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PARISH OF RAMSDEN BELLHOUSE, ESSEX.

CHRONICLES OP CHILDHOOD

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:CHROHICLES OP CHILDHOOD "by "THE WORST BOY IN THE VILLAGE"

Somewhere in Sussex -January, 1990.

I have some extremely happy memories of my boyhood in the Parish of Ramsden Bellhouse, in Essex, where I was born in 1921 at the Village Stores and Post Office, which was run by my father, Herbert Harvey.

The people of the village were for the most part poultry farmers and market gardeners, mainly because every residence was sited in at least half-an-acre and often two acres or more of land. The majority of dwellings were erected just prior to the Great War of 1914-18 and immediately thereafter. When my father came to live in the parish there were about 80 dwellings, and from the time I was born to the time I joined the R.A.F. in 1941 there were about 120 dwellings. These were situated along the main road, which was named Church Road (47 - 43 pre-1914); Homestead Road (8); Orchard Avenue (9) and Glebe Road (22). Later came Ramsden Park Road (12) and a further 12 in about 1934. Post-1914 houses were built beyond the Railway Bridge, including the Fox & Hounds Public House in about 1927, and pre-1914 dwellings beyond the Railway included two houses built for L.N.E.R. employees. Between the River Crouch and the Railway Bridge there were about 110 homes and a population of about 350.

The old established dwellings were few and included Ramsden Bellhouse Hall, known as The Hall (next to the Parish Church), the timber farm bungalow next to the Barn (which was used as a social hall), a thatched cottage on the corner of Ramsden Park Road, the Wee Cabin (known as The Salt Box), a larger house adjacent to Ramsden Park Farm, two farm workers' cottages at Ramsden Park Farm, and two timber railway cottages which were demolished later and replaced with brick dwellings. Ramsden Bellhouse Hall must not be confused with Ramsden Hall which was situated in Ramsden Crays Parish. The local squire was T W. Bacon, Esq., who used to drive to Church on Sunday mornings in an old Trojan

car.

Some of the villagers worked in London and travelled to town from Wickford Station. A sprinkling of residents worked in Wickford, Billericay, Brentwood and Chelmsford. The other parishioners were either general farmers, poultry farmers, market gardeners (self-employed), or were employed in local jobs as building operatives, gardeners, labourers and odd-job workers. A small number had private means and a few pensioners cashed their small pensions on a Friday at the local Post Office.

The local business establishments were the Village Stores and Post Office (1911), the little shop next door which sold papers, fireworks and sweets (Mrs. Barnes), a small confectionery shop which sold ice cream (Mrs. Holmwood) and Mr. Marven's shop for saddle and cycle repairs. Later came Mr. Davies with two coaches, but his main occupation was as a nurseryman. There were about three self-employed Builders.

My father told me that the Parish Church had been renovated about 1850/60, but I remember the Baptist Church being built on the corner of Orchard Avenue in or about 1927 because my chum Walter Ball attended this Church whilst I attended the Parish Church.

My memories relate mainly to the village of Ramsden Bellhouse as against the ecclesiastical parish which comprised Ramsden Heath and the small cluster of dwellings known as the Newhouse area on the London Road towards Wickford. Most of the older properties in the parish were situated in Ramsden Heath, which had some charming old cottages; this area was regarded as the old area and Ramsden Bellhouse as the modern area. I suspect this was the reason why the War Memorial was placed on a small green near the White Horse Public House at Ramsden Heath. The first house along Church Road, near the River Crouch, was originally known locally as: - "The Stone House" but at one time it was occupied by a person of German nationality and then became known as "The German House".

