

1. A BROMPTON CHILDHOOD

My life started on 5th February 1935 at Lowfields Farm, Fullicar Lane. (Incidentally, Lowfields is the farm where John Kettlewell, a benefactor of the village, was born.) The village has benefited from the trust he set up in the seventeenth century, originally to provide for the poor of the parish, but nowadays the hospitals, churches and schools benefit. I can remember my father helping to deliver the charity coals by horse and cart , to the poorest of the parish. The farm adjoining Lowfields is now known as Kettlewell Farm, the income from which goes into the Charity. I wonder if the two farms, in the seventeenth century, were one unit which was split after Kettlewell's death. The house at Lowfields is certainly the older building.



*Left: Doreen's Mum Eleanor Forth nee Lupton on her Wedding Day
Right: Fred Forth pictured on his Wedding Day*

I was born the seventh child of Fred and Eleanor Forth and my mother (pictured above on her Wedding Day) was to be 46 two weeks after I was born. She had been in labour all day with the district nurse in attendance. However, by evening, my father was getting very concerned as he suspected something wasn't quite right. Mum had always had fairly quick and easy deliveries with the other six children (including twins). Being a very single minded man and against the wishes of the nurse, he got on his bike and cycled down Fullicar Lane, which at that time was just a stony track, and into the village to the telephone kiosk on Water End Green to phone the doctor. I understand that at that time, the midwife didn't get her full payment for a delivery if the doctor had to be called - hence her reluctance for him to be involved. Eventually, Doctor Mackenzie, who was then just newly qualified, came out and assisted with the birth. My father had been correct in his assumptions that all was not well, as the umbilical cord was around my neck and Mum had a very difficult delivery. However, we both were fighters and lived to tell the tale.

I cannot really remember anything of my early days on the farm and what I do know is because of the stories my parents and family told me, although I do have one very faint recollection of a dog jumping up onto my pram.



*Left: Fred and Eleanor Forth with Florence, Wilf (baby) and twins Annie and Edith
Right: Fred & Eleanor Forth at Lowfields Farm 1935*



Doreen & Mum Eleanor on Christening Day

While we lived at the farm, each Wednesday and Saturday, my Mother used to walk to Northallerton market and back, a good six mile round trip, with me in the pram. She would call at a friend's house in Quaker Lane, Northallerton to feed and change me before continuing on her way. Bearing in mind the state of Fullicar Lane at that time, this wouldn't be an easy walk, pushing a pram and carrying the accumulator batteries from the radio into town to get them recharged, as well as sometimes having a basket of homemade butter with her to sell.

Her life must have been hard. One of my much older sisters lived at home as well as my three brothers.

In addition there was always at least one of the farm hands living in. Can you imagine getting the water from the pump in the yard to fill the copper boiler on Sunday evening ready for Monday washing day and providing meals for sixteen to eighteen people on threshing days as well as extra hands at haytime and harvest.



Geoff & Doreen at Lowfields Farm 1935



Annie Forth with regular visitor to Lowfields Farm Diane Lewis from York



Left: Doreen Forth around 1938 after move to Water End



Right: Doreen Forth 1940

By the time I was three years old, my parents decided it was time to move into the village before I started school. We moved into a cottage in Water End and my earliest recollection

is that of packing my dolls pram and setting off to go back 'home' to the farm. My sister caught me up at the bottom of the lane, but I know I wasn't very happy about it.

It was at this time that I first made contact with Freda Tyreman (later Freda Burn) who some of you will remember. Freda was to become my friend for the duration of her lifetime. We spent a lot of time in each others houses and in the gardens behind her home, in what was then known as Hornby Terrace, Water End. We also played in the small fields behind the cottages, which are remnants of the Toft and Croft system and can still be traced on the map today. Hornby Terrace then belonged to Claude Wilford, the mill owner, who lived in the big house, Cedar Mount. The cottages adjoin the garden of Cedar Mount and were no doubt built by an earlier Wilford to house mill workers. We were both avid followers of 'Dick Barton, Special Agent' and would listen to the hour long omnibus edition on the radio on a Saturday morning, as we weren't allowed to stay up late enough to catch the daily quarter hour instalment. We had very hard winters at that time, and one winter, the brick pond, at the bottom of Fullicar Lane froze over, solid enough to slide on. But poor Freda, she found the thin ice and fell in. She was soaked through and scared to go home to tell her mother what had happened.

