PART 2

Jumbled Recollections of Early Boyhood

Granny Jones, the only grandparent I can remember, the one who called the moon the 'Parish Lantern' was a lady of considerable bulk. This may have been due, in part, to the amount of clothes she wore. To me, she always seemed to be overdressed no matter how high the temperature whether outdoors or indoors.

She lived in a small cottage down a muddy lane in the village of Tibberton, half way between Newent and Gloucester. The cottage was a kind of almshouse, accommodation for the elderly provided by the local authority which in those days may have been the Parish Council. It was primitive by present-day standards but not necessarily at that time for a home way out in the country.

Water was obtained from a pump at the top end of the garden (and I suppose it was boiled before use) and the toilet was an outside affair which always intrigued me immensely. A brick-built structure with a timber seat with a hole in the middle. To me, a child, the area below this hole seemed like a bottomless pit into which everything disappeared for ever. Of course, it didn't and I was later to find out that it was a generous dose of quick lime, regularly added, which caused the contents to slowly disappear.

Opposite the cottage was a large field, which at the appropriate time of the year produced large mushrooms. Granny Jones cooked these to perfection and they were juicy, black and delicious.

Oil lamps were the only method of lighting in these country areas and fires were constantly burning in the black ranges because most of the cooking was done in an oven immediately adjacent to the fire.

In later years, when I acquired a bicycle, I used to deliver repaired boots and shoes to customers around Newent. I could manage about seven or eight pairs at a time and this job paid me sixpence a week in pocket money (about 2½p at the current rate). If my journeying took me anywhere near Granny Jones I would take her pieces of fish from our local fish and chip shop. They must have been pretty cold on arrival but there was always that oven next to that almost continuous fire.

Not on my list of deliveries was Tibberton School. This was a boarding-school and my Father had the job of keeping its boarders well-shod. Anything up to a dozen pairs of shoes at a time. They did not buy their new shoes from my Father's shop but he often had the task of putting their individual numbers on the soles of

their new shoes using shining brass nails. These deliveries were made by my Father in his pride and joy - his Hazlewood motor cycle and side car - but more of this vehicle later.

Talking of bicycles, my first was a 'fairy' cycle of simple design. The only brake was on the front wheel, a crude device which jammed on top of the wheel. The rubber on this wheel was badly worn and the metal core of the tyre was exposed. It was a fact of life that the brake had to be applied with some care. The 'Old Maid's Walk' was a favourite cycling spot as we weren't allowed on the street. There was an occasion when, racing down a slope in 'Old Maids', it was necessary to brake very hard (I can't remember what for). The brake stuck in the metal core, the front wheel ceased to go round and I went flying over the handlebars. I was lucky, only a badly chipped front tooth. Much luckier than a schoolmate of later years, a fellow called Cox, who succeeded in killing himself in a similar accident.

My next bicycle was one my father acquired from our step-cousins in Nailsworth. To apply the brakes on this model it was necessary to back pedal. An unusual design but as I cannot recall any serious accidents obviously a successful one. This 'bike' cost my father 10 shillings, one half of the then pound.

In those days Hercules used to manufacture a 'grown up' bicycle for Two pounds and ten shillings. Not quite as cheap as you may think when this was a week's wages for the average workman on farms and building sites.

So, when my Father bought me a Coventry Eagle bicycle, an up-market job, with semi-dropped handlebars, I was overjoyed. This new mount cost three pounds and ten shillings, a whole pound more than the common Hercules. This new acquisition was to take me on many an exploratory trip, far beyond the environs of Newent to which I had been somewhat restricted due to lack of suitable transport.

A boyhood friend, Raymond Beachus, his father was a garage owner, owned a 'fixed wheel' racing bike so his father probably paid the same for his as my Father paid for mine. But then, we always got our new shoes at 'trade' price. Talking of shoes, I was always told to keep my shoes clean and shining, not only was it good advertisement for the shop but also my Father used to say that the first thing anyone looked at was your shoes. Unfortunately, this was not instead of washing behind the ears but as well as doing this unnecessary chore (at least I thought so at the time)

Also, whilst on the subject of boyhood 'tips' I was tall, exceptionally tall, and my Mother always used to say "be proud of this and keep pulling your shoulders back, don't go around doubled up". A good tip, and I stuck with it right up to the present day.

Back to cycling, Bristol, South Wales and even London, that mysterious city, were now within reach and in due course we made all three. London, because we were heading for Wanstead in East London. Wanstead Grammar School for girls were evacuated to Newent and two of these girls were billeted with us. Having girls around who were not sisters certainly livened up the atmosphere. (Mother received 10/- per week for each evacuee.) A census was taken at the beginning of the war to find out how much accommodation was not in use in every house. (It was compulsory to take in evacuees if the space was available.)

Others from Birmingham were also billeted with us, but that's another story. The intent was to get to Wanstead. But we had no idea of the size of London. We gave up when we got to Hyde Park Corner and altogether overawed by the situation we about turned and cycled back to Reading where we did know a place to sleep.

South Wales, Penarth to be precise, was another of our destinations and perhaps I may digress at this point onto the subject of holidays. With little spare cash in the kitty our family never knew of the delights of a hotel holiday and package holidays weren't even in existence, so, we did the next best thing, we took advantage of relatives. Mother's sister, my Aunt Alice, married to a South Wales garage owner, lived in a 'lovely' home in Penarth. Almost new when we used to visit it. What a change from our old home. People weren't so keen on old houses in those days, as I have mentioned previously there was a reluctance to expose old construction timbering (we were to discover later that our home in Newent arrived sometime in the 15th. century) But Aunt Alice's home boasted a bath-room and that was really something. Not that, at that time, I was a believer in constant bathing, but to use that bath was one hundred times better than the system at home. Also, adorning their 'living' room mantlepiece (they didn't call them lounges in those days) was a Westminster chiming clock which chimed every quarter hour, it was a lovely sound and I can still hear it now.

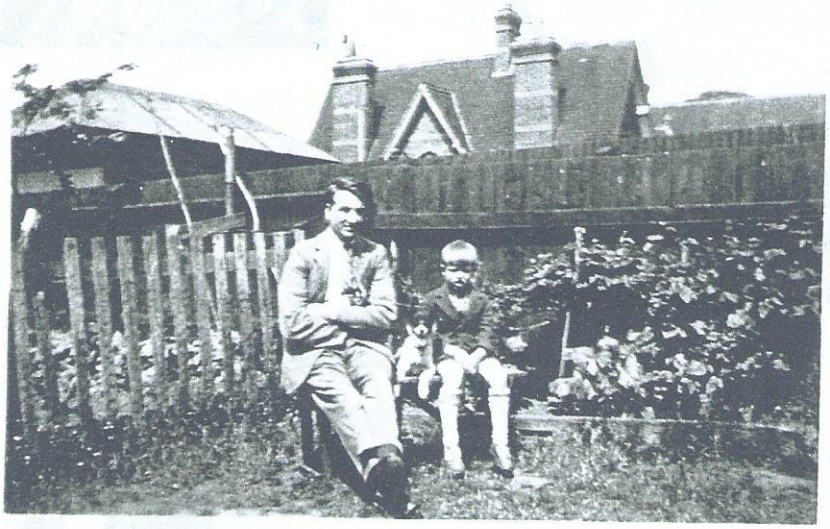
But back to bathrooms. At Newent we didn't have one but we did have a galvanised iron bath and once a week it was hauled into the kitchen and the copper in the outhouse was filled with water and the fire lit underneath. All through the evening each member of the family took his or her bath in turn with a constant chain of buckets to and from the outhouse with all those awaiting their turn or finished being anywhere except in the kitchen.

We were too young to realise that Penarth was not really a seaside town. What we thought was the sea was really a very wide and tidal River Severn. Years later we were to discover that beaches were covered in sand and not pebbles and mud. We didn't mind then we knew nothing different and Mother used to fix up a picnic and these we undoubtedly enjoyed amongst the mud and the pebbles. Dad could never be with us - he had to stay behind and look after the shop. Except on one occasion when he closed the shop for a few days and I found myself, with him, on a Campbell's paddle steamer sailing back from a day's outing to Weston-Super-Mare on the other side of the estuary (actually they call it the Bristol Channel).

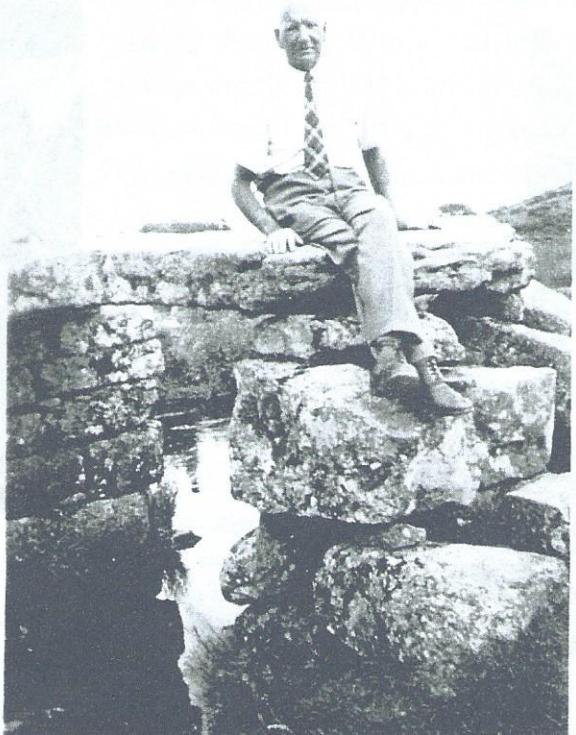
What a night that was, Penarth pier was ablaze from end to end and we were unable to land and so we were diverted to Cardiff, to the dreaded China Wharf. Dreaded, because it was in the heart of Cardiff dockland, about which we had heard so many tales. Details of this trip escape me but I do remember boarding a tram. It was packed to overflowing and I was squashed against an upright pillar on the edge of the boarding platform - indeed a night to remember.

