

## HAVERHILL AND DISTRICT



Learn, laugh, live

### Memories

#### Foreword - Memories

We asked members to submit their 'Memories' of earlier times and received a number of interesting pieces which have been collated here by David Campos on behalf of the committee. I thank him for his hard work and thank all members who sent in their recollections to make this article possible.

I always feel that amongst u3a members there is a hidden wealth of stories that are never put down on paper and so will eventually be lost to all. If this collection kindles memories of interesting times that you have enjoyed in past years then please write them down. If we receive many more perhaps we can present another article and preserve your stories for posterity.

**Peter Tatam**

I am not a sailor in the true sense but I would be given the opportunity now and then. I skippered occasionally but more usually crewed a 15' motorboat on Anglian Water reservoirs trying to drown artificial flies pretending to be a trout fisherman. While being unsuccessful I have seen smaller versions of these streaking across the water most impressively and sail boards in good hands lifted 15-20' into the air, spun 180 degrees and surfed back down to the water. I might add, all thrown in with the cost of a ticket. If only I were fifty again.

I will however have a look at this. I have some whippersnapper friends who have their own yacht who will love it.

Very kind of you to think of me as it does sound interesting, I grew up with a lot of

active sport and firmly believe sport is something you do, not watch. The official sports lobby thought fishing was inactive but my club, Invicta of Cambridge, put two of their guys in a boat for eight hours on Grafham Water. They needed helping from the boat only to be greeted by one of our members, Dave (83), going out for half a day on his own. They rated us equivalent to golf and eligible for funding. When I did my post heart-attack recovery at Addenbrookes they asked me what I wanted to do. I said, "Go fishing again." "How?" they said, "That's sedentary." "Well, I want to walk for 8-12 hours with a 20/30lb pack or wade in 3' of water." They coughed and said, "We could not do that!" They got me back to it and suggested some exercises to rebuild my arm muscles. Brilliant!

Hopefully we will all get back together this year as I have really missed the talks and the people. This is odd given I am all but a trainee hermit at times.

Have a good week and make the most of the coming snow. Set the inner child free. I am loving the news' letters and passing them on to some yuff as well.

Very best wishes and above all else do stay safe as we are far from out of it.

**Peter Thomas**

About 30 years ago I came across a pilot's Flight Log Book. Some 12 years ago Viv and I decided we wanted to try to find the owner and return it. Should we contact the RAF, the RAF Association, or the pilot's squadron records? Then Viv said we ought to try the local phone book, Cambridge area. After about 10 minutes

trying the listed surnames we came up trumps. Given the address and an invitation we got into the car and went to Long Road in Cambridge. We were met by two ladies. The log book was their father's. They brought out a photo album showing a handsome young pilot in his smart uniform. He had been flying that day so he was in his flying clothes. By his side that very day was a pretty young lady, also in her RAF uniform.

That photograph coincides with his log book, pictured on the very day they first met. Of course they got married. The two ladies we met that evening were their daughters. They were there that day to clear out the flat, for their mum who had moved south to be near her daughters. Sadly their handsome pilot father, husband and WWII hero, had passed away. The ladies asked Viv and me if we would like a memento of our visit. We chose a small flower vase. A vase we will cherish always.

There are thousands of stories like this. My sister-in-law Suky might write her dad's story one day. Her father was one of those heroes. We must never forget them.

