

"Visions of Childhood! Oft have ye beguil'd,
Lone manhood's cares, yet waking fondest sighs;
Ah! That once more I were a careless child'

My earliest recollections of Sherfield upon Loddon would be from about 1935/6. I had come to live with my father, whom I had not seen since my parents divorced some 5/6 years earlier. We had arrived in the dark and I well remember waking in the morning - in my very own room - to bright sunshine and bird song (a new experience for me) I can remember running up and down the garden path excitedly and peering through the hedge at a large, white, 'Nanny-goat' tethered outside on the village green. I had never seen a goat – in the flesh- as it were and I think it took some re-assurance before I ventured outside the gates.

A totally new Life

In trying to recall some of my many memories of the Sherfield of those times, I am aware that much may be out of 'sequence'. It was all too long ago so where possible, I have avoided times and dates.

The Reading/ Basingstoke road was the major road and double decked busses ran to and from Basingstoke to Bramley, every fifteen minutes. Cars were comparatively few. There were also 'Green line' coaches which I think, ran from Reading or London through Bramley to Basingstoke and beyond, but not so regularly. I cannot recall them stopping in the village at all, although I think there was a 'coach' stop outside the rectory, opposite the Garage.

We lived in a rented 'semi-detached house, No.4, Devonshire Cottages. (The Dodd family- Mr & Mrs and three children, Shelagh, Audrey and baby John, lived next door at No 3) From here, all this row of houses, from the police house down, face onto the village green. This 'gravelled' road' is shown as the Green way on your map. Most houses had a cast iron pump over the kitchen sink to supply water from a well.

Where it meets the, apparently unnamed road, leading from the main Reading/Basingstoke road – to "Bowlihs farm on your map - there was an 'Off Licence' called 'the Poplars', complete with huge Poplar Trees. It was a private house run by two elderly ladies, whose names escape me now. (They sold bottled beer (I.P.A) and soft drinks.

Clockwise from the Poplars around the 'Common" or Village green'

From the opposite corner of "Green way', lived the 'Bullpit family, including a school friend 'Bernard'. From here, down to the allotments, were – and still are - several assorted houses. Only farmland was behind them. Of these houses, an old farm cottage built side on to the road – still there in 87 – where the Alford family lived, stays in my mind. Mr & Mrs Alford were a very kind and generous couple and I became 'best' friends with Allan, the second eldest son. John was the oldest, and there were two girls Joyce and Barbara. (The girls shared the bedroom overlooking the road!)

Next door to them were respectively, the Tarling family(New Comers) and the two middle aged, 'Smith' brothers. I think it was "Jack' Smith, who used to empty the "Night Bins'. He was considered 'simple' and used to push a wheelbarrow with two large covered bins in it. Into these he would empty the 'Toilet Buckets' and wheel them to his 'allotment'. His older brother, who was rarely seen outside the house, handled the 'business' side of things.

I assume that a more modern and healthier method is installed now?

Opposite these two houses was an 'alleyway' which ran between the garden of the ex- police house and the garden of the "Poplars' The large rear garden of the 'Poplars' was usually planted out with vegetables and sun-flowers. There was a large shed with a corrugated roof, onto which we boys would delight in throwing stones, just to hear the noise! On the corner of this alleyway and facing the 'common' or Village green, was another small house. This was occupied by the

Elliot' family. The oldest son, - his name escapes me - was about the first youth to volunteer in the war. He joined the navy.

Back to 'Green Way'.

There were a couple of other old cottages in one of which lived another elderly lady, a relative of the Alfords. (Great Aunt I think) On the opposite side of the "Green Way" was the local police house. The local Constable was moved to the Bramley Road just before the war.

Next came "Devonshire Cottages", occupied by the Dodd family(NO,3) & the Bourke's in No.4. a rather 'noisome' drainage ditch, ran from across the road along the side of the "police cottage" and past 'Elliot's' It carried the waste water from all of them, hence the well remembered smell.

Next house along by 'Devonshire Cottages, is an old former farm labourers cottage, complete with thatched roof and old oak beams. (Apple Tree Cottage?) My Father and Stepmother lived there for some time before moving next door just before I arrived. Extra space was required for me. This particular cottage holds many memories. Father was offered the chance to buy it for forty pounds but declined the offer. At the start of the war, it was occupied by a family named "Lowcock". During the war, the old chimney collapsed and blocked the pathway, also caving in one wall of a shed in our garden. The family of - I think - six, continued to live there somehow but it must have been hell!

Post- war when my wife and I, visited my Step-'Mother, It had been renovated, complete with 'sunken' bath, by a lady whose name I never learned. She showed us round and offered to sell it to us for 1,000 pounds, but because my work was in London, I declined her offer. I regretted that later.

. The next house - comparatively large - was the "Willows". With it's tall Victorian chimneys. In those days "The Willows" was a rather up-market' private school for girls and was operated by two elderly sisters named Mitchell. (The main classroom is on the left-hand side of the driveway.) There was four Willow trees on the green outside the 'Willows'. I believe they began life as clothesline posts. In 1987, they were still standing but dead. A fact which saddened me, as I recalled the years of fun they had provided for we local children. They were at times a 'fort', a ship's 'crows nest' and a place to hide from adults, as the need or imagination decreed. Next to the Willows, was another old two storey, thatched cottage in which lived a very dear old lady, Grand mother to the Alfords and friend to all local children. There was a huge old "Granny Smith" apple tree in front of the House and Granny Alford inside it. Everyone loved her.

There were two or three more older cottages which I recall only vaguely as the field at the back finished in a hedgerow, which encompassed the 'allotment area. There is another semi-detached, house, very similar to "Devonshire Cottages" (Somerset/Cornwall Cottages?) in one of which lived - I think - the "Panter" family. The old timber built, Cricket Pavilion - of hallowed memory, was about a hundred yards in to the 'Green' on the right.

The gravelled road - or "Green way" curved around to the left here and was bordered on both sides by allotments. Another of the "County named' semi- detached houses was on the left. I vaguely recall the name of McKenzie, associated with one of them. If you went straight on instead of following the road left, a grass track led - more allotments on the left - to Bramley road. There was or is, a house on the corner of track and road set to face up the road on a slight angle. The then occupier was a rather dapper, professional gentleman. Always cheerful and I have a vague feeling that he also holds a pleasant memory for me but I have lost it.