Before we leave Penarth a few further thoughts. When I was very young my Uncle Aubrey arranged for a float to be entered in the local carnival to promote his

On holiday with Aunt Polly on Bringsty Common. Peggy, Eric, cousin Beryl and Phyllis.



With Roamer our pet terrier.

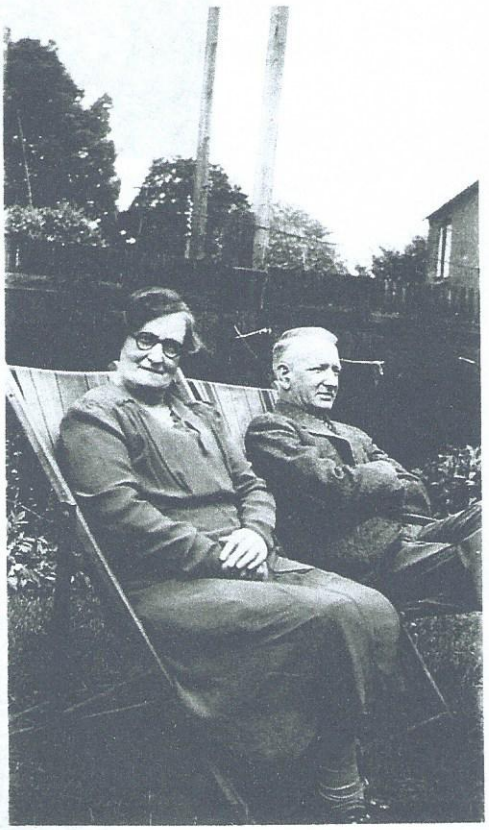


Dad on holiday.

Location and date unknown.

My Father and Mother with
Phyllis.
Circa 1917.

Easter 1951.
'Your money or your



Mother and Father on their
31st. Wedding Anniversary

garage. He wanted me to dress up and go on it. I said I would not. I was put under severe pressure, I remember it so well. I must have put up a very gutsy performance because, to everyone's disgust, I won. It's a funny thing but I have always hated dressing up for fancy dress balls and the like. Is there something wrong with me?.

But Penarth, arguably misnamed as the Cheltenham of South Wales, has much going for it. I have in mind the beautifully laid out gardens called 'The Dingle'. Until they disappeared some time ago, a puffing steam engine always reminded me of Penarth. It was a steep gradient up to Penarth station and from Aunt Alice's home we could hear engine after engine fighting it's way to the top. 'I think I can' 'I think I can't and then 'I thought I could' 'I thought I could'.

In much the same way a dog barking far in the distance always reminds me of holidays spent with my Mother's Aunt Polly at her little cottage on Bringsty Common near Bromyard in Worcestershire. It was an isolated cottage, well away from the main road, in the middle of bracken-covered, undulating common land. Access was down a muddy road, made even muddier by cows tramping down it for milking at the farm opposite.

Water was obtained from a clear natural spring a few hundred yards from the cottage. I don't know whether it was boiled before use, but drunk straight from its source it was delicious.

The owners of the dog I mentioned lived half a mile away across the valley, but with the wind in the right direction, the dog's bark came clear across to the cottage. Its funny how silly little memories stick.

I have mentioned Mother's sister Alice. Her other sister Floss, worked as a chief chef at numerous hotels up and down the country. One such appointment found her at the Dunrovan Hotel in Trevose, Cornwall. I don't know the details of the negotiated terms under which we all (less Dad) arrived at the hotel but I know I was expected to help in the kitchen and my sister Peggy to help at table. I think my other sister, Phyllis had already left home to train as a nurse (more of this later).

The journey to Cornwall was further than I had ever been before, the other side of the world in fact. One of the reasons I remember Trevose was because it was the first time I ever tried a cigarette. Not much to shout about one might think but in those days family discipline was much tighter than it is today and certainly I would have been for it had my Mother found out. It was a packet of 'Willy' Woodbines, five in number, bought for the princely sum of 2d., about 1p in today's currency.

Aunt Tab and Uncle Jeffcott (I think that's how it's spelt) lived just three miles* from Newent on the Gloucester Road. I've no idea of the relationship here but perhaps Phyllis or Peggy can help with this one. Aunt and Uncle had a large orchard (now a petrol filling station) and one day when staying with them, we saw a snake in the orchard. Someone identified it as an adder. It was late in the evening and a frantic call brought Uncle Jeff to the scene. He grabbed a garden fork and pinned it to the ground, saying, with some authority, that by sunrise it would be dead. Of course, after this comment, we were up at the crack of dawn and after a hearty breakfast (they always were in those days) we hurried to the orchard. Needless to

* See addendum

say the adder was still very much alive and we were asked to leave the scene and we all assumed that the adder was despatched by other means. A memory I will never lose because it is the only time I saw an adder in the wild.

As the years went by I was getting taller and taller. The tallest and I might add the thinnest pupil in our form at Newent Grammar School. No wonder my nicknames were Lofty, Spindle and Spriggy. The problem I had at this time was convincing my parents that I needed to make that all-important change from short to long trousers. It's not difficult to imagine what a 'Charlie' I felt with short shorts and short socks with a small peaked cap on my head. No wonder I collected those nick names. Perhaps it wasn't quite that bad but that's how it seemed to me.

Digressing a little, two of the school masters, one taught Geography and the other Maths, are still alive today and today is 1992. 'Mac' taught Geography and he was a chalk thrower and a head basher and one day Maurice Shorten called him a 'silly bugger' with dire results for 'Duffy' (Maurice's nickname). One day, if I bump into 'Mac' in Newent I will see if he remembers the incident as well as I do.

'Billy Beetroot', so called because he used to blush at the slightest sign of trouble, taught us Maths. I liked him, I liked him very much, and one day he called me out from the class and took me to the main hall under the stairs and to my astonishment asked for my help in the class. "Could I please do my utmost to prevent others in the class calling him 'Billy Beetroot' It was very embarrassing and could I try to stop it". I doubt if I was successful but I must have had a go.

Back to the trousers - At long last I got my own way and it was off to Gloucester to buy my first pair of long trousers. They were grey flannels and if Marks & Spencer existed in those days that's where they came from. For these, still the most important item of clothing I ever acquired, the sum of 4/11d. exchanged hands. It was also about this time that my parents bought me my first watch. A wrist watch, bought for the same sum as the trousers. To clarify - when we had our currency change, 240d. to the pound became 100p to the pound. So in present day currency, each of these purchases would be the equivalent to about 24.6 pence in today's currency. But as I have mentioned previously the average labourer of this period earned approximately two pounds and ten shillings a week. About £125.00 would be the equivalent today so the same watch and trousers purchased today would cost £12.50 each, so relative costs for these particular items remain about the same.

A single line railway track, operated by the Great Western Railway connected Gloucester to Ledbury, a distance of 18 miles and exactly half-way was Newent Railway Station. Initially there were little tank engines running over this route and then they introduced a single coach diesel driven 'railway coach'. Away with the old and in with the new. As I was getting older or perhaps it was the long trousers, I was allowed, occasionally, to travel into Gloucester on a Saturday by this latest transport. My fare for the return journey was 4½d. and the purpose of the trip was to visit one of Gloucester's five cinemas or, as we used to say, visit the 'flicks'

Leaving Gloucester station and en route to the cinema I would stop off and

buy a quarter pound of salted and roasted peanuts (piping hot) from Woolworths, these cost 2d., entrance into the cinema was 3d. (afternoon matinee) so the whole exciting outing cost 9½d. and if I had been given a 'bob' for the outing I made 2½d. profit. A fortune. A 'bob' was slang for one shilling (12 old pence).

This railway line was to get the 'chop' under Lord Beeching's drastic reduction of unprofitable British railway lines and a by-pass road now runs along the bed of the old track.

Once, when using Newent station I was asked to mind a horse. Whilst holding the bridle it reared up, I turned away sharply and knocked my head against a lamp post. When I regained consciousness the owner had returned and the horse was still there. Apparently I had been 'out' stone cold for some seconds and I saw artificial stars for the first time.

The railway, before the town by-pass was constructed, ran alongside Newent Court estate. Many years ago this building was partially destroyed by fire and the remainder demolished and cleared. The whole area became the site of new urbanisation with many houses being built and streets formed. Fortunately a proposal to fill in a large lake in the grounds was squashed and Newent lake is now one of the town's major attractions.

As a boy I was a member of the local Wolf Cubs and then I graduated to the Scouts. My time with the Cubs was not particularly memorable but we had a great time with the Scouts.

