"Memories of an Octogenarian" Lionel Sole

Part I. The Early Years: 1916-19

EMPTY

My life began before November 1918 and the end of WWI, for I was born on 4 May 1916. I have, of course, no memories of the months which passed before hostilities ceased but I can remember a few incidents, verified by my parents in later years, which occurred during 1919 and one of these I will refer to later.

In addition to the carnage of the First World War, I was born at a time when Britain was a major power, yet we in this country did not enjoy the benefits which today we take for granted. For instance, women were still without the franchise and the Welfare State did not exist; there was no public broadcasting, radio or television, and computer technology as we understand it today was a long way off.

Although I was to live in the Canterbury area for much of the pre-WWII period, I was born much nearer to London. The place was Fairseat, a small hamlet situated in the triangle formed by Sevenoaks, Rochester, and Gravesend. Access to Fairseat is made by an unclassified road which connects with the A227 (Wrotham Heath to Gravesend).

In 1916 the countryside around Fairseat would have been peaceful, but during the past forty years the area has been transformed, large estates having been built to meet the needs of those who commute daily to London and elsewhere. In addition Brands Hatch racing circuit has been constructed, so that today weekend walkers in the area are likely to hear the noise of Formula II racing cars as they power their way around the track.

Although in April 1916 Fairseat was undoubtedly a peaceful place in which to live, the inhabitants of the few houses which then existed would have been aware of the mounting casualties in France. My mother would have read the lists with great concern, for my father had just been conscripted for military service and my birth was imminent. By June my father was in France, serving as an ambulance driver on the Western Front and arriving shortly before the first battle of the Somme, when 20,000 Allied soldiers were to die on the opening day of the offensive.

Memoirs usually contain reference to the writer's family and I have no cause to do otherwise, though I am unable to provide much

information about my own parents' early years, for they rarely spoke about their youth.

Both my father and mother were members of a large family, not uncommon in Victorian times, but in other respects their backgrounds differed. Father was born into a family who were agricultural workers whose ancestors had lived in East Kent, as my grandparents did, for centuries, possibly since the time of the Norman Conquest, whereas my maternal grandfather had emigrated to England from Ireland during the mid-nineteenth century. Grandfather Scanlan had been apprenticed to a Dublin pawnbroker, but in England he joined the Metropolitan Police and rose to the rank of inspector. My paternal grandmother (nee Goodban) was from East Kent; my maternal grandmother (nee Harper) was from Brighton.

My mother, Blanche, was the seventh child of a family of eight, four sons and four daughters. All four sons were soldiers for various periods, one, Desmond, being killed at an early age whilst serving in Nigeria before the First World War; combined, Lionel and Edward served in South Africa, India and the Middle East, Lionel having been present at Omdurman and later fought in the Boer War and WWI, as did Edward. Of Reginald I have no detailed information as to his service.

It was Edward that I knew best, for I never met Reginald, and Lionel only twice. Uncle Ted was one of my favourite uncles and he gave me much assistance in my younger days. He died in 1971, aged 81 years.

My mother, together with her sisters Eva, Norah and Grace were all to marry, Norah probably enjoying the more varied life by emigrating to Australia with her husband in 1913; Eva, the eldest, was widowed during the First World War when her husband was killed on the Western Front in 1916, a few weeks after the birth of her third child. Unlike their brothers, all four sisters lived for eighty years or more, my mother dying a few weeks after her ninetieth birthday.

My father, the son of a waggoner, was the fifth child of a family of six: three sons and three daughters. Compared with the Scanlan family the history of the Soles could be regarded as less interesting. My father's eldest brother, Alfred, was apprenticed to a blacksmith, working first at

the village smithy in Acol, near Margate, and later in the foundry of Tillings of Maidstone, manufacturers of heavy duty lorries and buses; William, the youngest, was severely handicapped by having a shortened left leg from childhood and receiving very little education, so that for the most part he was employed for menial work. All three sisters were to marry, one, Bertha, died tragically on Margate seafront when in her 'twenties'; Emily, the eldest daughter, married a market gardener; and Ada, a retired sea captain of a Cross-Channel boat. Of my grandparents I know very little more than what has already been written, the only one I knew being Grandmother Sole who lived at Birchington, Kent and died in 1927, aged 72 years. The remaining three died before 1912 and before reaching their sixty-fifth birthday.

My parents probably met about 1905 in London when both were 'in service', my father as a groom and my mother as a maid. At the time of their marriage in 1912 my mother was the lady's maid at the French Embassy. Before their wedding, and realising the future importance of the motorcar, they decided that father should learn to drive, and this he did by attending a School of Driving, learning in addition the fundamentals of car construction and maintenance. The latter was most important, for in the early days of motoring, cars frequently broke down, necessitating roadside repairs.

Despite his additional qualifications it was not until late 1914 that he obtained the post of driver at Fairseat House where I was born. Meanwhile they worked briefly at Normansland in Surrey, where many wealthy people had country properties.

Father's luck in obtaining the kind of post he sought was as the result of someone's misfortune. Early in 1914 his employer, a Colonel Pitt, and his chauffeur were touring the Continent and had reached Austria when war was declared and, being British citizens, were arrested. Although the colonel, being above military age, was allowed to return home his chauffeur was less fortunate and was interned.

By April 1916 father, who had volunteered for military service on several previous occasions, was recruited as an ambulance driver and mother was asked to vacate their accommodation within six weeks of my birth. As a result, mother took rooms at Maidstone and these became our

x and lived at Staple

base, though we seem to have spent long periods with relatives at Henley-on Thames (Aunt Eva), Birchington (Grandmother Sole), Staple (Aunt Emily and Uncle Walter) and Bridge (Aunt Grace and Uncle George), the villages being near Canterbury.

Part II. Life in an English Village: 1919-28

As an appropriate map will show, the village of Bridge in East Kent is located three miles south of Canterbury. Today's motorists, hurrying to or from the Channel ports of Dover and Folkestone, might well fail to notice the village, for during the past forty years a dual carriageway has been constructed to join with the M2 near Faversham and the village now has a by-pass. As a consequence only visitors to Bridge now use the old A2 and, if approaching from Canterbury, will descend a hill to see the village nestling in the valley of the River Nailbourne, a tributary of the Stour.

For those who remember the village from pre-war days, one's first impression is that Bridge has changed little since that time: the bow-fronted Georgian houses with the adjacent post office; the Elizabethan house (which was my home); the three public houses; the parish church; and the bridge which gave the village its name appear the same as in photographs taken eighty years ago. But beyond the High Street one finds many new houses which have been built on green field sites, so that the population today is probably 1500 or more, being vastly greater than in the 1920s. The Bridge which I knew in childhood could not have been described as a typical English village for it had amenities which would not normally have been found elsewhere, nevertheless it was a village and most of the working population were employed on farms, some being part of large estates with stately homes. There were many large houses in the district and they too provided a source of employment, employing both male and female labour.

The village was self-contained, for there was a comprehensive range of shops - fourteen or more in total - which provided most of the needs of the villagers. Only when one required dental treatment or wished to purchase 'capital' items like furniture was it necessary to visit Canterbury or a nearby town, and in the '20s and '30s few working class people bought new furniture.

