

Down Memory Lane

by John Jordan

Whilst trawling through the website I came across Ashbury Parish Council and was amazed to find an article by Dennis Chivers who I had not seen or spoken to for sixty years. We were big mates and I contacted Ray Gigg who gave me his telephone number. I rang Dennis and spoke to his wife, Chris and told her it was Goosey (more on that nick name later) Jordan. He picked up the phone and spoke to me in shock as you rarely get a phone call from someone you knew over sixty years ago and we had a long chat about the good old times. I said we were coming to Swindon in September and arranged to meet him and his wife Cris with my wife Mary, a Watchfield girl and also go to Ashbury to meet Ray and Eunice Gigg.

I would like to give you some history of the Jordan family who originated in Fernham I think but I notice there is a Jordan mentioned in the Ashbury census of 1841-1901.

Henry was my father and his brothers and sisters were born in Fernham. Nobby who served in World War 1, Arthur(Kike) World War Two who married Joyce Halliday, Mac and two sisters, Amy and Else. Amy Jordan married a Barnes who lived in Challow Station and they had a daughter named Jean who had a son named Roscoe. Else married a Bunce (Olly)? and lived at 2 Pound Piece, with daughters Sylvia, Ann and Joyce. Arthur (Kike) was a baker and cycled along with Sylvia towards Uffington where Sylvia worked as a teacher at the primary school. On the return by the allotments near Winslow Bank they were involved in a motor accident in which Arthur was seriously injured and resulted in the death of Sylvia. I can remember Joyce Jordan rushing out of the house to go to the scene.

My father started work as a boot boy at Fernham Manor and whilst I cannot recall his career he eventually was employed in Roundhay Park in Leeds. He was married to a Lillian Powell from London. I was born in Leeds. They both worked for a Jewish family called Gilchrist, a wealthy family and my father was their butler. With the possibility of a Nazi invasion of the UK and the persecution of Jews they left for America. Looking for employment my parents then move to Challow Station where my father found employment working on a farm.

I went to Goosey Primary School, a long walk from Challow Station as a five year old hence my nick name when I arrived in Ashbury. My father became very ill and mother asked my aunty and uncle, Joyce (Tom Halliday's daughter) and Arthur (Kike) Jordan, 5 Pound Piece to look after me. They had five children, Graham, John, Ken, Jenny and Terry so you can imagine there was not a lot of room at number five, Pound Piece. My father passed away soon after and later my mother, Lillian Jordan married Stanley Halliday and lived in the house next to the Nurses Cottage. Stanley Halliday worked for Airey Nieve and Sir William Cash at the Old Vicarage near the church; Hetty Elmes was the housekeeper. The grounds were large and well kept and the walled garden if it still exists is worth a visit. I have two medals issued by Berkshire County Council with the crest of the council on the face. Around the rim is inscribed the name of Thomas Halliday and Stanley Halliday respectively. On the reverse there is a lady surrounded by children with the words "Never absent, Never late". These medals must relate to school attendance in the twenties at Ashbury School as no mention was ever made by Stanley or Thomas about further education elsewhere.

I attended Ashbury Primary School at age of six or seven years old where I think the Headmaster was called Mr Stevens and lived in the school house with his wife. We took the eleven plus exam and I remember the excitement when Bob Price from Idstone passed and I believe he was the only one who had passed the exam in the village previously. He then attended Wantage Grammar School. At eleven years of age I went to Faringdon Secondary School on a school bus which I think was owned by a gentleman from Uffington. The Headmaster was called Mr. Davis and Mr. Short and a Miss Rowell are the teachers I can recall. I was in a class with a girl named Jeanie Ayres and two classes below was Pam Ayres who came from Stamford in the Vale who went onto fame after appearing on Hughie Greens "Opportunity Knocks".

I left school at fifteen and rode an old bicycle to Faringdon in all weathers to work as an apprentice motor mechanic at Enterprise Garage for the sum of two pounds and twenty pence(old money) a week. They then opened a garage in Old Town, Swindon and then I cycled to Swindon daily on my trusty old three speed bicycle.

Back to Ashbury where I think Dennis Chivers has almost covered our history and the things we got up to in those days with a sense of adventure which could not take place today without an appearance in the Magistrate's Court. My name was John Jordan (Goosey) and not John Halliday as he refers to me in his article. One particular part of his article I consider is worth further discussion. He mentioned an incident which occurred on the Ridgeway where we were walking our dogs when we experienced a black horse and a rider who was dressed as a highwayman (Dick Turpin style). This horse and rider appeared about thirty yards behind us, passed us and disappeared. The day was clear and we could see along the Ridgeway from Liddington Castle

to White Horse hill. We and the dogs were frightened by this experience. We cannot explain the event and whilst I struggle to accept the supernatural we know what we saw. We never spoke about this experience to anybody else but in retrospect we should have spoken about this to older people in the village who may have had a similar experience or had been told about this event from hearsay or folk law and whether to the present day it has been seen.

