

For the first ten years of my life 1943-1953 I lived with my parents Frank and Lavinia in the cottage in the NW corner of the Barnhay. We left the village for a year but then Dad became gardener for Hugh Goodson at Waddeton Court and we lived there in a tied cottage 1954-56. Dad had done well at school (he was offered a grammar school scholarship but had to leave aged 13 to bring a wage into the family). Eventually he was secretary of the Football Club and Gardening Association and helped start the village Gardening Show.

The cottage in the Barnhay (also known as Barclay Square) was the LH of a pair with Bill Scadding an elderly farm labourer in the one right in the corner.

His grand daughters Wendy and Shirley Harley were regular visitors there. Bill wore the standard working man's clothing of his era: a pair of hobnail boots, corduroy trousers held up by both braces and massive brass buckled leather belt, a collarless collar attached shirt under the braces and of course the obligatory three days designer stubble.

My father told the story that Bill dropped down to the V&A one evening and ordered his usual quart of scrumpy. The barman said "Didn't you have enough to drink in the harvest fields today. Bill replied "Aw eese uz ad zixteen pints but cud uv had a guts vul if uz wanted"

Our cottage was where Louise May later lived for many years, when we lived there she and her late husband Bill lived a few yards away in what is now Poachers Cottage which was where my father had been born and lived as a child (four and more to a bed).

My father had been called up age 31 for war service at the end of 1942 and was posted to the Far East soon after I was born in February 1943. It was mid 1946 before he came home again. My brother Derek was born in 1947.

Dad joined the Devonshire Regiment who were already serving in Burma but was transferred to the 2nd Dorsets after reaching India. On the way through the Med on 6th November 1943 the convoy KMF25A was attacked by the Luftwaffe who sunk some of the USN escorts with guided bombs and torpedoed Dads ship, it was evacuated with no casualties. In the 55-man lifeboat the officer in charge asked who could row, five could and the next question was who has rowed in a crew and there was just Dad so he was put in charge. After the war one of his army mates came to visit and we went out for a row in our boat. Dad's mate said it's a long time since we rowed together. This was the first mum knew of the incident due to wartime censorship.

After jungle training the Dorsets went straight into action at the battle of Kohima where Dad's company suffered heavy casualties. Despite the onset of the monsoon the Japanese were pursued through the jungle-clad mountains until The Dorsets were flown out early in 1945 to re-equip and retrain for a replay in Malaya. The Regiment were aboard a troopship about to set off when the dropping of the atom bombs brought the war to an end. Home-coming imposed its strains on relationships and one line I remember is Mum saying "Don't come all regimental with me".

The two-down two-up cottage we lived in was rented from Sam Scadding who lived in a house in Rydon Lane. I believe he owned other property in the village. The living room faced onto the square with the narrow kitchen along the back with only a small high window facing the Castle. The stairs were across the back of the living room. There was a door at each side, the left to the kitchen and the right up into the staircase so there was sharp left turn up a couple of spiral steps at the bottom of the stairs.

Before I was born my mother lost twins due to falling down the stairs when pregnant.

There was a small back yard with two toilets at the far end towards the street, one was for the cottage next door and they had to walk along the street to get to it. Chamber pots were of course used at night.

At first the water supply was from an outside tap but eventually a toilet was built just outside the back door and a sink installed in the kitchen along with a gas water heater for instant hot water.

Saturday night was bath night when a tin bath hung on the wall of the kitchen was got down and filled from the gas heater. We boys went in first then after we had gone to bed Mum and Dad used the same water topped up with some hot.

The long back kitchen still had the large built in cauldron heated by a fire underneath. I do not remember it being used but Grandmother Basten who lived at Tuckenhay was still using hers for the weekly laundry.

We had a radio that was powered by a wet battery, these batteries or accumulators had to be recharged and a man dressed in plus fours came around once a fortnight to exchange the run-down ones. He drove a large pre-war Vauxhall car with the accumulators racked in the back seat.

Lighting was by gas but just down the lane Dad's brother Jim and his wife Jessie had no indoor tap and water was fetched about 75 yards in a bucket from a tap in the wall of the Castle garden (its alcove is still there but the tap has gone). They went on using oil lamps well into the 1970s. The single ground floor room had a black range for cooking with a tiny scullery under the stairs but there was no indoor drain, the stairs were even steeper with more turns than ours. The w.c. was a few yards down the path and shared with the cottage next door.

My father was one of 16 children and several uncles lived very close by. Uncle Ern and Aunt Louise lived on the opposite side of the square. Uncle Jim and Jessie was just out of sight around the corner and Uncle Les and Aunt Violet Frost only fifty yards away in a cottage in Church Walk. Les Frost died in 2013 aged 97. There were three other uncles and aunts in the village.