The Village Stores and Post Office - (my home)

My father came to Ramsden Bellhouse during 1911 to open up the new village stores and post office. In those days the mode of transport was pony and trap, but as the business developed various horses and carts came along. I can only remember the names Mary, Bonnie, Boxer and Kitty amongst the horses. Later came the first Ford T model car and

then a number of Ford lorries and one Cheviot lorry. What great fun I had driving the lorries around the village between the ages of 14 and 17 without being caught by P.C. Wetherall, the local bobby. My greatest joy, however, was looking after the horses and some times riding them bare back. I loved being allowed to operate the chaff cutter and preparing the food for the horses. I even enjoyed cleaning out the stables and much preferred this job to cleaning out the poultry houses on a Saturday morning before I was allowed to read "The Skipper" and receive my 1d. pocket money. I thought I was well off when later my father gave me 2d. to spend.

Before the arrival of gas or electricity the Stores was supplied by electricity from storage batteries charged by a generator run off a Petter engine situated in the power house. The battery shed was operated six days a week - not Sundays - and my eldest brother, Herbert, ran an "accumulator service" for the local people. The wireless sets in those days were run from a wet battery system and I think Herbert charged 2d. per battery including weekly delivery and collection. An internal telephone system was installed and connected to the outside sheds, the house and shop, corn store, hay shed and the power house - modern communication indeed.

On certain Wednesdays in the Summer one of the lorries was converted to convey some of the villagers to Maldon for shopping and swimming, and buying fish direct from the boats. On the way home via Tiptree the people would purchase strawberries. From the Stores we also sold petrol (Pratts Oil in 2-gallon cans) and the hay, straw, poultry foods (remember Ful-o-Pep Laying Mash?), coal, coke and paraffin oil were delivered weekly by horse and cart and later by lorry. For the heavy loads two horses, one behind the other, were used. One must remember that the roads were not at first surfaced and there were large holes which made transporting goods along them quite difficult. The groceries and provisions were delivered by another horse and cart on Fridays, and in later years on a tradesman's cycle and sometimes by car. On Monday mornings we were up early because this was Market Day at Wickford. All the eggs and poultry and the garden produce was collected from the various holdings in the village by my eldest brother or other employees and taken to the market to be sold. The proceeds were handed over to the various producers who then were able to pay my father for the poultry foods which had been supplied from the business.

The Stores was enlarged about 1935 and my mother and father retired in

1948. My brother Stanley and I were born at The Stores. the building had all "mod. cons." including a bathroom and hot water, although there was cesspool drainage. Hot water came from a solid fuel range with back boiler and later by means of a "Sentry" independent boiler. All the pipework was in lead.

As a much older boy I used to help my father in the shop and Christmas was always a very exciting time. One day Mr. Miles who lived next door to "The German House" came in to purchase two toilet rolls. I served him and in all innocence handed him the toilet rolls as they were. He was a rather "la-de-da" sort of a chap and he gently informed me that he wanted the goods wrapped up so that no-one would know of his delicate purchase. I remember also some of the old boys who came in for "shag" tobacco; this was cut off a string of tobacco and weighed to their requirements. I found out later that this "shag" was chewed and not smoked in a pipe. Some of the small boys used to try and pinch sweets from the sweet counter and Dad had a mirror placed at a strategic point to catch them - early closed circuit television surveillance?

My favourite job was to serve behind the Post Office counter but I was not allowed to do this until I was 17 years of age and had been sworn to secrecy as one had to be for post office business.

My schooling days

My four brothers went to school at Ramsden Heath and I well remember them telling me stories about Mr. Budge, the Headmaster. When I was five years old a new school was built in 1926 on a parcel of land on the corner of Gardiner's Lane and London Road in the parish of Ramsden Crays. The land was previously owned by Percy Jackson, the local farmer. The school at Ramsden Heath was closed down and the pupils transferred to the new school. However, youngsters from Ramsden Heath afterwards went on to Downham School.

