

## **FORWARD.**

Just prior to getting married over thirty years ago, my gran was living at Warwick Place, Priors Park. She had a '*New World*' gas fire fitted in the living room that made light work of heating the room. This had been fitted by Mr. Wathen. When we got married, we thought a similar fire would be ideal for us. I went to see Mr. Wathen, then living on Canterbury Leys, and still recall him answering the door in his blue boiler suit, my first encounter with the man who even then had many stories and memories of his working days in his head. Over the past few years, Mr. Wathen -now Dave has been a frequent visitor into our shop on his daily trips into town and would quite freely recall these memories to the extent that there were so many which I felt should be recorded. This I have done with the help of Tewkesbury Historical Society under their 'Oral History' project, and have put them down into words. I have tried to do this as much as possible as Dave has spoken to capture the true essence of the way he would relate his stories to us, as the spoken word can never truly be transferred into the written word.

I could not resist the title 'From a Monday morning to A Gas Man came to call' remembering the Flanders and Swann song, as Dave's memories takes us indeed from a Monday morning till a gas man came to call.

Bill Treen, 2008.

## ***'FROM A MONDAY MORNING TO A GAS MAN CAME TO CALL!'***

### **DAVE WATHEN.**

#### **INTRODUCTION.**

Dave Wathen was born in 1931 and lived at 47 Church Street [one of the Abbey Cottages, restored by the Abbey Lawn Trust between 1967 and 1971], until he was 21 years old. His family consisted of mum, dad, brothers Alan, Ken and John and sister Ruby. Living in this part of the town is undoubtedly the reason for his love of the Abbey, the rivers and the Ham.



*47 Church Street.*

At the age of 15 in 1946, he left the Grammar School to become an apprentice for the Cheltenham & District Gas Co. Dave was made redundant off the Gas Board after 26 years service in his forties [Dave admits to being very poor on remembering dates, describing it as “a severe failing of mine”!], receiving the *INCREDIBLE SUM* of £1300. He had, in fact applied to become a Technician, and also one of the local manager’s Inspectors. He received *TWO* letters of acceptance, vividly remembering them arriving on a Friday, and thus took promotion and a suit job, moving to the headquarters at Staverton. Unfortunately, when the gas industry was re-structured, it was a case of ‘last in, first out’. Apart from his redundancy payment, he received the princely sum of £10 as a leaving gift, -taxed, of course!



*Dave on the left with Pete Newman  
during national service in Germany.*

Dave served two years National Service with the Queen's Bays 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards in Germany and at Bovington Camp in Dorset.

He had three or four job interviews, one at Downtys, who wouldn't take him on because he had too many qualifications and he wasn't the kind of person to push a button or pull a lever, so he began working for himself. He eventually bought the premises at 65, Barton Street [next to the Watson Hall] off the Borough Council when it was derelict and had a closure notice on it. His son Michael joined the business, and they continued to trade as 'Dave Wathen & Sons'. Dave retired in 1993, aged 62 although Michael still operates.

## CHILDHOOD YEARS.

Monday morning would see me going to a private school, run by Miss Sollis at 16 Church Street.



*The view of the Abbey from  
Dave's back window.*

I lived in church Street in the old houses that were renovated, they belonged to the Abbey Trust and needless to say, we lived virtually underneath the Abbey. We had no clock in the house, because all we had to do was to look through the window and listen to the bells! We had an outside tap in the yard and outside toilet at the far end of the path by the side of the washhouse. In the house, we had a couple of gaslights before the landlords put in electric light. Eventually, we boys put a sink inside the house to make things easier. Every one of the row of houses had a toilet at the bottom of the path, which at night time, and particularly in the snow in 1947 was quite precarious! Bath time was a tin bath indoors, before which it was a case of kneel down in front of mother while she combed our hair with the nit comb! Our hot water bottle was a hot house brick wrapped up.

During the wartime, we kept rabbits and chickens. We had forty-two rabbits in different hutches –Chinchilla, Angora, Old English, Belgian hare, Rex all at the other side of the chicken run. The late J.O. Martin lived just down the road, and very often, maybe once a week, either Mrs. Martin or her housekeeper would open our front door and put inside a small basket of wheat –I think our chickens must have been the luckiest in Tewkesbury, because they did have some wheat! Maybe it was sweepings off the floor that Mr. Martin collected when he visited his warehouses. We were the only people in the row who kept any animals. My brother John used to do the killing and skinning. On one occasion, mother slipped up and told me it was rabbit we were eating, and that finished me eating rabbit! John would clean the skins, stretch them over a board until they were dry, rub them with sand or soil to get any surplus off and an aunt of ours used to back gloves with them –chinchilla, a bluey grey. Dad also had an allotment at Perry Hill, so we were quite self-sufficient. There was the cricket

pitch, the track, Dee's Orchard then the allotments that went right up to Wenlock Road.

John Martin was very good to mother. If he saw her waiting for the bus to Gloucester, invariably for my glasses, he would enquire "*Hello Mrs. Wathen, where are you off to?*" and upon replying would say "*Just wait here two minutes*" and he went off to fetch his car, a Jaguar I think, all aluminium, -there was no rust on *HIS* car, come round, open the door for mother and drop her off at Gloucester Cross. Father worked for 'Dobells' in the High Street and had also been a labourer. He might have to journeyed to Winchcombe to dig trenches for pipelines or drains, being paid the same rate if having to dig through soil sand or rock and if anyone dared to be two minutes late, there were maybe ten or so other blokes waiting to take their place. I recall him coming home in the evening, going down the garden to the shed where he would mend his own shoes with some leather bought from 'Evans' in the High Street.

The residents of the cottages at the time were:

No. 41, Mr & Mrs George Packwood.

No. 42, Miss Birdie Mellor.

No. 43, Mrs Eiger, followed by Mr & Mrs Holder.

No. 44, Mr & Mrs Frank Pemberton.

No. 45, Mr & Mrs Charlie Neale.

No. 46, Mrs Gladys Key [nee Wathen].

Her husband Fred died as a Japanese POW on the Burma Road.

No. 47, Mr & Mrs Bill Wathen.

No. 48, Mr & Mrs Frank Wilkes.

No. 49, the big house next door, Mr J. O. Martin [father of Francis Martin].

No. 50, Mr & Mrs Dan Harvey, landlord of the Mason's Arms.



*Mrs. Eiger.*

One of the first things I can remember, which must have been when I was only two or three years old, I saw a woman fall from the Abbey tower. I was in the back garden, heard a scream and this woman came tumbling down through the sky and hit the battlements which would be over the chancel, she didn't go right to the ground and died in hospital a few hours later.

My next memory is being in a Nativity Play at the Tewkesbury Festival in 1935 with Brian Linnell. We were King Herod's pages and Gerald Sollis was page to one of the wise men. Prior to the play, we all had to assemble in the Abbey Schoolrooms, which was used as a huge make up, and dressing room –done very professionally. We were both dressed in pink and chocolate brown velvet! Prior to the start, there were a lot of other older boys, aged about 14 or 15, who were pages to the three wise men and they took us up the Abbey tower, to the devil's bridge. We crossed the bridge, and then the huge vacant square on the other side of that, they pushed us up a ladder and we sat in a huge sort of recess and then they left us there! We must have been screaming and shouting in fear until later on, and I believe it was Mr Davis who was the sacristan at the time heard us and came and brought us down. The audience had their backs to the high altar and the stage went across the west door. We had no speaking part, but as

King Herod walked off, Brian Linnell was one side of him and I was the other, we had to turn round and somewhere above us was the star of Bethlehem that we had to try and find before we walked off! I think King Herod was Mr Baker who had the clothing shop before Chapmans in High Street, one of the wise men was a Mr Hall, a real gentleman, who had a sweet shop in High Street next to Billy Booths, above Mr Lane's [near to Somerfields now]. After the show, we had to go back into the schoolroom and have all this grease put on us to remove the make up.

JONAH AND THE WHALE									
<i>A Morality by James Bridie</i>									
First Student .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	DAISY BELL		
Second Student .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	EFFIE KNOYLE		
Miss Elishba Hupplefeather	..	..	..	..	..	..	WINNIE POWER		
Josibiah .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	J. T. KNOYLE		
Hashmonah .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	C. H. P. SOMERSET		
Euodias .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	CURIGWEN LEWIS		
Naaran .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	BENEDICTA BRUCE		
Shual .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	FRANK NAPIER		
Bilshan .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	RAF DE LA TORRE		
Sentry .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	BARTLETT MULLINS		
Jonah .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	STEPHEN MURRAY		
Captain .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	E. G. MORRISON		
Purser .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	DENIS CAREY		
Sailor .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	W. MUSTOE		
Woman Passenger	..	..	..	..	..	..	JOAN BUTTERFIELD		
Whale .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	JOHN WYSE		
Sophereth .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	JEAN LIND		
Eshtemoa .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	HENZIE RAEBURN		
Zemirah .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	BETSY LORRAINE-SMITH		
Zuph .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	EFFIE KNOYLE		
Zaza .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	BENEDICTA BRUCE		
Ziz .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	JEAN IRVING		
Shiphrah .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	DAISY BELL		
Stachys .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	FRANK NAPIER		
Tolad .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	J. T. KNOYLE		
Hadadezer .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	CHARLES HICKMAN		
Tola .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	..	WINNIE POWER		
Passengers on Ship	..	..	..	..	..	..	PAT BADHAM, JEAN LIND, JEAN IRVING, MARJORIE TYSOE		
ACT I, SCENE 1 : Outside the village gate at Gittah-Hepher. <i>Evening.</i>									
SCENE 2 : The same. <i>Next day.</i>									
ACT II, SCENE 1 : On a ship sailing to Tarshish. <i>Afternoon.</i>									
SCENE 2 : In the Belly of the Whale. <i>Afternoon.</i>									
ACT III, SCENE 1 : The balcony of the Hotel Baal, Nineveh. <i>Afternoon.</i>									
SCENE 2 : A hillside overlooking Nineveh. <i>Afternoon, Evening, Night, Morning, Noon and Afternoon.</i>									

*The cast of  
'Jonah and the Whale' performed at the 1938 Tewkesbury Festival,  
one of those arranged by John Moore.*

In 1938, there was another Tewkesbury Festival, these being arranged by John Moore who invited some of his actor colleagues to perform. I remember that from the great west door going straight back to the Abbey gatehouse; scaffolding was built for the audience. I cannot recall the play, but I remember the whale's head coming through the west door as it opened, with its jaw opening and closing. Over the top on one of the pinnacles, I'm pretty sure it was the left hand one, was the devil dressed in red with a spot light on him glaring down at the audience.