Both Freda's mother and mine kept chickens in the back garden as a cheap source of food, feeding them on kitchen scraps, green vegetable matter and, during wartime, the ration of 'Indian corn' as it was then called. In the springtime, both mothers would each set a dozen eggs for a broody hen to sit on, using orange crates as nest boxes. My mother was the expert on poultry and she would sex the unborn chicks while still in the shell, using a metal gadget on a string. If it swung back and forth it was a cockerel in the egg and round and round it was a hen (or was it the other way round?) And then we had the thrill of watching the chicks hatch out and seeing them grow in the small runs made by our dads for the purpose of rearing them, their yellow fluff changing to brown feathers in a matter of weeks. Sometimes the hens would fly over the wire around their runs and get into the neighbours gardens and eat all the cabbages. This would cause a bit of trouble at the time but was usually resolved by the gift of a few eggs. My mother used to put coloured rings around her hens' legs in order to identify which were hers if they did escape.

Brompton green, being common land, was a hive of activity in spring time with lots of chicken coups, and ducks and geese on the beck. The geese got really savage when they had goslings and would chase us with their necks outstretched if you went near them. I was terrified of them. I remember once, my mother sent me to the other side of the green, across the middle bridge to Polly Christon's, who ran a greengrocers in a shed alongside her house and made deliveries with a horse and cart. Of course, the geese were on the green, so to avoid them on my return journey I made a long detour by walking up the road on Polly's side of the green, intending to cross the top bridge. I was wearing a new, full length hand knitted, pink coat, as you had in those days, and I fell into a large puddle of dirty water. You can imagine the reception I got when I returned home with the coat wet through and all bedraggled and dirty. I expect I got the usual smack bottom to had insult to injury! Funny thing is, I can't remember wearing that coat ever again!

The green was always populated with animals other than the poultry. Mr. Thompson, a dairy farmer in Water End, would turn his cows out there in the summer and Mr. Lancaster, my Dad's boss, who was also a horse dealer, would break and exercise some of his horses there, which he had bought in to sell on to the army.

My eldest brother, Wilf, told me that when a fresh consignment was bought in they were to walk all the way from Northallerton station, where they had been brought by train, through

the town and then to Brompton and either up to the farm or to the stables behind Mr. Lancaster's house. When they were broken in and sold on, Wilf used to go on the train, up to Scotland to an army camp with the horses to make sure they were properly fed and watered on the journey.



Wilf Forth at Lowfields Farm

The cattle on the green provided hazards for the children playing there by way of the cow-pats they left behind. Many the time a child would fall full length into one of these. The cows also drank from the beck along with the ducks and geese, and this added to its pollution along with the raw sewage which also flowed into it. No wonder scarlet fever and diphtheria were rife in the village each summer. My brother, Geoff, contracted both these illnesses and had to go into the fever hospital on each occasion, This isolation hospital was situated up Sandy Bank in Northallerton. I can remember going with my mother to see him, but I was only allowed to look through the window and no doubt make faces at him. Each time Geoff came home from the Fever Hospital he had head lice, so it was out with the dreaded small tooth comb twice a day. By some miracle, I did not contact either of the infectious diseases from him, which was just as well as some children actually died from diphtheria, but I did get the head lice and hated the daily combing, with a newspaper on the table to catch the lice and then squash them. As well as the combing, once a week it was hair wash day with an evil smelling shampoo called 'Durbac. Things don't seem to have improved a lot with the treatment and infestations of head lice, and they are still rampant in the junior schools. So much for nearly seventy years of 'progress'.

There had also been an outbreak of meningitis in the village before we went to live there. My mother used to talk of straw being put down on the roads to deaden the sound of the cart wheels which was disturbing to the patients. Here again, the disease claimed the lives of local people. Tuberculosis was also quite common at this time and of course there was only the fever hospital and the Rutson Cottage Hospital to cope with these diseases. T.B. and lung cancer were thought of under the general term of 'consumption', there not being a great deal of medical knowledge, as there is today, or means of diagnosis for either complaint. With limited hospital facilities, especially for the general working population, treatment and care was often left to the local doctor, who occasionally was known to perform operations on the kitchen table.

