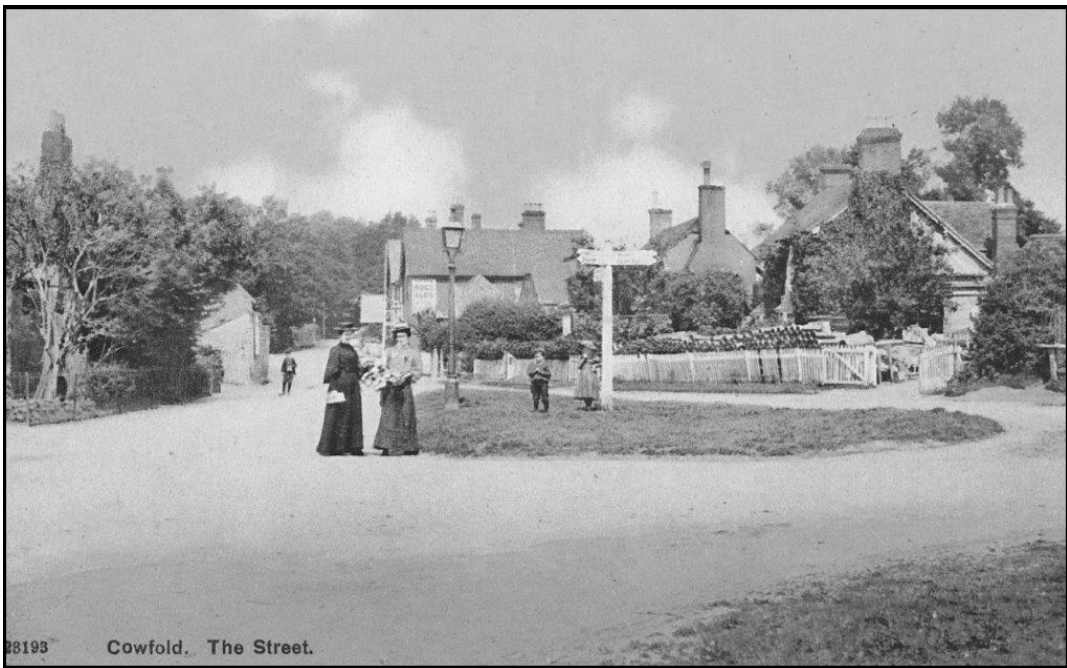


COWFOLD
IN THE
"TWENTIES"
SCHOOLBOY
MEMORIES



W.A.SAYERS

COWFOLD
in the
TWENTIES



SCHOOLBOY MEMORIES

Seventy years ago Cowfold was an exciting place in which to live, if you were one of the village children, that is. The days never seemed long enough to fit in all the things we wanted to do. Even running an errand for our mothers to the shop by the village green, could take upwards of an hour.

There would be birds' nests to look for in the tidily cut hedges. Then, as we were about to pass the saddler's shop, Mr Ireland, a rather small, thin man, would be outside, turning the handle of the flock-teasing machine, getting ready the filling of the new saddle he was making. "Just a minute, you boys" he would say. "Get me a packet of Woods, will you?" Diving his leather-stained hands into the pocket of his once white apron, he would hand over two pennies.

Just at that moment, a chauffeur from one of the 'big' houses, would pull up alongside the opposite wall in a gleaming limousine, and blowing his klaxon, would summon the garage man to serve him with petrol from one of the three pumps which stood there like soldiers in their uniforms, one red, one yellow and the other, green. Shell, Benzole and B.P. We had watched the deep holes being dug to accommodate the petrol tanks when the garage had replaced the stables and coach house owned by the Hale family. They used to run a service between the village and West Grinstead station, using a one horse 'fly' or a two horse coach. The family lived in a house near the school gates. Having seen this filling operation successfully accomplished, we would carry on, pass the long, red shed that stood in the garden of No. 4 Elm Grove and on to the two storey shop of the shoe repairer.

Downstairs served as a sweet and tobacco shop, and the room above, reached by a rickety flight of stairs, acted as a workshop. Here, repairs could be made whilst one waited, an 'upper' stitched, a new heel put on, or a steel pelt hammered back on, in a matter of minutes.

The Carpenter's shop next door was a hive of industry. In one shed, doors and frames were being made. In another, window frames were being shaped, and, if we craned our necks to look through another doorway, we could see a man planing the side of a newly made coffin. In the yard, littered with wood shavings, the wheelwright was putting the finishing touches to a wheel he had made for the wagon, which was propped up on a trestle. From another shed came the soft, puffing noise of the engine, which drove the belts for the sawyer's machines.

On we went, past another sweet shop and a drapers to a new shop. This had big windows, and was built with shiny brown bricks. The window on the right hand side of the door displayed a selection of boots, shoes and slippers of all sizes and colours. The window on the left was filled with a wonderful assortment of cut glass articles, pottery, crockery and bric-a-brac.

As we stood there, a horse and carriage went past. The coachman was sitting erect in his seat, his left arm cradling his long whip, held at such an angle that he could snap it in our faces when we stood by the side of the road. Inside, the Misses Hoper were on their way up to the school to see the headmaster.