In addition to the shops the village could boast of having its own gas works, providing gas for cooking and heating in some of the houses and limited street lighting. There was also piped water for some; a GP and a District Nurse; a volunteer fire brigade, the men riding on an engine pulled by one or two horses according to requirements; there was a village policeman, whose presence helped to reduce crime, though I cannot remember any major incident. But the village could not claim to have a

sewage works or refuse collection. Few houses were fitted with a WC and where they existed the waste drained into a cesspit which required periodical emptying. Most of the villagers had to be content with outside privies ('up the garden path'), with the pails being emptied by the night soil men. As for refuse collection this was no problem, for at the time there was little packaging. Most of the households had access to open ground, a kitchen garden or allotment, or both, so that much of the household waste was either burnt or composted, bottles being buried in 'banks', which are familiar to collectors, while the few tins were discreetly disposed of.

At Bridge were the offices of the Bridge Rural District Council, later the 'Bridge-Blean', and the local Poor Law Institution, which was dreaded by some old people, especially childless couples. Too old to work, possibly infirm and having no income other than the meagre old-age pension of the time, they were unable to maintain their independence, so that they had no option but to become inmates of the 'workhouse'. There they were separated, the man to the Men's Ward, his wife to the Women's Ward. After many years of married life this was difficult for them to accept.

Of the 'sights, sounds and smells' of village life these are but a few: the sight of cows being driven to/from their pastures to Mr. Stone's farm in the High Street twice daily and leaving behind a trail of mess to be removed, either by the roadsweeper or cottage gardeners, or both. The mess made by the cows was added to by horses, of which there were many, and on market days by animals being driven to/from Canterbury.

A more exciting sight for a small boy was the 'turn out' by the village fire brigade following the firing of a maroon, for it was then that I saw the firemen running down the street, each one clutching his helmet and axe in one hand while trying to fasten his tunic with the other. Parallel with this would be the removal of a horse from the shafts of a tradesman's cart to pull the fire engine.

Often the 'call' was for something no more serious than a chimney, a thatched roof, or haystack which had caught fire, but there was the occasional big blaze. One of these blazes occurred on a bitterly cold winter's night when the village wet/fried fish shop caught fire and was totally destroyed. Despite the shop being adjacent to the river and the fire

station nearby, it was a hopeless situation, for the brigade was equipped with a manually-operated pump only which could not produce the required pressure and the water froze in the hosepipe. In desperation the brigade resorted to buckets and were able to prevent serious damage to the house next door.

Among the sounds remembered are those of the animals as they were slaughtered at the abattoirs attached to the butchers, the sounds reverberating throughout the village. Two other sounds were those made by the village blacksmith as he forged shoes for horses and the sound of the postman's horse. Riding on top of a box cart, the postman would pass through the village during the afternoon when en route to Elham on the Folkestone road, returning in the evening to collect the mail at our post office at 8 pm precisely. The sound of his hórse as they descended Bridge Hill on a cold winter's night is not forgotten.

Bridge could boast of having a gas works; it could also boast of having a railway station, the trains connecting with main line trains at Canterbury, and the village was served by the buses which linked Canterbury with Dover and Folkestone. The omnibuses would best be described as charabancs, for until about 1926 these large cumbersome vehicles, fitted with solid tyres and with a top speed of no more than 20 mph were to be seen on most of the routes operated by the company. Provided with a soft top similar to that fitted to old-style perambulators, and folded back to rest at the rear of the vehicle, the charabanc had a seating capacity for about twenty-five passengers. The driver was assisted by a conductor and together, when the weather required cover for the occupants, they would raise the hood and, drawing it to the front of the charabanc, make it secure by means of leather thongs threaded through brackets fixed to the wings. For additional protection, side curtains were then brought into use. Such a procedure would cause a delay to the service. There is nothing new about delays to public services !

These are some of my memories of Bridge during the period when we lived there.

When WWI ended in November 1918 mother and I may have been at Birchington. I am not sure, but by the summer of the following year we were living at Bridge, together with my father, who was back in 'Civvy

Street'. Of this I am certain. We were then staying with my mother's sister, her husband and small son, Edward (Ted), who was four years my senior.

As a soldier father had served in France, Belgium and Italy, and it was from Italy that he made his journey back to Britain, arriving four or five months after the signing of the Armistice. Although his demobilisation was later than that of most Servicemen, that proved to be to his advantage, for he found immediate employment at a time when work was difficult to find. Working for the War Department (WD) as a civilian driver, his job was to ferry vehicles being returned to this country from the Continent. This meant collecting a staff car, lorry, or ambulance from a Channel port, often Richborough, near Sandwich, driving it to a reception centre at Faversham or Slough. As most of the vehicles were in a bad state of repair they could travel at low speeds only, and were driven on main roads which had a much poorer surface than today's standard, the time taken to complete each journey was considerable and father would be away from home for several days. Although his employment was not ideal it was work at a time when hundreds of thousands of ex-Servicemen were unemployed.

Unlike the system of demobilisation which followed the end of WWII, basically 'first in, first out', there was little or no system of control, so that vast numbers of men were discharged on to an unprepared labour market, neither Commerce nor Industry having had time to make the change to peacetime conditions. As a result many ex-Servicemen found that instead of returning home to 'a land fit for heroes to live in' they faced unemployment which could last for a long time. At the time it was not uncommon to see in towns and villages, men who had been through 'Hell', and were without unemployment benefit, singing in the street, turning the handle of a barrel organ, going from door-to-door in the hope of selling a pair of shoe laces or matches and receiving in addition a small sum of money from a sympathetic householder. Some men were amputees, others were blind.

Although my father fared better than some of his war-time colleagues he found difficulty in obtaining satisfactory employment, so that in the space of six years he had six different jobs before being 'taken on' by a firm of timber merchants with whom he remained, with the exception of the period 1939-45, for the remainder of his working life. In

retirement my parents continued to live on the premises until father died in 1970.

When father's employment with the WD ended he worked briefly for a small firm of haulage contractors, owned by my cousin's grandfather, and it is this period that provides my first memory of him. He was helping in the unloading of a load of poles from a horse-drawn dray and was wearing his Army uniform.

About the same time we ceased being 'lodgers' and moved into our first home as a family, my parents having obtained the part-tenancy of an Elizabethan house. It proved to be very poor accommodation, for it lacked all three services: water, gas/electricity and sewerage. Had the year been 2002 the property would have been condemned as being unfit for human habitation but eighty years ago our living conditions were not unusual, in fact they would have been considered the 'norm' for working-class families in rural areas.

The house still stands and a few years ago a local newspaper published a brief history of the property, together with a photograph which shows modern windows and the absence of the wooden shutters referred to below.

Built in the sixteenth century as a yeoman farmer's house it later became an inn and then an oasthouse, when an annexe was added. Probably towards the end of the nineteenth century the building was converted to provide three homes. It has since reverted to single occupancy and is a listed property.

From the outside the original part of the house is typically Elizabethan: timber-framed with brick infill ('noggin'). In our time lattice windows were fitted with outside shutters. The upper storey extends beyond the floor below. Originally the roof might have been thatched but today it is tiled. To the left, or south, of the older part of the building is the annexe built in brick, the front wall being fitted with two small windows.

During our nine-year occupancy of the first of the three homes, access was made from Primrose Alley, the door opening directly on to the living room. Being little more than twelve feet square there was little

space for furniture, but standing in the centre of the room was a circular table upon which stood a paraffin lamp, our sole source of lighting after dark. Opposite the window which looked out on to the village street was an open fireplace, the sole source of heating for the entire house and, with the exception of a small Valor stove, mother's only means of cooking. Access to the second floor was made by a staircase which led from the living room behind a partition wall and on reaching the landing one door opened on to the room above the living room, the other to the room above the cellar. This room above the cellar became my bedroom. A long, barrack-like room, it had a ceiling which sloped at an acute angle, so that on the street side it barely provided head room for a young boy. One small window provided natural light. Often intensely cold on a winter's night, I went to bed by candle light, the candle being quickly extinguished.