### **John Mac Manus**

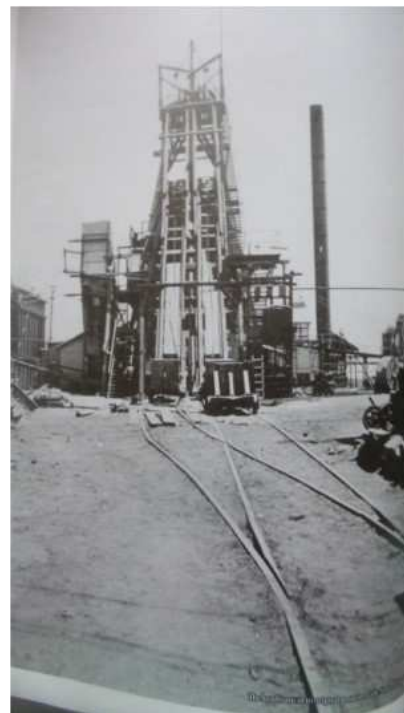
I know that at this present time we are all trying to escape from this terrible virus and sadly a lot of people haven't so I just want to tell you about my Escape. In the early seventies I was working for a dental company in North London alongside a tall Australian lad called Steve. One evening we were asked to stay for overtime to carry out a stock-check in the attic. It got to about 7pm and we decided that we had had enough and packed up and went down stairs. We noticed the lights were all turned off and the door had been locked by the caretaker who never checked the attic. Big Steve started to panic and said, "What do we do now?" I replied, "I have an idea." We went back up to the 1st floor and over to a door in the wall. He looked at me and said, "You must be joking!" I replied, "Have you got anything better?" I opened the door and discovered the drop was about 30feet but it was the only way. There was a chain-link conveyor belt which went across to the

other building which I knew we could exit from. He didn't look too pleased so I said being the smallest I would go first, so laying on my back on the belt he sent me over by pushing the control button. Once I was over he got on and I carefully brought him over. We went down to the ground floor and left the building feeling very proud of ourselves. We started to climb over the gate to freedom but as we reached the top we were met by two burly security guards and 2 vicious looking German Shepherd dogs. Thinking we were burglars they wouldn't let us go and contacted our manager who came out and verified our story. That was my Escape.

### **Brian Sullivan**

My first days of schooling were in Western Australia at a place called Gwalia. It was a mining town in the desert 165km north of the large mining town of Kalgoorlie. Gwalia was the name of Wales in ancient times.

The township was dominated by the tall poppet head of the mine. The shaft was the longest in the world in 1953. It had a 40 degree slope and 3345feet to the bottom. The gold content per ton was several ounces.



Miners worked in sideways shafts every 200 feet. The conditions were atrocious. They worked in dusty, dark cramped

passageways with candles on their helmets. The miners' houses were very different from those in England having



corrugated iron sheeting on walls and roofs. They had small windows with little air-conditioning. Open the front door and the back door and that was air-conditioning.

**Graeme Gee**

When thinking back on memories, I think of when, back in 1951, we moved into a brand new modern council house in Woodside Estate, near Garston, North Watford. It had a modern fireplace that not only heated the 'Front Room' as the lounge used to be called in our house, but also heated the water too! I also remember our kitchen had a gas fridge that had a little freezer bit in it so we could make our own ice lollies!

Whilst living there I remember one night we had a massive thunder storm and one bolt of lightning, in the shape of the Maltese Cross, seemed to come at us across the field and then fade away. One summer's day the sky, instead of the usual deep blue, was orange! Dad said that this was dust whipped up in the Sahara being transported by the high winds over the UK!

I also remember going shopping with mum to the local shops every day to buy the meat from the butchers, stuff she used from the chemist, tins of food from the grocers, her ciggies and magazines from the tobacconist - and, if we were lucky some sweets for us kids - and the veg (cabbage, tomatoes and spuds.- (King Edwards for Sunday and whites for the rest of the week). Oh, and eggs from the butchers too, unless she sent me on a Saturday morning to a small-holding on the edge of our estate to get the eggs.

I also remember my Mum and Dad heading a fairly large group of people who wanted a

Community Centre. They decided who would be able to do what part of the building work and then went to the Rural District Council to say that if they provided the land and the materials, we would actually build the place ourselves. One of their number, an architect, was used to working with the Council so he was very useful. The Council agreed and that building is still there and still well used I am told!