Incidentally, the houses along "Green way" all used to back onto Farmer Maynard's Fields and all had access to the fields, by means of steps to climb the steep bank and a gate in the fence. None of the houses shown behind there existed.

During the war, Mr Dodd, dug into the side of the bank behind his house and installed an 'Anderson" shelter there.

The meadows, which I remember best as waving in wheat or Oats, led down to the stream known to us as the "Little Loddon". Harold Lailey used to own two beautiful small fields there. One on the river bank was planted with numerous willow 'posts' intended to grow into trees, and just above it was my favourite, a small field with countless wild rose bushes growing in clumps. True

Hampshire! The Lailey's Father and Son used to shoot rabbit there and occasionally took me with them to help find the bodies!

Bramley Road to the store.

Of the residents on Bramley Road. I recall only Mr Archie Ham, a WW1, veteran who had lost an arm in the war and was a friend of my Father. At school, I had a powerful crush on his daughter, Rowena, who eventually 'broke my heart' by marrying a much older man, a Warrant Officer in the R.A.O.C, and going back to Canada where she had been born.

They lived at about the third house before Northfield Road. The road wasn't named then but a new 'estate was gradually being built there and the first house completed was occupied by another 'military' family named Wood.

The 'new' Police house/station was about halfway along Bramley road going towards the 'main road'.

A few houses prior to that lived the 'Barraclough' family. Mrs Barraclough, was German born but had lived there for some years. Nevertheless she was viewed with some suspicion at the outbreak of war. Her eldest son eventually joined a commando unit. She thus became the mother of a Hero and was very popular. She was a large, jolly and lovely person. I recall that her son married a young lady from the north. She used to visit often during the war and being closer to our age, she used to mingle with our group whenever we got together. There were about six of us and we would link arms in the blackout and walk/dance and sing our way around the village. I can't recall her name now but she was far more 'sophisticated' than we villagers and was a lot of fun.

Another of my best friends, Sam Naylor also lived in a house close by. His older brother Frank, a very handsome fighter pilot, was killed in action somewhere in the Far East.

I don't recall any other resident's names on Bramley road, except that some older cottages, on an alleyway, which led past the bakery, housed another of my friends, Jim Strong. Jim was better known as "Tommy Farr" at school because of his battered looks. Again, none of the houses behind – shown as 'Northfield road "Estate?" were there.

The bakery was owned and run by "Mr Jackson" who also owned the "Jackson's Store" which adjoined it. He carried a large and varied stock range and one could buy almost anything there. The Fire engine was housed opposite the store and the building formed the other side of the alleyway. The Fire station also garaged Mr Jackson's delivery van.

I used to 'work' for Mr Jackson during some weekends and school holidays, helping to deliver bread to the various big houses outside the village. Mr Jackson also kept chickens, which ran free in front of the store. I once got into trouble for trying out my home made bow and arrows on them! I didn't hit any but trying, made me very late home. A painful episode, as my parents were waiting for the shopping.

The Reading/Basingstoke Road

Around to the left on the Basingstoke/Reading Road stood the "other" garage and petrol pumps, which I think, were operated by the Panter family?

The only other shop in the village was next door to this and known locally as the 'Tuck' shop. This was where we children bought most of our sweets and cheap toys from the kindly lady proprietor. There was a couple more of those "County" named cottages too I think, and then nothing until the river.

On the opposite side of the road was a field, owned by Harold Lailey Senior, the local miller. It backed on to the Mill House house, but may have been leased out. In this field was the cricket pitch of the ' Sherfield Ladies Cricket team' (and very good they were too) There was a pavilion, (almost twin to the one on the 'Common'), but tidier and with a better toilet system!

The White Hart, was the popular local in those days. It was owned by the grand parents of the afore mentioned, Sam Naylor. Sam and I often slept there on invitation. "My" bedroom was on the left hand corner as you face the Hotel! Later when we were older, we adapted a large chicken

house in the garden at the back of the Hotel. Swept, garnished, and lightly furnished, with bedding, radio and cooking facilities for Sunday breakfast, it became our haven after the local dances, when it was too late to go home. I was, I suppose, in my early teens and supposed to be in bed by Ten PM in the summer. The dances finished at eleven and as I could only manage a waltz of sorts, I couldn't leave before the last waltz! The lights in the hall were always turned low for this, which encouraged me to try to dance! The popular 'last Waltz was almost invariably, a tune called "Whose taking you home tonight' Very helpful! Once home (in the chicken house) The radio would go on. The programme? "Anne to you" starring Anne Shelton and the Geraldo Orchestra.

Prior to obtaining the use of the 'Chicken House' to camp in, I had gone home late one night and found the door locked, so I sneaked into the back of 'Dodd's Garage' and slept on the back seat of the Rector's Car. (I think I did this twice) The car was a very large Austin or Morris Isis. I remember that it was cold, despite my overcoat but I learned from the experience!

There is or was, a phone box outside and to the right of the White Hart. The phone number pre and during the war was "Turgis Green 262" The one at Turgis was "Turgis Green 260" Why do I remember those? My good friend Allan Pitman and I used to take turn about calling one another for twopence, to practice the latest songs on one another. We both thought we sang better than Crosby did and would criticise and advise on any fault we found with one another's diction, technique, or delivery.

Oddly enough that also helped later in my life!

The village post office was on the corner of 'Beech"/Breach Lane, with a Baptist chapel behind it and the back garden of the rectory behind that. (I was pleased to see that the 'walk' from there to 'Wild moor lane is still in use) Then came the Four Horseshoes, where my parents went for a social drink at the weekend. The Bus Stop for Basingstoke was under the Pub Sign. Next to that were some very old terraced cottages. (My Stepmother moved to one of these after Father died in 1949) Then came the Rectory with its stables. The first Sherfield Scouts – of whom I was a proud member-, used a building just inside the rectory gate for meetings.

The Rector – known as the 'Squire' was the Rev Lee. Much loved but sometimes cursed by his flock, as he used to like visiting his parishioners and did so whenever the mood took him, In the morning, at meal times, in the evening, or even later. The thought of 'inconvenience' never crossed his mind. He carried an old, wooden, battery lantern to light his way at night. It would swing between earth and sky as he walked. Not popular with the local policeman during the black out but none dared question 'the Squire"! It also betrayed his presence and progress of course! He had two sons, both devoted and skilled horsemen. I don't know what happened to them.

