

Brian Smith's reflections of growing up in Hilltop through WW2 and beyond.

I was born on 24th March 1938 in Ramsgate, where the Smith and Barrett family had found themselves. With both sides of the family making Ramsgate their home from different parts of the country my parents decided that work and opportunity were very limited & moved to Canterbury initially landing in Nunnery Road. They shared a house with friends but when the husband was called up it became necessary to find alternative and more affordable accommodation. My mother, always being a keen walker often found herself with me in the pram in New House Road as it was then, and became interested in No 32, which at the time, before numbering was The Haven. Every time she came home she said to Dad that they should consider the property as an option. With no electricity or mains water Dad was not keen but eventually gave in, as we men do, and said he would at least look at it. Being a keen gardener, once he saw the quarter acre vegetable plot, the rest is history as they say and so this part of the family were firmly entrenched in New House Road & what we now know as Hilltop. And with Brother Colin still in the family home 72 years on it was obviously an important move.

The first job Dad had was at Chartham Concrete Works but soon moved to Williams, St Mildred's Tannery. He was subsequently called up but having passed his medical as A1 he was not allowed to join-up as his occupation was a reserved occupation as a woman could not physically do it. This caused some resentment among some of the residents who's husbands had been called up and were serving members of the Armed Forces.

One of my most early memories is of Dad taking me from the Air-Raid Shelter on the night of the Blitz and seeing Canterbury ablaze. This is still a vivid memory some seventy plus years on. Another war time memory was a day time low level raid by the Luftwaffe, which came directly over our house, Mum threw me under the dinning room table. This raid was believed to be on the Dunkirk Pylons, of which only one remains standing. This story gets told over and over, hopefully it remains accurate and doesn't get embellished over the years.

During the war period there was an Air Raid Warden's post at the junction of the by-road leading to the now Guest farm, Dad was a warden and as kids we had fun with the issued stirrup pump, which pumped water from a bucket, I'm not sure how effective it would have been if used on a serious blaze. Higher up the road was the Home guard hut, which can still be seen behind the overgrown hedge.

Growing up my peers were Roger Clements and Rex Boughton. Roger was best-man at my wedding and I have lost track of him but I believe brother Colin has tracked him down, so hopefully we can meet up soon and rekindle old memories. Rex's parents were Jack and Doris Boughton, who we owe so much for bring the hall into being in those austere times.

Like generations before and to date we all started our education at Wincheap school. The junior school had been a casualty of Luftwaffe incendiary bombs so classes were in prefab buildings. I started school in 1943 and the war was starting to draw to it's conclusion, but we did spend some time in the air raid shelters. Eventually the male teachers returned from the war and to us boys had many interesting stories to tell. Mr Cousin being the most extravert among them, but a good and dedicated teacher, particularly in the area of sport. In those days we walked home often by ourselves, no 4x4's at the gates then. On one occasion a Doodlebug (V1 Flying Bomb) came over while walking home up Hollow Lane and we scrambled up the bank and sheltered in the chalk-pit until it had passed. Was I frightened, can't remember but most probably was. The chalk-pit is now filled in and is part of the A2.

Once the war was over we had a V. E. Day celebration in the Oast House in Stuppington Lane. The Hop Gardens that supplied the Oast House have now sadly gone. Albert Tolput was the star of the party, he could get a tune out of anything, including the spoons and he could tap-dance. I believe the event was in 1946 a year after hostilities had finished in Europe, so most probably included V. J. Day and the cessation of all hostilities. Final memories of the war are the V1 craters in the woods above New House (Kings) Farm. The anti-aircraft guns located at Upper Horton Farm, boy were they noisy when they opened up. I also remember German prisoners of war being marched up the lane. They would make baskets and pegs out of brushwood and sell them to the locals.

1945 brought peace but rationing continued for most things. The shop at No. 34 was run by the Goldup family, with Lilley Amos from Iffin Lane helping worked. I can remember the first bananas and oranges arriving, which I had never tasted before. To us kids it was Aladdin's Cave, sweets in jars, , sherbert sold loose and just right for dipping your finger in. The in drink was Bing (carbonated flavoured water, manufactured in Broad Oak Road) and mum would use it to make a tasty jelly by adding gelatine. Mum would have a weekly order with the shop & other supplies were delivered. Hoppers bakery for bread, Hill the

Butcher, delivering in his Bull Nosed Morris, similar to Mr Jones's in Dads Army. Hambrook's Dairy delivered the milk by pony and trap later up-grading to an ex army Bedford. Goodman's hardware store delivered with everything from soap to paraffin also by horse and cart.

Canterbury slowly started to rebuild, Marks and Spencer having the only shop standing in St Georges Street so when Woolworth's new shop opened replacing the temporary one just over the Kings Bridge in St Peters it was a great occasion. The Marks and Spencer building survived by it's design (flat roof) and vigilant fire watch teams. The David Gregg's building was another milestone of design and is now a listed building.

The Festival of Britain heralded the beginning of the fifties (1951) and Canterbury had it's own on the site of the White Friars. By this time I was at St Dunstan's school in London Road. Our playground was the field opposite the hall, which was part of Wincheap Farm owned by the Lillywhite family. Fortunately the field was always in grass when we were growing up. Cricket and football were the order of the day and I was always keen to have my meal and get out to play & one Saturday I climbed the fence in my cumbersome football boots and fell and broke my arm. A late evening at the old K & C Hospital with ether anaesthetic and six weeks in plaster followed.

The most important Hilltop event was in 1951 with the building of the Hall. All the labour was provided by the men and boys of the road. Jack Boughton was team leader and as he arranged the supply of materials it became a wonderful playground. Health and safety, what health and safety? Ingenuity was the order of the day and an old bicycle frame and part of a metal bed went into the roof of the porch as reinforcements. There are fewer of us now that can remember the actual building work. I recently met David Norton who was a few years older than me and he recounted the story of one of the men slipping and missing me by inches, a reason for risk assessments I think? The summer of '51 gave us boys a good excuse to have late nights at the weekend. In October the building work was sufficiently completed for the official opening and the first service was conducted by the Bishop of Dover. In those early years there were church services every week and a Sunday School. Old Time Dancing and social evenings plus table tennis for both us children and the grown-ups.

When I look how far Hilltop have come it proves to me that all the effort was well worth while. The hall is in continual use and is a credit to the Trustees and residents and a fitting memorial for a past generation. Jack Boughton would be proud of you all.

In conclusion I left school in 1953 and went to work at Bligh Brothers in St Radigans as a sheet metal worker. It was hard work but it taught me several skills including how to hacksaw straight. At the age of 18 I was called up for National Service and joined the RAF as an Armourer, serving at RAF Kirkam, Lancashire, Waterbeach, Cambridge where Hawker Hunter's had been newly deployed and Bruggen in Germany on Canberra Bombers of 213 Squadron. Just before leaving 213 Squadron we practiced loading a secret bomb onto the Canberra's, I presume it's not so secret now, with cruise missiles etc. On leaving the RAF I retrained as a motor mechanic and ended up as Transport Manager for a local building and construction Company, Whiltshire's, unfortunately they came to a sad end and went into administration and closed. This took me to the University as a porter for my final working years.

And finally I'm now retired and enjoying my family and following my hobby of all things steam, particularly railway locomotives. My aim now is to pass this interest on to the little ones, which I'm having some success with.