*Dave in the white shirt with 'Jock' Robertson in the glasses at the hospital fete, circa 1938.*

I was with the school country dancing team, and we went to what was, I think a hospital fete to raise funds in maybe 1938, dancing where the orchard used to be [where all the new buildings now stand]. I recall Maurice Treen providing the 'tannoy', Ben Cook used to have a 'tannoy', but I think Maurice Treen did most of it [*questionable re-the year-Bill.*]. One competition was 'guess the noise' which was either someone stirring 'Andrews' Liver Salts', pouring 'Corona' or some fizzy drink into a glass.

One day, I must have been about four years old, I'd obviously had one of my tantrums, and mum could do nothing with me. Mrs Eiger, one of the residents in the row took me outside into the back yard, took down my trousers and put my backside under the cold water from the tap –whether it cured me or not, I don't know!

Next to 41 Church Street [Mr & Mrs Packwood's] was 'Barsanti's' which was a tearoom. I believe a lot of cyclists used it many years ago. There was a very large garden at the back, which went right along the backs of the cottages from No 41 to No 48. It was actually the other side of our washhouse and toilet. I have walked up on the roof hundreds of times to get into the tea garden. There was a tree only about a foot or so from our wall, so it was quite easy to do so -grab the tree and straight down into the tea garden! This was no ordinary garden. Besides the tables and chairs there were also dozens of marble statues of all shapes and sizes. I didn't do any damage, just looked around and probably made myself a mischief. At the end of the garden, at the rear of No 48 would be the 'Hidden Garden'. This also backed on to the late Mr J. O. Martin's garden. I know for a fact that they looked after it, -it may even have been theirs as you could walk from Mrs Martin's garden straight into it. There was a large rectangular fishpond with very attractive borders. Their housekeeper was Beatrice, she was a lovely person and their offices were over the kitchen. I am sure Betty Harvey who lived at the 'Mason's Arms' could see the garden from their upstairs windows. I believe a relative of Mrs Barsanti lived with her. I'm not sure, but I think his name was Mr Machavoy. He had a wooden leg and often used to sit on one of the seats in the Crescent. It used to stick out, so one had to be careful running along the path for fear of coming a cropper. The only other man I can recall with a wooden leg

in Tewkesbury was Monty Willis who had a barber's shop in High Street. You had to go through the tobacconist's to the back room. Monty was the father of Dave Willis.

I have seen photographs in one of the history books of the Pleasure Gardens where there was 'Flag Island' which is what we kids called it. It was like a stepped lump of concrete on one of the islands in the river just below the Abbey Mill sluice gates, I think there were about five actually. On Flag Island, we used to build our gang hut. We would draw the reeds out of the riverbed just as you would a bluebell –you didn't break them off, you just dragged them out which included maybe a foot underneath the water. There we would hammer in stakes into the island and weave ourselves a gang hut. We would then go onto the neighbouring tip and find any old piece of carpet to put in there. One day, we found a very old-fashioned candleholder, which became our main thing in the hut, which was our warmth and our light.

My parents were wonderful parents, and perhaps I was given too much freedom. I was lucky enough to have a tent and I used to love camping. You weren't allowed to pitch a tent on the Ham in the summer, but if you were clever, you could go over the Ham and pitch your tent on the old withy beds which was quite a dip so you couldn't be seen. We would go over there and I've stayed over there for two or three nights. There would always be hayricks there, so we would scrape a couple of sacks of hay, which would be our beds. In the morning, we'd light a fire, have breakfast which might be bacon, egg, sausage and things like that, but mother would always insist I would always go home because she had shopping for me to do –that was just an excuse to see me now and again! Anyway, on one particular occasion, I suppose I was a bit of a bossy so and so, the camp would have to be cleaned before we went back into town – the old hay would have to be collected and burnt, blankets folded over boughs of trees, no food left about, had our breakfast, went down into the Severn to wash –there was no soap, we used sand and had a swim. When this had all been done it was time to go home and do the shopping. I got home, and knocked on the front door. Mother popped her head out of the window and said "*What are you doing here?*" rather sternly –It was quarter to six in the morning, we hadn't been listening to the Abbey clock!! Of course, sometimes when we were going camping on the Ham early in the morning, with the low mist you didn't know where you were. You couldn't see six feet in front of you, -you hadn't got a clue where you were. You could hear the weir, one minute it was one way, another the other way. You could hear the Abbey bells ring, which again were one side or the other. So what you had to do was get down on your knees, find the footpath which was always worn as the Ham was used a lot, then follow the path. You'd either end up at the Abbey Mill or the flour mill!!

My family of course had a great number of dealings with the Abbey.

When I was about three or four, I think mother must have been ill one day and I couldn't stay with her. Dad used to pump the Milton organ in the Abbey, which he did for many years. I don't know whether he was paid a few coppers for it. I recall him going up two or three steps and there was this long handle coming out of somewhere or other, and I can see dad now pumping away on this handle. He may have carried out this task three or more times on a Sunday. His father, and his father's brother, one was John and the other Josiah were bellringers. In the belfry, there are boards about six feet high about bell ringing and peels of bells and they used to have tournaments over this. They would be to the second, ringing maybe a thousand peels, and the name Wathen was all over these boards. Neither dad nor I were bell ringers but the Devereux's were another big bell ringing family.



When I was about ten or eleven years old, I was a chorister at the Abbey for some while, then I was 'boat boy' I believe for either Les Marsden or Ray Mulcuck, maybe for both on different occasions. In those days, in the choir vestry where we used to change the choir was in black and white, the servers were in red and white, including the boat boy. I was 'conscripted' by the Revd. Purefoy on one occasion with a couple of other lads to wash his car round at his house. We went round there as duly ordered, and we were watering the car –I remember I had a watering can at the time in my hand. He appeared and spoke to me. As I turned, he was in his shorts and he was a rather large gentleman, and I poured this watering can down his leg! He jumped back out of shock, I jumped back in fear and he threw this chamois at me, catching me round the side of the head, which I never forgot! Some weeks later, it was payback time!

We were 'conscripted' *AGAIN* to go round there. We were each given a bucket of bulbs to plant in his garden. The beds had all been dug, and he gave us instructions on how to plant all these bulbs. We had a huge bucket each. I then remembered what he had done to me with the chamois so I planted every one of mine upside down quite deliberately with no chance of him finding out! Of course, at this time, the choirmaster was Captain Percy Baker who was a very strict man. Captain Baker was also a piano teacher. I had lessons with him –I don't know how my father afforded it, he put me to three tutors and I can't play a note! In those days for the first year you just played scales, you never even played 'Three Blind Mice'.

On one occasion I was one of six choristers who were probably ordered to meet at the Abbey one day. As you go through the Abbey gates on the right hand side there is a memorial to the Cartland family and Barbara Cartland was there. I think she'd just had the name of maybe her last brother to die in the army added, and there was a small service with her and I was one of the choristers who attended at that occasion.

There always seemed to be scaffolding around some part or other of the Abbey, which was constantly being climbed by us lads.

We often used to stop and have a chat with John Moore. When he moved out to Kemerton, he bought a house from Neville Duke. He had been an ace fighter pilot during the war and took the world speed record in 1953. He became a successful test pilot with the Hawker Aviation Company and later the personal pilot of Sir George Dowty. At the Cross was Gyngell's Garage and Allen's the grocers next to it. The manager was Mr Gregson who was always smartly dressed in a waistcoat, dickey bow tie and white apron and a waxed pointed moustache.

Our house was more or less opposite old Nellie Brick's confectionery and tobacco shop. Next to that was St. Mary's Lane where the council's most *BEAUTIFUL* shire horses used to come up. The council had three ash carts all drawn by shires, two brown and a grey. They were the most magnificent animals in all their brass. They used to come up that way as the council yard used to be where Durrant & Vickeridge had their boat yard, which has now two, or three houses built on it. This was the old town council yard and at the end of the day, these horses would be cleaned up and then the three grooms, Bill Cull was one I remember, would take them up Church Street, up Gander Lane to the field that is now the bowling green overnight. Jack Steele would come into Church Street with his pony and trap and mother would buy

milk off him. Jack Houghton used to bring two hand churns of milk holding maybe two gallons apiece on the handlebars of his bicycle.