**Mick Smith.**

### **The Trolleybus**

During a conversation with friends, of a similar age, we discussed the subject of freedom of movement for children. I think we all agreed that today's children, due to the times we live in, are accompanied by an adult until about the age of 15. We did not suffer from this restriction in our youth. One vivid memory is of my sister and I, 12 and 10, going on a 20mile journey from home to our auntie's house in Denton. We were taking Christmas presents. The journey consisted of three buses each way, with one of the changes requiring a walk across Manchester city centre. Our parents were confident that we knew the way but if we were to get lost in Manchester we should ask a policeman for directions. We didn't have any problems and the return journey was in the evening. I have to admit that we did sneak a look at the Christmas presents we were given to bring home.



One interesting aspect of our journey was the trolley bus from Manchester to Denton. We didn't have them where we lived. Trolley busses ceased operating in 1964.

**David Jefferies**

**Do you remember? –  
'Doodlebugs' (V1 Flying Bombs)**

During the Second World War in July 1944 Germany sent over what were known as 'Doodlebugs' to bomb London. They were really bombs with wings. They looked like a small aeroplane and had no pilot. They flew until they ran out of fuel and then dropped to the ground and exploded. The term 'doodlebug' seems to have arisen in the 1800s initially meaning 'idiot'. They were early cruise missiles and the only production aircraft to use a pulsejet for power and a gyroscopic guidance system.

In 1944/5 my father was in the RAF and working as a photographer. He was at home on leave one day when one of these dropped in a field very near to where we lived in Baythorne End in Essex. Luckily it did not land on a building so no one was hurt. It did however do some damage, as I remember, to the lock on our front door. It did not work afterwards; obviously shaken to bits.

The next morning my father took my sister and me to have a look and he took this picture of us sitting on the Doodlebug.



**Margaret Woodley**

**Memories of the Winter of 1963**

We heard the weather forecast for heavy snow on Boxing Day 1962 while we were enjoying Christmas Day at my Grandma's house in Walthamstow. We lived in a village about 7 miles north of Swindon and were staying in Walthamstow for the festive period.

With the threat of bad weather it was up early on Boxing morning, a quick breakfast and Mum and Dad packed the car. We set

off round the North Circular which was uncharacteristically quiet, through Hanger Lane and onto the Great West Road. Past Slough and Maidenhead, across Reading and out towards Hungerford. There we took to an old 'B' road that went directly across country through Lambourn to Highworth. This was shorter and quicker but more risky if too much snow fell. At first it was fine but then the snow started and by the time we reached our village the snow was falling fast. We left the main road but the gradient of our hill defeated us and we needed the help of some neighbours to get up the slope and into the drive. We emptied the car, lit the fire in the house and watched the snow fall steadily through the evening. Next day it was difficult to be sure of what was where, a foot (30cm) of snow does a good job of disguising landmarks. Dad was still of the mind that he would be going to work when the holiday was over so Mum and I got out the coal shovel and a border spade to help Dad with his snow shovel clear the drive. There were several occasions when I cursed them for buying a house in the corner of a cul-de-sac with a 25 metre long drive, and this was one of them. (Weeding it for pocket money was another).

When we reached the road we joined forces with the neighbours and dug a car width of road clear of snow right down to the junction with the main road. This would ensure everyone could get out next day. That night nature delivered another foot of snow and we were back to square one. The second snowfall was accompanied by winds which caused deep drifts on the main roads and around New Year came the coup de grace when in a couple of days another 3 feet of snow fell. Roads were blocked, snowdrifts stopped railway trains and the melting snow put the fires out on steam locomotives.