The National Health Service was not set up until after the Second World War, so access to medical treatment was sketchy and had to be paid for by some means or other. Sick Clubs were set up and if you could afford it, a family made a small payment each week to help to provide for medical care and loss of wages in times of illness. My father was a member of the Oddfellows Club and another at The Three Horse Shoes, which was referred to as 'Jack Sams', named after the landlord there. The Oddfellows invested some of their funds in property and a row of rather superior cottages was built in Water End was known as the Oddfellows Houses.

Some strange concoctions were used to combat childhood illnesses.

I used to get croup and my mother had the following recipe made up at the chemist and I still have the scrap of paper on which it was written.

4 ozs Syrup of squills

1 oz Ipecacuanha wine

1 oz Chloric Ether or Spirits of Chloroform

2 ozs Water

(Does anyone know what squills and ipecacuanha are ?)

Well, I looked them up in the dictionary. Squills is a purgative from the bulb of a plant of the lily family and Ipecacuanha is an emetic. I would think you wouldn't have the strength to cough after a good dose of that. As to the ether or the chloroform - well! you would certainly get a good night's sleep. The chemist had marked the cost of this concoction as two shillings and nine pence, which I would think was very expensive in those days in the early 1940's. For toothache, Mum would buy a large poppy head, again from the chemist. This would be boiled for a considerable time and then you would wash your mouth out with the resulting liquor. I know now that poppies are a source of opium. It is a wonder we aren't all drug addicts. And then there was the dreaded goose-grease which was rubbed into the chest for coughs and colds. I can still feel it's tackiness and Mum's rough hands rubbing it in - it seemed to stick your chest to your chin.

There has been so much in the press recently about giving children Omega 3 fish oils to help their learning abilities. Well, that is nothing new. We were given a good spoonful of cod liver oil and malt everyday as well as Scotts Emulsion (another fish oil product) in the winter. The cod liver oil really was delicious, sometimes I would help myself to another spoonful, but the Scotts Emulsion was a little less palatable - a bit of a 'nip your nose and swallow it' thing.

If you wanted a doctor and couldn't use the public telephone, which most people fought shy of, the most usual method was to watch out for his car coming into the village and catching him as he came out of a patient's house or flagging him down. Can you see the G.P's of today putting up with that! On one occasion my father was taken to hospital with pneumonia. No one explained anything to me about it and I felt traumatised by the sight of him being carried downstairs on a stretcher and taken off. To add to my distress, while he was in hospital, on Sundays, which was one of the few visiting days, because again there was no one to look after me, I had to go to chapel Sunday School in the morning and church Sunday School in the afternoon. And then, sometimes, my mother took me to Evensong in the evening. I was so fed up by this time, I used to hide behind the big fur collar on her coat and put my tongue out at people in the congregation. They couldn't see me but I got a lot of satisfaction doing it. Sweet little thing that I was!!!

Looking back, our living conditions were quite primitive compared to those of today. We only had a stone sink in the kitchen with one cold tap. Water was heated in a small boiler at the side of the large black range which also had an oven for baking . This range took up

most of one wall in the living room and on baking days my mother would feed the fire with long pieces of tree branch which we had gathered from the fields. She made bread and teacakes one day and cakes and pastry another. Fresh yeast was bought from the little shop along our row. This was the domain of one, Mrs. Kipling. I used to go along and buy either a pennorth or two pennorth of yeast on the day the yeast man delivered. It had to be fresh for my Mum but she did make exceedingly good bread and teacakes. (Pun) On Mrs. Kipling's counter stood the most magnificent set of brass scales with every size of weight. These were always kept highly polished and were fascinating to a child.

We hadn't electric kettles as nowadays, and all the cooking and water heating was done on the coal fire in the living room. Later on we did acquire a paraffin stove which stood in the back kitchen, but it always seemed to need the wicks cleaning and filling up with fuel and it produced foul smelling smoke if it wasn't just set right. However, it did mean that in the summer months we could do without the coal fire being on all the time. Paraffin was a product which was easily available then and most of the village shops seemed to sell it, the smell of it pervading the nostrils as you entered.