‘Drummer’ Weston worked on one of the local tips in the town. He was called ‘Drummer’ because he played the bass drum in the Salvation Army band. He came to our front door one day with a clarinet that he had picked up off the tip. It didn’t play as the felt pads had all gone, but all the body and the keys were fine. Dad gave ‘Drummer’ half a crown for it and repaired it, replacing the pads with leather.

Down Mill Street were the public baths, which were up some concrete steps above what was then the fire station. It was Thursday afternoon women and Saturday afternoon men. I believe there were two rows of four baths at maybe twopence or sixpence for a bath. During the war, the squaddies who were all billeted around the town and the Abbey Mill would be sat on the wall along Mill Bank waiting their turn to have a bath, as there was nowhere else.

In the Pleasure Gardens, there were two magnificent canons, which must have been eight feet high, one was pointing north, and the other was farther up, pointing straight across the Ham. We kids used to play on them and have great fun. I think it was when they were collecting salvage and were cutting up or doing whatever they had to do to them nearest to Abbey Mill, a spring came out and went straight through the roof of Dick White’s house in Mill Street and you can still see the mark on the roof today.

I was, I suppose always a bit of a bossy so and so, and we used to go on to the Ham, just over the bridge by the Abbey Mill where there were some corrugated toilets built by the Americans. I used to have a small gang of about five or six lads with wooden rifles who I ‘drilled’, using the toilets as a hut. Peter Finnigan recalls this and says once was enough for him! We would of course spend hours over the Ham. In summer, we’d take some bread and butter and make sorrel sandwiches, and in winter if there was sufficient snow, we would try and make igloos!

The Mop Fair was of course a great favourite of ours. The stalls would go down Church Street past the High School gateway, with Deakin’s Dodgem’ at the Crescent after which were these two magnificent ‘homes on wheels’ belonging to the Deakin family. They were *HUGE* and one couldn’t guess the tonnage of them. From the Cross up High Street to about where Newman’s the printers used to be, there were stalls of crockery, haberdashery and other such items.

One vivid memory, and we kids must have been a hell of a pest, fair day we could always manage to get hold of a pea shooter and buy dried peas from almost anywhere which were as hard as pebbles. So we used to go around the fair, get to the Noah’s Ark, fill our mouths with these dried peas and when someone we knew came round, we’d give them a real blast then run away in fear!

The land at the back of the Gloucester Road car park was at one time a tip and I can remember the old horse and carts with mostly household ashes in tipping there. That ground was all built up and it must have been just before the war that a fair was there. I went down to see them setting up, I remember a set of Dodgem’s being there and it was hard ashes underfoot. I was walking round and this bloke asked if I wanted to earn some money? I replied “*Aye, I’ll help*”, so I helped him put up his ‘roll a penny’ stall and after a morning’s work -which he wasn’t doing much as he was chatting with his missus, he gave me three pennies! I don’t remember any ‘blackout fairs’ being

held there. *[These were held there with everything being covered completely to stop any light being shown, at least one being presented by Midland showman Bob Wilson].*

I remember a fair coming to the Regatta Meadow. Everyone was saying that it was Billy Butlin's, but I don't really know. *[Jack Stephens relates that one held in June 1943 was presented by 'Butlins', but cannot confirm whether it was Billy Butlin. Jack recalls a Noah's Ark, Dodgem and Whip that came a week after the other rides. Six or seven Yanks would crowd into one car making it jump the swinging mechanism due to their weight!]* This bloke had a Whip and Dodgem plus about twelve stalls all well laden. This chap was a rather short stout man and he wore sunglasses maybe from the lights of the machine. All the small shops in the town had free tickets. They were little pink tickets about the size of the side of an old matchbox. Nellie brick who had the shop opposite us gave me a strip of these, which really were only to get you on site, but we took them up there and got our free rides.



*Butlin's fair advert from the Tewkesbury Register, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1943.*

I must have been about fifteen, which makes it probably just before the war and there was another fair on Rails Meadow. It was a real 'Fred Carnow's' fair *[Jack Stephens suggests it was Scarrott's!]* Half a dozen or so stalls, some swinging boats and this roundabout thing that had a flat base and screwed and bolted to it were lots of old bicycles! Three wheeled bicycles, old bicycles with no chains on, so you just sat there and pedalled away. This fair was there for quite a long time.

I don't really have any recollections of circuses. I used to be most unimpressed about local circuses.

At the latter part of the war, the fire brigade had a large flat-topped barge with no railings or anything by the Abbey Mill, that was used for practice in case of riverside fires which was propelled by two jets of water coming out of the rear. It didn't last long as it had so many holes in it, and it eventually sank! I believe the brigade had a Foden fire engine then, a magnificent machine.

We would often play in the Abbey Mill that was rented or owned at the time by Mr. Atkins. He had it as a sort of junk place, where they also sold tea to tourists. I remember seeing shields and swords, all sorts of things there. So during the winter when it was closed, we used to go over the sluice gate, over the top of the first sluice,

down the other side, in through a window and we would play in there for hours having great fun until somebody heard us in there!

Possibly just before the war, I was lucky having three older brothers, so I had old roller skates and we used to roller skate, play hockey up and down Church Street because there just wasn't the traffic.

We would go to the Sabrina cinema [the second site at the top of the High Street where the Roses/Library now occupy] three times a week Monday, Thursday and Sunday, which was a ritual, first house which was about quarter past four in the afternoon, as there was very little else to do. There was a large car park at the front, and a large area of scrubland at the rear with a wall boundary on to Oldbury Road. The programme would be adverts, the 'small film' which may have been a documentary followed by the 'big film' for both houses, but you didn't have to come out after the first house. I remember Mr. Kisby who would be dressed in a chocolate brown coat and hat with gold braid. He used to keep an eye on us –we must have been a thorn in his side!

My brothers Ken and John were projectionists, Ken not as long as John, as he went to the Coliseum in Cheltenham. Some days I would take John's tea up to him and of course watch the film for nothing. The prices at the time were seven pence at the front up till about the middle which were shilling seats and the back seats were one shilling and nine pence. I think the balcony seats were two shillings and threepence.

The first showing of 'The Dambusters' always sticks in my memory, as the queue went from the front steps down to the street right along to where Bill Shakespeare's father had his antique shop.

There was a scarlet fever epidemic in the town and one evening or morning, we were going to the cinema and across the road from the Sabrina was the old Tewkesbury ambulance that Fred Gynge used to drive. It was black in colour amazingly enough with a red cross on the sides and back doors. Out of this alleyway came three or four kids wrapped in blankets, straight into the ambulance and taken off to Tredington Hospital, which was at that time an isolation and fever hospital. Then came along the council blokes who took everything away, the mattresses, the beds which were all burnt

The winter of 1946/47 is remembered for snow and the following floods. I believe the snow started falling on Christmas Eve 1946. I certainly remember having to go to a job at Bredons Hardwick and I managed to walk a bit then bike a bit in the tracks where a farm tractor had been, and the snowdrifts were six to eight feet high. I think the council contacted the labour exchange and took chaps who were on the dole, issued them with shovels and they had to clear the public footpaths. Once the thaw began in February/March 1947, Abbey Terrace was flooded, and Mr. Dick Strawford lived in Turners Court in Church Street. Down the Tannel he had a first class, really solid punt about twelve feet long. He took it round through the Pleasure Gardens back up Gloucester Road and any supplies of groceries and coal were loaded on to the punt and a couple of us would pass the provisions up through the first floor windows. The water was up in Church Street across the end of St. Mary's Lane. On the High School side, the council erected a walkway, which was fine for youngsters, but far too dangerous for elderly folk. One thing that was eerie down our end of Church Street

when the floods were up was that you couldn't hear the sluice, as the water was one constant level. The army DUKW's of course were constantly coming into town.

Queen Mary visited the Abbey when I was a youngster. I remember her being dressed in a long pale blue coat and wearing a high feathery hat in the same colour.

A big treat was our Sunday School outing. If you put in the necessary attendances at Sunday School, you were allowed to go on the school trip, which of course then was our holiday! We never had one otherwise, as mum had no money. So it was either Weston Super Mare, Bristol Zoo or somewhere like that. On this occasion, -maybe they didn't have enough money, there was a chap at Bishops Cleeve who had three or four slides, rolling the penny down and things like that, almost like a 'mini fair' area. This was on the right hand side as you went into Bishops Cleeve, which I think was a farmyard at that time.

### **Schooldays.**

After going to Miss Sollis' school in Church Street, I went to the Infants School in Barton Street on the south side, now the 'Youth Annexe', Miss Yarnell was the 'baby teacher', Miss Cook the 'middle' teacher and Miss Morris the headmistress. She later married Mr Newman the printer.

After the infants school in Barton Road, the junior school was across the road, now Elizabeth Wyatt House, the teachers being Miss Hewlet bottom class, Miss Eaton middle and Miss Bedford top. The headmaster was Mr Morgan.

I then went on to the secondary school in Chance Street for two years when I took my scholarship and passed for the Grammar School in Gloucester Road. The teachers at Chance Street were Mrs Leatham first year, Miss Drinkwater second, Mr Thomas third, Mr Freddie Howel fourth and Miss Weatherby top class. Mr Leatham ['Dabfoot'] was the headmaster.

The Grammar School was then opposite the Abbey, with the schoolhouse next to it where the headmaster, Mr Struthers lived. I went there at a time when many of the male teachers had gone off to war, like 'Tic' Creeth who taught geography. We then had two or three lady teachers who were stand ins of a sort, not really educating, just writing on the board what came out of a book. Bill Whyatt, Tommy Thomas, Sam Guy, Jimmy Knoyle and I think Miss McCapin was the art mistress for a while.

