

# BILL LOVEGROVE'S MEMORIES

Interviewed by Simon Edwards in September 2013

Bill was born on 28 July 1942, during war time. He lived in Idstone Road until he was 24, when he moved to Hillside, where he has lived with his wife Diane for the last 47 years.

During the Second World War Bill's father was in the artillery in Burma and North Africa. He survived and came back with boils on his back, and Bill's sisters had to tend them. He got the boils from the Burma jungles.

Bill's next door neighbour and mate Jim Tilling was born on 29 July 1942. Bill lived at 23 Idstone Road and Jim at 22 Idstone Road. They were born twelve hours apart and have been friends throughout life.

Bill went to Ashbury School at age five. Boys and girls were separated out of class with different playgrounds. There were three classes with a stove in each room. The building was divided up into three rooms - one had a fixed partition and one a sliding partition. The Teacher's room was to the inside, with toilets which are still standing outside. The boys' toilet was at one end, and the girls' nearest to the hall. During Bill's time about 90 children went to school and Mr Clarke was the headmaster. It was a full house with 30 in each class. As far as Bill remembers there were 51 children at school from 10 houses along Idstone Road. For lunch at School Bill took a sandwich box (an Oxo tin box which was obtained from the shop for nothing). Two elastic bands held the lid on.

Bill used to toll the single bell first thing in the morning, to let pupils know that the start of school was imminent! In his final year at Ashbury School Bill was Head Boy. Bill then went to Faringdon School. He could have gone to King Alfred's at Wantage, but declined because of the transport situation, and cost. The school bus to Faringdon picked up children every day and brought them home.

There was no electricity or television! Cooking and lighting was by paraffin, and heating was by an open fire. The family had electricity when Bill was nine. Number 25 was the first house to have a television in Idstone Road, and neighbours were invited along to watch the football cup final - Bill would have been about 10 then. The Council didn't put electric in all the houses at the same time and only put in one light and one socket in each room. The house consisted of two rooms downstairs, and three bedrooms upstairs. To get to the toilet Bill had to go outside and then come back inside via a different door to the toilet. There was no light and no toilet paper - they had to use newspaper. Their toilet facility was a bit better than that of Bill's sister who had an outside toilet in her garden at Kingstone Winslow. Bill remembers needing a torch to go to the toilet and hearing the owls hooting. Bill's family's toilet consisted of a bucket, not a flush toilet, and the bucket was emptied into a hole in the garden and soil was thrown on it. A year or two later the 'compost' was used on the garden!

Wood for the fire was obtained from the local woods. Bill would use a catapult to hit a pigeon, and a stick to catch a rabbit. It was easier to catch rabbits when the binder was working. Farmers loved

the boys catching rabbits as it stopped the rabbits eating the corn. The most rabbits Bill brought back on a stick was six. There were hazelnut trees in Idstone and Ashdown woods, and these made good sticks. To carry the rabbit home Bill would cut one of the rabbit's leg, and other leg went over the stick and through the leg. Bill didn't skin them, his mother did this. Rabbits were roasted or stewed – good food. Another time Bill caught rabbits was when stacks of straw were taken down, very often rabbits and mice would be found underneath.

At Spence's farm Bill would stand around the rick and thrashing machine, and would whack mice with a stick, put them in his pocket and take them home to feed the cat! Occasionally there was a rat but he didn't take them home. Farmers might give you lunch of bread and cheese and a cup of cold tea, but no payment for killing mice.

During the War there was food rationing which didn't finish until 1953. Cheese, meat and dairy were rationed. Bill would go nesting looking for pheasant and duck eggs. To get a duck or moorhen egg, a spoon was tied on the end of a stick. Pheasants were very good at nesting, and during April and May, a nest might contain a dozen eggs. The largest haul of duck eggs Bill found was from wild ducks with 20 eggs in one nest. This was because two female ducks were laying in one nest! Bill had a lot of trouble getting all these eggs home. Wild ducks weren't considered poaching, but pheasants you had to be a bit more wary of. No-one worried about pigeons. The best time was waiting for them to come in to roost, as you could kill as many as 50 or 60 a day.

Mr Bartley New lived in 18 Idstone Road. He was a special constable, as was Fred New (different family) who lived at the bottom of the village (Pound Piece). They had other jobs as well, they were just part-time specials.