On wash days, the large copper in the outside wash house was filled for boiling the whites and providing hot water for the passing tub. The clothes were then put through the large wooden roller mangle to get as much water as possible out of them and it was very hard work turning the handle; there was no need for the work-out at the gym in those days! If the weather was dry, my mother hung out the clothes in the field at the back of our house, but sometimes there were cows in the field, and on one occasion they ate the skirt off one of my best dresses which the local dressmaker had made for me out of floral curtain material. This was about all you could get during the war as dress material was not available or on clothing coupons so a lot of 'make do and mend' was carried out.

On wet days, the clothes were dried around the fire on the clothes horse or hanging from the airing rack which was suspended from the living room ceiling, this being the only room with a fire. Big items like sheets were left to dry overnight. Otherwise you couldn't get to the fire to warm yourself. It seemed to take all week to get the washing dry in the winter. No wonder everyone suffered from bad chests and colds especially as most of the houses in Water End had damp half way up the walls due to the frequent flooding.

Talking of flooding, I remember one really bad February after we had had heavy snow and the beck flooded with the thaw. I think it would be about 1943 and the water came into the houses. My parents were up during the night lifting the mats and putting furniture up onto blocks made of logs ready cut for the fire. I came down stairs having slept through all the activity and slipped on the wet linoleum which was covering the floor and I went down with such a crash.

Did I get sympathy and a cuddle - you bet I didn't - all I got was a smack bottom!!! Of course we had to live upstairs until the water subsided - about three days I think. My mother did the best she could to boil water and pans on the small bedroom fireplace which hadn't been lit for years. Well, of course the chimney was blocked so not only were we in danger of being drowned but of being smoked to death. Our only past time was watching through the bedroom windows, to see the huge lumps of frozen snow come sailing down the beck like mini icebergs. There was no Social Services distributing food and heaters in those days and we just had to get along as best we could. When we went to living downstairs again everything was soaked through and the water mark remained on the interior walls for years to come - we never got the interior walls replastered or anything like that. Another year, again after a big snow with high winds, the snow blew under the eaves

and my father had to get up into the loft and shovel it out before it brought the ceilings down.

When we first moved to the village my mother still did the ironing with the old flat irons which were heated on the fire, even though there was electricity in the cottage. It was sometime before she invested in an electric iron - I think she was worried about the cost of ironing by electricity, payment for which was by slot meter which took penny and shilling coins . A collector came around periodically to empty the meter and the householder would get a bit of discount back depending on the amount in the meter. We also kept our oil lamps for some time, which we had had at the farm and they proved very useful in the event of a war-time electricity cut.

Wash day was also the weekly bath day. In the summer, when we came home from school on Mondays, Mum would fill the tin bath with clean water from the copper and we would have a bath in the wooden wash house behind the house. But in winter the bath was brought in before the fire. A treat during the war years was to have a tablet of green Fairy soap for the bath. Although this was the large household type tablet, it was a huge improvement on the alternative; hard, red carbolic soap. I hated having the last bath as the water always seemed gritty after my brother had been in it.

Although the village was self sufficient because of twenty shops which catered for most needs, travellers (or representatives) came round to collect the grocery order from either Lewis and Cooper or Russells of Northallerton, which was then delivered by van once a fortnight. Every three or four months, another traveller from Claphams, the drapers, furnisners and tailors in Northallerton (where Boyes shop now is) came around with suitcases full of samples. I thought this was very exciting as he unpacked sheets, pinafores, shirts, gloves, stockings, towels and all manner of things. Here again, you placed an order and it was duly delivered by van. The onion seller, knife grinder, lemonade man and Polly Christon with her fruit and vegetables were also regular visitors and many of the local deliveries and collections were still done by horse and cart. In summer, the milkman came around with his horse and trap twice a day, with fresh milk in a huge churn. In Winter I think we only got one delivery. The householders would come out with a big jug and get their required quantity, which was measured out in metal containers with long handles to get to the bottom of the churn. The coalman also had a horse and flat cart and the emptying of the earth closets was the duty of a local farmer with a special closed container pulled by a horse. The waste was emptied onto agricultural land to be ploughed in. Have you ever wondered why, when walking over a ploughed field, you always find pieces of pottery - well this is the reason. The ash pits were also used for disposing rubbish that couldn't be burnt.