We heard a rumbling sound, and saw the wheelwright and his mate trundling the large wheel they had just built, down the road. Here was excitement indeed! They were bringing it down to the forge for the new iron tyre to be fitted. We ran the few remaining yards to Mr Farren's bicycle shop, and stood by the entrance to the churchyard. One of the blacksmiths came out of the forge and uncovered the hole in the center of a very large stone, set in, the forecourt. This hole was to house the hub of the wheel as it lay on the ground. As we looked over the bottom half of the forge door, we could see the other blacksmith pumping the bellows. The coals grew bright and red. Sparks flew up the chimney and across the road, in the direction of the 'Red Lion'. The huge iron tyre was being heated until it was nearly white hot. Then, each taking a big pair of pincers, the blacksmiths lifted the tyre out of the fire and carried it, glowing red, outside and placed it on the wheel. Grabbing two hammers, they then proceeded to hammer the tyre on to the wooden rim, working 'opposite each other all the time so that the tyre would be put on evenly. Blue, acrid smoke arose from the rim, making us cough and our eyes run. When the tyre was in place, buckets of water were thrown over it to cool it down, so that the iron would contract and bind itself to the wheel. Having completed the operation to the satisfaction of their schoolboy audience, the two smiths retired through the forge doors to continue their morning's work, and left us to finish our errands.

In the 'Twenties' the village was well supplied with shops. Two butchers, one standing on the forecourt of what is now "Farren Court", with the house in the background.

In the 'Thirties* this was acquired by Mr. Farren, and a new house and shop was built next door to it by the butcher, Mr Dixon, with the slaughterhouse in the rear. Mr Goatcher had his shop on the opposite side of the road, which is now the "Clock Shop". Before the days of motorized transport both butchers delivered their meat by horse and two-wheeled carts. The animals were killed on the premises and sides of beef, lamb and pork hung from hooks on rails in the shop. Joints were then cut off as required. Sausages were made in one of the outhouses.

Next to Mr Goatcher's was the "The Old Shoppe" which is now owned by Mr & Mrs Holden. Here, Mr Hughes, carried on a greengrocer's business. He drove around the district selling his wares from a flat bedded cart, drawn by a donkey. Later, the property was let and turned into a sweet shop by various occupiers.

"Trelawny House", formerly "Jersey House", was the residence and grocery shop of the Peacock-family. The garden now occupies the site of the actual shop and the archway still remains which was the access for the horse and cart to reach the stable and out-buildings at the rear. They would deliver goods to the outlying districts, like Maplehurst, Littleworth and West Grinstead. I remember when we were youngsters and going to bed at nine o'clock, hearing the roundsman returning to the shop in the canvas topped cart. He was probably asleep, but the horse know the way home. At a later date, the cart was replaced by a belt-driven Trojan van.

The former "Sprinks Stores", the building still in existence, though modified to today's standards, is now trading as the 'The Village Stores'. A family business, it provided grocery, drapery, hardware goods, boots and shoes, haberdashery, furniture and carpets. Bran for the rabbits, corn for the hens, hay for the horses and paraffin for the stoves. It also housed the telephone exchange and the Post Office. It was once advertised as being able to supply everything from a safety pin to a Rolls Royce.

Two bakers supplied the needs of the populace. Mr Oliver, along the Bolney Road and Mr West on the present bakery site. On Good Friday they would deliver hot cross buns to their customers doors at seven thirty in the morning, straight from their ovens. The spicy aroma followed them down the street. On Easter Sunday, they made the loaves for the Heald Charity, (an explanation of that, later) and the loaves that were placed on the Altar at Harvest Festival were of their making.

The farmworkers received milk from the farms where they worked, but the rest of the villagers relied on the milk from Mr Hodgson's Brook Farm dairy. Twice a day, the cowman/milkman would load a large churn of that morning's milk on to a three wheeled float, painted with the Hodgson colour, which was reddish brown, the same as all the other vehicles and wagons on the farm. He would start off by pushing it up the hill and then start serving his customers by carrying the shining milk can which held about two gallons, to the door.

Here he would measure out a pint or half pint into the person's jug, using the brass handled measures that were clipped on to the side of the can. In the afternoon, he would repeat the operation for those that needed it.

The firm of "Fowler Brothers" were the largest employers of labour in the village, and had their offices in the village centre, next to the present Post Office. They were builders. They owned their own saw mill and carpenter's shop, a farriers forge and blacksmiths shop, ran a fleet of lorries for transport contracts, and they were undertakers. Where "Godman Court" now stands was a small plot of land, which was where their sawyers worked. There was tree in the center and under it was a pit, rectangular in shape and about six feet deep. It was here that tree trunks were sawn into planks, one man above and the other in the pit.

After a while, the sawing was transferred to the yard down the Henfield Road, next to the 'Hare and Hounds' and, at a later date, when the forge at the Lych Gate was taken down, a new forge was built on the original site, together with a garage and workshop. It was also used as a builder's yard. At this time there were two other builders in the village. Mr Walder, who lived in the house opposite the Village Hall, and Mr Jack Roberts, whose house is now "Ellerslie".