Back on the ground floor a door opened on to the space below the staircase, the space being used for washing, cooking on the Valor stove, and the storage of coal. From there one could descend a flight of stairs to reach the cellar. Much of the cellar was occupied by the ancient firebox which had been used for the drying of hops, but there was sufficient space to accommodate mother's mangle fitted with large wooden rollers. Constructed largely of cast iron, it required the strength of an Amazon for maximum efficiency. The cellar also provided winter storage for various root crops, including potatoes, which my father grew when time permitted.

The cellar was badly lit by natural light, but during daylight hours there was usually sufficient light to guide one to the stairs leading to the yard. There one found the communal pump which, when the temperature dropped to freezing, would require priming with hot water. The yard was the drying ground for the weekly wash and it was there that one found the three privies, one for each of the three families.

Before the advent of the range of domestic appliances which are now in general use, the vacuum cleaner, washing machine, refrigerator, etc., housework was a drudgery. For my mother washing day meant carrying numerous pails of water from and to the yard, heating the required amount in saucepans on the open fire and washing the clothes in a zinc bath (used also for the weekly 'tub' on Friday nights). After washing, with or without the use of a corrugated washboard, the washing was mangled, itself very hard work, and dried in the yard if weather

permitted. Ironing required the alternative use of a pair of flat irons heated on the open fire.

In the absence of a cooking range most of our food was boiled, an exception being the weekly roast eaten on Sunday, the joint being cooked at the home of my mother's sister who lived 'across the road'. By the same means mother was able to produce a weekly cake and bake pastry in the cottage which, although more than two hundred years old, had better cooking facilities, piped water and gas lighting. The cottage also had a very large garden, enabling my Uncle George to grow an ample supply of vegetables, to keep a few chickens and, occasionally, rear a pig. The rent paid for this cottage was three shillings a week, sixpence more than for our des-res.

Shortly after my fifth birthday in 1921 I contracted diphtheria and was driven to the isolation hospital in a horse-drawn ambulance, the 'fever bus', driven by the same uncle. The hospital was no more than a converted residence located in a country lane a short distance from Bridge. I was to remain there for six weeks, enough time for me to retain a few memories, including the sickly medicine which tasted like liquorice and the trains which ran past the building, though the line, being in a cutting, meant that I could not see the trains from my window.

In the following September I started school. Most people can remember their first day, especially if, like me, they had not previously attended a play school or nursery school. Such places did not exist in the village. For me it was a traumatic experience and I protested loudly for a few days but soon found a soul mate: Ronald Taylor, known as 'Sonny'. We were to become great friends and, together with his two brothers and sister, I was to spend much of my time at his home, which was adjacent to the school. His father was the local coal merchant and haulage contractor and his extensive yards, providing stabling for his horses and storage space for coal and 'faggots' (kindling wood), became one of our favourite playing areas.

The village school provided an elementary education for both boys and girls of all ages and was opened in the nineteenth century shortly after the Education Act of 1870. Known as Bridge CofE School, it provided for

an intake of about 120 pupils. Children would start school in the September of the year of their fifth birthday and could leave, as most did, when fourteen years of age, the school leaving age having been raised from twelve by the Education Act of 1918.

With most children's full-time education being confined to less than nine years the curriculum concentrated on the three R's, less time being devoted to subjects like Geography, History and Art. Each day commenced with Prayers. Scant attention was paid to Sport. For boys, during winter months, football of the 'kick about' kind was played on pasture land opposite the school, access being made by climbing along a fence which spanned the River Nailbourne. Our football periods were not well organised and for those not familiar with the rules, not very beneficial. I had one advantage over many of the kids, for I had football boots, not that they did much for my game. During summer months we might go for a run along the country lanes, while the girls played netball on a nearby field. Swimming was not an option, for East Kent was to wait fifty years before public indoor swimming pools were built.

The school premises were divided to provide four classrooms: the headmaster's house, two playgrounds - one for the boys, one for the girls - and the usual cloakroom facilities. The curriculum for the nine years of study was taught by four teachers, each of the assistant teachers being responsible for two years, the headmaster for three. This was the system of elementary education in rural areas during the inter-war years.

For the first two years we were taught by an unqualified teacher and for a few months sat in rows on forms arranged as a terrace, wrote on slates and used a piece of wet rag for erasures. Later, the terrace was demolished, being replaced by small tables and chairs. To bring the class in to the twentieth century we then were given writing books. The classroom, like the other three, was heated by a solid fuel boiler, stoked when necessary by the teacher. One had to be sitting near the boiler to feel any warmth on a cold winter's day.

Apart from remembering that much of subject matter in the early years was taught by rote, I remember very little of what was taught. On one occasion we were told that the novelist Joseph Conrad, who had lived in the next village, had died. The year would have been 1924. On another

occasion the headmaster, when speaking of Bloody Queen Mary and the persecution of Protestants, referred to the Martyrs' Field memorial in Canterbury. When I duly visited the memorial I found that a Joan Sole heads the list of those who had lost their lives.

In each of the classrooms hung a map which showed the British Empire, then covering a quarter of the World's surface, printed in red. Each year, on 24 May, we would celebrate Empire Day, when a local dignitary, often Colonel Talbot (Rtd), who lived in one of the stately houses, would give the entire school a 'pep' talk, emphasising how proud we should be to be British.

Although for the most part I enjoyed school, I liked better the time beyond the school gates. Together with my friends the Taylors and a few others I had a wonderful time, enjoying far more freedom than the modern child. Abduction and child abuse were words unknown to us, though probably such crimes did exist. Provided I was home for my meals my parents were seldom concerned as to my safety. In addition to playing the popular games of the day, we would roam the many fields and woods in the district, sometimes playing 'soldiers', using the trenches which had been dug for practice during 1914-18, when troops would be stationed briefly at Bridge before going to France. In the same field we would make and light a fire, cooking half-a-pound of beef sausages bought with our pocket money for twopence and baking potatoes brought from home.

As a child growing up in the 20s, I probably had more than the average number of outings, for there were some children who were lucky if they went beyond the boundaries of the village or saw the sea once a year. For me, in addition to the annual outing to the seaside, organised by a village committee for all children, and that provided by our Wesleyan Sunday School teacher, a Mr Hugget, at his own expense, which was a very small group, there was one, and sometimes two visits each year to Birchington, the home of my paternal grandmother. In addition, my cousin Ted and I were taken by our parents to places like Margate and Herne Bay, travelling in a horse-drawn wagonette driven by my Uncle George. This kind of travel has long since disappeared and it is unlikely that today one would see a wagonette other than in a carriage museum. Designed to be drawn by one horse, a wagonette has a maximum capacity for six adults, the driver and one passenger sitting high at the front while the other

four, accommodated at the rear by bench-type seats set lengthwise, sit in pairs facing one another. As our party comprised four adults and two boys only, the horse was not overburdened and when faced with a steep hill to climb the men would alight and, if necessary, all of the remaining passengers.

Leaving home shortly after breakfast on a Sunday morning and returning late in the evening, the wagonette proved a most pleasant way to travel, for the country lanes were uncrowded, and what little traffic we met with was largely horse-drawn. Usually we would travel to either Herne Bay or Margate, the latter destination incurring the greatest distance, being about twenty miles. With the horse trotting slowly and a stop for 'refreshments', the journey would take about three-and-a half hours. The horse would then be stabled, fed and rested until the early evening when we would return home.