Continuing along the road toward Basingstoke

There was another large house, next door to the Rectory which I think was called "The Laurels' A professional – and to us – somewhat mysterious gentlemen lived there. He may have been the wealthy Mr Barker. I do know that he owned a large 'Studebaker' Car which was kept at Dodd's I recall that when 'Pool' petrol and petrol rationing came in, this car was converted to gas with a large, gas producing engine on the back. I think it also had a flexible storage tank on the roof rack?

Separated from the 'Laurels' by fields and trees and the War Memorial, was another large red brick house standing in a large garden? (This appeared to be some sort of club or accommodation house in '87') Another gap and we have 'Wheelers Court' where an Aunt – on my step mothers side – lived. The village pond was in front of this with its garden wall descending into the water. Two resident Swans 'owned' the pond in spring and summer. Nesting time was traumatic as the Swans used to nest in the rushes beside the road. Tragically the male Swan felt it his duty to

defend his mate to the death and this included taking on the Double decked Busses and farm trucks!

The pond was also the local skating rink when it froze over in winter.

A large tree on the left of the pond was the place where the Bishop of Winchester, would rest in the shade as he paused to preach to the villagers. An awe - inspiring and much beloved man. I believe he walked from Winchester annually, preaching as he went. I wish I could recall his name but age has beaten me there.

There was another small row of semi-detached cottages (two or three) including one on the corner of Wildmoor Lane. Outside the gate of this cottage was a seat for bus passengers which was shaded and almost concealed, by a large Bay tree. A popular tryst for 'sweethearts' too. Opposite here across the green was another Chapel (There were three in the Village) Next door to the chapel was a large house and garden owned by an accountant or lawyer named Theirin. Mr Theirin was confined to a wheel chair but was able to drive and generally get about. He was always pleasant to everyone and I admired him greatly. His son Bernard was another friend whom I remember fondly. Moving back along a track toward the 'Green way' there was another group of cottages. I can only recall a family named Smith in one of them. Joyce, the eldest daughter was also at the school with me. The local Rubbish dump – or 'Tip" was in this area just before a farm. (We used to 'toboggan' down it on tin trays or old iron sheets!) There were two more school friends at the farm but the names escape me now. (Donaldson or something like that) and so back to the Poplars.

Dodd's Garage

The back of 'Dodd's' Garage was the site for most good things in the village. I recall the long, trestle tables; three or four rows of them, spread with all sorts of 'goodies.' Trifles, custards, jellies etc., for the big 'banquet to celebrate the King George the fifth's Jubilee or the Coronation of George the sixth (Two little girls made themselves very sick!) Mrs Dodd was dressed for the occasion as 'John Bull' she was, in those days, a vivacious, exuberant and lovely Scot with a mass of black wavy hair. She would burst into song at the drop of a hat, and was the life and soul of any event with which she was associated. On this occasion, I think she distributed all the celebration mugs too. I don't recall if it was part of the same on-going celebration, but the fun continued with a 'never to be forgotten' garden party on the green. This had all the fun of the fair with slippery pole climbing and another 'slippery pole, which was suspended over a huge tank of water. Contestants armed with 'pillows' would sit astride the pole and work their way to the centre, if they could. As soon as they were in reach of their opponents, they would try to knock one another into the water. Dancing around the May pole and 'Morris Dancing' was also part of the celebration but these also took place on the first of May every year until the war. I also recall one of the competitions, was to walk along a curving row of upturned flower pots, placed like stepping stones, with an umbrella in one hand. Not as easy as it sounds!

The garage was also the scene for the pre- Christmas distribution of the 'Barker' (?) bequest. A Roast of beef and two bags of flour were given to all the 'poor' of the village. Obviously this ceased with the war but I often wonder if some bank in Basingstoke isn't profiting from the unclaimed money! The local butcher shop was just along side the front of the garage and supplied the beef. The flour, I think, came from the Mill.

There was a row of cottages – in red brick – on the corner of the lane, but I can only remember the 'Grigg' family there. I have a feeling that Mr Grigg may have been in the Salvation Army. I do know that he and his two sons were extremely kind to me. They showed me how to hold and fire their blank cartridge pistol and also let me try my hand with their 'rook rifle'. The two Grigg boys, knowing of my interest in the Army, even went out of their way to tell me when they joined up. I have no Idea what happened to them after that. I hope they survived, as they were very special people.

It was one of my tasks as a boy to take the batteries and accumulators to Dodd's Garage to be recharged or replaced. (Prior to the advent of electricity) We also used to purchase small paper bags of carbide, for use in our bicycle lamps. These were, in appearance, small, odd shaped, dark coloured stones. Added to water it produced flammable gas. It had other uses too. For instance, small pieces, broken off could find their way into school inkwells, and the ink became a sticky mess giving off bubbles and a nauseous stench. It was also used, by just about every one, to destroy wasps nests.

One carried a large; lemonade or beer bottle half full of water. On arriving at the nest, preferably just at dark, one simply dropped a couple of pieces of carbide into the bottle and jammed the open neck of the bottle into the hole. The resulting gas killed everything in the nest. I once experimented with a 'four-penny banger' on a wasp nest. I jammed the firework into the entrance hole and lit the touch paper. Very satisfactory but a flying wasp body, struck me between the eyes. I also recall a large 'whet-stone' in the garage where locals were quite free to go in and sharpen their axes, billhooks etc.

Mr Dodd was a quiet and kindly man, with a ready smile for everyone. I remember him always, dressed in his well washed, pale blue, boiler suit as he walked across the Green to or from work. A very popular and I think a gentle man. I will always remember his cheerful smile and twinkling eyes, when we met on his way to or from the garage.

To the right of the Garage is, of course, the Village Hall with its rather ornate notice board, behind the wall outside it.

This was the 'official' hub of the Village. Dances, Whist drives, School plays – which always seemed to involve me – and of course the Village 'Hop' every Saturday night. These were very popular and people came from Basingstoke and all the surrounding villages to enjoy these, especially in the early war years when servicemen swelled the numbers. There were school concerts to raise 'comforts' for the forces too. Always, it seemed something was going on.

In those days the Caretaker couple was a large, retired policeman and his wife. Their name was 'Blundell or Blunden' They also had two Alsatian dogs.