Although cars were fairly sparse in the village, we were very well supplied with public transport. "Southdown" ran a double decker bus service to Horsham and Brighton each hour (half hourly in the summer), and a single decker service to Billingshurst and Haywards Heath every two hours.

The fare to Horsham was nine pence single and one shilling return. The last bus left the Carfax at ten twenty each night, after the cinemas and theatre had turned out. If you preferred the train, you could cycle to West Grinstead station. School boys used this way to get to Steyning Grammer School.

There was great excitement in the school, when bills were posted around the village, telling of the arrival of "Smith's" or "Harris's" Fair the following weekend. The engines pulling all the equipment blew their whistles as they approached along Station Road. When we came out of school at midday, many of us would rush down through the churchyard to Sprinks shop, cross the road, and stand by the Village Hall to watch these beautiful, massive engines pull the wagons through the gateway on to the fair field. Where the lay-by outside the present Post Office now stands, was a stile and a five barred gate. From this gateway a hedge stretched to the cricket field. I think this field, where all the fairs and circuses were held, was owned by the Godman family, but leased to Mr Tidey, the coal merchant at West Grinstead station.

As soon as we had seen the showmen had arrived safely, we returned home for dinner, and a scolding for being late. Back to school the afternoon seemed endless, and we were much too excited to take much notice of the teacher. At last the time came when we could put away our books and return to the field. By now, the wagons had all been arranged over by the side of the cricket field. The round-a-bout had been partially assembled.

Some men were constructing the swing boats, and others putting up the numerous booths for the hoop-la, roll a penny, darts, a shooting gallery and a miniature merry-go-round for the very small children. If any villager happened to be out of work, although this was very rare, he would be taken on to help with the construction.

As young boys, most of our time was spent by the traction engines, which were drawn up side by side, to provide electricity for the round-a-bout and the hundreds of multicoloured lamps that decorated the stalls. We watched the huge flywheel turning the generator with no more than a whisper of sound. Our noses twitched with the smell of burnt oil and the wisp of smoke issuing from the funnel, and together with the scent of trampled grass and may blossom from the hedgerows, made the 'telling off when we got back home, late for tea seem worthwhile.

When the circus came to the village, the 'Big Top' was erected in the same area as the fair. The caged animals were left in the wagons, and the horses, ponies, llamas and goats were tethered alongside the hedge. The elephants were taken to the northern edge of the field. I never imagined then, the forty years later, my house and back garden would be where these elephants once stood.

To those of us who were choir boys, Easter was a busy time. There was usually ten or twelve of us, and we sat on benches that were attached to the front of the present choir stalls, but were removed at a later date to make the aisle wider. Behind us sat the men, four tenor and five bass, and behind them were three ladies by the organ, who sang alto.

We had to be on our best behaviour most of the time, as in my case, my father sat behind me, and some of the other boys, their elder brothers. Also, the headmaster's pew was near the front. At Easter time, the choir master had us performing parts of Stainer's "Crucifixion" or Handel's "Messiah". There was an anthem at Christmas, and also for the Harvest festival. We had to wear those starched white collars which, when they began to wear a bit, rubbed our necks raw. On Easter Day, it was Matins at eleven, then home to lunch. At three o'clock we were back for the Children's service. At four o'clock we assembled in the belfry to collect loaves of bread. These had been set out on trestle tables by the two village bakers for distribution to the poor. A tablet in the belfry reads:-

"MRS CECILIA HEALD LEFT BY WILL £55 THE INTEREST TO BE DISTRIBUTED IN BREAD FOR EVER AT EASTERTIDE AMONGST THE POOR WHO FREQUENT THIS CHURCH. DIED 1735"

On Easter Monday saw the first of the charabancs on their way to Worthing, Littlehampton and Bognor from South East London. They came down from Handcross to Cowfold, and then out to Buck Barn Crossroads. There were a few independent companies, but 'Timpsons', 'Bennetts of Croydon' and 'Grey Green' coaches went by in convoys of six, up to twelve vehicles. We used to make a platform across the wide ditch that ran down between the garden and the hedge, and arming ourselves with notebook and pencils, took down the numbers of the vehicles that passed. It was easy to do, as there were very few cars in those days. There was also a ten mile an hour speed limit through the village.

When the coaches returned in the evening, the children in them were flying balloons and streamers out of the windows, though this practice was soon stopped, as it proved dangerous to other children on the roadside as they scrambled to pick up the streamers that had broken off. This car spotting was quite a craze in the late 20's and we all tried to out do each other regarding the numbers obtained. Goodwood Races and Point to Point events were eagerly looked forward to as the amount of traffic increased.

On certain days in the summer, the Horsham Motor Club held hill climbing trials up the hill in Picts Lane. They were Austin 7's, Morris Minors, Morgans and other small cars. The spectators watched from the field on the high banks, as the cars were started off, one at a time from the bottom of the hill, and timed by a steward with a stop-watch at the top.

As the cars were few and far between, playing marbles by the side of the road kept the lads occupied during the spring. If the weather turned a bit colder we got out hoops and trundled these to warm us up. They were made of iron by the blacksmith and were about two foot six in diameter. The girl's hoops were made of light wood. In the autumn, we played 'conkers' and picked those up from the large tree that stood outside of 'Carpenters', or the one which grew by Thornden Lodge.