Colonel Parkinson was the owner of Newent Court and it was our good fortune that he was also our Scout Master. One of the benefits we enjoyed from that combination was the full freedom of the grounds of Newent Court which included the lake, the woods and a steeply banked stream which ran through them.

We fished the lake, canoed on the lake, built timber bridges over the stream and on the dark winter nights we had camp fires around which we sang all the scouting songs of the day.

If the lake froze over the general public were allowed into the grounds. The ice had to be 3ins thick for this to happen. Obviously a good safety measure because, over the years, I never heard of a fatality caused by cracking ice.

One Guy Fawkes night a mock battle was staged. This was carried out during a firework display in Newent Court grounds. There was a defended force at the top of the slope. We had to attack across the lake in the canoe, land and advance up the slope lobbing 'little demons' (bangers) in the general direction of the defenders. It was a dark night and somehow a banger landed in the defending force's supply of fireworks. It was quite a display and I suppose we won. I can't imagine this exercise was carried out with the Colonel's permission. In hindsight a highly dangerous game and we were lucky no one was injured.

After the Scouts I joined the Rover Scouts but by now war had broken out and I had also joined the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. My time was split between the two but eventually it was to be all St. John's Ambulance.

Some nights, when the wind was in the right direction, we could hear the

distant rumble of guns and bombs as Jerry was attacking Bristol. The idea was that our team would be called upon to assist in the city and although we were always at the ready (albeit at the dartboard) we were never called upon. But I did know how to strap up a fracture and support a broken collar bone and I had my badge of office to prove it. But I am jumping ahead, shortly after this I was to volunteer for the Royal Air Force. This momentous decision terminated my life in Newent and I was to return only to visit my parents and sister and in later years my sister.

When cousin Peter came to live with us at our Broad Street home we were given the same bedroom at the rear of the house and access to it was through my parents' bedroom.

I suppose what I remember most about this room was the extreme cold in winter. There was no heating and if the temperature outside was below freezing so it was with the temperature inside. Bedclothes piled so high they made our shoulders ache just about did the trick and kept us warm. Also pillow fights with Peter helped to warm us up and prepare us for the night ahead.

Saturday nights were special treat nights. I used to go to bed early, equipped with five Sharps Eaton Toffees (value ½d.) and 'The Modern Boy', a boys' magazine of those days (value 2d.) In the winter months reading was by candlelight and when one hand started to freeze from holding the magazine just outside the bedclothes the other hand replaced it. Captain Cloud, skipper of a large airship & Ken something or other, skipper of a ketch plying the South Seas were my favourites and many a Saturday evening passed with my being engrossed in the adventures of these two.

Peter was going through the same routine on the opposite side of the bedroom but I don't recall what he read.

We both had to join forces if there was heavy rain in the night because quite a considerable amount would find its way into our bedroom. It usually came through the ceiling in one place, so a chamber pot suitably placed would usually look after the problem. Some old bit of cloth in the chamber to deaden the sound of the plop-plop of course. Sometimes the leak would play tricks and finish up over one of the beds causing us to move the furniture around. Builders came and went but they never repaired that roof successfully. Perhaps the fact that it was 400 years old had something to do with it.

Now is the appropriate time to mention that my Father rented the shop and the living accommodation from a Mr. Akerman, a relation of Akerman's the butchers just two doors away. In those days certain legislation fixed the rent and once fixed the landlord could not increase it, so, to overcome this problem the landlord would ensure that the tenant had to carry out all his own external and internal decoration and also all repairs to the property. As I said previously there was not too much money in the kitty so, externally, only dire repairs were carried out. My father did all the internal decoration and indeed seemed to spend most his spare time decorating. I think the rent paid was 7/6d. a week - just over a third of a pound.

Back to Peter's and my sleeping accommodation. Just when we seemed to

Newent has been famous for its daffodils for many years. Here school children collect bunches of daffodils to send to London to brighten dull hospital wards. This was organised by the Newent British Legion, and the collection date is shown as 11 April 1930. Pub. anon.

That's me - third from the right.

Just 7½ years old.

My Father's sisters. May on left and Winnie on right. Winnie remained a spinster. Tom was killed in the Great War and I have his medals. Photograph of Bert, Father's other brother appears elsewhere

As a choir boy. Circa 193[illegible].

As a scout. Circa 1937.

Mother with her two sisters. Floss on the left and Alice on the right. There were two brothers. Lennard killed in the Great War and Walter [illegible]

With [illegible]

have got everything organised we were moved to the attic. This was a good move, for one thing we no longer had to pass through my parent's bedroom. Taxing my memory a little, but I think this move was to make room for our evacuees and possibly to keep us away from the female element of this intake. Peter and I enjoyed ourselves in the attic. We were away from everybody and as long as we kept the place reasonably tidy we were left alone.

More about the attic. It was divided into three rooms or a better term would be three areas. Our bedroom, an area accessible by stepping over one of the low roof beams (which was full of accumulated junk) and a third area through a small opening into a dark section immediately underneath the roof. We never disclosed our feelings to each other but I suspect Peter like myself was just a little apprehensive about that dark hole particularly in the dead of night.

Perhaps it was because of this that we built up a very complicated system of lighting in the sleeping area, comprising of dry cell batteries, torch light bulbs, switches and yards of electric flex. It worked, and at the touch of a switch from either Peter's or my bedside the room was flooded with light.

On days of celebration i.e. Coronations, Jubilees, Royalty deaths or events of similar national importance my father liked to hang out a Union Jack. Of course it had to be at the highest level and that, of course, was our bedroom window. The problem of securing the flagpole was easily overcome. It was fastened to the iron bedstead nearest the window. If the wind blew the beds rattled and we didn't sleep. Our complaints landed on deaf ears but we enjoyed our stay in the attic and the rain didn't come in.

At this time there were only two places in the country where wild daffodils grew profusely. Kent in S.E. England and Newent. We were very proud of this and people used to travel from far and wide to pick them. Now it is an offence to pick them.

One of the big annual events in Newent was the sending of wild daffodils to the hospitals of London.

School children, during an appointed period, would go out into the woods and fields to collect daffodils and the idea was to collect more bunches than your mates. A bunch being the amount one could hold in one hand. When the big day arrived it was normal for me to carry ten or twelve bunches to the school. We all congregated in the school playground and marched off through the town to the Comrades Club, which was just a few yards from my father's shop. The town's brass band turned out for this occasion and Comrades' Club members, including my father, would be waiting with dozens of very large cardboard boxes. These were duly filled with our daffodils, taken to the railway station and dispatched to London Hospitals. Even then I wondered just how long would a daffodil survive in a cardboard box and if it did what would its 'shelf life' be when distributed around the wards. But I suppose it was the caring thought behind it all which mattered most.

The religious content of my early days was pretty intense. I can't remember at what age I became a choirboy but I was pretty young and it necessitated going to

church at least twice every Sunday. I also attended Sunday school at the local Parish Rooms most Sunday afternoons. After each visit we received a religious stamp to stick in a special book provided. I suppose this was to prove to our parents that we had not played truant.

My schoolboy friend, Raymond Beachus, whom I have already mentioned lived next door to the Parish Rooms and the old Sunday School is now a voluntarily-run Church restaurant.

As a matter of interest, Ray's father's garage in Church Street has now become a very popular Victorian Museum and there is a small square amongst the Victorian shops called Beachus Square, a nice little memorial to the family. The small living room where Ray continually beat me at darts is now a model Victorian kitchen.

Ray must have been a pretty good indoor sportsman because not only did he usually beat me at darts but also snooker and billiards. The billiards and snooker was played at the George Hotel, just across the road from the garage and we were allowed, as fifteen and sixteen year olds, to play in the games room providing we did not go into the bar. Also at the 'George' I learnt to play West Country nine pin skittles. This has stood me in good stead because we still play the game at social gatherings in Bournemouth.

It was one of these evenings when I first tried smoking a pipe and either because I was showing off or because I thought it was the thing to do, I inhaled the smoke, fatal with a pipe, and when I got home I could hardly stand my head was spinning so much. My Mother was convinced I had been drinking and told me off in no uncertain measure. I was in a 'catch 22' situation.

I couldn't tell her I had been smoking a pipe because I wasn't too sure that the punishment might be more severe for smoking than drinking.

I'm digressing. Back to religion. Over the years I got to know the morning and evening services inside out and although I found great difficulty in learning passages from 'A Midsummer's Night's Dream' for my School Certificate exam, I had no difficulty in learning, off by heart, dozens of hymns and prayers.

When my voice broke I had grown to be a pretty tall lad, imposing I suppose, and that's not what I thought but what our vicar the Rev. C. Burnell must have thought. At the time of this voice breaking, I was asked, in strict confidence, to continue to sit at the head of the choir and if necessary to mime. The boy sitting next to me was about 2'0" shorter so I could see the logic behind the vicar's request. Fortunately, this arrangement did not last too long and I never did join the senior choir but moved directly to pumping the organ. No electric pumps in those days the job was done by manual labour. This I did for the princely sum of 30/- per annum and a seat on the annual choir outing. Whilst on the question of money, if the choir was requested for funerals and weddings, we used to collect 2/6d. for each wedding and 3/6d. for each funeral. These were very good 'pay-outs' but I never could work out why there was a difference.