On one occasion, when we lived in Church Street, John Moore's mother who lived on Gloucester Road would often call in and have a word with mother. One day she left a case full of laundry there, and of course mother being mother said "*Don't worry about that, David will bring it up*". So David was told to take it up to Mrs. Moore, which I did on the handlebars of my bike. Two or three days after at assembly at school, Mr Struthers announced that he had a message from one of the governors that 'one of the boys from the school had been so kind to take an *EXTREMELY HEAVY* case up to her home'. He had been given instructions to mention this to the whole school -I'm glad he didn't mention any names, as I would never have lived it down!

I think I'd only been at the Grammar School for about six months. I went up to the cricket ground at the Swilgate to watch the senior 11 play. All the masters were sat in their deckchairs watching the game. I went round the side of the pavilion, along the

veranda. One of the slats had been removed and my left leg went straight through. The pain was awful, and as I shouted out all the masters turned round. Mr Knoyle said, "*Are you alright Wathen?*" [He always pronounced my name 'Waythen']. "*Oh yes sir, it's all OK sir*" I replied but I went round the back and the blood was coming over the top of my shoe. I went home, luckily only a short walk to Church Street, went through the kitchen to go upstairs. Mother saw me and the trail of blood. She called in the neighbours and went to fetch Dr. House, who inspected me and took me to hospital in his car. I was stitched up as necessary. I walked about gently for a few days – I must have looked quite odd, as I could not open my legs properly. If anyone asked what was wrong, I told them that I had damaged my groin. I went back to the hospital to have the stitches taken out and was told to lie on the table. Sister Parry was at my head and was told to keep me still. This she did, leaning on my head using her ample skills! I will never forget the pain. On returning to school, Mr Knoyle, enquired how I was. On replying, "*I'm OK thank you sir*", he reprimanded me for using incorrect grammar when I should have said, "*I'm ALRIGHT*"! Sister Parry later married Fred Gyngell.

Cricket was a great love of mine. I was probably fifteen or sixteen when I was a member of Tewkesbury Cricket Club of which most of the members were the 'older man' as they kept the club alive with their finances, but they needed someone to do a fair bit of running about which was what one or two of us younger lads did! I preferred fielding to batting and I did have my spell of bowling. It was very enjoyable playing with a lot of Tewkesbury folk, Eric Neale, Doctor Shepherd, Neville Neale, Vernon Caudle, Bernard Goodwin, Ken Haines, it was great stuff and we used to travel around quite a bit. Eric Neale who owned Tewkesbury Garage at that time would often take us to matches in his car as he also ran a taxi business. Tommy Goddard, who was a spin bowler for Gloucestershire brought a county eleven over for a benefit match, and of course all their thoughts were was money –get the sheets out, get the raffles out, sign the cricket bats and the cricket ground was packed.

In the early 1940's, we didn't have a gym, only a small yard at the rear so we would be marched along Church Street, down Bull Court, which is the court between the Hop Pole and the YMCA, which was the back entrance to the YMCA gardens. We would then go into the YMCA hall at the back for gymnastics, which I presume the education authorities rented off the YMCA for that particular use. Mr Thomas who taught English said he could always tell the boys who smoked 'Woodbines', and I was one of them!

### **The War Years.**

While I was at home, it must have been during the war, three lorries pulled in to the sort of lay-by opposite the Abbey in front of the Bell Hotel. Out of these lorries jumped possibly sixty soldiers. They had arms in slings, heads bandaged up, one or two had no trousers. I brought it to mother's attention, or she'd already seen it –she may have been sweeping the front. One of these squaddies, dirty and blood stained asked her for a drink of water. Mother put two and two together, I was sent along the back yard to fetch all the neighbours' tea, sugar, milk –whatever they could muster, mother opened her front window which looked straight on to the pavement. There must have been five or six ladies there making cups of tea, slices of bread because they had no biscuits I suppose, margarine, and that was the British Expeditionary Force, it was an incredible sight I remember to this day and will never forget. –I don't think we had much tea or sugar for one or two weeks after that!

In the early years of the war, we were playing in the Pleasure Gardens, I'm fairly certain it was a two engine bomber, a Handley Page Hampden I think it was, came in underneath the power lines and landed on the Ham, in about the middle. Apparently, we used to go over there being fascinated with aircraft and they would run the engines and we would play in the slipstream. Then a tanker would come, so I presume it had run out of fuel, although we later learned it had engine trouble. They were there for two or three days and then we came out of school one day and it had gone. How it took off we didn't know. It would have to have aimed between the flour mill and Mythe Hill because it only had 150 to 200 yards to take off. It must have been in the early days because later on the Ham was honeycombed in trenches, then huge trunks of trees were put like wigwams, so that enemy aircraft couldn't land. One thing we used to play on as kids was and old wooden hand-pumped fire engines, but I have no idea where it came from. This was also on the Ham as one of the deterrents. The old Cheltenham College boathouse at the bottom of the Lode was used for an RAF rescue team who had motorboats in which they went up and down the Severn on watch.

On one occasion, they wanted everyone from Priors Park, including children, to go to a demonstration of 'war precautions' by the ARP and fire service etc. Of course everyone had to carry their respirator in their little box. At a given time, they set off tear gas bombs while everyone had their gas masks on. They said if you wanted to see what it was actually like, to take your gas mask off for a second, which I duly did!

During the war, like a lot of the older people in the town did fire duty, fire precautions, and on one occasion Dad went to the top of the Abbey tower and kept look out for anything happening. The tanks that used to go through used to shake the house, but of course, the houses were brilliantly built, having timber structure and wattle and daub, which would 'wave at you', but it wouldn't fall out. Mother asked Dad if he could make a hanging wardrobe in their bedroom –just a top with a curtain round. He was going to screw the top to the wall. He took a hammer and a large nail to make a hole. He hit the nail then sent me down into the street to pick it up –it had gone straight through the wattle and daub, out through the wall and into the street!

Going over the Ham one day, there were millions upon millions of little silver strips that enemy aircraft would drop to hang on to the electric power cables to try to short them out.

The town of course at this time was full of Yanks. They made this bicycle that sat either six or eight, an incredible machine to see them ride. Then there was the 'Mason's Arms' down Church Street where Dan Harvey [the father of Betty Harvey] was the landlord. [Where the British Legion is now with the crooked window]. This was taken over by the Yanks. They'd taken over *every* empty building, garden shed – you name it, it was full. They made their transport office there, which I used to frequent! I did very well for sweets, pineapple juice or something or other. Many a time when the pub was closed, I remember Bob; I think a Texan would go up and call Dan at the back. It turned out he would pass a jug to Dan through his upstairs window at the back, as it couldn't be seen from the front, Dan would fill this huge jug with beer, and that was how a lot of beer was drunk by the Yanks! I took one of the servicemen home for tea from the 'Mason's Arms', and about ten of them turned up! After this, they would call in occasionally, opening the front door and calling "*You all right, Ma'am*" to mother being very hospitable as 'foreigners' in our country.

Everyone in Tewkesbury used to scavenge at the American tip. They used to throw away power drills still in their boxes. The biggest tip was up at Twynning Meadows where people have had lathes from! We would go up there and light a fire if there wasn't one already going. There would be hundreds of little steel canisters from siphon bottles or something. We'd then build a barrier and throw these on the fire which would fire off in any direction, -the most stupid thing to do, they didn't half go, and could have taken your head off!

There was a large American laundry on Gloucester Road where all the laundry was done. There were that many billets in the town that there was a huge amount of laundry produced. One day, one of their lorries hit a dog. He was so badly injured that they took him over to the tip and put five bullets in him.

From their camp at the back of Abbey Terrace, the Yanks built a sort of 'jungle bridge' across to the Ham. They used the Ham for their exercise and drill area. They used this bridge until so many fell off that they built a solid one driving huge timbers into the riverbed. They then put nets up where they would play baseball.

In Nelson Street, as a prevention against invasion, holes were dug across the road about three foot apart and put concrete boxes in with a metal lid that could be taken off, in which they would stick parts of railway lines to stop tanks or army vehicles going up there should we be invaded. *BUT*, me and some lads were cycling up Barton Street one day, I decided to go straight on, the bloke on my right decided to turn left into Nelson Street, head over tip I went, hand straight into the tank trap, weight of body -'crack, crack, crack' and my arm was bent right back! I think it happened on a Friday and I never saw anybody until the Monday. After some treatment at the hospital, Dr. Evans told mother that I'd have to have a masseur. I think at that time, mother was paying maybe a shilling a week 'hospital club' or something for treatment and thought that was it. I was sent to this masseur, a Mr Law who was over Bank House in Church Street where the Milk Bar used to be for weeks and weeks. After I'd finished my treatment, mother had a bill which she thought was paid for and I didn't find out till some time after when my sister Ruby told me that they had to sell the piano, violin, clarinet and some antique cats or something to pay the bill. Dad had served with the Worcesters as a bandsman, and was a stretcher-bearer. He played clarinet before joining up, but I often wonder how he and my Uncle Reg who served with the Worcestershire Regiment and played the tuba, got their musical training.



## THE RIVERS.

I suppose living in Church Street, the rivers were a great part of my life. I have boated up the River Avon, swam up the Avon, walked up the Avon, skated up the Avon and ridden a bicycle up the Avon!