I recently met up with a 'girl' who used to visit her grandparents who lived near us. She said "You used to let me play with you. I liked that, as you had a better trike than I had." I replied, "I didn't think I had anything better than anyone else - we were pretty poor." "Oh yes," she said, "You see, I hadn't got one at all." which puts it all into perspective. I did, however, acquire a lovely dolls pram when I was about five years old. One of the few photographs I had taken as a child shows me and my friends, lined up with our prams.



Doreen Forth, Freda Tyreman, Edna & Florence Stainthorpe

Our clothing is also typical of what we had at that time, it was either handmedowns or make do and mend. I suppose the reason we don't have many childhood photos is partly due to the fact that it was wartime and film wasn't available and the fact that we were all pretty poor and couldn't afford luxuries like cameras. One of my brothers had gone to the south of England to work and he bought the pram for me. But do you know, I still liked to put my dolls into an old shoe box with string through the end and pull that about.



*Left: Wilf Forth, Des and Edgar Hoare
Right: Wilf on rear right, Alan Thompson seated*

Another improvisation was that of making stilts from old treacle tins - again with string through the tops which we held in our hands. We used to totter around on these tins and I can't remember there being any broken ankles. We also used to make our own fishing nets from a garden cane, a loop of wire and a cotton bag. Other popular play things were large, metal hoops with hooks to steer them by. These were made by the local blacksmith and we used to race around the roads with them. Of course there was very little motor traffic (only Claude Wilford, Mr. Lancaster and the doctor had cars) and the horse and carts moved at a very steady pace so didn't constitute a danger to us. Mentioning the blacksmith, there were two smithies in the village. Jim Burn at the Green Tree and Sam Hardcastle, whose forge was on the corner of what is now the Crown Inn car park. When we came out of school we would go over to Sam's forge and watch as he hammered horseshoes and rims for cart wheels and see the sparks flying from the fire as he pumped the bellows. I always wondered if it hurt the horses to have a red hot shoe out onto their hooves.

We didn't have playgrounds with lots of equipment, apart from the Recreation Field, next to the Church Hall, which had been given to the village by the Todd family from Mill Hill House. I can remember one event being held on this field and then of course it was requisitioned by the Army when the soldiers were evacuated from Dunkirk and a field bakery was set up there. There were also temporary latrines in the corner near to the present Methodist Church and the 'humps and bumps' of this activity could be detected until the ground was recently ploughed and resown.

The village greens were our playgrounds and when I got a bit older I used to join in the cricket matches on Water End Green, with both boys and girls playing. Our course we had our own rules to fit in with the terrain, for example 'three becker's' (i.e. hitting the ball into

the beck) and you were out. One broken window and you were out, but we did all pitch in together to cover the cost of the replacement and it was good practice for the apprentice plumber and glazier who played with us.

One test of your ability was to be able to run barefoot, without falling in, across the big sewage pipes of which there were two near the top bridge in Water End. This was a kind of passport which gave the right to be considered a native of the village with certain privileges, like permitting you to pee in the beck.

Looking back, one of the things I can best remember was the 'freedom to roam' we had as children. In the summer we would take a bottle of water and some jam sandwiches and spend the days over the fields making camps in the hedgerows and exploring. We also played in the old ruined windmill, which has recently been renovated and made habitable. One of the most daring escapades, so I thought, was that some children would run across the parapet of Fullicar railway bridge when a train was passing beneath. I never attempted that but I can remember some who did and are still alive today!

Other summer pastimes were marbles for the boys, played around 'ally holes' as the target. These holes were made by digging shoe heels into the green. Skipping and hopscotch were popular with the girls. These latter two games were played out on the roadway as there was so little traffic. Skipping often involved a long rope being stretched right across the road, or when you got really advanced, two ropes, turned one with the left hand and one with the right, so they crossed in the middle and then it was 'All in together girls' and other such skipping rhymes. This really did require a lot of skill and concentration, timing the turns of the rope as you ran in and kept us fit and slim.