Bill's parents didn't have a car. His Father had a new pushbike on easy terms. Wages were poor and circumstances weren't good. Bill's Father had been in the War for five years, his Mother had been on her own and Bill's brother went into National Service. Bill didn't have to go into National Service as the year he was due to go it was stopped. Bill's brother didn't like it, but joined the catering corp, but in the end he really enjoyed it.

Bill and his brothers and sisters had a gas mask. The American military quite often pulled up in convoy along the side of Idstone Road, all nose to tail. They stopped for 30-60 minutes and then set off again. There was a small airfield at the top of Ashbury on the flat, and an observation post underground at the top of the hill. This was all fenced off. There was a bombing range further over, and the remains of a bomb were found. Three quarters of an exploded bomb was at the side of the wood for years, but is probably gone now. There was also a shooting range.

Bill walked everywhere as a child with a catapult and stick. He used to go out in the morning and back at night. Bill spent time on the farm in the Summer holidays. He would be picked up on a tractor and go off with them ploughing or combining – he was a dogsbody! Bill used to go to work with his father, who was a pipe layer on the roads. Jim's dad next door was a thatcher and Bill also used to go with him.

As a child Bill enjoyed playing cricket and football, and indoors he played draughts, ludo, snakes and ladders. The village cricket pitch was above St Mary's graveyard. This later moved to Kingstone Winslow. One time Bill was watching cricket talking to a mate behind him, there was a shout from

the batsman and Bill turned to face the match and a cricket ball hit him in the middle of his forehead. It nearly took him out! Bill's mother looked after him, he didn't see the doctor. The doctor at Shrivenham would take surgery in the morning and, if needed, do home visits in the afternoon.

The football pitch was down station road, on the right hand side. The ball often went into the stream. There weren't any changing rooms. They played in a local football league. Bill played in the Ashbury junior team. Henry Tilling, Fred New and then Reg Smith managed the team, and Alan Blow had a spell too. After a number of years the pitch moved to Pound Piece – this was before the bungalows were built. Players had to clear cow pats up before the match started, as it was a cowfield during the week.

There were four shops in the village. In Bill's time the shop was run by two old ladies by the crossroads, Simpsons opposite the pub, Dobsons opposite the old school which was also a post office, and Dykes just round the corner was an undertaker and his wife ran the shop. Tommy Holliday owned a Ford van. It was the only one Bill knew with pedals not in standard position, with the clutch in middle. Halliday used to do deliveries of milk in churns.

Bill's brother had an accident and was knocked off his bicycle by a lorry. He was in hospital for some time. It was never proven but it was believed that the chain off the lorry that picked the churns up, was swinging, and it had him off his bike.

The first cow's milk after calving is very rich and very strong, called 'boistins', and this makes good egg custard, and Bill's family were always pleased to be given this. One morning Bill and his wife Diane woke up to cows in their garden at Hillside, the cows had wandered from the field over the road – they made a terrible mess of the garden.

The old Village Hall in Church Lane had a balcony and a stage. Bill used to sit in the balcony, where he got a better view. There were films (very good but a bit behind the times) and also amateur shows. Bill's brother was involved with the shows along with some older children from the village. People from other villages (Bishopstone and Uffington) used to come to watch the films and shows.

The Bristol Bus company used to run. There were very few cars in the village. If you had a pushbike you were lucky. If people were moving house they would use a tractor and wagon.

The farms in the village were: Idstone, Reades, Manor, Les Halliday, Kingstone Farm, Zulu Farm – they were all good employers.

Eddie Bailey was a tractor driver. There was no cab, and Bill used to hang on the back. Button Bunce from Idstone Road had a Field Marshall tractor, there weren't so many about. It had a large single diesel engine and had to be started up with a cartridge. You could always hear it coming – it was a very definite sound. Tom Partridge, mended shoes. He had a shop in Berrycroft where he lived. His wife used to run the chapel.

There was a pot man who mended saucepans.

Johnny Ball lived in Bishopstone. He would come round bringing, amongst other things, paraffin apples, bananas, and even push bikes for sale. He had a small lorry with a paraffin tank on the back.

He had a book and you could pay off your debt in a week or two weeks – very helpful. Keoghs from Swindon ran this business prior to Johnny Ball. Johnny carried on until 1950s when it finished.