All us youngsters were completely self-taught at swimming. I don't think mum and dad would have given me the freedom that I had if they knew I couldn't swim like an elver! Many a time we would be swimming or playing on the banks as the grain barges 'Chaceley', 'Apperley', 'Deerhurst', 'Tirley' and 'Bushley' would pass us together with another barge 'Piscah' and oil tankers that were sailing up to Stourport. 'Apperley' and 'Deerhurst' were powered but 'Bushley' was not, -a 'dumb' barge. These were the original barges, later being replaced by 'Chaceley' and 'Tirley'. Both of these have sadly made their last sailings from Tewkesbury being sold off with the mill by the American owners ADM who shut the mill down.

I remember them having to do some repairs, and suppose they must have closed the lock etc. at Nafford, drained out the Avon through the sluice gate and after a few days the Avon was dry. Where the tan yard backed on to the river there must have been hundreds upon hundreds of cow's horns and a few skulls where they must have just thrown them into the river. There were two sunken barges at Abbey Mill that had been there for years. These were cut up and burnt on site on the riverbed.

Round the Tannel [Mill Bank, the road between the Abbey Mill and the sharp bend in St. Mary's Lane which was 'my patch'], the late Dr Evans had a garage round there with a huge sliding door. Then there was the lane [St. Mary's Lane] then there were some stakes in the bank with a rail about two to three foot high which I suppose was a precaution to stop him reversing into the river.

We used to stand at his garage door, someone would shout then we would run like tin tacks across the road, spin round on our stomach twice then run back to the doors. Of course the one who got back the quickest was the winner. On one occasion, a young lady started off alright, but only span one and a half times, cast herself off from this position and ran straight into the river and I fetched her out. Going round the sharp corner used to be Charlie Hancock's scrap yard. He had a huge warehouse there with low ceilings on two or three levels, nails put two or three inches apart and on these were hanging rabbit skins -there were *THOUSANDS* of them and I think he used to give us twopence or something for a rabbit skin, of course a lot of rabbits were eaten then. After that, the Blue Star Engineering Company acquired it and a chap with the name of Joe Cavanagh was the engineer or owner. We would go there during the school holidays to earn a shilling or two. He bought a barge from further up the river somewhere, which he was going to make into a houseboat, and anchored against his property. It was full of water and mud, and he said to us that he would pay us if we emptied the barge, so we would go down in our swimming costumes with buckets and bail it out. When we got down to the last four or five inches, it was amazing the amount of fish and eels were in there, but we cleaned it out. After this had been done, he said to me something about putting some steel strips on and there was a short plank

from the bank to the barge. As I stepped on the plank, the barge started to move out! All I could do was stand on the plank and watch it. The next thing, I was underneath, straight underneath the barge. Thankfully, I could swim like a fish and just came up the other side –I think he nearly wet his trousers in horror!



*Mill Bank – ‘The Tannel’, Dave’s ‘patch’!*

We used to swim a lot in Stanchard’s Pit where there were a couple of huts. A few of us were up there one day and quite a lot of squaddies would go up there, one of them was in real trouble. We didn’t realise it at first until one of his mates told us, as everybody used to splash about. Three of us swam out to him and brought him back to safety. I’m sure Tom Amphlett was with us, he was a first class swimmer.

We used to go swimming across ‘the sandy’. This was an area that apparently the Walkley men cleared and dumped sand that made sort of a mini beach. This I remember had a wooden fence [similar to our six foot garden panels of today] in a small square where the men changed, and an old roofless tram from somewhere or other that the ladies used to change in. we would then swim in ‘the sandy’ where there was a quite nice sandy beach, which unfortunately doesn’t exist any more. One of our pet things was going down to ‘the thirty two’ [this being the Abbey Mill], where we would jump off the sluice bridge, have a swim, then run across to the weir, dive in and swim up towards the weir itself. Now if you knew where to go, you could actually swim up onto the weir. You could get about six or seven yards away, and of course the current was quite strong, swim like hell to the bottom of the weir where you could stand upon rocks and sit on top of the weir. We would sit for a while, then decide we would run down the weir, do a racing dive because the rocks weren’t very deep, and then we might swim down to the Lode, run back up the Ham back up to the ‘thirty two’! that was a usual thing, -we were as fit as hell.

Just up above the ‘sandy’ was the weir, and we would often watch the salmon shooting the weir as well as the actual salmon chute which was very fast flowing water at the edge of the weir which was a more gentle ramp than the weir itself. About

thirty or so yards below the weir, we'd often see a couple of punts with a man in each. They laid a net across, which was about thirty or forty yards long with lumps of cork or something to keep the nets floating in which they caught the salmon. I do believe they were the Miles brothers, Charlie and Bill. They later stopped salmon fishing by net and that was all over. Roy Enstone recently reminded me of one of our visits to the island near the weir. He recalled us swimming or wading, I think the latter, as Roy couldn't swim, only to be greeted on the island by a family of rats!

There was a sort of walled area against the Ham at the end of the old railway line that used to take the trucks down to the old flour mill. It was like a small wired area with what may have been scaffold poles driven into the river bed to stop kids going out into the main river which I believe was also built by the Walk leys.

On one of our trips over to the 'thirty two', I was on my own going to meet my pals John Denley and Chris Sallis. I went over to the weir, picked my place and went in for a swim up on to the weir and sat there. There were two or three people on the bank and Chris and John turned up and said they were going down the Lode. They ran up and dived in, I ran and dived and met them in midstream. We'd got about as far as 'the sandy' and changed our mind so we got out. As we went up the bank a chap walked by, actually he was Harold Gore who used to live on Mill Bank, an old football referee. He told us that a bloke had gone under up there. We asked him what he meant and he said that there were three squaddies up there, now there were only two. We realised he was serious so we ran like the clappers along the path, and there were these two blokes on the bank in a hell of a state so all three of us did racing dives into the water because we knew which was the deep and which was the shallow part. We dived and dived and dived and could only go by touch really as you couldn't see, but we never found him. He was found a week or so later.

Chris Sallis and I were camping at the withy beds I think at the time by the weir. There was a small island that is no longer there. Coming down the salmon chute, the water was very much faster than that going over the weir. It would swing round, drop it's deposit and that's how the island was formed. We would either jump or invariably pole-vault the island. I forget what attracted our attention, maybe it was his shouting, but we saw Brian Counsell try to shoot the weir in a punt! Now it was not too substantial, and I think he got over the weir all right, but then as he got to the bottom where the rocks make the white water, he smashed the side, and out he came. The speed of the water from the salmon chute picked him up and started to whisk him away from the island back into the middle of the Severn, so Chris and I bent a withy tree down which he grabbed on to as he came past and we got him out. [Brian *INSISTS* Chris and Dave were frying bacon and eggs at the time!]

We would also play near the waterwheel by the Abbey Mill during the elver season throwing them at one another in handfuls! There were thousands there, but they were past the 'edible' stage, as they were turning black. Dad recalled to me how mother sent him elvers whilst he was away in the 1914-18 war. They took only a couple of days to reach him and were perfectly good to eat. Apparently many of his colleagues looked on in amazement as he cooked them.

## WORK

I became an apprentice at the Cheltenham & District Gas Company when I left school at 15, before going on to become a first class gasfitter at 21, although my apprenticeship was interrupted by my conscription. The showroom was at 81, Church Street, Gainsboro House, then moving to 17, Church Street, opposite the Hop Pole Hotel. The yard was at the rear of Gainsboro House, the workshops being accessed from St. Mary's Lane. In later years, the yard was at the gasworks on the Bredon Road/Oldbury Road. At this time, there was only one van and the common mode of transport was the humble pushbike. It was common place to have to bike to Bredon, Kemerton, Apperley and surrounding areas with your tool bag on the handle bars, sometimes even carrying lengths of pipe. We did have two handcarts –I have pushed a cooker on one from Tewkesbury to Bredons Hardwick and pushed another back after changing it! One of these eventually went to T.W. Fisher, the builders in Barton Street.

During the war, the workforce of the company were Rufus Raggatt, Jack Mayall, Alan Wathen my brother, were all exempt from service as the gas supply had to be maintained. Those who went to war were Alf Wilkinson, Walter Barratt, and Norman Simmonds, who was part of a flying crew who were shot down over Germany who with a mate made it to the Swiss border before being caught by some German farmers and ended up as POW's. In later years there was John Bourton who originally started as a labourer, a very nice chap who I played skittles with for years. He was what we called the 'lamp attendant' who would look after the lamps in the alleys etc. He lived in Trinity Walk. Mr Bernard Dyer was the boss who lived over the showroom with his wife. He eventually moved to Bristol. There were many labourers Ted King, Sam King, Ted Boulton, Jack Stiff, Harry Stiff the two Mace brothers, I suppose just after the war there would have been a crew of about eighteen. Rufus' son Peter had been accepted into one of the Oxford universities and at the time, the family owned a Ford Anglia car. However, to take their son to Oxford, they borrowed Rufus'sister's Armstrong Siddely, a most beautiful cream and beige car of which there were very few built. Mrs. Gibbs of course was an ex-owner of the Hop Pole Hotel.

At the side of Gainsboro House there was a door which led out to the workshops and to Mr Dyers' flat. During the war a two-inch gas main was brought up just inside the door and rather a large meter was fitted. This was for the cars and vehicles, which had been converted to run on coal gas. Cars would pull in there, and the gasbags, which were fitted on the roof, would be filled up.