The year 1924 was a momentous one for young Lionel, for we visited the Empire Exhibition in London and a few months later I received a second-hand bicycle. Travelling direct to London by train from nearby Bekesbourne Station our visit was for four days only but it was, nevertheless, a rare treat for my parents as well as their small son. For my father it was his first post-war holiday and he was not to enjoy a second, apart from the statutory national holidays, until 1939.

On our first full day we went to the Exhibition which was held at Wembley for two years, 1924 and 1925. The previous year the FA Cup Final was played on the famous turf for the first time and those familiar with the history of the game will know that the match was watched by a crowd of 100,000. However, before the match started a large number of the spectators, frustrated by the lack of accommodation surged on to the pitch and it was then that a single mounted policeman on a white horse was largely responsible for the police regaining control.

Although it is now almost eighty years ago, I remember distinctly the twin towers, which are now threatened with destruction, as part of the plans for the new national sports stadium. Within the stadium a series of pavilions had been built to accommodate displays representing Britain's many overseas possessions: Australia, Canada, India, etc. Staffed by men and women, some dressed in their national costumes, all of the pavilions

were of interest. In a single day we could not have visited more than a fraction of the pavilions, but I retain memories of some of the things which we saw. Of our remaining time in the capital I remember little, apart from a visit to the London Zoo, probably on the following day, which was a Sunday.

It could not have been more than a few months later that I was given a ten shilling note and told to go and see the lady who was selling a small child's bicycle. Not being able to ride the machine I proudly pushed the bicycle home. It was not long before I was riding around the district mostly alone and sometimes a mile or more from home. Today, that may be difficult to believe, but in 1924 and for many more years Britain's roads were not too dangerous. By 1924 a few of the traders in Bridge had replaced their horse-drawn delivery vans with motor cars, the Model T Ford being the most popular, but the continued use of horses was still the preferred choice, particularly on farms. The same year saw the demise of the village's most famous motorist: Count Zborowski who was killed at Le Mans. An émigré Polish count, Zborowski was rich enough to indulge his penchant for fast cars and model railways. In the grounds of his stately home, Highland Court, he built a track around his estate and on this he ran his trains and rolling stock. In his workshop he built with the assistance of his mechanics a very high-powered racing car, using an engine from a German zeppelin. This was the original Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang. Whether it was fitted with silencers I do not know, but when driven through the village at speed it made 'one hell of a noise'. Fortunately it would take a few minutes for the Count to drive from his home and down a steep hill, the noise giving the villagers time to take evasive action.

1909

While in the 1920s Britain's roads in rural areas were uncongested, in the skies above one saw few planes, for aviation was still in its infancy. In 1907 Bleriot had been the first to make the 21-mile crossing to Dover from France, and whilst the Great War had accelerated the design and manufacture of war machines it took several years to develop civilian aircraft to enable airlines to be established. In Britain the most important pre-war airline was Imperial Airways.

At Bridge the villagers would occasionally see a biplane which might have taken-off from nearby Bekesbourne, one of several small aerodromes built in East Kent during WWI, enabling planes to be ferried

from Britain to France. There the planes would have been used in aerial combat above the battlefields of the Western Front. As time progressed one might also have seen on a clear summer's evening the Imperial Airways' large passenger plane en route to Paris from Croydon, then London's airport. Like the small light aircraft, the airliner I could see clearly, for it flew at a low altitude, so low in fact that it has been reported that the pilot would, when possible, follow the railway lines, either to Dover or Folkestone. These two lines by-passed Bridge and were but a short distance from the main street.

The gradual increase in the use of the motor car and in the number of planes seen in the sky might have indicated to some that life in the village would soon be altered radically, but for the majority life remained the same throughout the '20s and '30s, for the local economy was based on agriculture and horticulture and the calendar of events followed the seasons of the year: planting and sowing, harvesting and ploughing. In addition the religious festivities had greater significance than they have today, especially Easter and Christmas, for they were Bank Holidays, providing working men with a paid holiday at a time when few enjoyed an annual week's holiday.

Throughout each year there were a number of social events, for instance in the summer there would be one or two fetes followed by the annual flower show. These events were well supported by the villagers, especially the latter, when keen local gardeners took pride in exhibiting their vegetables and flowers. Outside of the marquee there would be a range of sideshows: coconut shies, dart competitions and bowling for the (live) pig, etc. In addition to this there would be competitions for children and a display of some kind, gymnastics, performed by a team of soldiers being very popular. During the afternoon a military band would play, to be followed by dancing in the marquee to music by a local dance band.

Kent has long been described as the 'garden of England' and from early August until mid-October the various crops would be harvested, including the cereals, wheat, barley and oats; apples and pears; vegetables, including potatoes, carrots, turnips and swedes; and, of course, hops.

Although the mechanisation of farming equipment had begun in the nineteenth century, farming in East Kent as elsewhere was still labour

intensive and there was a widespread use of horses. This was particularly so when harvesting cereal crops. Using a horse-drawn binder the corn was cut and delivered as sheaves, which were then manually stacked to form stooks. After drying in the sun they would be carted to a central point for thrashing. This was done by a travelling contractor, using a thrasher, belt-driven by a steam engine. Finally, the bags of corn would be taken to a barn for storage, the straw being made into haystacks. All this could take a very long time compared with today's use of a combined harvester.

Being a child I played no part in the harvesting described but was involved in the picking of hops. For my mother and her sister picking hops in a local hop field was regarded as a social occasion, for they would be joined by other women who would not normally do paid work. Because it was traditional for children also to pick hops the school summer holiday was arranged to provide for this, so that the village school would be closed for six weeks from mid-August until late September. Like my cousin Ted I hated hop-picking, for I could think of far better things to do during my school holiday.

Each year we would proceed to the same hop field about one mile from our home. Known locally as 'Baker's' it formed part of a farm owned by a family of the same name. At the turn of the century my father worked there as a twelve-year-old following the death of my grandfather. Being eighteen miles from home he 'lived in'. He could not have been very happy and his mother was probably concerned, but she was a widow with several young children and with no widow's pension it was necessary for father to leave the school which he had attended half-time since he was ten and go to work. Why so far from home is not known to me.

Books have been written and films made about the hop fields of Kent, of the annual migration of EastEnders from London to places like Yalding, near Maidstone, to pick hops and enjoy a paid country holiday. Some of the Londoners went further afield and, for instance, reached the Canterbury area. Hardworking folk and living in some of the most deprived areas of London they could, when 'in drink', be a fairly unruly lot. As a consequence, the farmers who grew hops provided only the most basic accommodation for the visitors and this would take the form of army-type huts fitted with bunk beds – and no mattresses ! The occupants

would cook in the open, using whatever fuel was available and at night the huts would be lit by hurricane lamps.

Fortunately for us the local hop fields did not attract the visitors from the capital and the hops of 'Bakers' were picked by local people.

For something like eight years we would pick hops at Baker's, leaving home each morning at 6.30am and returning in the evening. For the first few years I was allowed to play, but from the age of eight my bottom was firmly fixed on a stool ! A hopfield is divided in to a series of parallel rows across the whole width of the plot, the hops being trained on wires and twine. There are several methods. At Baker's the bind first rose vertically to reach a wire about five feet from the ground, tied and then trained obliquely to reach a height of, probably, ten feet. The procedure was to pull a bind and, placing it on one's lap, turn the bind over so as to expose the hops for picking. When the binds were dry, no problem; when wet one was showered with rainwater. Picking the hops, which had been dressed with a fungicide, was a messy business and not well paid. Paid by the 'piece', the picker was paid an average of eighteen pence (12+p) per five bushels (one bushel = eight gallons). For a whole day's work my mother and I together might have picked fifteen bushels and for three weeks' work our take home pay would be less than four pounds. Mother might have been happy; Lionel was not ! However, I enjoyed the après hop picking holiday when we would go to Birchington. This holiday was from seven to fourteen days. After that it was back to school and the start of an English winter.