Down hill from the Hall was "Brown" the Builders. He owned just about all 'rental' property's in the Village as well as building some of them. I used to go 'rent book' in hand to pay the rent when my 'parents were unable to. Mrs Brown also ran the Sunday school at the chapel in the 'lane' past the 'Poplars'. Next door to his premises are the School and its adjoining schoolhouse.

There is – or was – a track behind Dodd's Garage, which led past the caretaker's garden and village hall to another, building? I think this was Mr Brown's storage for building materials. And then a house occupied by an elderly couple. There used to be a row of white wooden posts which marked the demarcation line between the common and the gravel track. There was a tall, hawthorn hedge around the garden of the next house, where the Scoutmaster - another name forgotten by me - and his two sons lived. I can recall a sign above the corner of the hedge that advertised 'teas' but I don't recall any teas being sold there. Beside his garden was the School playground and bicycle shed.

"The Lane" (Perhaps you should name it after the "Brown' family or Rev Lee?)

That unnamed road that on your map seems to lead to "Bowlings Farm" (a new name to me but almost certainly the farm I remember.) It used to be 'The Lane'. It is – or was - the site of the other chapel, which was the last building on the right as you approached the lane. This chapel was where Allan Alford and I went to 'Sunday School' We once got into trouble for releasing our pockets full of field mice and upsetting all the girls, except for Joyce Alford who was used to such happenings. The 'lane' was gravelled and sometimes referred to as Maynard's Lane or Lee's Lane, depending on which farm you were visiting.

Maynard's Farmhouse was a treasure of 'Olde England' even then. A beautiful thatched or tiled house with climbing roses clinging to the old beams and fronting an orchard. Ah! Those "Cox's orange Pippin's"!

I used to collect my frogspawn from the pond outside his gate. The lane turned sharply left here and there was another house on the left of the road. Mr Maynard, known to us kids but never to his face, as "Ken' Maynard', after the cowboy of that name, used to deliver – by bicycle – Fresh milk, which he carried in small churns on the handle bars. Doling it out to his customers as required. There were quite a few who preferred fresh milk, straight from the cow instead of the refrigerated 'bottled stuff'.

During the war, a 3" Bofors anti aircraft gun, was sited just outside his farm -house! Continuing 'up the lane' one eventually came to Farmer Lee's house which was at the end of the gravelled or bitumen road. Farmer Lee gave me a half-wild, jet-black kitten. Politically incorrect now but we named him 'Nigger'. He later made the centre pages of the Hants & Berks Gazette because of his odd friendship with a 'wild' rabbit which 'Pop' had saved from the burrow after dogs killed the Mother. Being "Irish" of course, they had the run of the house. I wish I could get a copy of the article but alas, the paper and its records are no more.

The gravelled part of the lane turned left to enter Lees farm and the lane officially ended there - but - "Lovers Lane' continued as a track (wide enough for carts). It had one or two 'five-barred, gates, to sit or cuddle on. Wild flowers, shrubs and trees grew in wild profusion. It was beautiful and secluded. At the very end one was brought back to reality by the high, wire fence, topped with barbed wire, which surrounded the Ordnance camp/factory. It was a huge complex then, with enormous camouflaged sheds where they did things with heavy shells, bombs bullets and etc.

Cross a stile, on the right and you would come to the river and Lower-Bulldowne Copse. Follow the Riverbank to Bows Bridge and home again or walk up the hill to 'Bulldowne Copse'.

St Leonard's

As choir boys, Allan Alford and I used to walk to church by going 'up the lane' almost to 'Lee's Farm, then we would cut through a farm gate on the left just before the farm. This track led us to the back of the great house. The house was at this time owned by Captain Wills, the tobacco millionaire. (It was later, acquired by Lady Raleigh. We assumed that the lady was the widow of the Raleigh Bicycle family but she may well have been descended from Sir Walter.

There were twin rows of huge Poplar trees, which led down to a small wood –part of the Estate – which, had been made into a 'walk'. Primulas, crocus, daffodils and other native flowers had been planted. Rustic bridges crossed ditches and a couple of rustic seats were also in place. It was very peaceful. The "Will's family' and guests were not the only ones to enjoy it! The track ran to the right of all this loveliness and on the left was the, then, rather unique sceptic pit system for the house.

The house stands beside St Leonard's Church and shares the driveway. I remember it as an enormous rambling place with servants quarters at the back and magnificent gardens and an ornamental lake. I got to see several of these great houses when delivering bread with Mr Jackson,

But back to the track!

There was a stile that led into the back of the Churchyard shaded by a large Yew tree. And just near this tree was a cast-iron' cross or grave marker, with the name "Julius Caesar' on it. (A local with a famous name?) In front of St Leonard's main door (which was never locked) stood two enormous old Pine trees. My Father is buried near one of them. He was Irish and a Catholic although I never knew him to attend church (I was made to attend three) the funeral was officiated over by the Catholic father from Bramley Camp. The local Priest didn't seem to mind. The statue of St Leonard in the front of the church tower was annually, the site of a jackdaw's nest.

As one entered the church, the Font was on the left and there was a row of low 'musicians seats' behind the pews. Above these was a deeply recessed window and on the sill were two or three Cromwellian helmets. I recall a line of painted, coloured leaves or flowers, which ran around the church walls. They were smeared with old whitewash in places and we were told that Cromwell's

soldiers did this, as 'Ollie' disliked such frivolity in a church. The organ was on the left of the church below the Nave? and choir seats. The choir used to don cassocks etc. behind the organ and some 'lucky' boy would man the handle of the bellows to keep the music flowing! The Rev Lee was an absolute joy at services. He would start the hymns with a stentorian bellow of sound then subside into silence. Then at intervals he would bellow out a line or a few words then subside again and this would go on throughout the service. The small door led out to the church yard again where the path was marked by coffin shaped stones and to the left of this and near the fence which hid the big house from the church was where Allan and I found an old, moss covered gravestone which leaned badly forward and to one side. Curiosity made us clean the moss away and there was a skull and cross bones carved deeply into the granite, Under this was the legend ' Here lieth ye body of John Silver. Pirate. It gave the date of birth (sixteen hundred and something?) and death I seem to remember that he was sixty-two.