Highlight of the choristers' year was the St. Mary Church annual choir outing - usually to Weston-super-Mare or Ludlow or somewhere fairly close by. I always

used to try and wangle a seat at the back of the coach with a certain lass who was in the same form as myself at Newent Grammar School (we were co-ed at the Grammar) and although I used to get the odd dance with her at the Women's Institute Annual Dance I am pretty sure she never guessed the thoughts I harboured in her direction. I haven't mentioned her name and she will remain nameless. For dancing I was the proud owner of a pair of patent leather 'pumps' which were fastidiously cleaned with milk.

When 'blowing' the organ the tune I used to hate was 'The Halleluiah Chorus'. It used to take so much wind. I would be pumping like mad and that little brass weight would be fluctuating up and down near the danger level and the music would start to falter and all eyes went - not to the organist- but to me. At least that's what I thought although I was a little bit out of sight tucked away around a corner

One day when I was about ten or eleven years old I must have told 'Duffy' Shorten, a local farmer's son and the boy who swore at Mac the geography master, that I would like a dog. Later he brought a pannier bag to school and in it was a puppy for me to take home. After my parents had shown initial shock and after much debate I was allowed to keep it. 'Duffy' said it was a cross between a 'pom' and an Alsatian. Later I was to believe the 'pom' bit because Jock had a pitch black tongue but an Alsatian? – no way. Jock never grew any larger than a terrier. For some reason Jock developed a nasty little protective temper. His favourite refuge was under the kitchen sideboard, once underneath, no-one could get him out.

Before Jock there was a black and white Jack Russell terrier called 'Roamer'. His home was a beer barrel, hopefully cleaned out, with an entrance cut in one end. It must have been blocked up with something otherwise it would have finished up rolling all over the garden every time Roamer got into it. I was very young at the time and I don't remember much about Roamer but I do appear on old photographs with him.

Many years later, when Sylvia, Keith and myself were visiting Newent one Eastertide, we took with us our current dog, a golden retriever called Raff (Raff II was to follow later) I was still lying abed on Easter Sunday morning when there was a commotion on the top lawn. Raff had pinched sister Peggy's new Easter bonnet and was systematically tearing it apart. It's funny how one recalls an incident but not necessarily the outcome - as on this occasion. But I would guess that Raff was in the 'doghouse' for some time because of this incident.

Mondays were always wash days. No machines to assist in those days. Clothes were boiled in a large copper (the same one which supplied the bath water) and then scrubbed over a corrugated wash board. Sometimes, today, they use these as a form of musical instrument. The nearest Mother got to a spin dryer was her own hands and a large mangle with wooden rollers.

Washdays were tough days by present day standards but at that time, in our household, the mangle represented the most up to date equipment. Monday lunch, in the summer months, was always taken in the wash house because that's where all the action was. It was nearly always 'bubble and squeak' and cold meat from the

Sunday roast.

I always came home from school for lunch. Before I went to Newent Grammar it was Picklenash School at the top of the Ross Road. It was about a mile and I usually ran all the way. On one occasion, to make the journey more interesting, I made a contraption I could carry. A wooden pair of handlebars with four propellers attached (the actual propellers being made from cigarette cards). The faster one ran the faster the propellers turned round. A simple device compared with the four propellers I was later to handle.

In those days cigarette cards, one from every packet of ten cigarettes, were collected by most schoolboys. They were in sets, of fifty and could be of cars, aeroplanes, footballers and the like. One way of enlarging ones collection was to play your mates at 'tips'. Each player, in turn, would skim a card against a wall and this would continue until one card fell on another, covering the card's narrow margin. The thrower then collected all the cards on the ground. If a player just had 'tips', touching a card but not covering the margin, he could have another throw. Full sets of these cards, framed for wall hanging are available today.

As I wrote earlier, I went on to join the Royal Air Force and Peter was apprenticed to the Newent International Stores, our largest grocers. He was three years younger than I and when he reached 'joining up' age he joined the Guards and found himself on tanks. Fortunately for Peter the war was entering its final stages. I don't think I would have fancied fighting in a tank and I had much the same thoughts about submarines. I suppose that's why I chose to fly.

Peggy, three years older, gave up her job in the Bon Marché Gloucester and helped in the war effort by working in the Rotol Airscrew factory on the Cheltenham/Gloucester Road.

Sister Phyllis, six years older went off to Bristol to train as a nurse when I was 10 years old and finished up in the Queen Alexander's Nursing Service doing war service in Kenya and Burma.

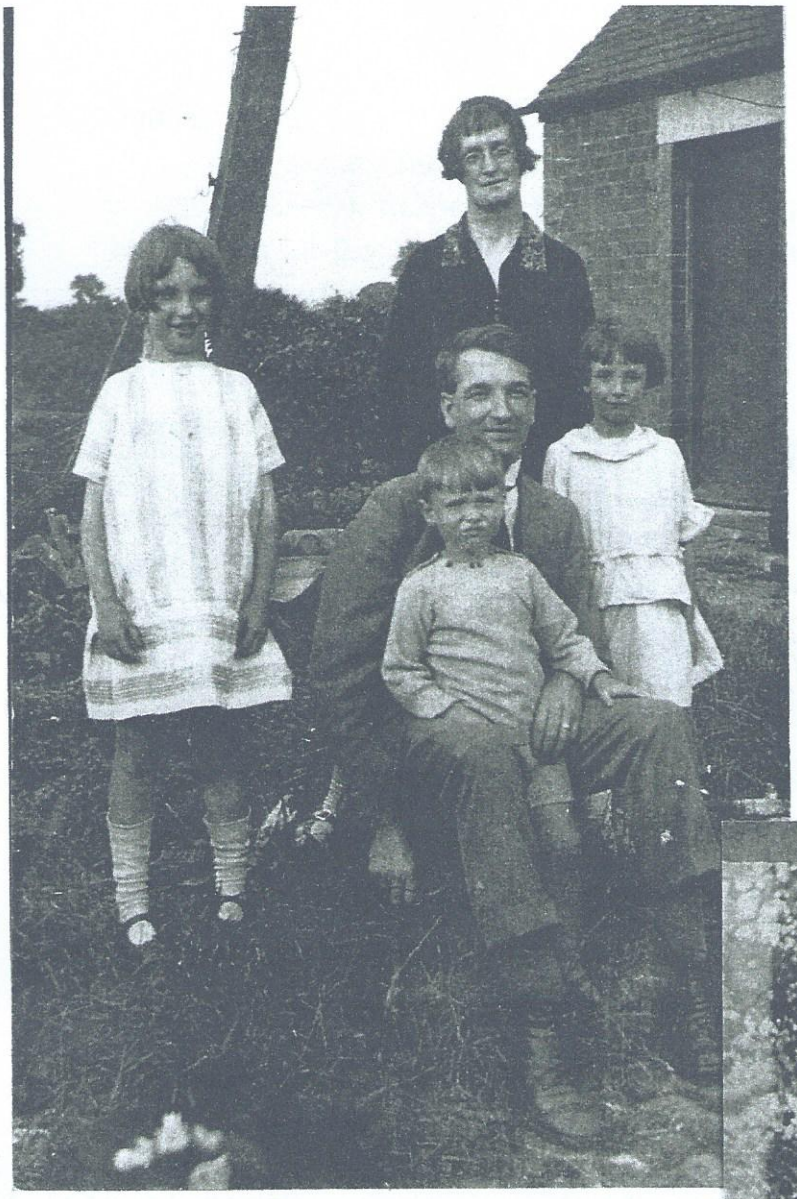
Sylvia, my first wife, was an evacuee from London and billeted in Newent. I met her when she was 15 years old and I was 18.

But the contents of the last three paragraphs are stories in their own rights and are not dealt with here.

Hopefully, someone will find these jottings of interest. In any event, as one gets older they say the memory begins to fade a little so perhaps I might find them useful reading in the years to come.

Grandmother Rowley. Mother's Grandmother. Circa (photo) 188
Philip and Catherine's Great Great Great Grandmother.

My Mother's sister Floss (Peter's mother)
with her father, Grandfather Harris (whom I never knew)



The family.
Circa 1926

Grandma Jones standing.
Stranger sitting.
My father extreme right.
Next Uncle Tom. Killed in the First World War (I have his medals).
Baby is Aunty Winnie (she remained a spinster).
Extreme left Aunty May (married widower Arthur Hannis who had two daughters and one son).

Circa 1884.

Uncle Bert not in photo.

Father's mother Grandma Jones. The only grandparent I remember.

Father's brother Herbert. Uncle Bert. Their brother Tom was killed in the Great War.

.....

.....Newent.....

.....May 30.....193.3

EXAMINATION FOR THE AWARD OF SPECIAL PLACES

.....Newent Grammar SCHOOL.

DEAR SIR, OR MADAM,

I am requested to inform you that your.....Son Eric.....has been selected for the award of a Special Place in the above-named School, so far as educational requirements are concerned. In accordance with the regulations of the Board of Education the value of each Special Place has to be fixed in relation to the income of the parents. If that income falls below £3 10s. 0d. per week, in the case of a family of two parents and one dependent child, or £4 per week if there are two dependent children, and so on, the pupil will be entitled to enter the Secondary School without payment of fees for tuition, books or stationery. Where the parents' income exceeds the minimum of the scale, the parents will be asked to pay one-quarter, or one-half, or three-quarters of the full School fee, or the full School fee, according to the amount of their income.