In Britain 'the weather' is often the first topic of conversation and in winter particularly. Today, to offset the gloom of long winter nights, technology provides a wide range of apparatus for home entertainment, TV and radio being a popular choice, for there are many TV channels and radio stations to satisfy varied interests. In addition, we have access to videos and computers, etc. At any time during the day or night we can press a button and listen to music of our choice, listen to a talk or the regional, national and international news, or we can turn on the 'telly'. By telephone – static or mobile - we can talk to friends in most parts of the world, or we can fax them or send them an e-mail. All of this is instantaneous. But this was not so in pre-WWII days, neither was there the

same choice of leisure pursuits outside of one's home nor, for the majority, the car to speed them to a venue.

The inter-war years provide an interesting period in the history of Information Technology, in particular that concerning radio and television, though it took a few years for radio to have a major influence on the lives of people and TV did not become popular until after WWII.

In rural areas, and to a lesser degree in urban areas, entertainment and other leisure activities were mostly 'home grown'. In the home the occupants relied mostly on conversation, reading, and playing cards and board games. Listening to music was a rare option, depending on whether or not a member of a family was a musician and wealthy enough to have a piano or some other instrument. Yes, more families possessed a gramophone, but it required more effort to use than the modern CD or cassette deck and the quality of reproduction was not as good. The gramophone of the '20s required to be wound up for playing each record; a record would play for a maximum of ten minutes and, ideally, the needle would then be replaced. As this shows, a symphony could require a set of three records and a pause between the playing of each of the six sides. As a consequence the gramophone in my home was seldom played.

In rural areas, and this included Bridge, outside activities relied heavily on local talent and initiative. The village hall was the venue for indoor events during winter months and these included whist drives, dances, public meetings and, most importantly for children, the annual Christmas parties. I was eligible to attend the party open to all children living in the village and the British Legion party for members' families. At every party the evening ended with each child receiving an apple and an orange ! Concerts were also held in the same hall when local people came forth to give of their best, two of the local slaughter men providing a song and dance act; a barber a monologue, while his wife provided her interpretation of a popular song ! The village school also staged an annual concert, the writer of this playing a very minor role.

Currently, during winter months, few villagers went beyond the village boundary, except to Canterbury to see a silent film at one of the two small cinemas, a football match or some other outdoor activity. To travel further to Chatham, or to London to see a 'live' show would be

regarded as exceptional. The same also applied during summer months, for not everyone had an annual week/fortnight's holiday and those that did would probably have travelled no further than to places like Margate, Ramsgate or Brighton. A holiday in Devon, Wales or Scotland would have, again, been regarded as exceptional and a holiday in the Channel Isles the ultimate. Only wealthier people took holidays abroad, a few during the 1930s taking a cruise, when this form of holiday started to become popular.

Today we can cross the English Channel by air, sea, or by means of the Channel tunnel. Access to France and other European countries is easy, and for those living in the southeast the total time from home to Calais or Boulogne takes no more than an hour or two, so that there are many who take advantage of this and frequently cross the Channel as day visitors to purchase beers and wines at cheaper prices.

In pre-war Britain travellers to the Continent had one choice: travel by sea, unless they could afford to travel by the limited air service from London. From the eighteenth century onwards the idea of travelling below the waves to France was no more than a pipe dream and during the '20s and '30s and for much longer shares in the Channel Tunnel Company remained at one shilling (5p).

An interesting innovation for travellers by train occurred during the 1920s when the Southern Railway inaugurated a through service to Paris from London (Victoria Station). Known from 1929 onwards as the Golden Arrow, the service continued until 1972 and left London at 11am, the train travelling to Paris via Dover, where the carriages were conveyed by ferry to Calais before joining the French system to complete the journey. The great advantage was that passengers remained in the same carriages and avoided the inconvenience of transferring as foot passengers to the ferry and re-training at Calais.

In the absence of roll-on, roll-off ferries, a post-war development, cars being taken to the Continent were hoisted aboard a ferry at Dover, Folkestone or some other south coast port.

As the preceding paragraphs will have shown, travelling to the Continent before WWII was far from easy and so there were far fewer

visitors to France and elsewhere. Personally, I can remember no more than one or two people, other than ex-Service men, who ventured across the twenty-one miles of sea which separates England from France, so that the majority were satisfied with viewing Calais from the white cliffs of Dover.

Let's now return to my own activities as a child and how I spent the long winter evenings. For the most part they were spent 'across the road', playing with my cousin Ted. Although he was my senior by four years we were firm friends and together we would play with toys which were 'simple' compared with those marketed today, among the most popular at the time being Meccano and steam engines. Combined, they gave us many hours of fun, for we would make with Meccano a windmill, or some other object, which we then were able to drive by the steam engine, using string as a driving belt. Occasionally we would be joined by Ted's friend Harold Decent who lived close by. Harold showed an aptitude for drawing at a very early age and at a later date we were fellow students at the local Art college. Unfortunately Harold's early promise was not sustained and he did not pursue Art as a career. His father owned one of the three grocery shops in the village and his business was conducted in a manner typical of the period.

In pre-WWII days grocers, large and small, purchased their goods in bulk packed in large sacks or boxes, etc. and on entering Mr Decent's shop one would see an array of biscuit tins, each displaying a label describing their contents. The tins would be on the customer's side of the counter, as were a number of other foodstuffs, like pulses which were contained in sacks, together with things like dates and prunes in boxes. On the counter of the shop were an array of large pieces of cheese - usually limited to Cheddar, Edam and Gorganzola - a quantity of butter, a ham and possibly a number of bags of sugar which an assistant would have filled during a quiet period and in anticipation of sales during the day. Also on the counter there would be the scales and the bacon slicer with various joints of bacon hanging above on butcher's hooks.

With far fewer pre-packed items than today it obviously took much longer for a customer to make purchases, particularly if one had to wait for other customers to be served. In some instances it would take the assistant a long while to deal with a single customer: butter had to be cut from the

bulk supply, weighed and patted into shape before wrapping; cheese was cut with a wire; bacon was sliced from the piece; selected biscuits had to be removed from the tin. But in pre-war days time was less important, particularly for the housewife. In Britain self-service shops, which required more packaging, first appeared in the late '50s and early '60s, while supermarkets and hypermarkets came later.

Mr Decent probably preserved his small quantity of ham, bacon and butter, etc. after closing hours by standing them on a marble slab held in a cool room, but the two small family butchers in the village kept their supplies of meat, carcasses and joints, in a steel-lined store kept cold by blocks of ice supplied by a Canterbury refrigeration company. The arrival of the 'ice man' would attract the attention of small boys hoping for a free sample !

Domestic matters apart, the most important development during the nine years in which I lived in Bridge was radio broadcasting which began in 1922 with transmissions by the British Broadcasting Company, later the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), using the call sign 2LO. Soon, very long aerials, held on tall poles, began to appear in the village, one of the earliest owners of a wireless set, as radio was then known, being Mr Taylor, my friend's father. His was a simple crystal set fitted with one pair of headphones. A year or so later this set was sold to my Uncle George and it was then that I listened to the radio for the first time. I was, of course, far too young to appreciate the importance of radio and the affect which it was to have on people's lives, but I can remember how very excited I was when listening to voices from some distant point, which was probably London.