The roads in and out of the village were blocked but in the village there was a Co-Op, a small independent grocer, two butchers, a greengrocer, a garage and a large general store cum agricultural supplies store. We also had two churches two chapels and eleven pubs so things weren't too bad. You may have noticed we had no baker. Bread came from the bakery

in Swindon and was sold at the grocers and the Co-Op. The road remained blocked for three days with no indication of when Wiltshire Highways would send us a snow plough, but one of the bakery drivers made a valiant effort to get through with a seven and a half tonner full of bread. Alas he got stuck, slid gracefully off the road and rolled over into the ditch about a quarter of a mile outside the village. He walked from there and told his tale to the garage proprietor who made a couple of phone calls, one of them to the grocer. Word passed to others and soon there was a posse of folks heading out in wellies to investigate the stricken bread van. The strange thing was that the accident had caused the back doors to burst open and trays of bread had spilled out into the snow – well -- that was the version agreed by all those that helped out that day. The trays of bread were carried to the grocer's shop and because selling stolen goods was an offence he gave anyone who came in a free loaf.

After the snow the temperature dropped alarmingly, minus 15°C was commonplace at night (although I think we called it 5°F).

An odd thing is that at those temperatures ice is no longer slippery because it is too cold to melt when put under pressure by a foot or a tyre. With frozen snowdrifts five feet deep (1.5m) and clear roads the buses restarted, we went to school and life resumed. I do not recall having a school day suspended due to snow in 1963. I took my GCE's in June without any kind of adjustments for the weather in the first three months of the year.

With hard frozen pitches it was lethal playing football in studded boots, but the local football team played in basketball boots instead and in no time the league was up and running again.

The Thames froze over from Lechlade to the London side of Oxford and people were skiing on the ice whilst being towed by a car.

With the deep frozen snow the wildlife had a desperate time because birds and small animals couldn't find food. It was quite common, when walking to the bus stop in the morning to catch the school bus, to find

dead pigeons on the ground or frozen to branches in the hedge.

I recall sometime in March it started to warm up and the snow disappeared almost as quickly as it came. The snow evaporated because of the very dry air and frequent sunny but bitter days. I think by April there was no trace of it and we just got on with stuff.

I suppose at 16 you don't think very hard about the impact on others, I know livestock farmers locally had a terrible time, and I seem to remember a shortage of some vegetables because they couldn't dig out the clamps of spuds and carrots. People didn't empty the shops though and I don't think we ran out of toilet rolls. There was hardship, some people couldn't work and the social support was far from generous then, but I don't remember anyone talking about mental health.

**Peter Thomas**

### **Wartime Childhood**

I was born in the first year of WW2 and was 4 when it ended. I remember almost nothing of the bombing – only the after effects of it. My family was not rich by today's standards but we probably had a lot more than many families who lived nearby. Both my parents had acquired life skills that fitted them to live frugally, and to maximise opportunities - a real asset during those years. Each Friday my father's wage packet was counted out into the marked jam jars that stood on the mantelpiece. Everything was written down in indelible pencil in my mother's little red cash book.

I remember my pre-school years as having continuous warm, sunny days (how come I had constant chilblains?) and non-stop play opportunities and freedom to roam – albeit only around the block. I only remember one rule and that was that everything stopped for the news bulletins, and I had to remain still and quiet. One sadness was when the rabbit, I thought was my pet, turned out to be the next source of food.

### **Clothing.**

Many clothes were passed on – but never shoes. However when these got too small the toes were cut out. We had only one pair

of shoes until they were outgrown. If shoes were not outgrown they were repaired. Sometimes blakeys were added. Shoes however old were always polished.

Any passed-on clothes that were too large had tucks added on the sleeves or the bottom. These were let down as I grew. When there was no more to let down a random piece of material was added. All girls wore an under garment called a liberty bodice.

Some clothes were made from the unworn part of adult clothes. I had a skirt made from my father's trousers. Outdoor clothes, especially the collars, were unpicked and remade with the unworn side on the outside.

I always wore an apron at home to protect the only decent set of clothes that I had to wear to church, the clinic or to the doctors.

Holes in socks were always darned, and knee length socks when outgrown had extra added to the top using 4 needles. New feet could be knitted for socks and grafted on the upper part of the sock.

Woollen garments (if not shrunk and felted in the wash were unpicked) and the wool used again. When unpicked, the wool was wound into skeins across two outstretched arms - usually mine. And woe betide me if I wanted to go to the loo before the job was finished!