In the workshop on the whitewashed wall behind the door was a notice board. If there was a place of 'horror' –filth, tough guys, bad payers or whatever, any of these were put on the board. When the foreman gave us our work vouchers for our jobs, we would, if we were lucky, have that job taken off us and given to someone who hadn't been to the property for twelve months or so.

I was on the old Cheltenham & District Gas Company. I think I was fifteen or sixteen at the time, one day my brother Alan, who was a fitter and drove the only van and I, had instructions to go and clear his coin meter and remove the gas cooker at Mr Dick White's house in Mill Bank. Dick White was supposedly to have come from a 'moneyed family', spoke like a real gentleman and could play the piano wonderfully. In his little cottage he had a baby grand piano and would spend a lot of time in the Bell Hotel playing the piano and having the occasional drink, which he probably

never had to pay for. We drove up, knocked on the door and Dick said *"Oh, come in, come in my boys"* in his pleasant way and Alan had said to me *"Don't turn the gas off, I'll disconnect it live"* because the stench was unbelievable. Dick's house was full of a baby grand piano and about twenty or thirty cats! Alan went through to the scullery, and I asked Mr White if I could empty the coin meter, which was behind the front door. *"Yes my son. One moment before you get down"* and he went off to fetch a couple of sheets of newspaper that he laid on the floor by the side of the meter. So as I got down, taking my weight on my hand, my hand sunk into something soft. I removed my hand from the paper and there was the imprint of it, and the truth of the matter was that Mr White had obligingly covered the floor with the newspaper, and that was cat's mess coming up between my fingers! I took all the relevant readings off the meter, we didn't want to count the money in the house as we were supposed to, so we told him it had to go back to the office, and he would be sent any discount forthcoming. We had to go out to Bredon on a job and hadn't been out of the house about eight or nine minutes, when I began scratching! At that time, Alan and I lived at home with mum and dad. I got home, ran straight through the house into the back yard and asked mum to have a look. I took off my boiler suit, which we all wore in those days, shirt and vest and mum took off five or six fleas off me –I had bites as big as olives on my back, but brother Alan never had a bite!

At No 22 Church Street, which in earlier days was Dr. Evans' and Dr. Holroyd's surgery lived Miss Bell who had moved to Tewkesbury and opened a private school, possibly for girls only. She was about six foot one or two, walked very upright like a guardsman, grey haired cut like a 'pudding basin' style and had a little Jack Russell terrier. She also had some very unladylike qualities! She very frequently complained to the gas company about the gas rings. As well as her cooker, she had a gas ring on a small table outside her bedroom door. When she arose in the morning, she would put two eggs in a given size saucepan with a given amount of water and cook them for a given amount of time! If either or both of those eggs weren't cooked to her precise taste, there was something wrong with the gas! It was my turn to go, so over I went, and she took me up to her room and told me of her problem. Off she went, I checked the burner, which was absolutely perfect, the correct mixture of gas and air etc. So I tapped around to make it look as though I was doing something, and then told her that I was *CERTAIN* that everything was absolutely right. *"I hope so"* she said, *"as I get my eggs from George Mason's on the Cross and Mr Collier the manager informs me that those eggs come from the same farm each time"*. At this point, she ushered me out along the long passage. I turned to her and enquired, *"Miss Bell, how do you know your eggs came from the same chicken!"* She became rather sharp with me, so I left rather swiftly. Of course, she went over to the Gas Board and reported me for being insubordinate! When she moved, 'Pickfords' came with two of their large vans and they had to fetch two more as she had mountains of newspapers, magazines and books.

Still in Church Street, and an apprentice at the time, we were called to the Hop Pole Hotel, which we frequently went to. The fitter I was with was somehow related to the Hop Pole and the chef there was a lovely man who had a small hooked nose. He rolled up his trouser leg one day and showed us what seemed to be more or less just a bone from his ankle to his knee where he had had an accident of some sort. We went in to the kitchen where *NO ONE* was allowed to sit at the chef's table unless they were invited. He invited us to sit at his table to have tea and toast before we started. Chef was rather upset. His wife was having some kind of an affair with the headwaiter. He said, *"Yes, one day, I'll slit her throat from here to here"* with a few

other chosen words, t which we didn't take too much notice. The very next day he did exactly that. They had a room next to the kitchen and he cut her throat. He then put on his chef's hat, walked up through the town to the Twyning Meadows, took his hat and apron off, folded it up, put it on the bank and jumped into the river and that was the end of him. Harry Jones had the job of cleaning the room where the incident took place.

We had a job to go and fit a bath geyser over 'Frisby's' on the Cross. We were operating out of Gainsboro House and I was an apprentice at the time. The fitter and I were walking up Church Street –he had the bracket in his hand and I of course was carrying the geyser on my shoulder! We had just got past 'Shentons' which was just past the hat shop, there was a coal wagon delivering stuff down the cellar. There was a notice on the back of this lorry and I was trying to read what it was. I just *COULDN'T* make out what it was and not looking where I was going, went straight down the cellar! Fortunately, it was what they called 'ovals' –compressed coal dust into sort of egg shapes.

There was a rather well known restaurant in Tewkesbury that also used to bake almost anything. I was called there one day with a fitter, as I was still an apprentice. I was told to clear out a cupboard at the side of a chimney breast where there was a gas boiler in the bottom, which gave them all their domestic hot water. The fitter went off chatting with the owner, and as I pulled all these books and rubbish out of the cupboard, there was like a cash book in there which was bent as if there was another book inside it. I opened it and there was the thickest wad of five pounds notes you could ever wish to see. I called the gentleman in and explained what I had found. "*Oh yes, I remember all about that, it is mine*" he said, but of course all the book related to a previous owner and it was obviously all his money. Anyway, it was all forgotten, and in any case, if I'd put a fiver in my pocket, my mum and dad would have known I'd robbed a bank or something, as we didn't have that kind of money! On the same visit, we went into the bake house. The ovens had not been lit as we were going to service them. There were four nine inch doors to the oven and each time we went to service it, I would take out *easily* a good three quarters of a bucket of rat droppings after which we would carry out the necessary adjustments. This had been done, and this gentleman was at the pastry table rolling out pastry. Now he always smoked, and there was a cigarette in his mouth –he was talented enough to even be able to talk without the ash falling off, but something else he had was a 'dew drop'! At this particular time, the dewdrop fell off his nose, hit the ash and took the ash with it straight down on to the pastry table! That made *NO DIFFERENCE AT ALL* and got rolled in!

I was a fitter when I was instructed to go to the Swan Hotel in High Street. I was taken up to one of the bedrooms which had just been renovated—all the carpets, the bedding, and the decor by the manager. He was a bloke of about six foot three and about eighteen stone, very arrogant. He said there was a mouse at the back of the gas fire. I said "*Excuse me sir, are you sure it's a mouse?*" He replied abruptly "*I know very well that it's a mouse.*" So I listened for a while and heard nothing and told him I didn't think it was a mouse and asked if we could hold the curtains back, open the windows and the door? At this he was *most* annoyed, insinuating I didn't know what I was on about. So I took out the gas fire, saw no droppings or anything, saying I was sure it wasn't a mouse. As I said it, out of the fireplace came a blackbird. When I say it was a 'blackbird', it was black because it was covered in soot! It was actually a pigeon that went round and round and round the room until I managed to get to a

window and open it to let the bird out! Of course, he couldn't blame me, but the whole room had to be re-done!

There was another very well known small restaurant at the top end of the High Street of which the owner would regularly call the gas board to service the equipment in the kitchens. I was very often asked for. On one occasion, the lady in the kitchen almost bit my head off the same time as making me the biggest ham sandwich I had ever seen before together with a delicious cup of tea and told me about her gas cooker, that when she put pastry in the oven and it had been cooked, there were dark splodges over the pastry which she was blaming the gas for. I examined the cooker, and said *"I'm sorry madam, it's nothing to do with the gas, the burners are in perfect condition, there is no sooting of flame, flame pattern is correct and it is the state of the oven"*. At this, she *immediately* went berserk, screaming and shouting –and she could scream and shout, believe you me, at which point her husband, who used to look after the front restaurant came in to see what the fuss was. *"This squirt has told me it's the condition of the oven making the pastry black"*, she said, so he looked at me and I gave him the explanation. He got down on his hands and knees, put his hand up onto the roof of the oven, pulled it away and there was black grease running all over his hand, at which I explained that when the oven was cold, this grease hung from the roof -the walls the back and the bottom were spotless. He turned round, and without going into what he said, put her in her place immediately. She shut up and we got on like a house on fire together ever after.

We went to Monty Willis' barbershop on many occasions to repair the gas water heater. Rufus Raggatt was the fitter and I was the apprentice. On one occasion, Rufus was working on the water heater and Monty called out to me *"Don't just stand there doing nothing, pick up your hammer and pliers and come here"*. He sat on one of the chairs and put his wooden leg on another. *"Take that old piece of rubber off, and nail this new piece on"*. I did as was asked, but was afraid to hit very hard. *"Hit the damn thing"* he said, *"It won't hurt my foot will it!"*

Many years later, after the Gas Board had been nationalised, I had to go and fit a new gas fire at a house at Northway. I had to collect the key from a gentleman who ran one of the shops at Northway. I collected the key, and asked if he could come with me to which I agreed. He sat in the van, which was probably breaking every rule in the book, but I took him round to the house. When we got there, he asked if he could sit and watch me which, again, I had no problem with. I was working away in the fireplace and he was nattering away behind me. Suddenly it went quiet. I turned round and he'd gone down as stiff as a board, legs and arms out straight, and the colour of flour. I knew basically what to do, so went over to him, rubbed his arms, legs and face to keep him warm, went into the hall, got five or six coats and laid over him. Nothing had moved, so I gave him mouth to mouth. I looked for a telephone but there wasn't one, so I opened the front door, looked up in the sky to see if I could see telephone wires, one going to the house opposite and one next door. I went back in and gave him mouth to mouth again, not even knowing if it was necessary, looked out and there were a couple of ladies next door on the step. I told them to ring for an ambulance. Not so very long afterwards, the ambulance turned up and a doctor in his car. The doctor asked me what had happened, and they took him to hospital. I eventually had a lovely letter from his son, and it turned out that the son was married to the girl I fetched out of the River Avon mentioned earlier. The man himself was fine, and released from hospital a few days after.