Some erudite adult told us, that when these old criminals were hanged and buried, it was customary to remove the bodies and re-inter them elsewhere, in order to thwart "bodysnatchers". Behind the church was the Crypt and 'Boiler house'? Several old graves were there, many gaping open as they deteriorated. A deep Moat flowed behind the church. It surrounded an Island with a summerhouse, belonging to the great house next door. It was full of large red Tench and Carp.

The Mill and Reading Road

I see that the mill – now named "Long bridge Mill' has been 'restored'. I have so many happy memories of the old Mills – Both of them!

The "Sherfield Mill' was always a favourite play ground. It was a mass of dust and flour covered cobwebs. Wooden steps polished by centuries of feet led to the floors above where grain and flour was stored. I will, never forget Harold Lailey the Miller and water bailiff. He was so kind to the village children – and adults. Always ready with a smile and a cheerful word. In fact "The Jolly Miller" personified. I used to take a carrier bag to have it filled with mixed dog biscuits, which he kept for sale in sacks just inside the door. The bags were filled with a big scoop. I don't recall him ever weighing them! He just filled up the bags! I would then explore the mill for an hour or two keeping well out of the way of the huge grinding wheels. Harold had explained the working of them and as long as we children didn't interfere with the work or get in the way, he never objected to my explorations. If the water wheel were working I would sit on the bridge and count the trout as they fed in the turbulent water below the wheel.

Behind the mill was the millrace, which directed the water to turn the great wheel. Beyond that the Loddon, in all its beauty, stretched away before me. There were a couple of 'fishermen's huts' erected on the banks, where anglers could sit and rest – or eat lunch.

It was – in the main – a trout river then ("Stocked' probably) but we youngsters could catch Dace, Chub and even Pike there – if Mr Lailey wasn't watching. There were also 'sticklebacks' in the ditch nearby, and small crawfish under the riverbanks. In '87' I was delighted to recognise, on the mill track, the very same 'puddle' holes and wheel ruts, that I splashed about in as a boy I have a few frames of 8.mm film taken in the 50's/60's, showing a sign on the riverbank. It stated that the fishing rights were owned by "The Grafton Angling Club'. A syndicate of professional gentlemen from London.

A little way past the Mill, on the right was 'Flood's Farm' it was owned by a father and son named Bullpit in the 30's before the war. Sam Naylor and I used to earn some pocket money there during holidays either 'potato picking' or 'hay making'. Horses did much of the work then and I used to 'lead ' the horse that ploughed up the potatoes. Then we had to go back and pick them up and put them in the sacks – all by hand. The Messrs Bulpit used to take a long lunch, possibly for our

benefit, and Sam and I spent our lunch hour (and a half) stalking one another through the farm buildings with Air rifles (loaned by the Bulpitts) loaded with elderberry pips. Further towards Turgis on the left was another lane on the left which led to "Sycklemores Farm". Maurice Sycklemore was another old school chum. I can remember one summer evening when he and I tried to shoot bats in flight, with a catapult! We were curious to see how good their 'radar' was!

When my wife and I left England for this outpost of civilisation in 1964, the Mill was reputed to be the oldest working water mill in England. When we came home for a visit in 1987, The building had collapsed, the bridge was gone and all that remained of my beloved river was a pool of muddy water about three feet across. I could trace the old course of the river by the depression in the grass of the meadow, at least as far as the old swimming hole. I was thankful that no houses had been built in that particular field. A Council worker who was sitting on a trailer by the house, told me that 'The Miller had died a couple of years before and his wife had gone back up north somewhere" I could not bear to look further or to take photographs of the remains.

I have never felt so bereft, depressed and angry as I did that day. I felt as though betrayed by the Hants County Council and/or the National Trust. That English people could care so little for their history had never crossed my mind. Hopefully I was wrong about that.

Stratfield-Turgis or just "Turgis"

Turgis had its own Cricket pitch in a meadow that I think – bordered the main road and the road that led past the 'Cricketers Arms' Its pavilion was built, I think by the same 'architect' as the Sherfield models. There was fierce but friendly competition between the cricketing ladies of Turgis and Sherfield. We boys also played many games there, either for the school team or the village team. The Cricketers Arms With its Inn sign depicting the great W.G Grace at the crease, was occupied by the Pitman family. Mr Pitman was an ex middleweight champion of the Metropolitan Police and taught his son – my friend Allan – all he knew and to good effect. There used to be an enormous Walnut Tree behind the Cricketers where Allan and I used to gather the nuts by the simple expedient of knocking them down with sticks and stones, hurled with great accuracy. Trying to get the stain off after 'shucking' the nuts was never easy!

I no longer recall where the road leads to, even though we walked it often. There were park-like grounds on the left where prize bulls, belonging to a retired Major General Williams, grazed. His large walled estate was on the right of the road – with more walnut trees.

The General himself was a fierce looking, archetypal type, complete with Moustaches and florid face. He was reputed to be as fierce as his looks but he once spent an hour and a half of his lunch time, teaching a small boy (yours truly) to cast with a fly rod.

Wild Moor Lane

The Basingstoke road was the 'official' way to church but we sometimes walked to St Leonard's via Wild moor Lane. Entrance to the lane on the left as we left the village. The first 'Lodge" and gate which led to the Earl of Winchelsea and Nottingham's Estate was a few yards further along the Basingstoke road. (Both Lodge Gates were on the Basingstoke road). I have many memories of the great house, with its marvellous parks and gardens. The lakes and green-houses at the back and the old Coach house, where the 'bag' was laid out, counted and shared after a 'shoot. The estate was so very popular pre-war for its pheasant shoots. George Fifth was sometimes a guest there. We lads were always employed as 'stoppers and beaters' for the shoots. We started before Dawn patrolling the borders of the woods to chase back any pheasant or partridge that came out for a walk. Then breakfast would be served. We took our own drinks – sweet tea carried in beer bottles- but breakfast was brought round to us by car, in the cold light of early morning, and usually consisted of thick sandwiches of 'corned beef' and/or cheese, heavily laced with

mustard. They were glorious! All food was made on the premises including the bread. When all the guests were ready, usually quite late, the beating and the shooting began. I shall never forget it. We beat through the woods with a constant shower of falling shot pattering the leaves above and the ground around us. The ladies used 16 bore guns and the gentlemen used 12 bore. If any one missed a pheasant then the Gamekeeper – always known as Mr Miles – would bring it down for them. I never knew him to miss.