In order that the value of your child's Special Place may be ascertained it is desired that the enclosed Form 66 H may be completed and returned to the undersigned at your earliest convenience.

A further communication will then be sent to you stating the value of the award.

Yours faithfully,

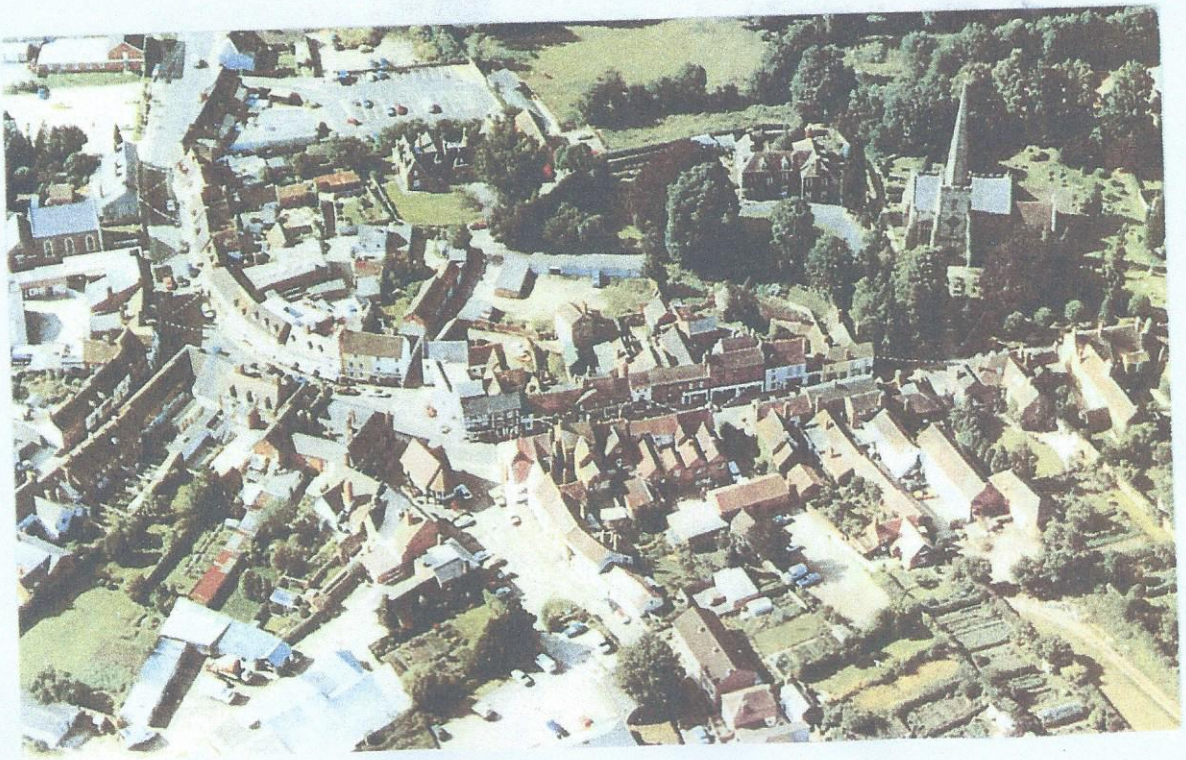
C. F. Reed

Clerk to the Governors.

With cousin Peter and Jock.
Circa 1936.

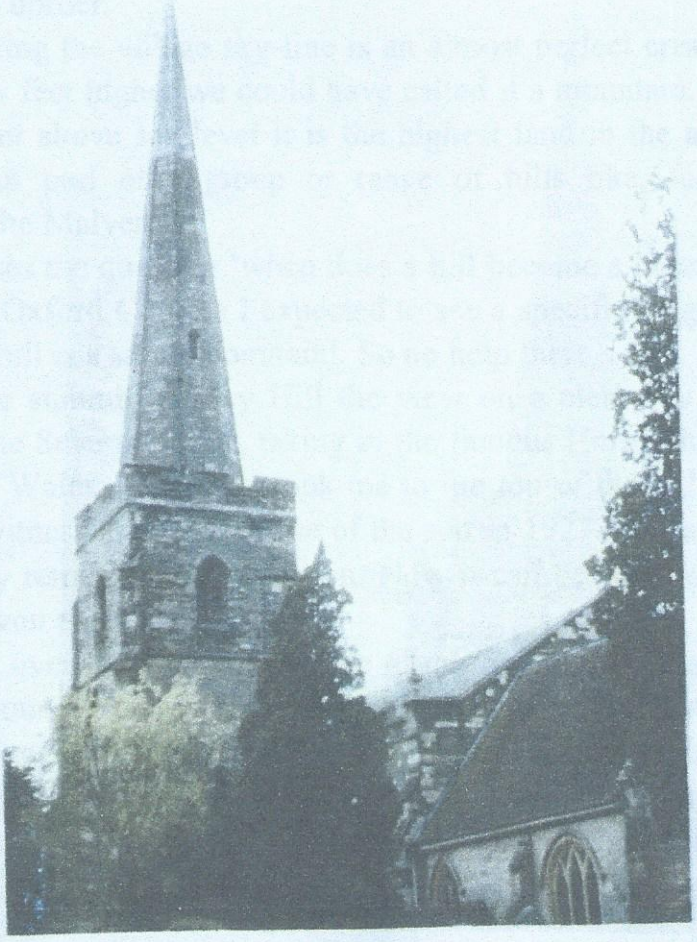
Photograph taken whilst Peter
was living with us at Newent.
Location: The Crofts.
Date: Circa 1934.

The old shop as it was in 1985.



Newent from a hot air balloon.

Newent Grammar school.
(after introduction of
new road scheme)



St. Mary's Church.

Even More Jumbled Recollections of Boyhood

It is now 1998, some five years since I finished writing the first 'jumbled recollections'. During those five years I have been jotting down further memories as they came to mind.

I think there's now sufficient of these to start putting them on paper. Should the reader think that 'enough is enough' and slip away to watch TV, I would be only mildly disappointed because, for me, the very act of writing is good therapy and keeps me, I hope, gainfully occupied. Also there is the added advantage of such writing providing knowledge of the past should my memory start to deteriorate. Although I am now 76 years old, I do hope this state does not concern me for some time, if ever. By the same token, if there is any repetition of previous writing perhaps the reader will exercise forgiveness. I just cannot keep back checking - I am too lazy.

So it's back to my home village of Newent on the Gloucestershire and Herefordshire border.

Dominating the village sky-line is an almost perfect crescent-shaped hill. If it was just a few feet higher we could have called it a mountain. Its name is May Hill and at 971 feet above sea level it is the highest land in the area. It is isolated - it does not form part of a group or range of hills like, for example, its close neighbours, The Malverns.

This raises the question 'when does a hill become a mountain'. When I looked this up in the Oxford Concise I expected to see a specific height mentioned, instead it just said 'a hill is a small mountain!. So no help there.

From the summit of May Hill the view on a clear day is stupendous. From right across the Severn Valley, taking in the famous Horse Shoe Bend to the Black Mountains of Wales. My father took me to the top of the hill when I was just five years old to witness the total eclipse of the sun in 1927. At least I think it was total. I only vaguely remember the occasion. Now it can be witnessed again in 1999 but only from Devon and Cornwall.

To walk over the summit was one of our Sunday afternoon pastimes. It was a long walk, about six or seven miles, but well worth the effort. A gradual climb to the top and down the steep escarpment on the Longhope side to The Glasshouse. Crowning the hill is a copse of ninety nine fir trees. As a boy I was told that attempts to grow the hundredth fir always failed. I never bothered to count the trees;

I thought it easier just to believe what I was told. They were planted to commemorate one of Queen Victoria's Jubilees.

We were too young to go into The Glasshouse Inn. That was a pleasure to be savoured many years later when the war was behind us and I would enjoy a man-to-man pint with my father.

Not far past the Glasshouse Inn and en route to the Taynton road (one way home to Newent) a large house had become a nudist colony. Quite a shaker for a small country village like Newent. If my memory serves me correctly, it was surrounded by a large protective fence but there were peep holes to be found and there was always hope that someone would be spotted in their 'birthday suit' only in those days we called it 'being starkers'. For my part I had no such luck!

And so home to Sunday tea. Always a special occasion and always in the living room. Funnily enough a part of the house which was seldom used in the week. Sunday tea usually meant Mrs Nunn's fresh cottage loaf with butter, jam and cake - a combination which only appeared on Sundays.

As young children we always thought the May Hill walk to be the biggest walking challenge but many years later when I was a member of the local Boy Scouts, moonlight treks over the Malvern Hills from one end to the other was the order of the day. These were considered to be great fun until one night we were caught out in thick mist. It turned out to be a long, cold night and the trek was no longer fun.

Mrs Nunn ran a small bakery just a few shops down the street from our shop and as well as her excellent bread she made delicious ice cream but my favourites were her home-made sponge fingers, the kind which normally disappeared into trifles. I treated them like cakes.

Another favourite Sunday walk was to Pauntley church. The distance was slightly less than the May Hill walk. You will have heard of Dick Whittington and his cat setting off on a walk to London, well Pauntley was his starting point. Although Dick Whittington was an historical fact, his cat was not - there is no record of a cat accompanying him but it's a good fairy tale and pantomime material, so who cares. The distance to London from Pauntley is about 120 miles but Dick's walk was well rewarded because, as we all know, he did become Lord Mayor of London on more than one occasion.