One day, we were working at the Albion in Oldbury Road. Mrs Cox was the landlady, -rather a large lady but very pleasant. A lot of our work was taking up floorboards to lay gas pipes and on this occasion, I can't remember if it was the fitter or me, walking across the bedroom floor, putting a foot through where the floorboard wasn't, the foot going straight through the ceiling! Whichever one of us it was took our leg out, looked down through the hole and Mrs Cox looked up at us and said "*You ought to come down here and see the 'ole!*" Needless to say, we burst into laughter which *DIDN'T* help the situation one little bit!

Of course, at this time, John and Lucille Moore had their little bookshop in Church Street.

At one time, I knew seventy five per cent of the population from Apperley to Kemerton, as I was going into these people's homes which I thoroughly enjoyed. On one occasion, I had to visit a house at Bayliss Road in Kemerton to look at a water heater. I had just got into the house and a little boy came in with blood running down his face and neck. His mother almost hit the roof! I had a few words with her, washed my hands at the sink, asked her for some cotton wool and bathed his head. When his head was over the sink, I showed her that he would have to have stitches at which point Gran came in. Well, in a matter of seconds, I had one already flaked out and the other like a wet paper bag! I told them not to panic, and I took him down to a Dr Wilkinson, a lady doctor in Kemerton just down near the blacksmiths. Fortunately she was there, stitched him up and I took him back home, made mum and granny a cup of tea and went on my way!

Just outside of town was Mitton Manor House to which I was instructed to go and look at a gas fire. I went to the back door, I introduced myself and the lady, who was the daughter of the lady of the house said "*Oh yes, come with me*" and I walked into the kitchen where there were chickens, pigs, sheep, buckets of droppings, it was up to your neck. Anyway, one saw that, and just carried on with what you were doing. We went up the stairs up into the lady's bedroom where the gas fire was. I knelt down and asked, "*Could you tell me exactly what is happening?*" "*Well the damn thing doesn't work*" were her first words then she bent down to instruct me. Now this lady had all the dents and bumps in all the right places! I noticed there happened to be only one button on her blouse and the next thing, only a matter of *INCHES* from my face was the lady's bosom! I was only a lad of sixteen or seventeen at the time and didn't know what to do, but she did, and quite without *ANY HESITATION* picked up one with the one hand and tucked it in her blouse and tucked the other one in with her other hand, and that was that!!

I was at a job on a farm one day. It was lunchtime, and of course, we took our sandwiches with us on the pushbike. I asked the farmer what he was having, "*Turnips today. I love 'em, but they don't 'alf make I fart!*"

I had to go to one of the cottages in Tolsey Lane to Benny Sutton's -a lovely man who had two sisters. I went on many occasions to service the gaslights, which was all they had. On this occasion, Miss Sutton said to me "*Oh, I'm in a bit of a pickle, I don't know what to do*". I asked her what was the matter and if I could help. She said "*Well I don't know. I'm supposed to light the fire in the temple*", -the 'temple' being the Masonic Hall next door at the time. "*I just can't get it to burn*". I said I had some meths in my little mouth lamp, so we went into the temple and I'm not sure if there



were one or two fires there, put some meths on them and eventually, to her delight, got the fires going.

In the 1940's when we seemed to have higher floods and before the Mythe Causeway was built up, there was a gas main that went from the town, up Mythe Hill to, feed Shutonger. It was only a four-inch main, but it was in such a state that when the floods came up, water would fill the main which could be highly dangerous. Four or five times a day, we had to go up the Mythe Road as far as one could on one's bike, then get on to the railings on the left hand side, which I think had three spars, about a hundred yards along, one had to walk along this spar to a standpipe poking up in the air about a foot above the railings. You had a pump on your back, you'd take the plug out, listen, and you'd hear a 'glug, glug' which was a small amount of gas pushing water out, so you knew there was a fair amount of water in the main. So one then put the plug in one's pocket, if you didn't drop it! take the pump out, put it on the standpipe and pumped until all the water came out. This had to be done *EVERY DAY* that the floods were up, which they could have been for weeks and in every imaginable weather.



*Floodwater laps the Mythe Causeway.*

Another occurrence was the gas meters at the Hop Pole hotel and the YMCA in Church Street. These meters were about two foot square and almost always installed on lead pipe. As the water rose, the meter wanted to float which lifted the meters and bending the lead. The only solution was to go down with waders on, take some odd lengths of timber and wedge between the ceiling and the meter to stop it pulling on the pipes.

Billy Wilkins was quite a character. There was his bakery at the back of his shop in Barton Street [No 12, now the Hing Wah Chinese take away], and he had sides of bacon drying in a couple of places at the back, and he used to burn coke. One day I happened to be there when he had a delivery of coke from the Cheltenham & District Gas Company. They would fill up baskets, which were about three foot high, and two foot six diameter which they could carry up the alley and put in the store. On this occasion, the chap said "*Got your coke gaffer*" to which Billy replied, "*OK, you know where it goes*". At this point, the bloke asked for a tip before he'd even taken

one basket up. Billy hit the roof! Unbeknown to him, Billy Wilkins was a big shareholder in the Cheltenham & District Gas Company and he got straight on the phone to his bosses, and from then onwards, they never got a tip again.

Of course, you always think of the company supplying gas, but the lorry loads of coke that came out was tremendous as all the schools and hospitals used it in the fires and boilers.

I called down the shop one morning to get some stuff, and Bernard Dyer, the manager at the time said there's been a report of a smell of gas in the High Street up by the old Co-op which I was sent to go and check. It must have been quite amusing to a lot of people as the only way you could really find an outside leak was to look for the stop tap covers on the path or the drain heads. So there I would be on my knees with my bum stuck up in the air, sniffing drains, cracks in the floor and all that business. The smell was most severe and it got that bad that even shopkeepers were coming out - they knew who I was, complaining of the smell in their shops. I went into the old Co-op and saw the manager there and asked if I could go down the cellar. He took me down to the cellar that was as clean as a new pin, all white washed, but by God, didn't it smell! I thought there was something odd. It didn't smell of pure gas. Of course I could also smell cheese, as that's where they used to store it. I went to Giffords the old greengrocers, Jenkins the bicycle bloke, Oldacres on the corner and I was looking for one or two hours. Eventually, I got to the old Tewkesbury Car Mart that was owned by Vic Watson. This was on the corner of the old Sun Street, just over the railway line that ran across High Street to the mill. I got talking to the bloke on the pumps who said, "*Oh aye, we've had a bit of an accident. The bottom of one of our petrol tanks has fallen out*". It was petrol that had seeped through all the drains. If anybody had dropped a lighted match down any of those drain covers, the one side of High Street would have gone, it was that frightening! As soon as they told me, I knew what I was on about as the smell wasn't just gas. So we just had to be cautious and tell everyone not to light matches until it had dissipated.

One of my memorable jobs was at the old Tredington Hospital when it became a hospital for the elderly after being a fever and isolation hospital. In the centre of both wards were solid fuel fireplaces which the draft, instead of going straight up through chimneys, amazingly enough was sucked under the floor to chimneys on the outside of the building. These were ripped out and they had tiled surrounds built of I believe sixteen sections to each surround with four apertures for gas fires. Coming up from the centre was an aperture that would take four separate flue pipes up through the ward, right up through the roof space to the fans on the top. It was my job to fit all the fires. I was out there for two or three months doing one ward at a time. By this time, all the nursing staff knew us, as did a lot of the very elderly patients. We'd completed the one ward and in the second ward there was a lady who was blind and totally bedridden, -I was told she was ninety-nine years of age but she could talk. Very often, there would be a call "*It's about time these men had a cup of tea!*", we were a happy band, there was just Ken Bishop and myself. As I walked in one morning, everyone clapped and blew me kisses, and all the patients in the ward knew what was about to happen. I was called in, and the nurse said, "*Mrs. So and so [I can't remember her name] in the bed in the corner wanted to see me*". I went to see her and introduced myself, knowing she was totally blind, I just touched her hand, "*Oh David*" she said - she knew my name, "*I have a present for you*" and she gave me a dish cloth that she had knitted herself. "*I would like you to have this*" she said, the nurse came over and I told her that I couldn't take it, but she said I must, she'd worked at that for ages. I was

so overwhelmed that I nearly fell on the floor. I thanked her most sincerely and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Visits to the church at Bredons Norton Church were frequent where we had to service the lights. They had the tallest set of steps I had ever seen. I think there were six mantles to each light. There would always be two of us, as the glass globes were so ornate that if ever we had dropped one, they could never have been replaced, as heaven only knows how long they had been there. Each time of course, even though we had the key to the church, we would always sign the visitor's book.