'Thornden' was a large house that had been a vicarage, and the present 'Old Vicarage*' is a replica. It was previously named "Hamsteel", but when it was bought by Lord Ashcombe for his son, the Hon.

Guy Cubitt on his marriage around 1926, the name was composed by joining the first part of 'Thornhill' (Mrs Cubitt's home) with 'Denbies', Mr Cubitt's home at Dorking. The Cubitt family were builders in the last century, and 'Cubitts of London' built many of the high class properties in Mayfair and the City. Mr Cubitt formed the present estate agents 'Cubitt and West'. He was joint Master of Foxhounds with Colonel McKergow of Twineham Grange for many years. He employed three grooms for his six horses, two gardeners, a chauffeur, and when I left school I was employed as an under valet - cleaning the boots and hunting kit, and when I was old enough to drive, became under-chauffeur. The household consisted of Cook, Nanny and four maids.

"Empire Day" at the school was a great occasion. Mr R.H.P. Quick, a tall, well built man, with hands as largo as plates it seemed, when he clipped us around the ear for some misdemeanour, was the Headmaster. For two days beforehand he would drill us in the playground like a Sgt. Major. We would march back and forth and salute the Union Jack flying at the flag staff, as if it was a 'March Past'. Then we would go into the school to learn the song, which had been especially written for the day. When the 24th May arrived we turned up at school with polished boots and faces, and looking more respectable than usual, to await the arrival of the school governors and Mrs Norris, our benefactress who did so much for the village in those days. At ten o'clock the visitors came in and took their seats at the end of the hall. The glass partition that parted two classrooms had been folded back to make one large hall.

After the Vicar had said a prayer, and we had sung a hymn, Mr Quick would give a short speech about the Empire, and what it meant to England, and so forth. Then came the presentations. We left our desks and proceeded to a table where Mrs Norris stood. As we filed past she pinned a medal on each pupil. The medal was the size of a war medal.

In 1926 the country was in the throes of a General Strike. There were no buses or trains, no papers or post, coal and other deliveries were disrupted, causing a shortage of everyday commodities. This was followed by the depression and general unrest in 1929. During these days the community seemed to cope very well. Perhaps, being children, we were shielded from monetary matters by our parents, but, unlike these days, the question of money was hardly ever raised. Sometimes my mother would come back from the shop and say that the price of a certain article had gone up from eight pence three farthings to nine pence, or perhaps cheese had risen in price to four pence a pound. Of course, there were poor families in the village, but the local gentry were very considerate towards their staff with gifts of pheasants and rabbits. In time of illness, bunches of grapes or chicken broth and soup would be forthcoming. Ex-service men could receive vouchers for coal and groceries from the British Legion, and the monks from the Monastery were very generous to the war widows in the village at that time. We heard rumours of unrest among the population of the North, the Jarrow marchers, the Midlands and Wales, but without the present day coverage of radio and television, the situation did not seem critical at the time.

The "Beer House" ran a Tontine Club, where members could put money by each week, and then at Christmas withdraw their savings with a bonus. Also the "Red Lion" and the Village Hall each had a Slate Club. This was a similar amenity whereby members subscribed a fixed sum each week. If they were ill, or had an accident, a doctor's certificate handed to the treasurer would enable the member to receive sickness benefit, providing he did not work, was indoors by 6 p.m. and did not leave the village for any reason. Again, the surplus money remaining would be shared out at Christmas.

"Carter's Garage" at Lower Beeding ran coach trips, which were in great demand in those days, before cars became popular. Members of the British Legion which had a very active branch in the village, would "get up a load" as they put it, for a day's outing to Eastbourne or Hastings, at seven and sixpence per head, or to Portsmouth, Southsea or Southampton for ten shillings. The money was collected a shilling at a time at their weekly meetings.

We would get up at six in the morning, and then, after a breakfast we were too excited to eat, the families would congregate in the Red Lion yard to await the arrival of the coach at eight o'clock. Arriving at our destination by mid morning, the men folk would wander off to find the "British Legion Club" in the town, and the children with their mothers, would make their way to the beach. Having ascertained the toilets were not too far away, we spread the rug or blanket on the stones, with the picnic basket in the middle.

It was funny, that whenever we got on the beach, the tide was coming in, yet when we were almost ready to go home, there appeared to be miles and miles of sand.

If it was a choir outing, the towns were usually Salisbury or Canterbury. These were miles away, right outside our county of Sussex. Another event looked forward to for weeks, was the trip to Aldershot for the Searchlight Tattoo. We left the village at teatime, and returned well after midnight. Although it took the coach sometime to park, it seemed ages before it was dark enough for the spectacle to commence. There was very little work done at school the next morning as we described the scene, and the events to our pals who had been less fortunate.

As boys the world over, we were always up to some kind of prank or other. This was before vandalism and graffiti were invented. Even the things we did we had to plan when the local policeman was out of the village, as if we were caught we would get our ears boxed by him, and another hiding from our fathers, when he told them in the Red Lion later that night, what we had done.