Virtually all the working-class people in the village had been to school there and many were related. Children were completely free to wander. Apart from the summer motorcars were few and far between and there was no fear of strangers as you knew everyone. Parking in the village on a summer's evening especially at weekends was chaotic. Mrs Winnie Maddick the pianist at the V&A was famous for playing rugby songs and attracted an enormous following both locally and amongst holidaymakers. (This was before foreign holidays were normal).

Most of the men were in agriculture or horticulture with a few tradesmen. Dad cycled to work at Blagdon. Mum did domestic work at various houses but the one I remember was for Mrs Churchward who was the widow of the last village squire Charlie Churchward. I remember seeing him once looking out of the window of their house that looked out over the War Memorial.

There were very few pleasure boats on the river most craft being for fishing or dredging. Mr Bibby a former RN officer who lived at Woods had a 50ft MFV style motor yacht named Blue Hills and used to cruise as far as the Azores. Hugh Goodson at Waddeton had another motor yacht the Wattonia. Wilf Baker and Sid Collings at Duncannon had almost identical white painted 25 ft motor launches and ran trips for visitors in the summer.

There were one or two men who still made a living from fishing such as Ivan Collings and one or two of the Adams family who lived at the bottom of Mill Hill. (Annie, Fanny, Gert and Oll, Nortin?, Tom and John). Fanny would row visitors to Dartmouth and back.

The most salmon I saw caught was 15 at one haul at Mill Point. The salmon fishing boats were still rowed to the various hauling points. Most of the boats were too short for all the four crew to row so three rowed. The man on the centre thwart had a pair of oars while the bow and stroke pulled one oar on opposite sides of the boat. Great pride was taken in keeping stroke and having a smart style. Men from the village always went to Dartmouth Regatta and rowed in the whaler and cutter races. They took great satisfaction in beating the crews from visiting warships in the heavily waterlogged BRNC boats that were kept afloat. The warship crews used the ships boats that were kept aboard and therefore dry and light. Dad rowed in the winning whaler crew for 26 years. The last time when he was about 55 years old. The coming of the outboard put an end to all that. A note in Dad's diary: 27th August 1948, Dartmouth Regatta 1st four oared, 1st Whaler, 2nd Cutter, 3rd 4 oared Licensed Victuallers.

Mum's parents were still alive and working at Tuckenhay Mill. Living in a thatched cottage built on the edge of the creek, I used to go and stay with them or with Mum's sister Pearl Wakeham and her husband Tom who was the mill engineer. Granddad had a small rowing boat that he kept alongside the orchard he rented and kept chicken in at the bottom Corkscrew hill. He taught me to row when I was about five or six and eventually gave us the boat after a fall injured his knees. In summer visits to Tuckenhay were always by boat but by bus in winter.

Dad was of course a salmon fisherman crewing in his step brother Les Frost's boat (no 15) along with his half brother Stan, the other crewman was Sam Chubb. Les moored his boat at Stockenpool where there was a small lock up tin shed for all the spare gear and boots. In winter the boat came home to be stored upturned in the garden. I still love the smell of tar that was heated in a bucket and used painting the boats bottom.

There were three sand barges working on the river. A steam powered steel barge worked out of Galmpton and was owned by the Langmead family. When laden she only made about two knots and had to work with the tide. The grab was worked by a small steam crane. I had a good look at this one when we later went to Waddeton to live for a couple of years.

Another steel barge worked out of Totnes and she was a bit faster.

The wooden Stoke barge was possibly named Evening Star and owned by Wilf Baker who lived in the terrace at the side of Mill Quay. It had I think a Thornycroft petrol paraffin engine and was much faster. I am interested in old working craft and at one time thought Wilf's barge was

a typical west country estuary barge that may have originally been used under sail as she was similar to the preserved River Tamar barge Shamrock that is owned by the National Trust and kept at Cothele Quay.

These barges served as transport for bulk cargoes before the coming of the railway and motor lorry. A few years ago, Ada who used to live near to Wilf told me that Wilf had the barge built at Galmpton and that during the launching Wilf's wife fell in the river.

The three-man crew were Bill Baker who also lived down on the Quay and lived until about 80 and died around 1999-2002 and my Uncles Hamlyn and Freddie John Collings. Dredging was done by mooring over a suitable sandbank and starting a petrol engined winch that was bolted to the deck over the cuddy in the bows. A boom was swung out from the mast and a grab used to dredge the sand. The same system was used to offload onto the quay where the lumps of clay were sifted out by shovelling it on sloping wire sieves. The clay rolled down in lumps and the sand fell through before being collected usually by F.R Hills Albion lorries from Marldon.

