



Tony

MEMORIES OF GROWING UP IN ASHBURY BETWEEN 1940 AND 1955

Part 2

By Tony Stayne



Tricia (Tony's sister)

So many happy memories keep coming to the surface as I write, so many lovely people and so many childhood adventures. Each time I visit Ashbury these days, I go first up Church Lane to the cemetery to see who has most recently gone to his/her reward. Each name I recognise triggers fresh thoughts and remembrances from up to 72 years ago.

Next door to the Rose and Crown was "Mr. Marsh's Yard" At the back of the yard was a large barn and beyond that a sizeable vegetable and fruit garden with gooseberry bushes, currant bushes and fruit trees. Mr. Marsh was friendly and spoke in a hoarse voice all the time we knew him. He lived in the cottages at the cross trees.



In the Rose and Crown Archway. Left to right: Tricia Stayne, Brian F, Brian S, Tony Stayne, John S (background), Maisy Tilling, Paddy F.

On a high bank next to the road beside the pub arch (now sadly incorporated into the public bar) was a covered area under which stood a number of early engines, museum pieces, with heavy flywheels, which were slowly rusting away.

Under a massive ivy bush between the pub and Mr. Marsh's yard we children discovered an old open well shaft with no cover as all the woodwork had long ago rotted away. It was reckoned to be sixty feet deep. We dropped stones down and waited to hear them hit the bottom. It could have been a death-trap so it was quickly filled in and made safe.

Mr. Marsh's yard was sometimes used for killing pigs and I remember on one occasion watching two pigs being slaughtered by having their throats cut. I felt sure at the time that the second pig could understand what was happening and I can still hear their screeches of terror when I recall it today. After the slaughter one of the pigs was hung up and butchered in the small thatched (now corrugated- iron) barn that used to stand in the grounds of the blacksmiths. Later that day Jacko and I played football with the pig's inflated bladder.

Every so often the roads were tarred and new gravel put down. This was always an exciting time for us with the smell of the tar and the great steam rollers trundling along like terrifying monsters. Jacko and I, as usual, could not resist the sticky, black tar and we would chase each other with sticks dipped in tar until we got it on our clothes. My grandmother used to get very cross about this and she developed a "*special relationship*" with Jacko regarding tar.

Across the yard next door to old Mr. Barratt's cottage (no longer standing) was a row of sheds or stables in one of which Harry Partridge the village cobbler carried out his trade. Harry was an amazing character. He was very crippled and got about on two crutches, his legs swinging. Each working day he would struggle up from Berrycroft where he lived, always with a smile on his face. My friends and I would go and chat with him in his workshop where he sat on a big pile of leather, cutting and stitching away. To our shame we once stole a box of black metal shoe eyelets from him and hid them away somewhere. But it wasn't long before our

consciences clicked in and we felt we should return them without Harry noticing. I always assumed he was associated with the Partridge Memorial Chapel.

Old Mr. Barratt, who, I think, was Nelly Bunce's grandfather, had a long beard and could only take very small steps so it took him half the morning to shuffle down to Southwell's shop and back again. He must have been into his nineties at the time.

When the Miss Whites gave up the corner shop at the crossroads, Mr. and Mrs. Pease from Swindon took over and ran it for a while. One day my friend Jacko and I were throwing a hard ball of plasticine to each other when he suggested that I try to hit his hand which he held out for me. I aimed and threw, but he removed his hand quickly. What he had failed to point out to me and I had also failed to notice was that his hand was in front of Mrs. Pease's living room window. The plasticine broke her window and cracked a vase in her living room. My popularity slumped!

Mrs. Colton??? (William Bunce's sister) lived in the High Street cottage next to the old blacksmiths shop where Ray and Eunice Gigg now live. I remember her as a dear little old lady. We used to fix a button to her window with a drawing pin and pulling a long piece of cotton from where we hid across the road we would "tap...tap" on her window. Eventually she would come out to see who was tapping, but she never discovered us or the button.

One of my sister's admirers gave her a baby jackdaw which we kept as a pet. It flew around freely and would come when called. It often perched in the tall elm trees in Church Lane. I remember showing off to some guests staying in the Rose and Crown and calling out loudly "Jack. ... Jack" and to the amazement of the onlookers he flew down from the elm trees, perched on my outstretched arm and took some food. `

In the small paddock beside the first row of Berrycroft cottages was the "tip-cart". It was a two wheeled, flat decked, farm cart and if the hooks were undone which kept it anchored to the towing bar, it could be used as a giant seesaw. It was a regular meeting place for boys. "See you down the "tip cart".

On holiday, home from boarding school, I met Jacko in the village High Street. I hadn't seen him for a long time. I was eighteen and studying for "A Levels" in the Sixth Form.

Jacko: "Hello Staynesy what are you up to these days?"

Me: "I'm on holiday from school "

Jacko: "How old are you now?"

Me: "I'm eighteen."

Jacko: "What! Eighteen years old and still at school, you must be b****y thick."