As the nights grew darker, we still played outside - making the outlines of houses from the fallen leaves on the greens and playing fox-off. Sledging by torchlight in Mr. Lancaster's field, which is now Danes Crest, or making slides on the icy roads in the winters, which were always cold and snowy, were other pastimes ruled by the seasons. The sledging could be fairly hazardous as there was a brick wall at the bottom of the run and several children got split heads by running into it when going down bellyflop. The way to avoid the brick wall was to go through the hedge onto the road and pray there wasn't a bus coming!! Keeping warm was a problem in wartime winters and most of our clothes, as I have already said, were 'make do and mend' or 'handmedowns'. Not for us the 'designer label' clothes demanded by the children of today. Jumpers were knitted from pulled out adult woollens and then they sometimes ended up as bathing costumes, with the sleeves cut out and the body of the garment stitched between the legs. Can you imagine what we looked like when these got wet through! But we had to have the right gear when fishing in the beck in the summer.

I even had a pair of mittens made from rabbit skins Mum had cured, after we had eaten the rabbit itself, and a pair of leggings with numerous small buttons up each side which had to be fastened with a button hook - it took ages to put them on. My hands and legs always seemed to be chapped in the winter, no long trousers for the boys, just shorts until they were about fourteen, and the girls were never seen in trousers, although we did envy the Land Army girls in their's. I also suffered from the dreaded chilblains, but there again we played outside much of the time and didn't spend our days in a centrally heated home before a television set or computer. Snowfire ointment was the general treatment for these ills, but they never went away until the Spring came with the better weather.

Making clip and hookey rugs was a winter occupation done by all the family. If you didn't help making the mats on the large wooden frames which took up most of the space and were suspended from the beams in the ceiling, you had to sit at the back of the room away from the fire and freeze, so there wasn't much option but to help. Doing these rugs was an

early form of recycling as well as a necessity as the only other floor covering was the cold linoleum. Old woollen clothing, such as skirts, dresses, trousers, coats etc. was cut up into either three inch clips or long strips, depending on which method of weaving into the canvas backing was to be used. My mother used to scour the village for suitable material and black was always highly prized as this was used for the borders of the rug.

When the war started and I was at school, my mother and Freda's mother helped at Lowfields Farm with haytime, harvest and on threshing days, as most of the able bodied men had joined the forces.



Sharing our 'lowances during a well-earned break at Haytime on Lowfields Farm 1935

Freda and I would come home from school on our own, remember we would be only seven or eight years old, and walk all the way to the top of Fullicar Lane to our join our mothers in the fields. We were usually just in time to share the workers 'clockings' or 'lowances' as the refreshments were called, having scalding, hot tea from a large enamel can and fresh scones and teacakes, made by my mother. They did taste good after our long walk. If we were well behaved in the fields, which of course we always were, we would get a ride back to the farm on the back of one of the cart horses, or on top of a load of hay or corn, and then have a lift back to the village in Mr. Lancaster's rattly, old horse box, bumping down the stoney, rutted lane. But as my father would say, "Third class riding is better than first class walking!"

On threshing days, as, again, there was no one to look after us at home if it was school holidays, we would go to the farm with our mums, and be issued with a big stick and told to kill the mice and rats as they came out of the corn stack. We used to run after them as they appeared and give them a good walloping. The women would be cutting bands on the top of the threshing machine and feeding the corn into the drum and the older boys would

be employed in the 'chaff hole' as it was called. This was where the dusty, flaky husk off the corn was dispelled ready to be bagged up for animal bedding. There was no Health and Safety Executive in those days and it was all hands deck. Before the threshing day itself, my mother did a huge bake ready for the 'lloances' for the sixteen or so hands required for a threshing day.

The thing that put a stop to our freedom after dark, was when the soldiers were brought back from Dunkirk and were billeted in the halls and empty houses in the village. There was then a curfew imposed and soldiers were posted around and would challenge you with "Who goes there". A field bakery was set up on the Recreation Ground (the one near the Church Hall) and lorries and other vehicles were parked there and on the village greens, covered in camouflage netting, which we children would help the soldiers to weave putting the strips of khaki coloured material into large mesh netting. I can remember the soldiers putting on concerts in the Village Hall and we would sit on their wooden bunks and listen to them singing songs such as 'Please don't send away the Border Boys, we'll need them by and by' referring to the Border Regiment billeted in the village and 'Hang our your washing on the Siegfried Line.' I think they must have written the first song themselves. They played tunes on spoons and other improvised instruments, sometimes accompanied by the piano. Even today, when I hear the old hall creaking in the wind, I think of those soldiers billeted here and wonder how they managed to sleep. In reality, I would think they thought this was heaven compared to the Dunkirk beaches. My mother would sometimes invite one or two of the soldiers in for a meal, (which would usually consist of, you've guessed it, rabbit pie, I certainly couldn't eat it now. What hunger will do for you!!