The barge store (now the Boating Association Clubhouse) was full of paint and gear including two very long galvanised sheet metal portable bilge pumps. The approx 4" diameter tubes had a valve at the bottom and spout at the top worked by a plunger on the end of a long pole. I am pretty sure pumping was by pulling the rod up and down hand over hand and must have been very hard work. Paraffin for the engine was stored in funnel topped square 5-gallon drums. The engine was hand cranked to start on petrol with decompressors unscrewed. Once the flywheel was spinning the decompressors were quickly shut and hopefully the engine picked up and ran. Once warm the petrol was changed to paraffin as it carried less duty and was cheaper

I think paint for the barge was mixed there from linseed oil and fillers. The place was quite smelly with the most memorable being the driers used to make the paint dry faster.

The Star eventually hogged (bowed up in the middle) and was abandoned in Stoke Creek in the 1960s before being broken up/falling to pieces.

In those pre-Health and Safety regulated days it was common practice for any of the village children to spend the day out on the barge. My brother Derek caused a scare when the crew could not find him for a while and thought he had fallen overboard. He had gone into the cuddy and gone to sleep on a pile of ropes

There were virtually no cars parked on the quay and the sand was our playground. There was always plenty of odd ends of string lying around from where the nets were mended and this was strung together to make crabbing lines. Bacon rind was the preferred bait for the first one but then it was torn up for bait. I once came back to my line after a couple of hours to find an eel had swallowed the bait and several inches of line.

The old men of the village spoke of sand being taken from the river in the days before dredgers by rowing a heavy boat onto the sandbank at high tide, loading by hand at low tide then rowing back and throwing it up to the quay by shovel. My father spoke of hearing of longer trip involved rowing out to sea around to the Mewstone and other offshore rocks to gather seabird guano as garden fertiliser.

The wreck of the ex-Brixham sailing trawler 'Glory' lay out against the remains of a quay at Mill point. I understand she had been put there in the early 1930s after years of being moored off the creek but she broke adrift in a winter's gale and ran aground at Pighole Point. At some period, the original iron 1907 'Kingswear Castle' paddle steamer was used as a houseboat by people called Beuleigh, Booly or similar and moored outboard of 'Glory'. Eventually the KC was abandoned upriver at Fleet mill where she is slowly disintegrating. Her engines live on in the present KC preserved by the Paddle Steamer trust and after many years of restoration and operating on Medway in Kent returned her home River the Dart last year.

During WW11 the Glory was stripped of her pine decks for firewood but the oak timbers were too hard to be sawn up. One Sunday afternoon in about 1952-53 I remember coming out of the afternoon service and seeing her burning. In 2010 I tried my penknife some of her probably pitch pine floors and the timber was still sound just below the surface. Some of her iron fastenings are still intact after well over half a century exposed to salt water and the weather.

At the end of WW11 a number of Motor Torpedo Boats and possibly one steam turbine example were broken up in the creek for scrap. They were packed full of old tyres, paraffin poured inside and then they were set alight and the copper later collected. One of my books had an exploded drawing of the steam turbine type and I knew what a boiler looked like.

Similarly, a number of flat pontoons reputedly built in Canada were dismantled for building timber and reputedly this helped Dick Lugg

establish his construction business during a time of great materials shortage.

I started school in 1948 or 49 and at that time there were two teachers. The head was a Miss Sutton. Her assistant was I believe an unqualified teacher called Miss Taylor (they had been employed during the war as so many male teachers had gone into the forces). Miss Taylor taught the younger children and the head the older ones. The school was very crowded and our classroom was in what was then the Working Men's Club and is now the village hall. The air raid shelter was still standing in the higher playground. We still had slates in the classroom but I am not sure if they were still in use. Most writing was with pencil but pen and ink was also used. I hated the scratchy nibs and sloppy inkwells. We had to change the style of writing to italic; as a result my hand writing was never neat but was quite readable. A generation earlier my father had been taught beautiful copperplate hand.

There were still working farms right in the village. Harry Collings and his wife Daisy with their teenage son Philip had a farmhouse in one of three thatched cob-built cottages at the top of Mill Hill. Only the highest one Laburnum Cottage is left now and my great Aunt Lill (Brimmacome?) nee Collings lived there. The farm yard was at the rear with cow houses on two sides for about twenty animals. The dung heap sat in the middle of the concreted yard.

I have always thought Harry rented land from Mr Bibby at Woods House amongst others. The farm yard and cow houses were at the back with a huge dung heap in the middle of the yard. He ran a small heard of South Devons and this came in from the fields twice a day for milking and like any other Devon village the roads were always covered in cow dung but we were used to the smell. I went to stay with Aunt Flo in Plymouth and upon going with her to see an Uncle Melbourne Collings on the outskirts, there was a farm opposite and the smell of the cowpats on the road made me homesick.

Harry employed a couple of labourers and at least for a while there were land Army girls as well. They had a blue Fordson Major tractor. I do not think they had any horses but there were still plenty in use. I can remember going to Newton market and seeing farmers dressed in brown suit, bowler hat and shiny leather gaiters trotting in on their huge carthorses. The odd one was ridden to hounds but I doubt jumped well.