I was one of a number of boys who started school for the first time at the new school at Ramsden Crays; the Headmaster was Mr. Herbert Bear. I was privileged to be invited to the 60th anniversary of the opening of this school (in 1986) and I spent two very happy hours talking to the staff, although no-one in the school was able to tell me how they came to trace my address in Sussex where I have lived for over 40 years. The temporary headmaster looked in the Punishment Book for me but my name was not entered; this I believe was due to the generosity and kindness of Mr. Bear, because I well remember being given the cane by him. I was shown round the school and memories certainly came flooding back,- (Since writing

this Isabel Johnson has sent me a copy of the Punishment Book, and my name is in it)

Three other teachers were employed in 1926. They were Mrs. Newton, Mr. Tomlinson and Mrs. Clark. I was in Mrs. Clark's class of infants and I can still remember one or two youngsters wetting the timber floor! Later to replace Mr. Tomlinson came Mr. Jones and Mr. James (both from Wales) and Miss Clarke came along when an additional class was added in one of the upstairs rooms. There were two other female members of staff whose names escape me. I shall always be - - u... -i—«,, oavirta'Man which I received from these dedicated

When I was about six I did not like going to school and sometimes my father had to chase me with a cane. I still refused to go and in the end my brother Henry often took me to school on the back of his cycle. Sometimes on Wednesdays at lunchtime I was taken to school by the lorry driver who delivered the groceries at The Stores. The old driver - that is how he appeared to me - had great difficulty in getting the vehicle into gear as it was a rather ramshackle lorry - but it was another means of getting me to school. My home was exactly one mile from the school and when going home to lunch I used to create a little interest by walking between one telegraph pole and the next and running between the following two poles, by this means I would cover the ground in about ten minutes. The road from Jackson's Corner to the River Crouch was at that time lined with huge willow trees*

One always remembers school-day sweethearts, and mine included Blossom Dean (my favourite), Daphne Parmenter, Beryl Tillison (?), Olive Ball, Connie Doble, Winnie Abbott and Mary Dovey, but I have to record that the last four did not return my passion! My school chum Walter Ball (Olive's brother) has a wealth of stories of my schoolboy antics; these I shall not relate

I was taught gardening at school from about the age of twelve. When digging the vegetable plot with Walter Ball he often teased me because he said I used to grunt a lot I still do!! Carpentry lessons were held at Billericay and later at Wickford. Sometimes our Headmaster would kindly take us to watch Essex play cricket in the Summer either at Chelmsford or Brentwood. I was Captain of the Footer XI (his words) and the school team played at Jackson's Corner. We had great fun travelling to the away games because we went in an old coach with the girls who played netball. (We played other games in the coach!!) What memories I have of sitting in Mr. Bear's class and looking out of the window and seeing the two

horses and the ploughman ploughing the field adjacent to the school playground - sights which our grandchildren cannot imagine. I well remember Mr. Bestley, the school caretaker. We sometimes borrowed his key to the toilet block when he was absent during the lunch break. I had access to the stoke-hole because Mr. Bear often asked me to stoke up the boiler. One day I unlocked the toilet door which led to the passageway behind the girls' lavatories and with some twigs tried (unsuccessfully) to tickle their bottoms!! You ask Blossom Bean and Daphne Parmenter!

I have not referred to my academic ability, but I will mention that I often managed to achieve top marks for maths in Mr. Bear's class.

Parish Church

The Rector, the Rev. F.W. Austin, M.A., lived in Stock and came to Ramsden on infrequent occasions, sometimes on his cycle and later by car. My first recollection is of the Rev. Tom Jones, the Curate. He lodged opposite The Stores with Mrs. Ruffels (Chingford) and preached very long sermons. The Church was heated by a large tortoise stove fired with coke and was well stoked by the choir boys. Evidence of this will be found on a large beam in the Vestry where I carved my initials with the aid of a red hot poker. Everyone welcomed the advent of gas for lighting and heating. I was able to ring (chime) the three bells on my own. Eventually I was discharged from the choir for being rather mischievous. Despite my shortcomings I was always full of admiration for Mrs. Sexton, who was the Organist and Choirmistress. She always referred to me as "the worst boy – in the village", for which I received much punishment from my dear father. I was, however, forgiven for writing in one of the Prayer Books "Satan is in all the choirboys"!