Tommy Halliday worked a small farm in the village and delivered milk daily in stainless steel containers suspended, one from each end of a wooden shoulder yolk. He would ladle out the milk with pint measures into containers at each house as he did his rounds. Tommy also kept a huge carthorse by the name of Caesar. Caesar was an impressive sight as he was led down the high street from the farm to the yard by the dairy, his great hooves clattering loudly and his huge body swinging from side to side as he walked.

In the first or second house on the left going down The Malthouse lived Mr. Hall. He was a big, red faced man who worked a market garden on the Farringdon Road. In his small car he would deliver fruit and fresh vegetables to the villages in the district. He delivered regularly to my mother at the Rose and Crown. He was one of several tradesmen who delivered goods to the villages. Many will remember the lorry which came out from Swindon with tin kettles, brooms, paraffin, garden tools, crockery and cooking implements etc. for sale. The driver was Mr. Bew and I think the iron- monger's shop he came from was Kehoh's (Sp??). My father and Mr. Bew were friends and I became friends with his son Terry when I was at school in Swindon. The van from Webb's the bakers in Bishopstone would deliver bread and cakes. The GWR lorry from Shrivenham station would arrive at the Rose and Crown with beer barrels for the bar. The green Bristol Bus from Swindon stopped outside Miss Stroud's cottage by the cross trees then, having gone around the village, it stopped for a few minutes again outside the Rose and Crown where it picked up passengers.

For several years my mother organized a coach trip into Oxford to visit the Christmas pantomime. On the journey back Mr. Fred Reason who had a good, deep bass voice would be persuaded to sing "*Who Killed Cock Robin*" during which we all joined in the chorus.

When the American troops were stationed at Watchfield they organized a special party for the children from Ashbury. They were very generous. Like every other child I used to call out "Got any gum chum?" whenever Americans were around. Once I was given a whole pack of emergency rations which included Horlicks tablets, chewing gum, some sweets, coffee and other items which were hard to come by.

One evening, two big American soldiers came into my father's bar and demanded whisky, they became very threatening when my father would only give them one nip of whisky each as it was scarce and he had rationed it so that everyone had a chance to have some. My mother phoned the American military police who arrived too late to catch them.



Mr. Stayne with American Soldiers at the watercress beds.

After they had left, Stan Halliday, who usually sat on the wooden armchair by the bar door, pulled a quart bottle of cider from under his coat and said to my father "It's lucky they didn't start anything Landlord."

Many people experience a very special feeling on the high downs where the sky meets the horizon in every direction. I experience it as a feeling of "friendly isolation" and a kind of "populated silence" which I have tried to describe below.

One day, alone on the Ridgeway Path and far enough from home to feel the freedom of the downs, I stopped... stood still and listened into the silence which breathed gently in my ears.

What was it I could hear? Was it the hum of the myriad life forms so abundant all around me? Were those countless, tiny, sounds emanating from the grassy banks of the ancient Ridgeway Path, or were they something more... something vaguely familiar but just out of reach, just beyond my grasp? A thousand whispering voices carried upon the warm currents of summer air.

Holding my breath so as to miss nothing, I stepped lightly through the early morning sun-tipped dew, my senses alert.

At Waylands Smithy I stopped again and inclined my head to pick up the sounds carried upon the light breeze. There they were, a little louder, a little clearer, yet I could not make sense of the jumbled words for they seemed to be in a dozen languages. The voices lifted and fell with the breeze as I strained to understand them.

Close by, the great, ancient stones stood in silhouette against the blue of the sky and the green curtain of beech leaves which surround this hallowed place.

Here, at Wayland Smith's Cave, as we used to call it as children, we had often run to make a wish and jumped and skipped around the stones, crawling inside the dark tomb to imagine withered corpses and old bones buried before time began. Then someone would shout a warning to frighten the rest, so that we scrambled terrified and screaming towards the daylight convinced we were pursued by ... we knew not what, our fears magnified by the thought that "they", whoever "they" might be, were just behind us, snatching at our heels, these creatures of our imagination.

And are the voices that I hear again today simply the echoes of those conjured up long ago by childish fears, or are they older, older than the tomb itself, carried on the winds of time, blowing forever across the hill tops, along the valleys and through the swaying grasses, seeking a resting place, a listener, a believer who will hear and understand?

My mother and Father loved Ashbury, its people and the beautiful countryside all around and Tricia and myself consider that we were blessed with an amazingly happy childhood growing up in Ashbury. The experience has enriched the whole of our lives.

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Tricia Stayne on her pony Tommy.



The Old Berkshire Hunt with Tricia and pony Tommy.



Ashbury fancy dress parade. I believe the "witch" is Rose Simpson



L to R: Tony Stayne, Maisy Tilling, Tricia Stayne, Brian F, Paddy F, Brian S, Michael S.



Photograph taken around 1946. Mrs. Stayne used to invite boarders from my school to stay for the school holidays.

Back row L to R: Ashley Norman Thorpe, Paddy F, Mick S

Front row L to R: John S, Brian (Brat) F, Tricia Stayne, Anthony Stayne, Jean ? (now lives in Bishopstone), Mrs. Stayne.