The Estate Gardner lived in Wildmoor Lane opposite the Back gateway of the house. There was a wall around the estate then. His garden was a riot of colour as he had to propagate the flowers to plant on the estate and also to supply the house with cut blooms. Inside the grounds he also grew exotic fruit such as figs, peaches etc. Further along Wildmoor lane lived Mr Miles, of treasured memory. His cottage was small but there was a small row of chicken houses beside the road – with their backs to the road. These were also used to hatch Pheasant or Partridge eggs. At the end of the hen houses was a small gap and into this gap, fell the only German bomb to hit Sherfield during the blitz! It made only a small crater and didn't even knock down the hen house nearby. I suspect the bomber released the bomb – probably a small anti-personnel type - when shrapnel hit his aircraft from a Bofors on a gun site near Farmer Lee's. I remember this because I was in the field when the bomber roared low overhead. There was machine gun fire too but this may have come from the rear gunner. I do know the bomber was smoking badly from the starboard engine as it disappeared, low over the trees.

Mr Miles had a great influence on my life as he – like his counterpart – the water bailiff taught me so much of the local wild life. The Water Bailiff was of course Mr Harold Lailey Snr, then later Jnr!

Incidentally, Harold Junior married the former schoolteacher Miss Freda Tett, who taught the juniors (Mrs Green? taught the very young children). The Rev H.H Munday, was Headmaster. A Yorkshire man and graduate from Winchester Diocesan College. He was another man I shall never forget.

Mr Miles, the gamekeeper, sometimes allowed me to 'help' him with feeding the rides and the pheasants, I had sharp eyes and could spot nests of eggs and magpies and other predators for him too. Looking back I doubt that he needed my 'help' but he was a kind man. I think his old black Labrador was even better at spotting nests than I was.

I can still visualise him as he walked to the village for tobacco or supplies. Always I picture him in his old Barbour hat, a sports Jacket and cardigan, Breeks, stockings and brogues. A stick in one hand, Pipe in his mouth, under the upswept moustache and of course, with the black Labrador that never left his side unless ordered to do so.

Along Wildmoor lane I remember a copse on the left where I learned of some glorious old fruit trees, once belonging to a long gone house. The Track beside this railed copse, led to 'Breach Lane. There were huge Victoria plums and apple and pear trees all hidden within the copse. There were more copses on both sides of the road on the way to the hamlet and in one, close to, what passed as the 'village green', I found and watched my first Badger 'Set'. The lane turned right and passing some old cottages on the left-hand side, wound around to end opposite St Leonard's Church with a 'Pub' on the left known as the 'Le Fevre Arms'. Those old farm cottages were right on the roadside and one stepped from the road, straight into the 'living room'. If one turned to the right – towards Sherfield – the usual way home from church, The gates to the Will's House, was on the left (The other was shared by the church) Just at the top of the small hill and on the right, was the other lodge house and gate to the Earl's Estate, There was a high bank and hedgerow on the left and on this bank grew the best wild strawberries in the area, in season of course!

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Bow Bridge and the Stratfield-SAYE Road.

Stratfield Saye road forked to the right after one left the village on the Bramley Road. There was an old bridge – Bows Bridge on your map - over what we used to call the "Little Loddon". During the early years of the war (1940) just the bridge on the left-hand side sited a round concrete obelisk with a steel post in the centre. If it is still there it may interest people to know that it was a 'Spigot Mortar' site. In the centre of the concrete was a strong steel post or 'Spigot'

A recess in the Mortar base used to seat over the steel post and this fearsome weapon was meant to protect the bridge from enemy tanks approaching across the river meadow.

It was assumed that they would not use the road.

I once watched a trial of this weapon. A large sheet of hessian was slung between two of a line of willow trees that bisected the meadow. This was the target and the gunners actually hit it first shot. This same meadow was also used to try one of those odd guns, which had two dished wheels. They were towed about by the barrel, and when action was required they were tipped onto their side so that one wheel became the base and the other was overhead cover. I don't recall any one being brave enough to actually fire it but it was fun to watch them practice. Walking down the Stratfield Saye lane was also a longer way round if going to Bramley, On the right of the road was "Lilly Mill" and Farm.

This was a favourite place for all the villages who could get there. The Loddon and the 'little Loddon' converged here and it was the favourite swimming place in summer. People came from Sherfield and Bramley to swim, picnic, Fish, or just rest there. I never wondered before about a 'right of way'. The farmer and family were kind and friendly folk. Access was through the farmyard with a Mill building and a pool on the left, then through a gate to the water meadows. I once caught a large, four-pound pike there on a spinner. I still have the scar on my finger from when I tried to prize the brute's jaws apart with a stick, to retrieve my lure.

Continuing along this road eventually brought one to Stratfield-SAYE Estate. If you turned left you could reach Bramley Camp and Bramley Village with its Railway Station and Hotel.

Sherfield to Bramley

Leaving Sherfield on the Bramley, Road one went up a gentle hill and at the top of this hill on the left were and may still be – a couple of brick huts. These were part of yet another AA gun site during the dark days. The track into them was also the easy way in to Bullsdowne Copse.

Bullsdowne Copse was magnificent. Carpeted with bluebells, it's paths lined with clumps of primroses as they wound between clumps and stands of Hazel, It was a lovers paradise in the spring and summer months. (I have a photograph of it on my computer even now!) Past the huts was down hill and a sharp bend to the left (Houses on the opposite side of the road) and you were almost at the R.A.O.C, Depot entrance. The camp looked to be well built and the barrack huts looked comfortable.

I never went into one but before the war, villagers were able to go there to the Cinema and the NAAFI and shop.

There was a huge Drill hall or Gym where the films were shown and where I had my first boxing contest. My Father worked in the camp and sometimes slept there to look after his beloved Horses. They were used to pull the dustcarts but Father knew their origins and loved them as only an Irishman can.

Their names were "Billy" and 'Charlie' Billy was an old pet and would "Shake hands" with you if asked. "Charlie" on the other hand would rather take a piece out of anyone near him. I asked my father once, why this was so. He lifted me up and with his other hand parted the hair on Charlie's withers and ribs. There were whip scars there. He said "That's why son".