Church life was very much to the fore in my childhood. My father was one of the Churchwardens for many years - there is a window in his memory in the sanctuary of the Church which was dedicated by the Archdeacon of Southend, Canon Cowing. Bill Bailey from Rayleigh travelled by cycle to play the harmonium and played well despite the loss of two fingers on one hand. Later we had a piped organ built by a firm from Thaxted. This was placed at the back of the church, following the removal of a number of pews, and I would pump the blowers when the person who normally did this, Mr. Voyce, was absent. My brother Eric sometimes played the organ when Mrs. Sexton was away and if my memory serves me well, Mr. Milliard also used to help out. When I was "thrown out" of the choir I used to sit in the back row of the church with

Jack Calton and his sister Joan, and sometimes with Kathy Voyce.

The first Curate after Tom Jones was the Rev. Salisbury, who was an excellent preacher. He had returned from Australia because of failing health. We were privileged on one Sunday to have the Bishop of Bathurst to preach when he was on a visit from Australia where he had been a friend of Mr. Salisbury. Just prior to the second world war we had a funny old boy named the Rev. Pattinson. He was short in stature and stood on a stool in the pulpit so that he could be seen. He lived with his daughter and son at The Chalet. In the Summer I always played in the churchyard before the services and on Sunday evenings I would take grasshoppers into the church in a match box and play with them during the sermon. These antics created much mirth and merriment amongst those around me but annoyed my mother and father immensely! I recall one Harvest Festival when Miss Benson, who was responsible for decorating the altar and sanctuary, rather overloaded the area and during the service all the flower arrangements collapsed and water ran everywhere. Mr Abbott and my Dad had to clear up during the service before the Rector was able to pronounce the blessing. This was definitely not the fault of the grasshoppers jumping around!!! I was in the front row of the choir stalls and thought the church was falling down. Everyone was sorry for poor Miss Benson, a faithful Steward of the Church.

Before joining the choir I attended Sunday School in the Church Hall and the teachers were Miss Benson and Mary Poulson. The banner which was used for marching round the hall (rather like the Salvation Army) had the words "God is Love" embroidered on it. I enjoyed carrying this banner when it was my turn. I occasionally smile when I think of Miss Benson coming into church loaded with various books and papers and wearing somewhat quaint clothes. She sat in the second row on the North side. Mrs. De Vere sat behind her and always came in late with her invalid son John. She joined in the singing in a very un-melodious voice and her husband, who sang tenor in the choir, was a source of interest to the younger members of the congregation because reaching the top notes caused him to break out in a sweat on his forehead! Mrs. De Vere also provided rock cakes for Church Socials, some of which I once put inside the piano and which were sufficiently rock-like to interfere seriously with the accompaniment to the musical items.

Tie Church Stable

This lovely old building was at the entrance to the Parish Church at the boundary with the Hall. It had a thatched roof and had been used for

tethering the horses and later for storing the cycles when people came to church. It was also well used by various courting couples who found it quite cosy and private! This building was in existence until after the Second World War and I think it is to be regretted that it was not restored and renovated by the Parochial Church Council. An attractive building, typical of old England, could have been preserved but instead, sadly, has now been lost for ever. Some very ugly entrance gates were erected in its place, but these were later removed I am pleased to say. I do hope a parishioner has a photograph of the old Church Stable.

The Church Hall

This was a timber building and was a converted old war-time hut used by the Searchlight Unit stationed on Pump Hill during the 1914-18 War. Members of the village converted the hut and erected a stage. I think the Gun Unit stationed near the Searchlight Unit was on Kent Hill. The concrete area on which the searchlight stood was still in existence when I joined the R.A.F. in 1941. There was a similar building just behind the hall where the Masters (?) family lived. I think Mr. Masters was one of the Railway Signalmen. There was another war-time building half way up the hill leading to Ramsden Heath, on the left hand side. The deeds of the Church Hall were held by the Diocesan Office at Chelmsford and I suppose they hold copies following the sale of the property in the Fifties. It was still being used as a Church Hall in 1949 when my father died. In the field adjacent, Church Fetes and August Bank Holiday Sports were held. These occasions were always great fun. Dear old Ted De Vere ran the Aunt Sally stall and we all enjoyed trying to knock off his top hat. Teas were served in the Church Hall and proceeds of the Fetes went towards maintaining the Parish Church.