A siren suit – a bit like a onesie – was made from a blanket and could be pulled on quickly when the siren sounded to go outside to the Anderson shelter. The floor of this shelter was a nominal 4 foot below ground. During play it became a pirate ship, a whale, a mountain and a myriad of other things. It had a constant smell of dank earth, paraffin, wet pants and BO ... but it was still a joy to play in.

**Memories of food.** (Plates were always left completely clean)

Butter and margarine were mixed together – more marg than butter I suspect. This mixture was warmed before use so that it could be spread thinly.

Scrambled egg had water, or water and powdered milk added to it.

There was a slice of bread with every meal 'to eke out'.

The tea leaves from the teapot were re-boiled, sometimes more than once.

My mother was Catholic so there were a lot of 'fish days' – and totally in Lent.

It was always shepherd's pie on Tuesdays – unless it was a 'fish day'.

The carving knife was razor sharp to enable the cutting of wafer thin slices.

Broken biscuits from the glass sided container at the grocers were a treat. Fish paste, junket, tapioca were not my favourites.

### **Medical matters**

Lard was rubbed onto bumped heads, blue bag on stings, tar ointment was rubbed into chilblains. Germolene from an open tin was smeared onto cuts and grazes ... and there was a lot of 'kiss it better'.

Friars' Balsam was inhaled for chestiness and in addition we were taken to the road works to sniff the tar fumes. In those pre-NHS times the doctor rarely came to the house but if I was 'good' he gave me a threepenny piece.

### **Significant events**

My brother was born on Jan 15 1943 under the Morrison shelter downstairs as I huddled with my aunt under the stairs watching as the midwife assisted with the delivery. Possibly my first sex education lesson!

### **The Victory Street Party.**

I stood in a doorway in my fancy dress and watched everyone else enjoying themselves. I had chicken pox so could not join in. I had big hair bows cut from old sheeting and crayoned with red and blue. These bows did NOT look like the shop ones! My mother had curled my hair into ringlets with strips of old sheeting dampened with spit!!

My father was too old for initial call up and, as a carpenter, was in a reserved occupation. After strategic bombings he was part of a team deployed to make essential sites functional again. When such deployment was to be for many months we were sometimes able to accompany him. When Marshfield aerodrome (near Bristol) was bombed we went and stayed in

Colerne, a Cotswold village. We were billeted with a widow, Alice Moules. I had no grandparents so she became 'Nana Moules', and she spoiled me rotten.

We were again in the limestone area when my father was part of a team making war rooms in tunnels leading from quarries. Luckily the invasion never happened.

I remember the war years as some of the happiest years of my life

**Barbara Surridge**

### **A Memoire.**

I would like to tell you of a wonderful and amazing time of my life.

It was 1946 and I was looking for a new job. My mother and I went to a Recruitment Centre. I was asked what I thought I might do and I replied that maybe I could work for the NAAFI.

I was asked what my current job was and I replied that I was a shorthand typist. The interviewer said, "How about joining the C.C.G?" Mum and I looked at each other, not knowing what that was. We were told that it stood for The Control Commission for Germany – the British Sector.

Mum said in a strange voice, "Would that mean her having to go to Germany?" The answer was, "Yes, but she is not yet 21, so too young for now, but she would work at the London H.Q."

My eyes lit up at that. I had lived in a small Wiltshire town. Well, it all came to pass. With great excitement, I boarded the GWR train to London. I was allocated a room in a hostel in Queens Square near Knightsbridge with several other girls. How I enjoyed London, visiting museums, galleries and Harrods, in between working for a Colonel!

After a few weeks with the other girls, I was sent to Bletchley Park, (I had no idea what the place was!) We were billeted for a week in a Nissen hut in the grounds. We were given a brief course in German and inoculated. We were all given uniforms. Mine was a WRNS one – very attractive, and told to go home and wait to be called.