Chiseldon had a Fish and Chip shop, and they used to bring fish and chips in a box in the boot of a car to Ashbury. Everyone knew what time to expect the car full of fish and chips!

There was the Home Guard in Village.

Thatching was classed as an essential trade and Jim Tilling's Dad next door was a thatcher so exempt from War. At that time houses were thatched with straw from the farm. Wheat straw was longer than barley straw, so more suitable for thatching.

There were eighteen allotments at the end of houses along Idstone Road. Bill's Father had one, as did most people. Idstone Road houses all had long gardens, not like today's modern houses. There were orchard and apple tree allotments at the back of the school. The last one was behind Bill's house (Hillside). All the thatched houses in the row in the High Street had an allotment at their back. The best orchards were by the Mission Hall and down by Upper Mill. They had Blenheim apples at the Mill – Bill used to fill his shirt up with apples and get out before the owner saw him! There were also walnut trees at the top of Upper Mill Lane (where the chickens are now). Alfie Edwards lived in Claremont and it was all orchard from there to the Mission Hall.

Chicken and pigs were kept at the back of houses. A gentleman from Idstone used to put the bullet in. The pig was then set fire to which would burn off the hair. The pig was salted down. The family would keep the pig meat, and if feeling generous might offer a joint to a neighbour if they were on good terms. The pig would be salted down in urns as there weren't freezers or fridges.

Mr Tilling and Mr Fitchett used to cut hair along Idstone Road with hand cutters which had something like a saw blade on the front! Having your hair cut pulled a bit sometimes! Bill would be given cake, and also asked "Do you want a glass of wine boy?"! Home made elderberry, damson, rhubarb, dandelion and potato wine - powerful stuff!

Kite Jordon worked at Hewers Bakery in Wanborough and he would have yeast to get the wine started. Bill's family acquired a wooden beer barrel and using this resulted in 4.5 gallons of wine! They had to buy sugar, but 'cadged' the yeast.

Mr Staines was landlord at the Rose and Crown. Bill's Father would send him down for an ounce of Black Beauty tobacco. He used to cough terribly and later changed to Old Holborn, which was much cleaner, but it was too late. He died of bronchitis of the chest, blocked lungs. Bill would be sent for a big bottle of Forest Brown from the Rose and Crown. It depended on how 'flush' Bill's Father was on how often he would buy beer. Bill's Father couldn't work if it rained. He went on 'rain pay'. He got paid by the yard.

As Bill's family didn't have electricity, they had a battery radio, 120 volt dry cell battery, and a 2 volt rechargeable full of acid. Bill had to take it to the post office shop to get the battery charged. His Mother would put it in a bag and tell him to carry it carefully, and not to spill it. It lasted for a while until the bottom fell out. It sometimes took a while for the battery to be recharged. If Bill wanted to listen to a particular programme he would call down to the shop asking when the battery would be

ready. The battery charge didn't last long. Bill used to listen to Dick Barton Special Agent, the Archers, and Down your Way.

Bill would fish in the Manor Pond which was also the watercress beds and catch sticklebacks for fun, and newts too.

Many houses in the village belonged to the Craven Estate including Cravens Wood Yard and Barn (where Richvale, Kingswood and Barkside are now). Bill's Dad was a wood corer, cutting wood up by hand, saw and axe, into lengths. There were no lorries to speak of so the wood had to be lifted on to a horse and cart. Trees from Ashdown Wood were cut by hand and stacked up.

The Craven houses were sold to tenants for £50 each. Billy's Cottage was more expensive at £150. Sonny Sherman, and children John, Eddie, Bob and daughter, lived in Craven Cottage in the 1960s. Sonny made wooden gates for Bill. Bill remembers the Shermans painting Craven Cottage!

Gladys at the Rose and Crown didn't believe Bill was 18, so Bill and four others used to cycle to the Black Horse at Wanborough for a pint of beer. Bill used to drink a pint of light ale which cost 1s 4d. Over the years the brands of beer at the Rose and Crown have been: PRHA, M&B, Charringtons, Tobys, Arkells.

Bill added that there was a shop in Kingstone Winslow – Wilson's Shop, which was a general store. There was also originally a chapel in Kingstone Winslow but only the graveyard remains.

**Bill Lovegrove**