The Social or Village Hall

This was a converted barn approached by a track opposite the bungalow occupied by Mr. Marsh. There was a small wooden farm cottage just in front of the barn. I used to enjoy the parties in the hall with the open log fire - no modern heating, kitchen or lavatories in those days. I went to the Whist Drives held there, at which Mr. Charlie Abbott acted as M.C., from about the age of 12. My father won many trophies playing billiards in the Hall; it was a very happy village club. The local W.I. held their meetings in this barn, and there was also a weekly library service. Ramsden was a friendly and close community in my young days. Perhaps it still is, but I doubt it.

My sporting activities

On the land opposite The Stores, in Glebe Road where the new Village Hall has been erected, we played football and cricket and had our annual Guy Fawkes bonfire. I often carted the materials for the fire with- the horse and cart. Great competition existed between the Barneses, the Dobles, the Balls, the Harveys and other young lads of the village. What wonderful days they were. More competitive football followed as I got older and I joined Ramsden and Downham Football Club whose headquarters were at the White Horse Public House. I played with my-brother Stanley, Walter Ball, Roy and Les Barnes (who was a good goalkeeper 'but sometimes very nervous before the start of a match making it necessary for him to have another pee), John and Stan Doble, "Rimmer" Bear and "Sooty" Letch. Walter Ball played inside left; I played outside left and was nicknamed "Galloping Harvey". Prior to playing for Ramsden and Downham I went on Saturday afternoons to watch away games with my brothers Eric and Henry and we travelled in Davies's "bone shaker" driven by Len Barker.

About this time I always supported Eric and Henry when they played cricket for Ramsden and Downham. The Secretary of the Club, Mr. Gamble (Mr.Patten's baker) used to ply me with lemonade, cakes and sandwiches on the quiet. When I grew up and played, the Captain was another "la-de-da" chap who worked in London. He turned up in an old Morris car for the matches and always wore his bowler hat. I used to bat at No. 4 or 5 and I recall scoring my first 50 on the ground at Writtle, where we used to try and break the shop windows which surrounded the village green. I was never to make a century but am pleased to record that my son John upheld the family honour much later in another county.

The Scouts and Cubs

I joined the Wolf Pack in 1929 when the Cubmaster was Mr. Aubrey Taylor who, sadly, was killed in a motor cycle accident near his home. I attach a copy of my enrolment card. My brother Henry took over the pack, but by then I had joined the Scouts. Mr. "Fritz" Sexton was the Scout Leader in my time and we had some very enjoyable times, especially on paper chases, "flag raiding" on Kent Hill, week-end marathons and camping at Stock where there was a concrete swimming pool with fresh spring water. I was asked to leave the Scouts because of my unconventional behaviour. However, "Fritz" was an excellent Scoutmaster and I always regretted upsetting him. The Scouts were responsible for arranging the huge bonfires for the George V Jubilee and the George VI Coronation celebrations which were held on Kent Hill. Due to the rain the Coronation fire turned out to be a rather damp squib, but nevertheless we celebrated the event. We had a torchlight procession through the village along

Ramsden Park Road to Kent Hill.

Transport

My father ran a taxi service, first with the pony and trap and then with the various Ford cars. Then came Mr. Davies with his coach to take the business people to the station at Wickford, and to transport people on social and sporting occasions. He then bought another coach which we called a "bone shaker" and which Len Baker used to drive. The "City" buses ran from London to Southend every hour and we had to go to Jackson's Corner to catch the bus. Later we were thrilled when the occasional bus came through the village instead of going through Crays Hill. This service operated a year or two before the Second World War. In those days on the 11th of November at 11 a.m. I remember when still at school how the buses and lorries stopped for the Two Minutes' Silence.