Shortly before joining the Royal Air Force and going off to war, I walked with Sylvia, my first wife, to Pauntley. The church is very old and could be either Saxon or Norman in origin. It was small, very small and when we entered it was empty. Not knowing what the future would hold and in the quiet of the church we conducted our own mock marriage ceremony, pledging ourselves to the real thing at the end of the war. In the event we were married in April 1944, shortly after I had completed my tour of operations over Germany, not waiting for the end of the war.

Puff's Alley was a foot path running alongside Mr Markey's forge. Only a short distance from home it was a turning off Culver Street. A brook ran the length of the alley and this was a happy hunting ground for us small kids. We used to go

armed with our jam jars and butterfly nets and the target was the abundance of minnows and sticklebacks which thrived in the stream. Triumphantly we would return home with our jam jars suspended from loops of string and full of small fish. Of course the fun was in catching the fish and displaying the catch. Keeping them was another matter and sad to relate after a few days their demise became inevitable.

In only a few short years it was fishing of a different nature. It was a whole day's expedition, usually on a Sunday when the shop was closed. It was indeed a special treat to accompany my father on one of these fishing trips.

The destination was usually Malswick Mill, just a couple of miles from the village on the Gloucester road. The stretch of water my father was allowed to fish was a section of the River Leadon, a tributary of the Severn but nothing like the Severn's width but it was larger than the stream in Puff's Alley.

Here we would catch eels, dabs, roach and perch. Sometimes a salmon trout which may have slipped through a net from protected fishing further upstream. They were a little dry to the taste but nevertheless a real treat. Eels were a nuisance. They would wriggle and squirm and double back on themselves twisting around the fishing line. Still, once they had been despatched and unravelled and transported to the frying pan they made an excellent meal.

Whilst on the subject of eels it may be worth mentioning that the River Severn is one of the few places where elvers are caught. Elvers, or small eels, about the size of a worm, are alleged to swim all the way across the Atlantic ocean from the eel spawning grounds in the Saragossa Sea. Cooked the same way as their parents, in deep frying oil, they looked like a plate of short spaghetti.

It was not easy to be alone with my father. The shop kept him busy five and a half days a week and every Sunday was usually spent with the whole family. It was on Sundays we made those trips to Nailsworth, the Malverns and to Uncle Bert and Auntie Flo in Gloucester. This did leave early closing Wednesdays and if there was going to be any chance of getting my father to myself, this was the time and of course only during the school holidays.

One of these afternoons would see the two of us setting off on a shooting expedition with a Mr Mark Lake. Mark was a friend of my father and he was the proud possessor of a 12 bore shot gun and a brace of ferrets. The ferrets were a kind of back up team. If it was rabbits we were after and if the bag was insufficient, the ferrets were sent into the rabbit warren to chase the rabbits out into the open. Unfortunately the ferrets weren't allowed to roam freely. The both had a long leash and sometimes, deep underground, the leashes would become entangled in a tree root. It was then necessary to introduce an essential piece of equipment - the spade - and this is the area where I helped to pull my weight. They would not let me shoot the 12 bore but they were only too pleased to hand me the spade. Sometimes it took ages to get a ferret out of the warren and remember, don't forget to put on those tough hedging gloves - a ferret has strong teeth!

Long before this, however, I realised the necessity of keeping myself amused. There were boyhood friends. Bonzo Usher, Herbie Field and Ray Beachus all come to mind but they weren't available all the time. My two sisters, both much older than myself, had little interest in playing boys' games and on many an afternoon during the holidays I found myself in the garden fending for myself. So, like most children finding themselves in a similar situation I used to enter into the realms of fantasy.

Guns and swords were manufactured from a Meccano kit or pieces of timber and with these I would become a swashbuckling pirate or a sheriff of the wild west or whatever. On one occasion I remember tying myself to the line post so well that my mother had to come in response to my yells and untie the knots. All this changed when father made a dramatic decision and bought a horse drawn hansome cab minus the horse and wheels and had it placed on the top lawn. Now the cowboy image sprang vividly to life and the imagination really could run wild. It also brought my sisters back into the garden and once again I had company. I cannot remember the going of that superb plaything but the weather was getting to it causing the upholstery and woodwork to look much the worse for wear. However, whatever Dad paid for it we certainly had his money's worth.

It must have been around this time that suddenly and for no apparent reason I started to suffer from severe headaches. We used to have an old iron portable bed and Mother used to drag this onto the York stone paving of the back yard and order me to lie on it until the headache ceased. I can still remember those occasions - lying on my back staring up at the blue sky and waiting patiently for the headache to go.

Staying with the back yard it is worth mentioning that the old stone pump trough was still there with the remains of the pump itself. Somewhere under the yard there would have been a well but this must have been slabbed over. We never looked for it so never found it.

Akermans, the butchers, were just two doors away from the shop. They used to supply our Sunday roast. This would last two or three days. On other days it most likely would be tripe and onions cooked in milk or faggots and peas, and sometimes fish and chips from the 'fry up' across the road and next to Barlow's sweet shop.

Akermans had their own small abattoir at the rear of their premises. We became accustomed to the dull thud of the stun gun clearly heard from our garden - a noise which always heralded the death of another animal. This was a more acceptable memory than one which I will never forget. I forget my exact age at the time but I must have been about ten years old. I was playing in the garden of Cooks the bakers at the top of the High Street with Bonzo Usher and Herbie Field when a squealing pig was pulled from a lorry and dragged to an open space in the garden and hoisted on to a low bench. We weren't supposed to be around but we were hiding in the shrubbery and we stayed fascinated and transfixed. Two men fought to hold the pig down and then they slit its throat. The screams of that poor animal as

Playing in the Hansom cab
(Lindwood stable) with 'Bonzo'
Usher.

Phyllis as an officer in the
Queen Alexander's Nurses
Service seeing service in
East Africa and Burma.

its blood poured into a bucket was something I will never forget. Why couldn't they have used the abattoir and stunned the poor beast first?

Although living in the heart of agricultural land I knew little of farming. I was, if there is such a thing, a village 'townee'. My only contact with farming came through boyhood friends. To this day I have never been on the back of a horse. I have followed them when ploughing a single furrow (I wasn't driving) and helped to stable them at the end of hard day's work (the horse's) but never, ever sat on one.

I keep referring to Newent as a village. I was never quite sure whether it was a village or a town. With a population of around 2000 it was on the border line. When I was a lad Newent held a market every week in the Square and livestock was bought and sold. I am not too sure when this practice ceased but I understand that because of this fact, Newent should have been classified as a town. In future I will call it a town.

By and large, in those early days when I was in my early teens we had to make our own entertainment - in the fields, beside the many streams and in the Recreation Ground in Watery Lane. In the winter months and if we were at a loss to do anything else, Saturday mornings usually found us playing football in the 'Rec'. I was lucky, not only did my father sell boots and shoes he also sold football boots and leather footballs. So obviously I was well equipped. One of my father's many sidelines was servicing Newent Town Football Club's equipment including blowing up their footballs and re-studding their boots. The town football club was a very successful team. I think it was 1938 when they won their league and also picked up four cups that season. Football excitement in the town reached fever pitch that year.

On those Saturday mornings we just kicked a ball around and usually with yours truly in the goal. These mornings served as practice for my attempts at goal keeping for the Grammar School team. As I was so tall the sports master thought I had to be a good goalkeeper, at least that's how he saw it. He was to be sadly disillusioned. On one occasion I let in 21 goals playing against Ledbury Grammar School. I consoled myself with the fact that half of their team played for Ledbury Town and they were huge and towered above us. I was duly relieved of my goalkeeping role and never stood between the goalposts again.

My cricketing ambitions were also rapidly diminished when, one day, fielding at 'silly mid on' I took a full-force ball in the 'you know whats'. My interest in cricket waned from that day forth.

I suppose I really was an indoor sportsman. I loved to play table tennis at which I became rather proficient. Darts I enjoyed along with billiards, snooker and nine pin skittles. I was always very competitive and still am when I play golf and bowls but I never let it cloud my enjoyment of the game.

I suppose the only regular source of organised entertainment in the town was the small cinema cum concert hall in Culver Street. Its basic use was as a cinema and it was here I saw and heard my first talking 'movie' and also my first coloured one. I forget their titles but one very early one does come to mined and it was 'The King of Jazz', this 'flick' as we called them being in colour and sound.

During the performances there were always three or four intervals when the operator changed the reels of film. Sometimes, more frequently than not, the film would break and the show would stop to the ironic cheers of the audience.

The cinema also ran a Saturday morning club for youngsters. The entrance fee was the princely sum of 3d. I suppose this is where I acquired my love of Westerns. Sometimes they were run in serial form - you know - 'don't forget to come next Saturday and see if Hoot Gibson escapes the deadly trap'. Yes, he was a great favourite and so was Tom Mix and his horse Trigger. The masked Lone Ranger and his white horse Silver were also very popular.

On one memorable occasion I actually appeared before the public on the stage of this small theatre. The occasion was a Boy Scout concert based very loosely on Ralph Reader's famous Gang Show. I was half of a singing duo who gave a very gusty rendering of 'There's a hole in my bucket dear Liza, dear Liza. Then mend it dear Georgie, dear Georgie'. I was the Georgie half. My 'drag' was not good enough for a Liza.