Later on in the war a Land Army Hostel was built in Little Lane and the girls billeted there worked on the local farms. Sometimes, they would put on a party for us and hold a fancy dress competition. As there wasn't much else going on for us other than that provided by our own imagination, we really looked forward to these events. There was also a Prisoner of War camp at Stone Cross which housed Germans, Italians and Ukrainians. They too worked on the land and some went on to marry local girls and stayed on in this country after the war. The farmers were very glad of this additional help as most of the local young men had been called up into the forces or to serve as Bevin Boys in the mines.



Left: Doreen Forth at Whitsuntide Fancy Dress aged 16

Right: Women's Sack Race Whit 1951 Anita Shaw nee Peacock leads Doreen Forth by a short head

If my memory serves me correct, the Brompton Whitsuntide Sports, as the Spring Bank Holiday Carnival was then known, continued throughout the war years. We were always eager to take part in all the sporting events and the fancy dress parade, as this was an important source of income for us which we duly spent on the fair. Mr. Lancaster, my father's boss was on the committee and he entered horses into the parade, all decked up with highly polished horse brasses and rosettes made from crepe paper adorning their mane and plaited tails.

As a general rule, it was Mum who was the disciplinarian in the house, after all we didn't see such a lot of my Dad, who was always either at work on the farm or digging the garden. But Sunday lunchtimes we all sat around the table together and that was when my father came to the fore. It was 'sit up, shut up and eat up'. He was a stickler for table manners - always telling us to 'keep our wings down' i.e. elbows tucked in and to 'let our meat stop our mouths.' Knives and forks had to be properly held, we had to sit with straight backs and no giggling was allowed. One day, my brother was misbehaving at the table, Dad took his belt off ready to thrash him, Geoff got under the table and it was my legs that caught the brunt of it. But we still laugh about it today! On another occasion, Geoff sneaked off to swim in the River Swale at Morton Bridge. This was a foolish thing to do as boys had been drowned doing the self same thing. Well, when he got back he got a real thrashing from Dad with the wet swim trunks. It must have hurt. This may seem cruel these days, but it was done in love and concern for his safety and we all had a deep respect and affection for our parents and never questioned their authority and accepted the punishments as duly deserved.

Sundays were very much the 'family days'. In the summer months we would go for a walk if Dad wasn't haytimming or harvesting, which at that time they tried to avoid on the Sabbath and it was only done in a wet year, when it was difficult to get the crops in. Sometimes it was up to the 'Wheatsheaf Inn' which was at the top of Winton Bank. It was quite safe

walking on the road as there was so little traffic. I can't have been very old as I remember going in my pushchair. We would go into the pub and sit on the old wooden settle. I would have a small glass of lemonade, Mum a shandy and Dad would have half a bitter. On other occasions we would walk over the fields. Dad would always know where the birdnests could be found, where there was frogspawn and where the firemen from the steam trains had thrown onto the railway side, huge pieces of coal which were too large to go into the stokehole. Dad would then produce a sack from his pocket and carry the coal home to supplement the allocation we were allowed or could afford. He also knew when the blackberries were ready and where the best ones could be found. Sometimes he would get the horse and cart from the farm and we would go 'sticking' picking up the branches and sticks which had blown from the trees. These would be sawn into convenient lengths and stored in the stick house at the back of our cottage ready for winter. This stick house had a stall and manger in it and I wonder now, if it had been a stable sometime in its past. He could also mesmerise rabbits by walking round and round them in ever-decreasing circles until he got near enough to hit them on the head to stun them. He would then wring their necks and paunch them, then mum would skin them and then into the pot they would go. Yes, he was a country man through and through!

At Easter 1940 I started at Brompton School. How different.....

Doreen Newcombe 1998