One of our favourite tricks was to tie a rope across the alleyway between the Bolney Road baker and the house opposite, fastening it to the front doors, which again, were opposite. Then we would knock hard on both doors, dash across the road, and hide behind the hedge, and watch the occupants who were trying to open the doors.

In the middle of the 1920's, the army decided to hold a mock war between the Southern and Eastern Commands. Sussex appeared to be the battleground.

To us, ten and eleven year olds, this was something that had come to life out of the 'Modern Boy' magazine I used to buy with my pocket money, each week. This I had to earn by running errands for the neighbours.

It was the school holidays and the weather was hot. We always seemed to have hot summers in those days. One morning, we awoke to see soldiers marching along the road, past our gate. My father, who had been in the garden at the time, said that an officer had told him they were the advance party, and that they would be followed by many other units during the day. They were making camp in 'Big Cowfold', (the field on the left after the 'Sports Field'). Sometime later we heard the sound of the bagpipes, and around the corner at 'Capons' came a company of Scots Guards. Then came the artillery, gun carriages and ammunition wagons, each pulled by four horses, followed by more marching troops preceded by a fife and drum band. And so it went on all day. Horse drawn carriages and wagons, field kitchens, with the cooks walking behind, giving a stir to what ever they were cooking or stoking up the fires as they went along. The next day, an anti-aircraft battery was set up in the field behind us, and later on the guns started firing when Bristol Bulldog fighters attacked the site and dropped bags of flour. That evening, just as the sun was setting, two Handley Page night bombers flew over. They were huge, and in the dusk their wings were like two barns, joined together by the fuselage.

The following morning we went along to the camp, there must have been a hundred bell tents arranged in rows and thousands of troops.

We were told it was a staging area between Billingshurst and Maresfield. On another day we heard a roar of engines in the distance, and through the village came squadron after squadron of tanks and armoured cars. As they turned right at the Red Lion their tracks churned up the road like a ploughed field. I do not know which side won, but to us twelve year olds it was a wonderful experience.

Electricity came to the village in the early Thirties. The only illumination up the 'Back Lane' as the Station Road was called, came from the oil lamps in the Red Lion and the Aladdin pressure lamp which hung in the window of the saddler's shop. The church and many of the larger houses had their own petrol driven generators and batteries. Some, like the Village Hall, had gas-making machines which used carbide. As our house had been recently built, the Council were among the first to install electricity, and each house had two power sockets and a ceiling light in four rooms.

By now, radio, was here to stay. I remember my first crystal set: a square box about six inches by four, with a glass lid. Inside, you could see some bits of metal connected to wires which protruded outside as terminals, to which a set of earphones could be attached. In the centre of the box was fixed a many faceted crystal and leading through the side of the box was a thin wire, known as the 'cat's whisker! The idea was to explore the crystal with the wire until you heard music or speech, which was being transmitted from London. At that time we had a lodger, a young man who was in great demand as an electrician.

One evening he took a galvanized watering can, stuck a metal funnel down the spout, and welded the diaphragms of the earphones inside the can, to make my first loudspeaker. Soon, these sets were superseded by factory cabinet sets, which ran on dry batteries and accumulators. Mr Farren set up a battery charging service and the children found a new way of earning pocket money, by taking people's accumulators to be charged. Finally, when electricity came, these sets were obsolete and the new mains-fed models became the vogue. After hard saving I bought a Pye model with its rising sun motif on the front. At lunch time we could listen to Reginald Dixon on the organ from the Tower Ballroom in Blackpool, at teatime until the six o'clock were the dance bands of Jack Payne or Clive Errand.

Some nights I used to sit up to listen to Carroll Gibbons and his Savoy Orpheans until midnight. For the young children there was Uncle Mac in Children's Hour and the Ovaltinies.

The Red Lion and the "Beer House", as the Hare and Hounds is now called, were more than just public houses. My father, in common with many other men, rarely missed his daily pint. After tea, about half past six, he would go out into the kitchen, take off his working boots and put on a pair of shoes. Then he would take the kettle, which had been singing on the hob, and put the water into a metal hand bowl and put it into the sink. Then, lighting a candle he would place it on the window sill and proceed to wash and shave. When this had been completed he would put on another jacket saying "I won't be long" and go out of the door.

The 'pub' was an important meeting place and information centre, as I suppose they are today. You heard the latest news. You found out if there was a job going spare, or a house becoming vacant; how the village sports teams had fared over the weekend. Sometimes he would come home later with a rabbit he had bought from a gamekeeper for the price of a pint. Once he bought a raffle ticket for a harmonium, and won it. That is how I started my musical interests - but that is another story. Beer was then fourpence a pint and a single whisky a shilling. Players cigarettes were ten for sixpence and Woodbines, ten for four pence. Many makes had cigarette cards in the packets, and we used to swap them between ourselves until we had collected a set. I wish I had kept mine; some of these sets are worth very high prices these days. Sometimes my father would come in at Sunday lunchtime with twenty herrings he had bought for a shilling from a fishmonger who had come up from Brighton. In the winter time the muffin man used to cycle out from Horsham with crumpets. He would take them out of the deep basket attached to his handle-bars, and stack them in sixs, on a tray. This he placed on his head and walked around the village, ringing a handbell.