In those days life was very different to today and the majority of families were on very low wages; poor I would say, so any entertainment was self-made. Television was in its infancy and phone calls were made from the phone box on Idstone Road, four old pence and buttons A and B. I can remember when they laid the cables for cable TV on the footpath in Pound Piece which must have occurred in the late fifties. Very few had TV and if they did I think they were renting a black and white television from Radio Rentals. To watch TV in those days was a wonderful experience.

I can recall sliding down Winslow Bank in sacks, and the manufacture of sledges for the winter. Trolleys made from old pram wheels and planks, marbles and conkers were played, scrumping of apples and the dragging of trees branches and rubbish to build a bonfire for Guy Fawkes Night in the field opposite Pound Piece. Riding in the trailer which was bringing corn from Maddel and return from Mr. Spence's drying barn at the Manor House. We also went to the chalk quarry to dig out fossils, an interesting pastime and the chalk is full of them should you be interested. Cricket and football were played on Pound Piece roads. Another activity was the collection of car numbers; do not ask me why. Other activities were cycling to Radcot Bridge to fish and building camps and fires in the Beech woods above Ashbury and carving our names in the bark of the trees.

Health and Safety did not exist in those days!

Very long walks with Dennis and our dogs both day and night. The night sky was a sight to see; all the stars and the constellations which we knew by heart; no doubt less splendid now due to artificial light, from Swindon and perhaps the village. Walking to the White Horse, Wayland Smithy and playing in the burial chamber before it was brought back to what it is now. Seven Barrows, Liddingham castle, Weather Cock Hill and Alfred's Castle was quite a normal walk in those days. With reference to the Blowing Stone at Fernham, when properly blown it could be heard on White Horse Hill. At Lower Mill you could watch Kingfishers which nested in the banks of the stream.

I can remember the film shows in the village hall and the projectionist was a Mr. Coles? From 20 Pound Piece. We used to sit on the balcony with our legs through the railings. The films in general were war films like "The Cruel Sea". The Mobile Tuck Shop which visited every week and the "Donkey Man" who came once a year and gave rides around the village for a small payment. This man travelled with his donkey from very far away, walking daily from village to village. I can vividly remember being woken by Auntie Joyce to see the church lit up in 1953, Coronation Year.

The shops were the Post Office, owned by Mrs Courtney, Tishy Stroud at the Cross Trees and the shop at the crossroads. The Rose and Crown was owned by Mr and Mrs Stacy. Fruit and berries were collected in the autumn for the making of home brewed wine. A Lambourn doctor held a weekly surgery in the front room of Mrs Tombs house at 3 Pound Piece.

I had two accidents which needed the Lambourn Doctor. The first was when I was on top of a rick and Les Halliday started the elevator on which the metal towing frame had been stored, with the result that it came off the top of the elevator and dropped on my head; the second being running down the playground at primary school, climbing onto the school gates, slipped and the gate latch went into my inner thigh.

I was in the choir at Saint May's church and attended both morning and evening services and Sunday School. The Vicar was the Rev. Mortimer and I think a Mr Barnet, whose wife may have been a teacher at the primary school, played the organ. The village had a bell ringing group and I can remember the vicar saying "They ring the bells to bring people to church and then come down from belfry and walk straight out of the church". He was not impressed with this.

Buses were few and far between, the only Taxi service was run by a Mr. Miles from Shrivenham.

Other events I can recall concerned was Sonny Sherman and the football team. The goal nets were rotten and you had to have nets to play against other teams which the club could not afford. Sonny made replica nets for the football team using baling twine to form the mesh. Jim Tilling thatching the houses, both were very skilled craftsmen. During the winter months farm workers carried out hedging and ditching. I can remember the laying of hedges, a true craft, producing a strong thick hedge which when grown in the Spring provided shelter, food, and nesting for birds and each hedge had its own character. This practice was replaced by machinery where

the hedges and ditches are battered down with flail mowers and hedge cutters producing a uniformed untidy hedge. The result was the demise of a craft which had been a pleasure to see.

From Ashbury I went to Chieveley to stay with my brother David and then joined the Army in 1964, completing a twenty two years; I came out in 1986. In 1967 I married Mary Johnson at Watchfield and she joined me in Germany soon afterwards. We have two sons and three grandchildren. During my service I and my family saw a lot of the world and during this career I was posted to the East Midlands University Officer Corp. in 1982. We settled with our two boys in Nottingham. In 1982 I was promoted to Warrant Officer (ASM) Class One. Within a few days I was posted to 36 Engineer Regiment, Royal Engineers at Maidstone, Kent. Days later I boarded a North Sea Ferry, a merchant vessel named M.V. Nordic and sailed to the Falklands. On my return I stayed with the Regiment and in 1984 was posted to 43 Command Workshop REME at York and I retired in 1986. My employment as a civilian was with Nottingham Police as the Transport Manager until my retirement.

I made a visit to Ashbury many years ago to see Joyce Jordan and we had a meal in the Rose and Crown and my second was to pay my respects to L/Cpl. Peter Higgs at the War Memorial who died on Mt. Longdon whilst we were in the Falklands in 1982.

How the village has changed for the better and new build compliments the old village well. I found the village to be very clean and well looked after and a very attractive place to live and work in. It is an area rich in history.