Woolshot's Farm

Percy Jackson was a very good farmer and his father had the farm before him. He must have come from Scotland because he had Scots Porridge Oats for his breakfast every morning throughout the year - as we at The Stores knew! He owned a Shorthorn herd of cows and the schoolchildren visited the farm on numerous occasions. Each year at least one field remained fallow - perhaps a better form of husbandry than that practised today. He allowed the school to use the field opposite the farm for school sports and for football. He also farmed at Ramsden Park Farm, and I remember George Jackson taking over the latter farm. George's sister Joyce lived at Gardiner's Farm. I well recall when George upset a number of villagers when he had the annual shoot of rooks (or crows) in the churchyard because they were a nuisance to his crops. The churchyard was surrounded by lovely elm trees which the birds used for nesting. Sometimes the birds were not killed outright and one evening I witnessed a really good confrontation between George and the bird lovers.

Our Elder Statesmen

In my young days we were brought up to respect our elder brethren, and in most cases we honoured the code. I always remember Captain Kensdale (Ramsden Park Farm), Mr. and Mrs. Dovey (The Grange), Mr. and Mrs. Abbott (Eversley), Mr. and Mrs. Sexton (Fernshaw), Mr. Baldary (The Chalet), Miss Sharp (Cox Green), Percy Jackson (Woolshots), Mr. John Patten (Baker) and other outstanding residents in the parish. These good people took a great interest in the life and affairs of the village. They all left a feeling of loss when they passed on and the village was poorer

without them.

Two well-known eccentrics

There were at least two well-known characters. One was Bill Bryant who lived at the end of Homestead Road and whose wife bred spaniel puppies. I'm afraid the house was very malodorous and I dreaded delivering goods there. Bill always used a hurricane lamp in the Winter when he went out to get his pint (and more) of tonic water!! He wandered all over the place on his return, but his faithful hurricane lamp lighted his way home. The other character was known as "The Ramsden Bellhouse Hermit" - Bill Roote, who lived in a shack in Glebe Road, just past the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harris (Ferndale). Len Barker of The Bandbox will remember him. He would come into The Stores for food such as condensed milk, tea, sugar and shag tobacco. The smell was awful and we had to fumigate the shop after he had left and open all the windows. He would arrive with a long stick and an old bag. In the Autumn he would bring in mushrooms for Dad to buy. When he had left the shop my mother would throw them away because they were so dirty. Old Bill was a placid end harmless type and lived on rabbits and what food he could scrounge. I often wondered what happened to him; perhaps he went to the Infirmary at Billericay to live out the rest of his life.

Some random memories

It must be made clear that during my boyhood many, many acres of land in the village were undeveloped - some were very overgrown with brambles and suckers. In the 1930's there was a depression with very limited building and we therefore had the immense benefit of being able to play on acres of land virtually unrestricted. One must also remember that the side roads were only dirt tracks and unsuitable for motor vehicles, The area of land adjacent to The Wee Cabin comprised an apple and pear orchard where we enjoyed scrumping and latterly courting!

The local chimney sweep was Mr. Snutch who lived in Glebe Road. The building craftsmen were Mr. Taylor, deaf as a poker but an excellent carpenter (Aubrey's father), Mr. Doble who worked for Homesteads with Mr. Gower, Mr. Bogie Barnes and Mr. Sainsbury. The workshop and depot was adjacent to the Barn. I was taught to milk goats by Mrs. Gertie Barker of The Bandbox. I often found old Len in bed having another cuddle when I arrived at 7 a.m. to milk their goats! Later I was upgraded (I was only twelve years old) and I went to milk the cows which were owned by Mrs. Dovey at The Grange. Len Doble was her employee and when he was away I used to stand in for him. All the milking was carried out by me before I went to school. Len regularly delivered our milk at The

Stores, arriving at about 8 a.m. every morning except Sundays. We were all saddened when Len was killed in the Second World War. He was a clever footballer.