Going past the camp would take you into Bramley Village. There was a Railway crossing – with gates- then the Railway Hotel on the right. The Station was on the left. Further on again on the left hand side was another fascinating place for a boy to pause. A genuine, working Blacksmith's shop. There were still a good many horses to be shod in the area although the tractor was taking over rather rapidly. A little further on and there were two 'semi-detached houses, almost identical to 'Wheelers Court. Another Uncle & Aunt lived in one of them. They faced the road to Little London. I cycled to there twice to visit the 'local' G.P . A delightful, Old Irish Doctor named Daly. Dr Daly used to drive from village to village making house calls. (How different now)

I was in bed with a badly gashed knee and being tended by him, when workmen came to erect the electric power pole that was to carry power to our house and the Willows. I can't remember the year but it was about 1936/7. Goodbye to oil lamps

“The Common’

Referring to that Knee injury. I should mention that the “Common’ as the Village green was called, was a wild place then. Shallow ponds and rushes abounded. The track on the map, which runs from the Willows to the unnamed road, was known locally as ‘the trunk’. It was wide enough for a small car in summer but ‘boggy’ in winter. Almost all the houses had their own footpath across the common to the school and shop. They all bisected ‘the trunk’ which was possibly how the name came about. We boys used to play cricket there. Retrieving a ball from the dry pond area beside the ‘Trunk’ I ran onto the hidden hoop of a rusted away bucket. The other edge of the hoop sprang up and cut me to the bone below my right knee. I still carry that scar too.

It was not unusual to find a person hunting snipe on the common with a shotgun, in those days.

It was very marshy in many places, with ponds and pools on both sides of the ‘lane’.

The main or ‘dryer’ half was riddled with molehills, which, after school, became battlefields for ‘Dinky toy Tanks etc. Sometimes in more gentle moments, we would create ‘fairy gardens’ out of them using twigs and grasses to simulate trees and bushes and bits of glass or mirror for ‘ponds’. Flowers were plentiful and grew in wild profusion on the Village green.

I used to pick them to give to my ‘new’ Mother, who accepted them all with a smile. She also liked the tall feathery grasses that grew on the common.

One of my most vivid memories of the ‘Common’ was and still is - the skylarks. These drab looking but glorious little birds were everywhere. I would watch and listen to them for hours. Watching them land and tracing their ‘run’ to their nests. They always ran away from their nest before they took flight and always landed some distance from their nests before sneaking carefully back to them. The Village green on the other side of the unnamed road was even wilder and hares and even foxes were seen there. Another vivid memory is of waking to ‘magical or Fairy’ music, one cold but bright morning in a particularly harsh winter. I forget the year but the air seemed to quiver to the sound of millions of tiny, tinkling bells. It really was “magical. On rushing outside, I found that every twig, on every bush and tree, every blade of grass on the Village green was coated in ice. It must have rained and frozen in the night, a phenomenon which none of us had seen before or since. A light breeze cause the ‘icicles’ to tap one another, producing the bell like noises which seemed to fill the world. There was a ‘downside however.

Much of my leisure time in that winter was spent in finding small holes in the snow. These were caused by small birds such as Robins, Tits etc. They apparently froze in flight or when resting and fell into the snow. I would recover them and take them home where my parents would thaw and revive them, feed and water them, and as soon as they flew to the window to get out we would release them.

The current furore about the hunting ban reminds me that there was a “Hunt’ that used the area in those days and also a beagle pack. I cannot recall where they were quartered however. I know that when the ‘Hunt’ was on, we boys who knew all the secret ways and shortcuts became popular with non-riding followers. I believe the Rev Lee’s two sons had something to do with the Hunt.

Other Activities

Harvest time, which coincided with school holidays, was always a happy time for us youngsters. The wheat, oats, and Barley were all cut and ‘sheafed’ by a Reaper-binder. Some were Horse drawn still in the thirties but horses were swiftly giving way to tractors.

Most of the male villagers – those who were available – would spread out around the selected field. The men with shotguns the children with ‘Rabbiting sticks’. As the reaper-binder circled the field cutting, binding and ejecting the sheaves. The rabbits, and sometimes foxes and hares would retreat into the centre. Then they would make a run for it and those that the shot-gunners missed were run down by we boys with sticks. Rabbits could not outrun us on the stubble.

Afterwards the Farm hands would ‘stook’ the sheaves upright, three each side and one each end

When they had dried out they were harvested on hay carts. We school children were paid to help. A Rick was built with the sheaves and this was later thatched to await the Threshing machine. Thatching was, and no doubt still is an art and a relative of mine was very good at it and in much demand. I was allowed to go with him to help sometimes but never quite grasped the skills involved. The Rick's were then fenced with chicken wire some way from the Rick. This was in part to stop cattle and horses from pulling the Rick apart but it had another use too!

The next big event would be the arrival of the travelling Threshing machine. Drawn by a massive steam engine, they would arrive and set themselves up within the fence. Then threshing began. More pocket money for the lads as we were employed to man the Chaff pipe or chute. These had hooks attached to which we had to fit sacks. These filled with chaff and were bounced or kicked until full whereupon, they were quickly lifted off and another hooked into place, sometimes another boy would stack them one against another ready for tying (Sewn with string) but usually the same boy did this while the next sack was filling.

Oh yes! That fence. Many of us owned terrier dogs that were put over the fence and as rats – or anything else ran out of the Rick, so the dogs pounced and killed them. My "Peter" was one of the best at this, He would pounce, throw the rat over his head, snapping it's neck and on to the next without a look or pause. He knew he was good. He used to earn up to fifteen shillings a day at this – which was more than I could earn!

Life in the village was good. If we were not earning pocket money, there was always sport. Cricket, soccer, 'Shinty' (rather like hockey with round sticks) Swimming in the rivers, fishing, following the hunts - Beagle or Fox – the shooting season, bird nesting in spring. All these things seemed to happen one after another and I cannot ever remember being bored.

Leaving Sherfield

I left my beloved village in early 1943 I think it was. Life was never the same for me after that.

I recall that America had entered the war, and a large bomber base was built at Aldermaston. The Americans at that time didn't bother Sherfield aside from passing through in their strange vehicles. However; there were a lot of 'gum-chewing' girls in Basingstoke, where I worked for a wholesale clothing manufacturer.