A lot of the older farm workers wore leather boots and gaiters rather than rubber Wellingtons. Oilskins were in short supply and being impervious, too hot and sweaty for manual labour so often all that was worn in wet

weather was a heavy hemp sack over the shoulders. Sacks were essential to the rural economy apart from containing everything from crops to coal; they could cover a broken window, act as a cushion on a cart or rowing boat seat or be a doormat.

Open fires were the norm burning mainly driftwood although some coal and coke were delivered by the Coop lorry. Women out for a walk carried a basket to gather fire-lighting from the hedgerows. Mum could spot a dry twig at twenty feet. Most shopping was done in the village from the Coop. Mr. Callard was the manager and my teenaged Aunty Pam Collings (later Baker) assisted.

Sam Rowe ran Austin 18 taxis from a house opposite the school. Mr Baker had a car spray shop next door to the post office.

There was a carpenter's shop in an old cottage at the back of our yard where the curl of shavings coming out of a plane fascinated me. The workshop moved to a wooden shed in the V & A car park and the old cottage was eventually pulled down and rebuilt as a house.

Billy Plumb had recently had the first bungalow built in the orchard to the right as you went down Mill Hill and Dad had an allotment there. I can still taste the carrots and peas straight out of the ground and pod.

Of course, it was not all sweetness and light. Boys will fight and little gangs formed. We became good at making bows and arrows, catapults, clubs and whips. In one stirring engagement, I was flogging Chris Scoble with a plaited binder twine whip so he shot me in the lip with an arrow. It went right through and struck a tooth but with no lasting damage and it certainly has never stopped me talking.

Christmas was always special although there was nowhere near the number of presents there are now. There was a school, British Legion and Buffs children's party.

I was in the church choir and on Christmas Eve we travelled by taxi to the big houses like Woods and farms like Tully's at Waddeton where we were fed mince pies and cider. The old cliff top track to Woods was closed to big cars so we had to walk up and someone fell into a huge frozen puddle. Could have been the dark, cider or both.

David Howells, a school friend who had come to the village, lived at Sandridge Park where his mother was cook to Lord Cathcart. My godfather Charlie Kiff was gardener there and lived in the Old Coachhouse in a flat in what had probably been the hayloft, the front

double doors originally for loading hay opened back on fine days leaving an unguarded drop of about twelve feet. There was a long whippy flight of stairs with no guardrail up from the cobbled coach house to the flat. There were extensive traces of the WW2 US Navy camp in the grounds and just below Pell meadow a scatter of 9mm Sten gun ammunition on the beach, such fun for school boys. BANGS!

My father said there had been a secret bunker in East Wood that his brother Jim had been involved in but we never found it. For some reason I expected it to be deep in the wood but I know now it was at the edge close by the creek.

At Waddeton we had the run of the estate as long as it was out of sight of the front windows. We spent two glorious summers on the beach beside the WW2 slipways. We never built a decent raft but the tin bath was a lot of fun. The best find was a 20 mm cannon shell, its head was decayed away but it was still full of cordite. Tests with few flakes did not cause an explosion so a cupful was ignited and burnt fiercely for several seconds.

By the time we were living at Waddeton I was going to Paignton Secondary Modern School and cycling there past the construction site for the Standard Telephone factory. At times the road was two inches deep in bright red liquid mud. My younger brother had rejoined Stoke Gabriel School and was walking there.

It snowed very hard one winter when the wind was from the south east. Snowflakes the size and shape of upside-down saucer took some seconds to fall the last few feet. It lay a couple of feet deep where it had drifted and was dry and fluffy compared with the normal wet sort we see. I went to see my friend David at Sandridge and we built a real igloo down by the creek just by chopping squares out with our hands.

I can still remember with dismay the day Mum told us we were moving from the village. We had been out to our favourite bit of beach at Ladies Quay (just below Woods opposite White Rock) and were half way across the field leading back to Pump Lane. Eventually my parents bought a house in Totnes where boating became my main interest.

Cars in the village. None of the working people could afford cars and even motor cycles were rare though Henry Collings had a Norton and Charlie Lane who lived in Barn Park had a motorcycle and ungainly saloon sidecar known as Charlie's chicken house.

Dick Lugg the builder had an Austin 16 and Mrs Bibby drove a Talbot Ten. Mr Bloom who kept the Castle Hotel had an early 1930s Daimler. Mr Baker the landlord of the CHI had a Morris 10 Doctors Coupe. It had a dickie seat in the boot and was kept in sheds in what is still the pub car park. A Hudson Terraplane sat unused alongside a large and for prolonged period unfinished house on the right of Aish Road about three hundred yards from Rowes Farm.

Francis **George** Collings
gvcollings@blueyonder.co.uk

December 2006 with revisions in 2014