People in the village were served with bread by Mr. Patten, the Baker from Ramsden Heath. Mr. Smee was the regular roundsman and he delivered six days a week, coming round in a horse-drawn covered cart. The bread was lovely and crusty, and sometimes a little burnt. How we used to love Good Friday when Mr. Smee would deliver Hot Cross Buns at about 6 a.m. The milkman was Mr. Eldridge, a short, shrewd person and he came round twice a day in a horse and milk cart which contained two large churns. He delivered the milk to the door in a small 2-gallon chum and ladled out the milk with two ladles, one half-pint and the other one-pint, into the milk jugs which residents used in those days. Later his son, known to us as "Patty" Eldridge, took over. His younger brother also helped out. "Patty" used to play football with my brothers Henry and Eric. Mr. Barnes (next door to The Stores) also sold cakes and these were delivered in the area by Tom Voyce who rode a tradesman's three-wheel cycle. I loved going round with Tom because he would let me have one (or perhaps two) chocolate cakes ex gratia. I was only about ten years old and I rode with him on my small cycle.

Blackberrying was a joy in those days. My mother would take us on a trip to various fields near the bottom of Pump Hill and we would have a picnic tea with her home made bread rolls, lashings of jam and scrumptious cakes. I also enjoyed fishing in the ponds and streams. Before joining the R.A.F. in 1941 I used to help my father by delivering the post in the mornings in Homestead Road, Glebe Road and sometimes Orchard Avenue. Stan Carpenter, our popular postman, would bring the bags of mail on his cycle from the head office in Billericay. The post was sorted in the Village Post Office. After delivery I would go off to work in Ongar. On Christmas Eve we would send Stan Carpenter and Mr. Gooch on their cycles back to Billericay at 11 p.m. decidedly merry and half tiddly, but they always returned next morning for the Christmas Day delivery quite cheerful and bright.

As a very young boy I found haymaking time great fun. Farmer Jackson would send one of his employees early in June to cut the grass on land which my father rented in Homestead Road. We had picnic teas and played in the haycocks, much to the annoyance of the workers. This occasion was one of the highlights of the year and it never seemed to rain!

Although we were rather high-spirited lads, we never caused serious damage to private property. We often upset some of the more stuffy residents through our boisterous activities, but on the whole it was good clean fun. We were all disappointed to lose our hand-made recreation area, but there was a need for the new hall. The atmosphere in the new hall was entirely different and there was a more modern, formal approach to leisure activities. Mainly this was exhibited by the committee members, some of whom were newcomers to the village, and the rural atmosphere became an urban atmosphere. Believe me as a "country yokel" this was and is true in other areas where large-scale development has taken place and long-standing residents are forced to take a back seat.

I kidded myself that I was a good table tennis player. When I was about 15 I played for the Social Club in the S.E. Essex League -winning some and losing some. The favourite fixture was against Runwell Hospital because we were provided with excellent refreshments. As a 15-year old I had a good appetite.

I recollect Mr. Charlie Abbott having his early morning exercise running with his dog from his home in Orchard Avenue down to The Stores and back home before going to business in London. During 1940 I had the pleasure of taking him to work at Epping in his eldest daughter's car. My fiancée, now my wonderful wife, carried on this task for about another eighteen months after I joined the forces.

We used to play jokes on Mr. Poulson and Mr. Garvey and other residents when they returned home from London. We also played havoc with dear old Ted De Vere's car. I was taught to swim in the murky waters of the River Crouch by Peter Plowman and "Fatty" Tyler, and the area used was just across the western side of farmer Jackson's fields. Olga Barnes (Skinner) used to deliver the newspapers by pony and trap and in later years on her cycle. Her mother used to sell fireworks to us despite our extreme youth.