Brian Jones lived next door to the cinema. He was my own age and in my form at the Grammar School. I was church and he was chapel and we became good friends. Even today we meet occasionally. He lives at Downtown on the Salisbury road. He was my table tennis partner and he had access to a full sized table stored in the community room of the Congregational Chapel. The chapel was on the other side of Broad Street opposite the shop.

It was in this room, around 1930, that I saw my first silent moving picture. Unlike the cinema in Culver Street where I saw my first 'talkie' this projector was operated by hand. The film was called 'The White Hell of Pitz Palu' and appearing in the film was Ernst Udet. Udet had been a German air ace in the first World War and was famed for his dare devil flying. In this film he flew with his wing tips almost touching the vertical mountain face and if we wanted to see it in slow motion all we had to do was to ask the operator to wind the handle a little bit slower.

Before we leave Newent's little theatre I remember its other attractions besides film shows and local concerts. Professional variety acts used to visit the town. These were occasional rather than regular. On one such visit a strong man act called in on us. He was almost a one man show and his name was Carl Dane. I never saw him on stage but he was scheduled to tow a lorry along Broad Street with his teeth clamped onto the tow rope. Well, practically the whole of Newent turned out to witness this incredible feat. He did not pull the lorry very far but he did move it and the street was adjudged to be level and he did not lose any teeth. What a strong man!

The roaring 20's. The 1920's. At this time American gangsters were shooting it out on the streets of New York with Tommy guns ablaze in order to gain control of the sale of prohibited liquor and here, in England, we had the new dancing rage - the Charleston. A dance with a difference which was sweeping the country. Women wore cloche hats which looked a bit like inverted basins and occasionally, very

occasionally, a rickety old aeroplane would fly over Newent and in 1927 I went to school for the first time.

It was Picklenash school on the Ross Road and the only qualification necessary was to have attained the aged of five years. I remember little of the infants' school only the shape of the playground and classroom come to mind. There was a Bill Sysum and a Frank Foster and even today I think of a Frank I know as Frank Foster.

The next step was Junior school and I do have one or two memories of this period.

A Mr Hudson was headmaster - we called him 'Boss' Hudson and he ruled the school with a rod of iron or rather a willowy, swishy cane.

One day I was talking in class to my next door neighbour and 'Boss' Hudson walked into the room and apparently my crime was not talking but the way I was doing it. Talking behind my hand. Because of this somewhat unusual crime I felt a few blows across the hand from his swishy cane.

Just a few days later he came into the classroom to talk to the teacher and guess what - he put his hand to his face and talked behind it. My efforts to point this out to my fellow classmates did not go unnoticed by the 'Boss' and he quickly removed his hand. Why couldn't I cane him as he had caned me? There was no justice.

I have written elsewhere that cousin Peter came to live with us for many years. Shortly before his death he shared his 70th birthday celebrations with my wife Barbara who also achieved that age in the same year. At the party, Peter also repeated a 'Boss' Hudson story to me and this was not for the first time. Peter was alleged by a certain Mrs Biscoe to have thrown stones at the church clock which was situated above the main entrance door. Mrs Biscoe was the wife of the local Postmaster and the Post Office was right opposite the church. She gave all the details to 'Boss' Hudson. Peter hotly denied the charge but this did not prevent 'Boss' accepting Mrs Biscoe's story. So Peter was caned in front of the assembled pupils. Peter never got over the injustice of it all and, as said, mentioned it yet again at his 70th.

One day in the Picklenash school playground, I balanced a piece of board across a kerbstone, put a stone on one end and stamped on the other. The idea was to shoot the stone into the air as far as possible. Unfortunately there was a nail sticking up just where I stamped. My yells brought rapid medical attention and they wrapped up the wound, put me in a garden wheelbarrow and wheeled me home. My parents - after the initial shock - must have thought me a prize fool.

One other event sticks in my memory. For some reason or other, a schoolmate Nick Francis (son of the local Sanitary Inspector) and myself had provoked the anger of a gang of bullies and we were both threatened with dire consequences when we left the school to go home. Apparently there were amassing at the school gates. Nick and I thought the odds much too great so we climbed over the playground fence and into Akerman's field and high-tailed it for home via the back

entrance. Fortunately tempers must have abated the next morning. I don't recall any fisticuffs.

I passed the 11 plus examination at the aged of 10 and gained a place at the Grammar School. It was a free place because my father's income was less than the borderline amount of £4 per week.

Memories of the Grammar School are recorded elsewhere but there should a 'Jones tree' on the school playing field at the top of Lamb's Barn pitch. When the school acquired the playing field it badly needed landscaping so the call went out to all parents to contribute a tree. My parents responded, so their tree should be quite a size today considering it was planted approximately 60 years ago.

My sister Phyllis, six years my senior, left the Grammar School the year before I joined it and my other sister, Peggy, three years my senior, continued her education at Picklenash.

Amazingly, in this year of 1998, Mr Matthews 'Mac' for short and our geography master is still alive today. He must be over 90 years old now. Memories of 'Mac' include chalk throwing and head slapping. Quite normal procedures in those days but I wonder what the reaction would be today to such disciplinary methods. Anyway our form must have thought highly of 'Mac' because I remember contributing towards the purchase of a cut glass bowl for some reason or another. My parents must have supplied the money for my contribution although, having been on the end of his strict discipline many times, I could hardly have been in agreement with the arrangement.

Our next door shop was a jewellers and the owners were the Wiltons. It was their son Ray who endeavoured, without success, to teach me how to play the piano. Their daughter Eileen would eventually become Mac's second wife but this was not until I had long left the Grammar School. Ray and Eileen were much older than the three of us and I always had a feeling that their father was not too happy with the three young kids next door. Maybe I was wrong because he did grow lovely sweet and juicy gooseberries and many a dish of these was handed over the fence. His pear tree overhung our garden so at the appropriate time of year we were never short of pears. Mr Wilton's main drawback was an habitual cough so he always announced his arrival. This warning enabled us to clamber back over the fence clutching a recovered ball or whatever before he appeared on the scene.

Newent's hub of activity was undoubtedly its Market Square. I only vaguely remember it as a market with farmers herding their animals through the streets on market day. Then the market disappeared leaving only the Town Hall. This is a black and white building built on stilts. A medieval structure, unused, but one of the most prominent buildings in the town.

The Onion Fair, organised every September, was a major annual event which captured the interest and instilled excitement in every one of the town's inhabitants. Peter's Fun Fair stalls, swings and their roundabout used to fill the Market Square and there it stayed for a long exciting weekend. It was the roundabout (carousels they call them these days) which was really the main attraction. It had a superb

steam organ which used to blast out all the stirring songs of the day. If we were lucky we would be able to scrounge a few pence out of our parents for a ride on those prancing horses and if there was any money left over it would go on the hoop-la or roll-a-penny. Then Mr Peters dismantled all his equipment and shipped it out to his next venue and the town was quiet again, relying once more on the little cinema and sports grounds for its amusement and entertainment.

After many decades the Onion Far was re-introduced to the town last year, only this time it was to spread itself over most of the town. Most of the streets were closed to traffic to accommodate all the stalls which are now in use.

Every Boxing Day the Ledbury Hunt would meet in the Market Square and large numbers would turn up to watch the elegant huntsmen and their ladies drinking from their stirrup cups. We never knew the contents of the glasses but whatever it was we considered it an achievement not to spill any, considering the way those horses pranced around.

So the hunt and hounds would away to some local spot where a bagged fox would be released. My father would have the motorcycle and sidecar to hand and all warmed up and ready to go, and off we would go to follow the hunt. If you have never done this it could be very exciting always remembering that the hunt went in a more or less straight line across the fields but the followers had to stick to the roads and lanes. We never did see the hunt catch a fox.

There was a story going around the town about a fox doubling back and entering the town. It was supposed to have finished up in Mrs Ewer's lounge. Mrs Ewer was a very large lady living in an almshouse in the High Street and she was in the lounge at the time. What with the fox, barking and braying hounds and the huntsmen trying to separate them it must have been mayhem! I believe Mrs Ewer survived the invasion but in what condition I never knew or indeed the extent of her compensation.

Just below this row of almshouses in the High Street was one of the town's few bed and breakfast establishments. It was called the Devonia Tea Rooms. B & B at the Devonia cost 2/6d a night - approximately one quarter of a day's pay for the farm labourers who worked in the fields around the town.

Reverting back to Grammar School days for a moment, Dorothy Thomas was a very pretty girl, in fact she was a 'smasher' and the good news was, she was in our form.

I may have forgotten to mention that the Grammar School was co-educational and for that matter so was Picklenash. Unfortunately the girls had their own playground and they were also separated in the classroom. Sad to relate, our lot of girls were very bright. One of them, Sybil Parry, could not be dislodged from the pole position in the class. It was the same story term after term. Sybil, a rather quiet girl, finished up as a headmistress and still lives in Newent.

Dorothy Thomas was the daughter of a publican and lived in the village of Huntley and on one occasion her parents arranged a party at the pub. I was invited along with other members of the form and what a great party it was! Events such as

this were few and far between in those days. Opportunities to play Postman's Knock and other such games were always pretty rare but in this game one could kiss a girl in a dark corner, and passionately, and get away with it.