Before the 1930's, the western side of the Henfield Road was farm land. The present Church Close, from Steyne House to the Old Steyne House was a grass meadow, which was used by the local butcher to graze cattle and sheep before slaughter. As the original Old Steyne House had a very long garden, it is understood that it was used as a rope making establishment.

From this house to the Bakery, the only buildings were a large black barn and a green, tin covered chapel, situated on the present site of the telephone exchange.

Where the "Noahs Ark" garage now stands was the seat of learning for many of the village's young men who have now sadly 'passed on'. It was the Cowfold Grammar School. In the mid 1920's the long, black and white timbered building was purchased and converted into a dwelling and tea rooms by two maiden ladies. I remember being taken there when a lad on one occasion, and was thrilled to see, suspended from the ceiling, the propeller from a First World War aeroplane. Whether it had any connection with the ladies, or whether it was in memory of a pupil of the school, I never found out. The origin of the name is also very hazy. Could it have been that the building looked like the Ark to someone? Anyhow, it has remained "The Noahs Ark" for the past seventy years.

The two fields (now called the Sports Field) which were used for playing cricket and football, were owned by the Godman family, and let to the two clubs for a nominal rent. They were divided by a hedge, which stretched from the pavilion to the pond on the far side. Although the football field was only used during the season, the cricket field and pitch were maintained in an excellent condition all the year round by enthusiastic players and volunteers. It was sub-let by the Cricket Club to the Stoolball Club who played mid-week. On the eastern side of the field, in front of the "Old Boy's" hut (now the Scout H.Q) were two grass tennis courts, surrounded by fifteen foot wire netting.

From the northern end of the hut, stretching to the pond, was the Rifle Range. The hut was divided into three; one for the footballers, one for the cricketers, which was also used for their teas, and the other part was the "Old Boy's Club". This was formed to assist the transition of school leavers to the age of eighteen, when they were considered to be responsible enough to fend for themselves and were also eligible to apply for membership to the Village Hall Club, to which many of the respected trades-people belonged.

The pavilion, though smaller, was situated where the present one stands, and beside it was a separate scoring box. The scorer was the village sage, Mr Tom Mills, and my father, who also umpired for the stoolball team, was the umpire and they both served many years in this capacity. The village had two cricket teams; one played on Saturdays and the occasional Sunday and as Wednesday was early closing day, a Wednesday team was formed for those who were available in the evening. The village had some very good players in those days and on several occasions the occupants of the houses across the road had a cricket ball through their windows when certain batsman opened their shoulders and let fly.

Walking through the churchyard on the way to the school, one passes the 'Old Reading Room' as it is called. This room, with a flat overhead, was built around 1852 by the local builder, under the instruction of Mrs Hoper, of "Hill Farm" (now Homelands). It was for the use of the men of the village to read the newspapers that were published.

In those days papers were scarce, and not many people could afford them, anyway. In 1896 the Village Hall was built by Frederick Godman of 'South Lodge', Lower Beeding, and became a new focal point so that the popularity of the Reading Room declined a little, although it was still frequently used for Bible reading, Missionary meetings, Parochial Church meetings and such. On occasions when the Church was packed, i.e. Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Armistice Day, we choir boys were sent to collect chairs from there. These were placed on each side of the aisles. Since those days the Reading Room has been used as Election Committee Rooms, for rehearsals of the Village Players and during the war was used for schoolgirl cookery classes, First Aid classes and Home Guard and A.R.P activities.

The Village Hall has been the venue of many memorable occasions. Dr Dicken's Ball, held annually in aid of the Royal Sussex County Hospital, was the highlight of the year, and tickets at five shillings a head were eagerly sought after. The stage, decorated with ferns and potted palms, housed the popular eight piece band from Brighton or Dorking. The Annexe at the bottom of the hall and its quota of wicker chairs and palms, served as a 'sitting out' area for those who could not stand the pace. A net, filled with balloons hung from the roof, to be released later, whilst three hundred dancers, many in fancy dress, perambulated on the floor below. A buffet and drinks bar was available in an adjoining room.

At this period of time the dance floor was considered one of the three finest floors, in Mid Sussex, only surpassed by the Queens Hall in Cuckfield, which had a sprung floor.

Whist Drives were very popular in the village. Those in aid of the Blind and also the Sussex County Cricket Club were extremely well attended. As many as forty tables would be in play, and overflowed into the passage way and the club room. The winners at the end of the evening would qualify to play in the grand final at the Dome in Brighton in the autumn.

Another event which had good support was a Whist Drive and Dance (tickets - one and sixpence), the whist from seven thirty to nine and the dance from nine thirty to one. The various sports clubs would hold dances every so often throughout the year, and there was an "Old Time Dance Club". The Crawley and Horsham Hunt held their Hunt Ball here on several occasions and the 'Duckling Dance', organized by their parents for the younger members of the Hunt.