There being just one pair of headphones, listening was restricted to a single person, unless the two ear pieces were separated when two could share the pleasure or, if the headphones were placed in a large bowl, the number of listeners increased, though one had to be very quiet to hear the broadcast. Later, my uncle bought a 2-valve set fitted with two sets of headphones. Progress, indeed ! This replacement necessitated the use of a wet-cell accumulator which required a weekly charge. To ensure no interruption in listening my uncle bought two accumulators, sending one each week to Canterbury for charging.

Although the arrival of the wireless set created much interest, it was not until the introduction of the loudspeaker that the impact of sound broadcasting was fully appreciated. I have no recollection of listening to a set fitted with a loudspeaker whilst living in the village and it was not until 1932 that my father purchased a set.

At about the same time as I listened to my first radio broadcast I saw – but did not use - my first telephone. This also was at the home of Mr Taylor. The telephone receiver took the form of a box secured to a wall at a convenient height. The mouthpiece was attached to the front edge; the earpiece to the left hand side; while on the right-hand side was a handle. To make a call one lifted the earpiece, wound the handle, and waited for the voice of the local postmistress who asked for the number to be called. If the subscriber lived locally she would plug a lead into the appropriate number; if a call was outside village exchange she would 'plug in' to another exchange. This could be Canterbury or some other town. When the call was finished one 'rang off', again using the handle on the receiver. For non-subscribers calls could be made at the village post office. Outside telephone boxes appeared before 1939, the boxes being fitted with A and B buttons. To make a call the receiver was raised, money inserted (minimum charge twopence) and the voice of the operator could be heard. When button A was pressed the operator could hear the caller and would request the number required. Further money would then be inserted, depending on time and distance. If the number was unobtainable button B was pressed and the money which had been inserted was returned. Subscriber Trunk Dialing (STD) was introduced in the 1960s, the Thanet (Margate, Ramsgate district) Exchange being one of the first to install the new system.

1925, like the previous year, was a momentous one for the Sole family, for in April my brother Desmond was born and soon afterwards my father changed his kind of employment when he went to work for a firm of timber merchants in Canterbury. Both of these events were of major importance to me, for I ceased to be the only child and from then on I saw more of my father. I was then nine years old and until that time we were little more than strangers, for following his three years' service in the Army father's work as a civilian kept him from the family home for very long hours. As a taxi driver he would leave the house before I was out of bed and would return long after I had gone to sleep. Apart from an

occasional Sunday, on average once a month, it was a seven-days-a-week job. His new employment meant working a five-and-a-half-day week. Although he would still leave the house by 6.30am he would return shortly after 6 pm, unless overtime delayed him. This meant that we met one another for an hour or so before I went to bed. On Saturdays he would be home by early afternoon and was 'free' until Monday morning.

For me it was unfortunate that he was a keen gardener, for though there was no garden adjacent to the house, he had an allotment which he liked to visit whenever possible.

Possibly as a form of compensation he would frequently allow me to accompany him to work on Saturday morning, so that together we would travel around the district delivering quantities of timber. I really did enjoy those outings, for they provided further opportunities to see the towns and villages of East Kent. The form of travel could not be described as luxurious, for his first lorry was a converted private vehicle. I think the firm's carpenter must have made the conversion, for the 'coachwork' had to be seen to be believed. The make of vehicle was Alldays and Onions (the name of the makers) and there have been times when such a make of car has been one of entries in the annual London to Brighton Veteran Cars Run. Having once been a private vehicle it was fitted with pneumatic tyres but at some time in its life it had lost the two front doors. There were, of course, no seat belts. I am uncertain as to whether the windscreen had survived the conversion, though it probably had. It was a credit to my father that he was able to keep the lorry in service for as long as he did, for it needed constant repair. After a year or so the company changed hands and the new owners began to sell imported timber in addition to English. This meant that the Alldays, which was limited to a maximum load of fifteen hundredweight, was no longer suitable, for customers began to order timber in larger quantities as more and more houses were built. The first replacement was a Ford, followed by a series of Bedford trucks, each capable of carrying a load of three tons.

During the final period of our residence in Bridge, the villagers saw an increase in the use of cars in preference to horses, though horses continued to be used on farms until well after the end of WWII. It was about 1926 when charabancs were replaced by buses fitted with a hard top and the two services, Canterbury to Dover and Canterbury to Folkestone

were increased. As a consequence, the greater comfort and frequency of the buses caused more people to travel into Canterbury for their shopping, to the detriment of village traders in Bridge and elsewhere. During their leisure hours more people also went to Canterbury for entertainment, which caused a gradual decline in the number of concerts and dances held at the village hall. From the same time onwards there was an increasing number of village traders who switched to cars from horses for delivering orders to their customers. The brewers who supplied the three public houses did likewise, so that beer was no longer delivered by drays pulled by pairs of magnificent Shire horses. While the majority of traders preferred the Ford as an alternative to the horse, a few bought a very low-powered vehicle known as Trojan. This vehicle was powered by a two-stroke engine which used a belt for transmission. It was not very successful and soon disappeared from our roads. While two of the brewers bought heavy-duty lorries, one bought the steam-driven Foden. Like the horse-drawn wagonette, the Foden has been consigned to history and is rarely seen outside of museums. The Foden is a juggernaut and the weight of the vehicle probably exceeds its maximum carrying capacity. Much of the weight can be attributed to the need to provide a water tank and bunkering for coal. Fitted with solid tyres it travels at very slow speeds, whether on level or rising ground. When driven up a steep hill I have known the speed of a Foden to drop to 2-3 mph. I know this from personal experience for, together with friends, I would cling to the tow bar when one was climbing Bridge Hill on the Dover road ! Dangerous? Yes, but we would know at which point the vehicle would gather speed, when we let go of the tow bar. The amount of traffic then using this main road was minimal.

The Foden which delivered beer to *The White Horse* in the village was crewed by two men who were as rotund as the large barrels of beer which they delivered. When they climbed into the small cab positioned at the extreme front of the vehicle there could have been very little room for them to work, one driving and the other stoking the fire.

I am uncertain as to when the first garage in the village came in to being, but I do know that because there were relatively few cars the proprietor found it necessary to undertake other types of engineering. However he did provide a service for those who owned cars and sold petrol in returnable two-gallon cans. It was not until after we had left the

village that a second garage was opened. This garage installed a petrol pump, the fuel being pumped manually from the supply tank.

Despite the steady increase in the use of the car in preference to the horse and some changes in the way that a few villagers made to their lives, the way of life in Bridge during our final years of residence remained much the same as it had been since the end of WWI, both working and leisure hours being largely governed by the four seasons as previously described. To the village itinerant traders and other visitors continued to make their weekly visits. On Sundays during the season, the 'shrimp and winkle man' would come with his bicycle and homemade trailer to sell his goods, having travelled first to Canterbury from Whitstable on the now defunct railway. In the Sole family this meant either shrimps or winkles for tea, eaten with mother's homemade rolls. On Thursday afternoons came the 'oil man', his horse-drawn cart heavily laden with hardware products of all kinds, together with paraffin. He would stop outside of our house, when mother would buy the week's supply of paraffin for our oil lamp, candles and any other requirement. While the trader attended to the needs of others, his horse, tired after a long day, would champ on its bit and fidget. Once a week the sound of the organ grinder was heard as he turned the handle of the organ, from whence came familiar tunes, including military music, such as that by Souza. Less frequently, possibly every second or third year, came the road menders.