I had to return to my biological mother for reasons, which are not relevant here. I hated it and as soon as possible, I raised my age a little and 'escaped' to the Army. I managed to get 'home' for an occasional brief weekend. These were spent helping 'Pop' with the garden and his allotment, or Helping Mother with shopping etc. Very brief interludes but they helped. Many old friends were still there and the Saturday dances were still held then.

Sherfield – Post War

My memories of Sherfield in the post war years are somewhat curtailed. I stayed in the Army until invalided out in 1953, so occasional weekend's and leave's were all I had.

Nothing appeared to have changed at all, although changes may have been taking place in some areas unseen by me. In 1946 when I came home from Germany, the dances were still held at the Village Hall. Some of my friends had 'grown-up' and some of the girls from my school days were suddenly, beautiful, young ladies! The Village however, seemed unaltered. The "Jubilee Tree with it's seat built around it, was still there, as were the two large air raid shelters, built for the school children, although I doubt if they were ever used – not as air raid protection anyway!

Jackson's Store was still 'Jackson's Store' although Mrs Jackson no longer recognised me when I called in there.

Mr Dodd still ran the Garage, but I think John was also helping a little after school at this time. I was sent to Palestine where there was a certain amount of argument going on at the time. In 1948 the place was left for the inhabitants to fight over and I spent a little time in Libya, ambushing Camel trains carrying 'Hashish and Slaves.

Coming home in 1949, I again visited 'my' village. Outwardly, again, it appeared the same but the dances seem to have ceased and most of my friends, including the girls, seemed to have disappeared.

Whilst in Palestine I had met up with 'Tommy Farr' or Jim Strong. It was in the middle of Jerusalem, late at night. Jim had become a Cook in the Catering Corps and had to supply sandwiches and tea for me. A story in itself but not relevant here.

I did meet with my old friend Allan Pitman, who at that time was in the Parachute Regiment. Needless to say that he was the Regimental Heavyweight boxing Champ! The last I saw or heard of him, he was living in Basingstoke with a wife and child. I tried to find him but had no luck.

It was at this time, whilst on leave after Palestine, that Farmer Maynard had his revenge, although he never knew it.

I was home for the weekend. My father and I stepped out of the back door of No, 4 Just as Mr Maynard – somewhere in the field behind the house – let fly at something with his shotgun. To my fathers amazement – and my own – I found myself flat on my face behind the rockery. Father started to laugh but stopped when he saw my face. I hadn't realised that I would still react to gunfire like that. Not in Sherfield anyway. My 'battledress' was well muddied.

By now I had looked up the former Red Cross nurse who had nursed me back to health in Germany. She was to become my wife. I took her to Sherfield to meet my Father and Stepmother' and she was an instant hit - with 'Mother' anyway. 'Pop' the old professional, always had reservations (not about her) but felt that 'soldiers and marriage didn't mix'. That apart, all was well and he approved.

Time passed! Father died and I later, married my nurse. (She is still 'nursing' me today 56 years later!)

We were both working in London at this time. I had joined the new Car trade and she was a secretary in an opposition firm!

There was some speculation in the 50's about driving and drinking and I decided to test it out. We had a flat in Hendon at the time and I drove an open Jaguar sports car. We decided to go for a drink at "The White Hart" I drove down rather quickly and we went into the public bar – still original then. There was an 'old timer' there whom I should probably have known once, He was describing to the barman, an altercation he had had with some young chap. I think he was a 'Hedger & Ditcher by trade. His Hampshire accent seem to get broader as he concluded his tale with the words, " Ar'Oi told'un Oi said if ee'wants up endin, oil up end'ee' (all in one word) I bought him a beer! We had our drink – one large scotch and soda for me and we got back into the car. I had to chuckle at the bemused expression on my wife's face and finally, somewhere near Reading, she asked ' what did that man say?"

The test by the way, was conclusive. I - who usually drove as naturally as I walked, had to concentrate on my driving all the way home. I wasn't noticeably any different but I knew there was a difference. Lesson learned again.

Finally; Mother (I never thought of her as otherwise) decided that she would live in London with her youngest daughter. My wife and I had visited her several times in her cottage opposite the school. We used to walk her beloved 'Pekinese dogs for her. I don't think she was ever happy in that old cottage. Before the move we took an 'estate car' down and took her to the village where she was born and grew up, I don't recall the name of the village but it was beautiful and unspoilt. She was so thrilled to be able to look at the houses and village she had known and obviously loved so well. I understand her emotions much better now.

We had Christmas in London and flew to this 'out-post of Empire', arriving on New Years Day 1964.

We had not intended to stay but when our respective parents died one after another, there seemed little point in coming home.

1987

We came home for six weeks in October of 1987. My one desire was to return to Sherfield

Which resulted in some sadness as I have already written.

On the road from Reading I recognised 'Syckelmoores Lane' and determined to show the ladies my beloved Loddon. I told them to look for the river and the bridge and only as I drove into Sherfield I realised 'they' must have missed it. I turned and went back – even slower this time. Still no river! No old stone bridge! The result of my search I have already told. I did not look too closely for changes after that. I couldn't find Breach lane either but did eventually. I was rather pleased to see that the walk, up breach Lane across the field to the copse (it used to be railed) and across to Wild Moor Lane is still marked.

The White Hart where I had hoped to spend the night was now a restaurant and closed at the time.

Basingstoke, That dear little market town was an unrecognisable 'city'. I thought I knew the old town backwards but things had changed a lot.

Whitchurch was – thank heaven – still as I remembered it. The White Hart there helped to restore my faith in England again. Then I heard that another 'war' was about to erupt as the Hants County Council, was planning to extract gravel from the Test Valley. Nothing it seemed was sacred anymore.

I was 'under escort' of three ladies, My wife and daughter, and my sister-in law My other 'planned itinerary' had to be carefully managed (Visiting all the trout streams in the southern counties) The ladies wanted to visit Churches and cathedrals! With the aid of an ordnance survey map and my memory, I managed to work out a route, which included churches near rivers! As it happened the fishing season had just closed anyway! I was interviewed by the BBC, about Fishing in Australia. My Sister-in-law had told someone that I did radio broadcasts on the subject in Australia but it was fun.

Wm (Please call me "Bill) Bourke. PS I was better known in the village by my second name "Douglas' to differentiate from my Father who was also William. I don't know why, as every one locally, called him "Paddy".

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