Usually, a week or so before Christmas, the gentle folk living in the 'Big House', would give a party for all their employees and their families. On that day we had to dress up in our Sunday best, and walk along the road to Clock House, where my father was one of the four gardeners. After divesting ourselves of our outer clothes, it was often cold and frosty with perhaps snow in those days, we were shown into the Servant's Hall to meet the other families. This had been decorated with Chinese lanterns and paper chains and the large table set in the centre groaned under the weight of the food which had been prepared by the kitchen staff. Everything was home made; supermarkets had not be thought of, nor yet deep freezers. At half past four a bell was rung and we all sat down.

After the pulling of crackers and the donning of paper hats, the butler, parlour-maid and housemaids proceeded to hand around the goodies which we children had been feasting our eyes on ever since we had arrived. At six o'clock precisely, everyone was shepherded through to the front hall, with its parquet floor and winding staircase, to meet the master and his wife who were waiting beside a tall Christmas tree ablaze with lights and tinsel. Underneath the tree were piles of parcels, all covered in Christmas wrapping and bearing the names of all those present. The two sons and daughter, who were home for the holiday from boarding school, knelt down under the tree and handed the packages to their parents who then called the recipients forward to receive them. Usually the men were given shirts, their wives dress or skirt lengths, and according to age the children received train sets, dolls or doll's prams, and soft toys for the infants. After the presentation, those who wished went home and the other returned to the servants hall for liquid refreshment and mince pies.

The late 1920's were interesting times for us twelve and fourteen year olds. Aircraft were appearing in the skies in increasingly numbers and we vied each other in the identification of the various types, military and civil: Bristol Bulldogs, Faire Falcons, and Veda 'Gulls'. One day we watched in amazement as the "Graf Zeppelin", German airship, passed overhead. On another day the much talked of "Brabazon" with its six engines flew along the South Coast on its trial run. Each year, daring pilots in their seaplanes competed in the Schnieder Trophy races in the Solent, reaching speeds of three hundred miles an hour.

The railway station at West Grinstead was a busy place in those days. A number of boys who went to Steyning Grammer School cycled over and went by train. If you wanted to go to Bognor, for instance, you could go to Shoreham and change to the coast line, or go to Christs Hospital and change for the Portsmouth line. The coal merchant, who also kept the general stores had his coal depot in the station yard. Heavy goods and bulky parcels were sent by rail, cattle transported to Steyning and Horsham markets, as well as cattle food and fertilisers for the farmers.

Each year, in April, the Crawley and Horsham Hunt held their Point to Point races over a course across the fields at "Lancasters" in the Littleworth Lane. The event was very popular with the hunting fraternity in those days. On the morning of the races, the Station Road was thronged with villagers on bikes, womenfolk pushing prams with 'tods' running beside them, and the better off in cars.

They would make their way down Stonehouse Lane to the ground, where a large marquee had been erected and the bookmakers stands were stretched along the side of the field. Farm wagons from South Lodge, Leonardslee, Brook Farm, Twineham Grange and many other farms had been taken to the course the day before to act as grandstands for their owners and their guests.

In the marquee, the staff of Wakefields, caterers in Horsham, prepared the tables for the Hunt luncheon, to which all gamekeepers and farmers were invited. In the afternoon the hunt servants, Huntsmen, Whippers-in, and grooms distributed tickets to members of the public for a free tea.

Sometimes, if it was wet, the cars would become bogged down in the mud and had to be rescued by tractors. I was an under chauffeur at that time for the Master of the Hunt, and it took me up to ten o'clock that night to wash the mud off the two cars that had been used. In those days a car was never put away dirty. I have washed many, even on frosty nights.

I have already mentioned the Village Hall Club. This was held in the Reading Room of the Village Hall. The members were the tradesmen, shop keepers and responsible citizens of the village so that when a young person was accepted by the committee the discipline was more severe. Heaven help the newcomer if he sat in one of the Elders chairs, forgot to close the door behind him, or was discourteous to another member. There was a large table under the window where one could read through a selection of daily papers and periodicals at any time of the day. In the evenings the members played chess, cards or dominoes in their usual groups, or sat around the fire, spinning yarns and jokes. By pushing the bell push by the side of the fireplace, one could summon the resident caretaker who lived in the flat above and ask for bags of crisps, chocolate, sweets or lemonade for about tuppence each. Players cigarettes were a shilling for twenty. If we wanted to play billiards or pool and snooker we went into the main hall. The stage was in three parts. One third was permanently in position and would accommodate a five piece band. The remaining floor space was taken up by a full sized billiard table, and when a complete stage was required for, a function, the other two parts were erected over the table.

The health of the population of the village, Partridge Green and West Grinstead was in the capable hands of Doctors Graveley and Dickens. The surgery was in Dr. Graveley's house (now owned by the Poole-Connor family) and Dr. Dickens lived in the house next door, now the home of Dr & Mrs Allen.

The waiting room was small, about six feet wide, and when you sat down your knees touched the knees of the person opposite. When there was a flu epidemic, the place filled up very quickly, so some of the patients had to stand and wait in the roadway outside - not very nice on a wet and windy night, especially if one had walked from West Grinstead or Parkminster. Whilst waiting, you might have heard a sudden yell. Dr. Dickens had relieved a patient of a troublesome tooth, or lanced a pus filled boil. Sometimes, the Nuns at the Convent at the Roman Catholic Church at West Grinstead would fall ill, and then two or three young boys from the Home there would have to walk over to the surgery for medicine. If my mother saw them go by the gate she used to call them in and give them hot drinks and cake, to help them on their return journey.