During the '20s and into the '30s 'A' and 'B' roads in Britain were surfaced with tar and gravel, the gravel being rolled in to the hot tar by a very heavy steam roller. The road menders, working as a team of six or so, used very basic equipment, for in addition to the roller there was little more than a simple mobile furnace mounted on a chassis fitted with iron wheels, wheelbarrows, buckets, spades and brooms. A heavily constructed wooden caravan provided secure storage space for the small items of equipment and shelter for the men if necessary.

When required to move the caravan and furnace, the equipment formed a train, pulled by the roller and as the process of re-surfacing a road progressed the roller would tow the equipment to a convenient parking space to provide a local base.

Each day the gang would start where they had finished on the previous day, using material which had been delivered to the roadside. Having heated a barrel of tar, the tar would be drained into a bucket and then poured on to the road, a second man raking the tar to provide a thin film. Finally, using shovelfuls of gravel, the tar would be covered and, having repeated the process a number of times, the roller would be brought into use. Surprisingly, a considerable stretch of road was treated each day and, if the job had started at Canterbury, the gang were soon at work in High Street, Bridge, much to the concern of the villagers, especially the ladies, for loose gravel covered with traces of tar were picked up on footwear and carried into the home.

For travellers the re-surfacing of roads by the method described created a major problem, especially for cyclists, for loose gravel played havoc with the tyres, so that it was often preferable to walk a distance to avoid the most recently treated surface rather than run the risk of a puncture. Unsatisfactory compared with the methods used today, the tarring and gritting of roads produced a surface much better to that found on minor roads, which were either 'flint', 'gravel' or 'dirt'.

Three more anecdotes which belong to 1927 before I begin to close my memories of life in an English village, the first concerning a visit to a stately home and my very tenuous link with Eton, the famous English public school. The latter is more easily explained, for I sometimes wore the cast-off clothing of the rich man's son who attended that school ! This was made possible by my father's friendship with the butler who worked at the 'big house' and it was my friendship with the butler's son which made it possible for me to see at first-hand the working conditions 'below stairs'. Those who have seen the TV series 'Upstairs, Downstairs' or any film depicting the same period in time, will know exactly what I mean.

The stately home, set in a very large park, is the largest in the district and access is made by a private road, guarded at each end by 'lodges', houses then occupied by the gatekeepers. Whilst the public were permitted to enter the park in order to visit Bishopsbourne, the next village, visitors were allowed to use the road and a well-defined path only. The house is protected by a 'second line of defence' in the form of substantial fencing, so that access to the house at this point is/was made by another gravelled road. It was, therefore, with some trepidation that I

approached the house, although I had been assured by my companion that 'all was well', for the owner and his wife were on holiday.

Having arrived at the house we descended a short flight of steps and entered the building by one of the many back doors to find ourselves in a very large kitchen. There my friend met his father and we saw a host of servants of all kinds, kitchen maids, chamber maids, etc. These people worked long hours, from early morning to late at night for very little pay, much of their time responding to calls from upstairs: buckets of coal, hot water, food and drink, or any other demand made by their employers. Today we might regard their conditions of work as slavery, but seen in the context of the time the servants probably regarded their employment as satisfactory, for they received free board and lodging and with time they might progress to become either a butler or housekeeper, depending whether male or female, occupying the top jobs in the hierarchy. Of course conditions of employment in the stately homes varied, some employers being better than others. In any case, for many country girls with a working class background the choice of employment upon leaving school was not great and domestic service was often the best option to adopt before, hopefully, they married.

Although I did not see 'the lady of the house' that day I was to meet her in different circumstances a short while later. Young Lionel was then breaking the rules of the park: I was swinging on a branch of one of the hundreds of trees when Madam drove past in her chauffeur driven car. Ordering her driver to stop I was given a severe 'dressing down': 'Get down at once' was her immediate response. I was only a small boy and it was a very large tree. I was having fun. Oh, well, it was her tree and she was entitled to protect it. About forty years later, whilst I was listening to a radio broadcast on the life and work of Joseph Conrad the novelist, I again heard the voice of the lady. She was recalling her memories of the great man when he was her neighbour and living in the nearby village of Bishopsbourne. Life is full of surprises !

Autumn is the 'shooting season' and in the autumn of 1927 a 'shoot', extending over several weekends, was held on Barham Downs near a black mill, which was then a well-known landmark, about two miles from Bridge. Local men and boys were recruited to serve as 'beaters', the men being paid 37p and the boys 12p. Despite my tender

years I had an offer to participate and, having obtained the permission of my parents, I accepted the offer with alacrity, the prospect of receiving a sum equal to five times my weekly pocket money being too great to resist. So, armed with a packet of sandwiches, and in the company of friends, I set forth. Upon arrival I was positioned on the corner of a wood and there I stood alone, my solitude being broken only by the arrival of a man with a glass of lemonade at midday. The procedure for the 'beaters' was to listen for a signal, the blowing of a whistle. This indicated that a 'shoot' was about to begin and the 'beaters' were then required to make as much noise as possible by banging a length of wood against a tree. This caused the birds to fly from the wood and towards the guns. About mid-afternoon the 'shoot' ended and, having drawn my pay, I returned home. I repeated this experience three times and in so doing became richer by 37p, a large sum at that time. I thought it all worthwhile, despite having got soaking wet on one occasion. An oil painting which hangs in our bungalow at Draycott serves as a reminder of my first pay days. In December of the same year Grandmother Sole died at a time when snow lay thick upon the ground. On the morning of the funeral I was sent by bus to Canterbury to collect the family's wreath, so that my parents' departure for Birchington would not be delayed. In the afternoon and evening I went tobogganing with my cousin Ted, using a toboggan which my father had made. The venue was a nearby field with a good slope and we both had tremendous fun, especially during the bright moonlit evening.

The New Year heralded my 'scholarship year' and the year when we left Bridge. In pre-WWII Britain the State provided free elementary education for all children up to the age of fourteen; secondary education being provided by independent fee-paying schools, most of which offered a few scholarships for the children of parents who were unable to pay the fees. 'Few' is the correct word to use, for the number was minimal to the extreme and the chances of a child who had attended a village school to attain the required entry qualification was virtually nil and at the time not a single pupil of Bridge CofE School had been accepted by the two independent schools, Simon Langton and Kent College (boys only).

Despite this appalling record my father was fearful that I would be accepted for secondary education, thus placing an additional burden on his slender resources at a time when the family was facing a crisis. I was unaware of this, and it was not until many years later that I began to

ponder on the possible reason and came to the conclusion that my mother had become tired of living in a house without services and wanted something better for her young family and for herself. She also longed for a daughter to replace the little girl who died as an infant before I was born, a secret which she kept for many years and then made known to Lily only.

I am sure that my father worried greatly about mother's wishes, for he knew that he could not possibly obtain the tenancy of a house with all 'mod cons' for 12p a week, which was what he paid for 1 Primrose Cottages. He worked on the principle that one's rent should not exceed one day's pay, which meant a maximum outlay of 70p for rent, lighting, and heating. In the end he found a desirable house and in doing so exceeded his target and it must have been some relief to him that I did not pass the scholarship examination. But my friend 'Sonny' Taylor did, having had a series of private lessons, and the teachers at village school were euphoric, so much so that the headmaster proclaimed a special one-day holiday ! I am unsure as to whether this was entirely due to my friend's achievement, but the holiday we certainly had.

