden Parish Council bought about 5 acres of land from the Fossey brothers in Eversden to become Eversden Recreation Field. So the cricket club returned to the village. A football club was also formed, and a play area for the children with swings and a slide.

It was about this time that some of the younger village boys wanted to play cricket against other villages. I already used to play in the garden with my son, Chris, and Andrew, my nephew. Sometimes the girls, Nicola, my daughter, and Suzie, my niece, would join in. Suzie being the youngest was only allowed if she fetched the ball from the strawberry field when it got hit there. Suzie later went on to bigger things. We will come to that later.

Buff Hagger came to me one day and said he would arrange a game with Kings College Choir boys. I did not know at the time where this would lead to but we went and played in Cambridge. Out came the choirboys all dressed in their cricketing whites, our boys in their multi-coloured outfits. The other side had all the cricket gear: bats, pads and gloves, enough for all the team. We on the other hand had a motley collection of two cricket bats and an assortment of pads. Some from the men's team that were worn out. Some smaller ones Buff had borrowed from the school he worked at. We did not look the part and lost heavily, but I thought I would not let this happen again.

About this time the CCA decided to form a league for youth teams. Six other clubs and myself attended a meeting. When I finished after 20 years there must have been 75 youth teams in the league.

By this time I had began pestering the ECB rep and the CCA for help looking for equipment and cash. The Lords Taverners came up with a full cricket bag and the ECB with grants of cash. I was able to keep subscriptions to a minimum from the boys.

I run the youth teams for about 20 years with the help of other members of the club but mostly from one of the parents, John Pryor. We run three teams: under 11s, under 13s and under 15s. After a few years I started a Saturday morning coaching session in Comberton College. This was over-subscribed so I had to use another room and have them in two sessions in age groups.

When I first mentioned this to the village college, the financial bursar wanted to charge what I considered far too much. I pointed out all the boys were from the college but this made no difference to him so I left him to it. Later I spoke to the youth coordinator for the college who said she would try and get the costs lower so I could run the course at a reasonable price. She did. I was always in her debt for the help she gave me in setting up the coaching sessions.

I decided to open a bank account with a Building Society in Eversden Youth team name and kept it separate from the main club finances and this money went back to the boys.

Suzie started playing for the youth team when she was about 8 years old. By the time she was 14 years old I happened to be one of the selectors for the County under 15s and I could not see any of the boys we had selected were better so I put her name forward. The other selectors agreed but were a bit apprehensive but we put her in the team.

Somebody must have told the Cambridge Evening News as they telephoned me to ask more about this revolutionary thing of putting a girl in a boys' county team. I just said she was good enough to be in the team.

The next I heard was Lords Cricket Club were not too pleased and had got in touch with the CCA but nothing was said to me so she played. This was not the end of it. On the morning of the game I was told TV cameras would be at the ground to interview her. Suzie was not too happy with this situation but we decided to carry on as normal. It was a bit chaotic but she survived and went on to play the rest of the season and in my opinion was the best player that year.

One incident was when a rather loud-mouth of a boy playing for Suffolk saw Suzie coming in to bat, he was heard to say girls should not be playing boys' games and he would have to bowl slow to her. Suzie hit his first ball for a 6 and from then on he bowled as fast as he bowled at the boys. At the end of the game the Suffolk boys said she was man of the match.

Due to coverage on TV, Suzie and I were introduced to Rachel Heyhoe-Flint who played for England and I think was captain for several years. Her advice was if Suzie wanted to play for England she would have to play for a ladies team. With all the attention Suzie got from the TV and press coverage Cambridge Ladies cricket club began to take an interest in her and she was invited to play for them.

Within a few years she was picked to play for England Ladies and played all around the world. Suzie also played in the World Cup final, Australia v England. England won and Suzie received a winners' medal. Much to my disappointment I could not be there, as I was on holiday in Switzerland at the time.

A few years later I happened to be running one of my Saturday coaching courses when a lady came in with a small lad of about 8 or 9 years old and asked if her son could join. I looked at him and said he looked a bit small, but he could stay for the session and we would see what he was like. This boy, Mark Pettini, went on to play cricket for Cambridgeshire, Essex and England under 19s. So having two players going on to play for England was not too bad for a small village cricket club.

Over 45 years I started as a player, became groundsman, captain of the second team, youth team organizer for 20 years, Chairman, and finally President of Eversden Cricket Club. Finally I can sit back and watch the cricket on a Saturday afternoon. I have taken up golf and table tennis in my retirement year just to keep me fit as possible.

And So Finally

This all started with me buying a redundant computer from the college where I worked as Head Caretaker. They taught me how to use the computer for which I am grateful. I needed to practise on the keyboard so I started to put down my thoughts about my early life.

People used to say when I told them stories I should put them down on paper so I have done.

This only goes up to 1962 when I was married and went to live in Kingston. Perhaps some day I will carry on with the rest of my life stories.

I sometimes wonder, What if my father had returned from the War? I would have not left London at that time and there would have only been Chapter 2 in this book. The rest would have been a completely different story.

I should apologize for the grammar. As you may have noticed, my schooling never taught much grammar or I never took it in. But like a lot of my school friends we got on in life. I suppose you could say we went to the University of Life, and worked hard at it.

I hope it has been interesting to read, as it has been interesting to write down.

If I have got anything wrong, I apologize, as memories fade as you get older.

Terry Osborne

2005