In the mid twenties there was an outbreak of Scarlet Fever, and about fifteen of us from the school were ferried in ambulances to the Isolation Hospital at Goddard's Green. I remember it was very painful when we had hot baths, and our parents, when they visited us had to stand outside and look in through the windows.

In this short reminiscence I have tried to portray the lives of the school children at that time; the discipline at home, at school, and as teenagers to be responsible inhabitants of the village. Most of us had to walk to school, some a distance of two miles, in all kinds of weather. A few had cycles but there was no car to ferry them a couple of hundred yards. If we needed sweets or to go to the fair, we had to earn the money by running errands or helping in the garden, but we were free.

We were free to play marbles along the sides of the road, to roll our hoops, pick up the 'conkers' outside the carpenter's shop or look over the bottom half of the forge door and watch a horse being shod. In the summer holidays we were free to roam the fields, picking flowers or blackberries, at Easter time it was primroses. We could search the hedgerows for bird's nests, or make a camp in the wood behind Thornden. In the severe winters we would make sleds and have fun tobogganing down Brook hill or sliding on the pond at Woldringfold, which had frozen over. As there was no television and very few radios, we learnt to improvise games and amuse ourselves all day long. We were never bored.

There was very little crime in the village, and what there was, was petty; due to the fact that television, videos or computers had not been invented. The coppers were fair, and if you did get a flick around the ear, you did not sue him for assault. How things have changed.

When I was twelve I was persuaded to become houseboy to the headmaster.

He had a new one every two years. This entailed getting over to the School House at eight fifteen each morning and start by scrubbing the front door steps, which were of red and white coloured tiles, some days I could get away with just washing them. Then I would go around to the shed and proceed to clean the shoes, a pair for the master and one pair for his wife. When this was done I would have to get the coal bucket from the kitchen and fill it for the cook, then it was time for me to go to the classroom. At lunch time I was back again for a quarter of an hour to chop some firewood or tidy up the backyard. On Saturdays I worked from nine to twelve. At eleven o'clock the cook would bring me out a cup of cocoa and a couple of her flapjacks, then I would receive my week's wages of half a crown. Although I did not realise it at the time, but later on in life I found that I had learned how to take responsibility, to do a job properly and thoroughly and to take the rough with the smooth.

There were many interesting walks from the village, and of course, there still are. During the summer months on a Sunday evening our parents would take my brother and I up the field by Thornden to Bakers Shaw (where during the holidays a number of us boys would make a camp, weave hazel branches to make a shelter, and have a whale of a time climbing trees) across the park and on to Northfields Farm in Burnt House Lane. Then we would carry on through High Hurst to the "White Horse" in Maplehurst. Another time perhaps we would start off across the football field and pass Brook Hill and on to Little Brook and Picts Wood to Picts Lane.

This we would cross and take the footpath to "Violets" and Mill Lane, calling in at the "Crabtree" for refreshment and catching the bus back to the village, the fare was sixpence for the four of us.

I may as well describe the other two walks ending in 'pubs'. One was through Eastlands Farm to Lydford (now Bankfield Grange) and out into Kent Street and down to the "Royal Oak" in Wineham. The other one was from the school, through the allotments, past Potters and Gervaise where we turned left to the Monastery and on to the path to Littleworth and the "Windmill".

Sometime in the mid Twenties, the church roof underwent repairs. Quite a number of the stone slabs were removed, cleaned and stacked beside the path, but one was brought up to the school and the children were asked if they would contribute a penny a week to help with the cost. This was done, and when the time came for the stone to be replaced we were told to scratch our names on it, then we were marched down to the church and watched it put into place over the centre window of the chancel and as far as I know, it is still there.

For those people who needed any furniture or parcels transported there was three Carriers in the area. Mr Crossfield from Picts Lane, Mr Dinnage in the council house next to Thornden Drive and Miss Sharpe from Crabtree. Each one travelled between Horsham and Brighton and would convey chickens, game or rabbits for sale in the markets and return with any household items that had been ordered from the shops. They provided a good service, but unfortunately faded out when newer, faster vehicles became available.

I left school at fourteen with mixed feelings. People say they are the happiest days of your life, but I was looking forward to finding out about the real world, which we had been told was a grim place full of pitfalls.

After the Christmas holidays I started work to train as under chauffeur and valet with the Cubitt family at Thornden, washing cars, cleaning boots and scrubbing the Master's muddy red coat and white breeches after a day's fox hunting.

These memories will never fade, but I thank God for the privilege of living through a wonderful era. The twentieth century has seen more technological and sociological change than any previous centuries; surviving two World Wars and seeing the growth of electricity, radio, computers and communications. The birth of the nuclear age, supersonic aircraft and space travel, a landing on the moon and finally, the Channel Tunnel. I wonder what kind of world it will be when all these things are the memories of a future schoolboy.