When writing of Education in Britain pre-1939 one cannot over-emphasise the importance of 'the scholarship', for it provided a rare opportunity for children of parents with lower incomes to obtain the benefits of secondary education. This could lead to more prestigious employment than that which was within reach of those who left school at fourteen after elementary education. Those who left school at sixteen, who had received secondary education and who had obtained a School Certificate, could expect to qualify for employment in banks, the Civil Service, in the offices of accountants, etc., while girls, for whom education was still thought by many to be irrelevant, could seek employment as teachers, nurses, secretaries, shorthand typists, etc.

For those who failed the 'scholarship' examination at the age of twelve - and this was by far the majority - the future was bleak, for there was no second chance, other than home study, by evening classes and/or correspondence courses, which could lead to vocational qualifications, like City and Guilds of London Institute certificates. As a consequence many of those who left an elementary school without any 'paper' qualification found employment as farm workers, factory workers, railway porters, shop assistants, etc., while the more able sought an apprenticeship in

engineering, cabinet making, printing, etc., but this was difficult if the child lived in a country area.

Again, in pre-WWII Britain, university entrance was confined to a minority who had the ability to pass the entrance examination and whose parents or sponsors were wealthy enough to meet the high costs involved. The only exceptions to this being the few 'exhibitionists', among whom was Sir Edward Heath.

For all its faults, and many remain, Britain can today be proud of its provision for Education. For those who have the motivation there are courses available to meet a variety of needs of people of all ages, academic and vocational; for the late developers; for the young, for the old; for those of working age, for those who have retired. The Open University courses, leading to degrees in many subjects, bears testimony to the progress in Education in Great Britain during the past seventy years.

For Ronald Taylor and Lionel Sole the 'scholarship' examination meant the parting of the ways. My friend transferred from the village school to Kent College and later studied at Goldsmith's College in London. By 1938 he was teaching at St Peter's, Broadstairs and when war came he served, as I did, in the Middle East, but he was an officer. While I was in Tobruk he wrote me a letter to which I replied, and some time later we came within half-a-mile of each other when my unit transferred to a large camp in the Canal Zone. But we were unable to meet; the Army did not encourage officers and other ranks to fraternise and I was no more than a 'two-striper', a bombardier. Our conversation was therefore confined to the telephone. Upon our return to the UK we met at his parents' home, but by then we had little in common and I have not seen him since, but I have learnt that he became headmaster of a very large Comprehensive school in the London area. If he is still alive I hope that he can claim, as I can, to have had a very happy and interesting life.

As a child I had been a friend of Ronald's sister, Freda, and his two brothers, Mark and Edgar. After he left secondary school Mark joined the RAF and was trained as an aeronautical engineer and navigator, so that when war came he joined the crew of a bomber. It was during a cold winter's night that his plane was shot down over Germany, and though he was able to bale out his parachute became entangled in a tree, resulting in

him breaking his pelvis and suffering severe internal injuries. He was found the next morning by a German and transferred first to a hospital and then to a POW camp. He remained a POW until 1945, at one time sharing his captivity with Douglas Bader, Britain's famous legless fighter pilot.

During my serious illness, 1946 - 8, whilst I was still in hospital, Mark paid me a visit. His pelvis had long since healed but he was still receiving treatment for his internal injuries. Two years later I visited him in Guy's Hospital in London, but he was then terminally ill and died shortly afterwards. He was a very good friend and a brave man, whose life was cut short at an early age.

During the war I had a chance meeting with Ronald's other brother in a Cairo. We had a couple of beers together before Edgar and I went our respective ways. I have not seen him since, but I believe he became a bank manager on the outskirts of London. Freda, the brothers' sister, married an Army officer and lived in India before that country gained its independence from Britain. I met her several times in Bridge during the early post-war period and my last news of her was that she was suffering from cancer.

At Easter, 1928 the two families, the Soles and the Cowells (my Uncle George, Aunt Grace and cousin Ted) made a last outing together in the horse-drawn wagonette. That day we went to Herne Bay and while Ted and I played on the beach our parents engaged in several long conversations. A week or so later I learnt the reason: we were to leave Primrose Alley and move to 62 Roper Road, Canterbury. This is a very long road and the houses, built on one side of the road only, were built in several different styles and could then be - and may still be - described as 'desirable'. At the time they were occupied largely by professional people and tradesmen with their wives and children. The exception was a small terrace of 3-bedroomed houses at the far end of the road, and there families with a smaller income lived.

We moved on a Saturday afternoon, my father having obtained permission to use his firm's lorry. The removal of our possessions required two journeys and for the second my mother sat in front with Desmond, then three years old, while I sat in the back, perched on some item of furniture and clutching the family's cat. Had the scene been filmed we

would have appeared much like the one portrayed on our TV screens: a family fleeing from the horrors of war or some natural disaster.

62 Roper Road was to be my home, with a few short interruptions, for nine years. My parents lived in the road, but not the same house, for the remainder of their married life, until father died in 1970. As for me I have often thought that my childhood ended when we moved to Canterbury from Bridge, for I was then twelve years old and two years later I started full-time work.

Many people trace their roots back to their childhood and even now in my old age I still regard the village as my home ground. For many years I continued to make contact with Bridge, periodic visits being made until my uncle and aunt died in the '60s and my cousin had married and had moved to another district. My last visit was quite recent when Joy and I were staying at a farm near Faversham and we spent some time walking around the village.

Although, as I wrote earlier, the approach to the village causes one to think that the village has changed little since my childhood a closer examination changes one's opinion. For instance, gone have the fourteen plus shops which had lined the main street, being replaced by one mini-supermarket, a newsagent's shop which also sells confectionary, tobacco and a few other things. The chemist shop, once owned by a Mr Stockwell, being replaced by a pharmacy accommodated in part of the post office. All these changes have come about through changes in life-style, most of the working population of the village, men and women, now being employed in Canterbury and places further afield, so that they lead very busy lives and have a preference for 'one-stop shopping' provided by large supermarkets.

Among the other changes which I noted that day was the disappearance of Mr Stone's farm in the High Street to which I would go, carrying a jug, to buy milk. Gone too is the forge, the cobbler's shop, where one sometimes saw the AA patrolman eating his packed lunch, having previously leant his cycle, together with his attaché case of tools, against the wall of the shop.

Time did not permit us to visit the sites of stately homes which in pre-war days provided employment for the villagers, but I had heard previously that many of them had ceased being the residence of a wealthy owner and were being used for another purpose: Highland Court, once the home of Count Zborowski, being owned by Kent and Canterbury Hospital. Broome Park at Barham, the home of Lord Kitchener, CiC British land forces in WWI until his death by drowning in 1916, has undergone major changes, the house becoming a time-share property, while part of the extensive grounds is the crematorium for Canterbury and district. It is there that my father is buried, his life recorded in the Book of Remembrance.

Joy and I ended our visit by driving down School Lane where we paused opposite my old school which is now someone's home. On the opposite side of the road, and looking across the fields, we saw the new school and this caused me to think of today's pupils and what their lives might be like in comparison to those of my generation. I thought that many, like children living elsewhere, would be living in comfortable homes fitted with all mod-cons, and having access to radio, TV, video recordings, 'pop' music, computer games, taking foreign holidays and being taken to/from school by car for safety. How different from the childhood of my generation: a lower standard of life, but we were free to roam at will; every journey however small beyond the boundaries of the village being an adventure and a holiday when we could play on the sands at Birchington or Margate was as satisfying as the Costa del Sol. Additionally, in the absence of radio and TV, we were largely screened from the worse aspects of life: news of violent crime, riots and wars, etc. Ours was an innocent childhood and we were mostly happy. I hope that today's children are also happy, for every child deserves a happy childhood.