Well, I waited. I took several jobs in the meantime and got on my mother's nerves. Finally, in the harsh winter of 1946/7, I received instructions to meet in London's Victoria Station. So, with great excitement on my part and feelings of apprehension on my parents' side, I set off on my great adventure. I met the other CCG members and off we went – first stop Dover and then across the Channel. It was a very hard winter – so hard that the sea on the approach to The Hook of Holland was frozen over. Then there was the journey by train through Holland and into Germany, the stations closed and dark. I sat by the window thinking, "I am actually in Germany! The enemy country!"

My first stop was Dusseldorf, but I ended up working for a Major in Cologne. My first sight of Cologne was of the huge cathedral standing amidst rubble and bombed-out buildings – a truly dreadful sight! My driver took me to a big house in the outskirts of Cologne which I was to share with four other girls. I was the youngest, so they rather took care of me. I worked for a Major, along with one other English girl and two German girls. Then started a most wonderful two years! My friend Joan and I made the most of our time off – weekends and sometimes longer, visiting Brussels, Paris (including The Folies Bergeres!) We also spent a week in Berlin, where we saw Hitler's Bunker (or what was left of it!), the balcony from which he had made some of his raucous speeches and The Olympic Stadium. One evening, we went to the theatre to see "Hamlet." What mad fools we were, expecting it to be in English! After, "To be or not to be" in German, we scarpered. Our driver took us to see the Mohne and Eder Dams, which had been destroyed by the "bouncing bombs" invented by Barnes Wallace and dropped by The Dam Busters.

We took a trip down the Rhine and stopped at a place called the Drachenfels, where we hired a taxi to take us to the Schloss at the summit. That was where Hitler and Neville Chamberlain had met to agree "Peace In Our Time!" This proved not to be so!

My friend was transferred to the American Sector – very different from the English way

of life! She invited me to stay and we visited two of Ludwig's Bavarian Schlosses – absolutely stunning!

After two years the criticism of the C.C.G in the British Press got to me and I decided to return to Dear Old Blighty, and I did!

**Marion Woodhouse.**

When I was about 5 and living with my nana in Ireland I remember getting a pennyworth of broken biscuits from the local grocer. If the shopkeeper couldn't find any in the tin, she'd break some whole ones for me. So kind.

I was so impressed by the big red bacon slicer and the overhead wires that took cash to the cashier and brought the change back.

**David Campos**

### **Pea Souper**

The pressure at COP26 to reduce the use of coal to cut carbon dioxide gas in the atmosphere reminded me how bad the pea soup fogs, or smogs, were before coal fires were banned by the Clean Air Act in 1956.

The changes were slowly introduced to prevent the severe smogs which caused havoc in 1957 and again in 1962 when more than 750 people died because of lung infections. In 1962 I was 15 and during school holidays I could accompany my father to his work as a salesman for a firm involved in the reconditioning of commercial motor spares. We would travel around Greater London in a Bedford CA van, the one with the sliding doors that could take off fingers if the driver braked when the doors were open and not secured. However, on a hot day and with the doors secured open the breeze was great!

The last call was to the Post Office workshops in Yeading, Hayes.

We enjoyed a cup of tea with the workshop manager, but when we emerged to drive back to Leyton the dreaded smog had come down. It was impossible to see more than a few feet ahead of you with the thick fog being a horrid shade of brown. At first, we crawled along the A40 to the North Circular to attempt the journey but within an hour the conditions really worsened until it was impossible to drive safely. As I was wearing a white stores coat I got out and walked ahead of my father so that he could see the coat and know where to go. I walked approximately 20 miles following the A404 all the way to Walthamstow and then down the Lea Bridge Road to Leyton. When I arrived home my face was black from the soot in the air and my white coat was filthy.

We get fog today, but it is nothing compared to the soot laden smog of years gone by. If the negotiators at COP26 had to endure such conditions they might be a bit more amenable to ending industries reliance on coal?

**Peter Tatam**