Sadly within a few years Dorothy was dead and left all who knew her in a state of shock. I can't remember the cause of her death. It was only a few years before we had been told that a pupil at the school had gone over the handlebars of his cycle and killed himself. A fellow called Cox. Death (which always seemed a long way into the future) suddenly arrived on our doorstep.

Before leaving the subject I would like to mention that a funeral cortege seemed to command much more respect in those days than it does today. When a funeral procession passed through Newent streets all the shops would draw their blinds, anyone on the street would stand silently on the kerb, men would doff their hats and if you were following a funeral in a car there you stayed. Overtaking in the streets of the town was definitely taboo.

The local police were also respected, especially by us young kids. The police station and Magistrates Court (now a museum) were only 100 yards from the rear entrance to our home. I think it was a Sgt. Smith we used to respect most of all, I suppose I really mean, feared most. One incident which I was very much afraid would reach his ears occurred when I was probably about 10 or 11 years old.

Although Newent was only a small town, we still considered ourselves as townsfolk, with my father in business in the town. Although his business was very much with the farm workers, as have mentioned elsewhere, I knew little about the 'land'. What little I did know stemmed from visits to Garlick's farm. My bosom friend, Ray Beachus, was friendly with the son of the farm owner and this relationship found me visiting the farm frequently. One day Ray and I were returning from the farm across open fields when we came upon what appeared to be a derelict house. The house had small leaded light windows and it was these we started pelting with stones. Imagine our dismay and surprise when someone emerged from the house waving their arms and frantically yelling at us! We took off and he didn't stand a change of catching us but had he recognised us and would he report us to Sergeant Smith? We heard no more and this time we were 'off the hook'.

One card game I used to play with my father - the only card game I played with him - was cribbage and it is a game which stands me in good stead even today. As I have already written his lameness prevented him from joining in any active game (except keeping wicket in a game of cricket) but this did not prevent his being interested in most sports.

One of my parents' surprise birthday gifts was a table tennis top. Not quite full size and it didn't have trestles to support it so we had to spread it across the top of an old table. Brian Jones joined me for many a game in our back garden and we used to record our scores in pencil on the timber outside wall of the washhouse. Many years later when I had occasion to visit the old home they were still there.

Transport in the 20's and even into the 30's still relied largely on horse-drawn vehicles. Guy Ford used to deliver milk on his milk float and Jimmy Cook, brother of Billy who did that loop-the-loop during his free aeroplane trip, delivered the daily bread in his horse drawn box van. By the way, a milk float was a two wheeled cart with the floor about 18 inches off the ground. This made it easier to load the large stainless steel milk churns. Milk was dispensed from these with a half-pint or a pint ladle, dependent on requirements, into the housewife's jug. Tighter hygiene would arrive at a much later date.

So when Uncle Aubrey turned up at the shop with Auntie Alice after journeying from Penarth in South Wales in a motor car, excitement in the family ran pretty high. The car was a 'bull nosed' Morris Cowley. An open four seater with little doors to gain access. The 'bull nose' had a canvas hood which, more or less, kept the wet weather at bay. I remember that on top of the radiator to indicate its temperature was a large round thermometer visible from the driver's seat and also to everyone else. My excitement ran even higher when Uncle Aubrey suggested taking us for a short run in the car. It was to be my first trip ever in a motor car.

My cousin Beryl, Uncle Aubrey's daughter, was married to a Royal Air Force pilot at the beginning of the War. I think he was called Glen and he owned a Ford Popular saloon. The very first £100 car and built just at the start of the hostilities. So my second car ride was a lift from Newent to Penarth in the Ford - a journey of about 60 miles and how very impressed I was. Dad's motorbike and sidecar could reach about 45 mph flat out but this car bowled along at 60 mph with perfect ease. Sadly Glen was killed on operations shortly after this and sometime later Beryl married for a second time and her choice was again an Air Force pilot. His name was Stan Wright. He survived the War and is still alive today.

The wash house at the old home, the outhouse with the table tennis scores written on its timber walls, was not just a wash house. On Mondays it was also a dining room. I used to run all the way from Picklenash school during the lunch break and sit down at a round, bare, timber topped table to enjoy the cold left overs from the Sunday joint. Well, the meal was not all cold. Left over vegetables were put in the frying pan and the result was a kind of 'rosti' which I used to really enjoy.

Mondays were always wash days and the process always took the whole day. I remember the old mangle with its wooden rollers. I could see daylight between the rollers and I used to think it was a waste of time putting the clothes through them. My father must have had similar thoughts because one day a brand new mangle arrived and this time with rubber rollers. Mother was in her element with this new equipment.

Wine making was another pastime associated with the wash house. The wine was usually made with dandelions, elderberries or elderflowers. Dandelion wine was the favourite and also the most potent. There was no means of checking the alcoholic content of the wine in those days - one just had to wait for the after effects! We kids used to gather the fruits and flowers for the wines and I suppose the most unpleasant to gather were the dandelion heads. Only heads, the stalks and

leaves were not used. The sticky white substance from the stalks would congeal on the fingers like white glue and would strip off the fingers like strips of rubber. Mother had the wine making down to a fine art with the final fermentation process taking place in a large earthenware vat with a piece of yeast covered toast floating on the surface of the liquid and the whole thing covered with a piece of muslin.

Incidentally the copper in the wash house was used for all the bulk production of hot water and the fire beneath it would often be fuelled by leather cuttings from the shop. There was no Clean Air Act in those days and if the cuttings gave off toxic fumes nobody complained.

Much to the disgust of my sister Peggy (Phyllis had already left home to start her nursing career) I did keep pet mice for a while and because of the general opposition to this choice of pets they were banned to the wash house where they resided on a shelf. I didn't keep them very long. I suppose I soon tired of the attention they required.

Actually the building was in a pretty poor state and many years later on a visit to Newent I noticed one of the main roof timbers had started to fracture. Using a timber dead shore and folding wedges I supported the defective timber and I would like to think it is still there today.

Through the wash house, up a steep step and one was in the coal shed and garage. Constructed entirely of corrugated iron it housed the motorbike and sidecar and also the weekly supply of coal, about one hundredweight a week if my memory serves me correctly. Also this was the store for those hand-truck loads of timber offcuts from the local sawmill I wrote of earlier. Through this building was the only lavatory which, in the dead of winter, could be a pretty cold place where lingering was out of the question. Water was not plumbed into the toilet so each time it was used it necessitated the user taking his or her bucket of water and hoping this would do the job. It was a long, long haul to the toilet from the bedrooms and not helped by the crossing of fifteen feet of backyard from the house to the wash house. We ensured before retiring that the necessity to use the lavatory for major usage was not on the night's agenda. Lesser requirements could be catered for in the bedrooms.

Although life for Mother was often tough, help was sometimes on hand in the form of a Mrs Robinson on wash days and Florrie Jones to assist in looking after us three kids when we were young. The last I heard of Florrie was that she was 86 years old in 1993. I wonder if she is still out there? I don't remember Mrs Robinson and I only vaguely remember Florrie Jones.

Long before they filled it up with new bungalows and houses the Crofts was one of our favourite short walks. Along the rear of Old Court and the Church and then alongside Newent Lake across the railway line (now a by-pass road) to the two wishing bridges. Sadly these are now neglected but when we walked to them they were maintained in pristine white paint and as they were located in such a delightful setting they made an excellent backdrop for the family photographs.

It wasn't always that way. During one winter of exceptional heavy rain a torrent of flood water the width of a river raged down the small valley engulfing the

Dad at the helm of the Jones' transport.

Auntie Alice with Uncle Aubrey's Morris Cowley.
My first ever car ride was in this vehicle.

Cousin Beryl joins us in the 'stage coach'
Circa 1927.

two bridges, a sight I will never forget. However the two bridges survived the onslaught but many years later they were to be neglected and today they are in a very sorry state.

Just over the wishing bridges (where this name originated I have no idea) and to the right was a slope rising about 60 feet called Hill Top and it was from here that I used to launch my 'Frog' model aircraft. Elastic powered and costing my parents five shillings (one quarter of a pound) this cardboard model would fly quite a distance especially as it was aided by that 60 foot slope. This was one of my more memorable toys.

I must have been ill one Christmas. When we were ill we were always given a bed in the corner of our parents' bedroom and a coal fire was lit in the open grate and this is how I remember this particular Christmas. The train set was made by Hornby and once again cost five shillings. Consisting of a clockwork engine tender and two Pullman carriages it ran around an oval track and it was one of the best presents I ever received.

My father's brother, my Uncle Bert, lived in Gloucester with his wife Flo and he never gave me a present for Christmas or birthday until one Christmas. Surprise, surprise, he gave me a toy wheelbarrow painted green with a red wheel. It looked a treat but what had prompted this sudden act of generosity I never did find out. I did not receive another present from them but when Aunti Flo (who had survived Uncle Bert) died, all three of use benefited in her will from the sale of her small terraced house in Gloucester.

When I came out of the Air Force I never went back to live in Newent but Peggy still lives there so I never severed ties with the town and quite often return. The town has changed dramatically over the last 60 years increasing its population fivefold. Houses now cover what were green fields but when I return I am still able to find places unchanged since those early days.