On Tuesdays and later Wednesdays before I was of school age I travelled by horse and cart to Billericay with the elder boys who went to carpentry lessons. In Billericay I bought a ½d. bun and sometimes we went on to Little Burstead to the Forge where the horses were shod. The Forge was run by Tom Carpenter, the brother of Stan Carpenter the village postman. We then collected the elder boys on the way home.

The days of oil hurricane lamps, candles and carbide lamps came to an end when the gas mains were laid to the village. Coming home from school I watched the men welding the gas pipes. I also enjoyed watching the roadmen making up the main road with the stones, sand and water, using a steam roller. I was excited when I was allowed to jump on to the large steam engines operated by the Keeling family when carrying out deep ploughing on some of the fields in the parish.- the horse ploughs were not able to plough very deep on the London clay.

The early part of the war was rather hectic and my brother Stan and I had to clear the coal and coke from the railway trucks at Ramsden siding on a Saturday afternoon because the charge for demurrage was very high. We would clear 18-20 tons of coal in an afternoon, all by hand shovel. Sport had to take a back seat. My war-time experiences included the L.D.V.'s, later known as the Home Guard. We went on duty at the School and our "dug-out" was the stoke-hole. I remember the bombs falling in Glebe Road and just missing The Stores. Then there was the experience of a bomber unloading his incendiaries over The Stores and the Main Road through to Homestead Road. I remember a parachute bomb falling near Miss Sharp's home.

My contact with the young people of Ramsden Heath was mainly confined to sporting activities. I enjoyed the socials and whist drives in the Reading Room, next to the "Tin Church", I think in Mill Lane. On various occasions the choir from the Parish Church would attend this church and support the regular worshippers. The Bensons, Joneses, Huggetts and Ben Coote seem to be familiar names in the football world, together with the Voyce family - Charlie (sadly lost in the war), Tom and Fred. Their father was a most loyal member of the Parish Church. Mr. Foreman of Ramsden Heath was the local undertaker.

Some other points of interest

Before I went to Sussex, Messrs. Homesteads built a small estate of about 20 houses on the fringe of the Sussex village where I now live. They were like those in Ramsden Park Road where Mr. Ball and Mr. Poulson lived. the site agent was a relative of Mr. Mayell the Coal Merchant who lived in Ramsden Heath. Homesteads in those days would not allow Public Houses on their estates, hence the Fox and Hounds at Ramsden is built on the North side of the railway line. I remember my father talking about Mr. Curtis, Mr. Cousins and Mr. Carter the Managing Director of the firm, and how they regularly visited Ramsden together with the local agent for the village, Captain Kensdale, who lived in the house adjacent to

Ramsden Park Farm. I met Mr. Carter's son, Lawrence Revell Carter, who later became Managing Director of the firm, many years afterwards at my local golf club and we had long chats about Ramsden Bellhouse. I also met P.C. Wetherall's successor at the clubhouse - he was serving behind the bar and somehow recognized the Harvey strain! Alas, both are now dead.

Conclusion

Life somehow has passed by so very quickly. The Second World War was responsible for splitting up the boys of the village and we seemed to grow into manhood overnight. Most of us were married during or immediately after the war and the majority seemed to move away. My brother Stanley married in 1947 and moved to Billericay and the only persons I remember who stayed in the village were Walter Ball (since moved), Isabel Abbott (Johnson), Connie Doble and Dennis Jones. Of the older generation, Olga Barnes (Skinner), Len Barker (Ramsden Heath) and Sid Barnes appeared to accept the new urban surroundings.

A great part of our English heritage has been lost by over-development and planners here as elsewhere have made many questionable decisions, but we have to accept that homes have to be provided for people to live in.

The reader of these memoirs will readily accept that life as lived in "the good old days" will never return. The pace of life, social change and the general pattern of family life have dictated a very different life-style, but it is with much joy (and perhaps some sadness) that I am able to record a most wonderful and outstanding period of my boyhood. I would gratefully thank all my school chums and more especially acknowledge the privilege of having had a mother and father whose good qualities were unsurpassed and four brothers who made my childhood so very happy.

LESLIE BERNARD HARVEY