It must have been just the Christmas of 1946 when the cold weather started which carried on well into 1947, and the snow must have been ten to twelve foot high in places when we had another job to do at Bredons Norton. An old chap whose name I cannot remember lived there down a short lane in a thatched cottage in an orchard. His wife had some sort of mental illness sadly, and she was coming home for Christmas. She was only allowed home providing her husband had the proper heating and hot water organised. Jack Mayall and myself had to go out there. We knew where the road crossing across the lane for the gas supply was, but the ground was that hard that we had to start digging with a hammer and chisel. We eventually got down to the pipe, which was only about a foot deep, cut it, but nothing was coming through. We actually wee-ed on the pipe to try and defrost it and it was only the next day that we got the supply to him, which enabled his wife to come home for a few days over Christmas. The old chap was cutting down his trees in his orchard to get warmth, as there was no electricity. He had very few trees left as most had been cut down for heating.

A regular occurrence when the weather was freezing was keeping the gasholder in the gas yard free to rise and fall. The gasholders had an inner and outer part, which enabled it to rise and fall depending on the amount of gas inside. There was a seal between the two parts, which invariably would fill with water and in winter would freeze solid. One of our jobs would be to walk around the ledge, which was about six inches wide, fifteen feet up and hit the ring with a sledgehammer handle to break the ice. Sometimes we would finish work at 5 o'clock, do 'boiler work' at 10 o'clock, being there till 8 o'clock the following morning when you went straight to work again, but it had to be kept unfrozen.

Whilst I was an apprentice, we went to the Waterworks at the Mythe to set up a new laboratory. This was being built by Collins & Godfrey above the old one which was downstairs. The 'chippy' working there said it was the first time he'd been out of the workshop in about twenty years, as he was the one who built these things from a plan. They were of course masters and did a lot of tower work. He'd built all the cupboards and we had to see to all the water heaters, Bunsen burners and put all the pipe work in. immediately underneath this laboratory was this engine room. I have never seen such a beautiful thing in my life! The flywheel on the engine must have been about sixteen foot across and when it was in motion, there wasn't a bit of vibration, and that thing used to motor. The room had a mosaic-tiled floor and was as clean as an operating theatre -it was spotless. There was a chap there oiling it like they did on the railway engines in the trigger pots. There were spanners, some as big as a bicycle wheel hanging in their position on the wall all ready for use. The engine was of course coal fired and the engine house was the other side of the wall. It was green in colour and shone like nobody's business, then there was the brass work, and that thing was in full operation. That was the only one to my knowledge that was there. It was an

amazing thing. Strangely enough, getting back to Josiah Wathen who was chief engineer, a post he relinquished in 1912, my brother John worked there, as did my brother Alan over the years. John was on the distribution side working twelve-hour shifts. He worked with the late Norman Robbins from Newtown and I think it was twice a shift, he would have to go out of the waterworks, across the Ledbury Road to the little Alum House. In there was a hundredweight bag of alum which he would pour into a hopper head which then went into the system.

We were occasionally called to the malt house, when it *was* a malt house in Station Street to service the gaslights. In those days, they didn't even have a mantle, no globe, no mantle, all it was, was what we called a 'fishtail jet'. It wasn't a limp yellow flame as all that would do would produce soot, so this jet was like looking at the palm of your hand and was blue with just a tinge of orange and that would give them all the light they would have. There were blokes there with shovels as big as wheelbarrows just shovelling this malt about from one side to another. I also recall that the large streetlights in Church Street had twenty-four mantles in them. Another interesting fact is how the beer was kept cool in the cellar of the Berkeley Arms. Again, a 'fishtail jet' with a ceramic cover was installed. This got very hot thus drawing cool air up and circulating cold air around the cellar.

Still with the old Cheltenham & District Gas Company, I was sent to Mrs Hopton's in East Street to change the gas meter. The house was a 'side on' house in East Street which backed on to 'chimney pot row' [North East Terrace]. Mrs Hopton let me in, I told her what I had to do, *"Alright, my duck, I'll go on, I've got lots to do"*, and so off she went. I saw the meter was quite high on the wall. I think she loaned me a pair of steps. I went up the steps, turned the gas off at the main tap, no trouble at all, put my grips on the nut on the top of the meter and *'BANG'!* -I ended up across the kitchen on the floor! As I went back there were sparks. She heard the commotion as the steps went over as well, came down, *"What's happened my duck?"*, *"I don't know"* I replied -I suppose I was a little bit surprised, so to speak. I had an electric shock. Living next door was Peter Finnigan's father, I think, who was on the MEB at that time. He came in, put his tester on the kitchen wall and everything he touched was live! *"Good God, you'll have to have the place re-wired!"* in saying that, I must have changed the meter or she would have had no cooking, so something must have blown.

I'd finished on the Gas Board and was on my own. I had a job out at Twynning to have a look at a central heating boiler that was on bottled gas. I got out there and no sooner had this chap let me in, there was screaming and racket that frightened me to death! - the house was full of parrots. He had an extension on the back which was glass covered over with bits of felt. He had over forty and one was on a stand in the kitchen. Me being as I was, sort of said *"mw, mw, mw, pretty Polly"* and all that sort of thing, the chap said *"He's alright, he won't hurt you, he's never hurt anybody"*. I put my hand out and it nearly took the end of my finger off. *"Oo, he's never done that before!!"* he said. He also showed me upstairs to one of the bedrooms that was full of birds, as was the outhouse that you could look into through the kitchen window in which there were some *HUGE* birds, some with the most magnificent colours.

## The Great Gas Changeover.

Between May 1967 and 1977 the changeover from town to natural gas came along. The conversion programme began near Burton on Trent. This was a tremendous changeover and one will never know how many millions of pounds that must have cost [suggested cost £563 million]. The wastage was *UNBELIEVABLE*. We as fitters didn't do any of the conversion at all, this was done by contractors –they'd been in a jam factory two weeks before –they didn't know one end of a screwdriver from the other! They would make a preliminary visit to premises to see what equipment was on site, and if the cookers were that old, they would take photographs and go through their history books. It is *AMAZING* how old some of the appliances were that they converted [suggested number of appliances about 40 million]. They would have the kit delivered, then maybe two or three weeks later they would call back to do the fitting. We had to look after the 'aftermath', i.e. leaks etc. We would be getting perhaps twenty leaks a day which would have to be repaired. There would be 'blow off's' on the street corners, these were long pipes with burners on the end that they used to light as they didn't want the gas to mix, they let it 'breathe' for a while because the calorific value was very different for each gas. There is much more air burnt in natural gas with no sulphur, no muck, it is a very, very good gas, that is except on one occasion!

If we had the chance, we would go into the YMCA at about ten o'clock one morning to have a cup of tea, as one did in those days. Some of the local postmen used to use it, Roy Morris who was Francis Martin's right hand man, very sociable, very pleasant, we'd have a 'Kit-Kat' and a chat. I had the van on this day. I went into the YM, ordered my cuppa and the caretaker behind the counter said, *"What the hell's the matter with this gas Dave?"* I asked him what he was going on about; he said, *"Look, I'll show you. The tap's only cracked open at the moment"* at which point he turned the tap on full and the flame was two foot above the cooker! I knew *INSTANTLY* what the problem was, I told him to turn off all the gas, ran across the road to the gas showroom, burst into the shop where there were four or five people, I was most rude and ordered that if anyone comes in, tell them to go home, turn the gas off, tell all their neighbours to turn theirs off at the meter and don't turn it back on until they've heard from the Gas Board *WITHOUT FAIL!* I knew it had to be a 'high to low governor' somewhere. Now this could either be at Gloucester Road, Chance Street, Gas Works Yard at the Bredon Road and Nelson Street. At that moment, George Cook came in and put his bike outside. I shouted *"George, come with me"* and we rushed off in the van. I knew it could be one of only three or four places. What it meant was there was a problem with one of the 'high to low governors' that reduced the pressure of the gas from a very high pressure as it was pumped from Cheltenham. At strategic points like going down to Apperley at Walton Hill there would be one of these governors that broke it down from maybe 100psi to 8psi. I realised I had to make a circuit, so we did Gloucester Road first. In the governor house, which I knew quite a bit about having serviced a lot of them, if the high pressure got the wrong side, a screeching whistle would blow as a warning. This one was ok, so I went through Priors Park, came out of Oldfield thinking I would turn right at Chance Street up to Bredon Road. There was a policeman at the junction of Chance Street who saw me coming and waved me straight on, at which point I realised it must be the one in Barton Street at the Nelson Street junction. I parked the van about fifty yards up the road, there was a crowd of people, wagons, and police there and there was gas everywhere! We ran over to what was left of this pit where we found what had happened. Whether it was motorway works at the time, but one of these huge earth

scrapers with massive rear tyres about eight foot high and two foot wide had come up Barton Street, moved over to the left to avoid something, hit the kerb, bounced and went straight on top of the pit which was a steel and concrete lid six inches thick, smashing the lot including the governor underneath. There was high-pressure gas coming out of there as you would never believe. We didn't have any tools to hand as we'd left them in the van, and you couldn't find any wheels as they were under the debris. George ran back to get a pair of 'stilsons' so that I could turn the governor off. The fire brigade were there, and I'm pretty sure it was Barry Sweet who was there who said "*We've got to get this lot out*" at which point Barry threw his arms in to try and get the debris of smashed metal and concrete out. I remember saying to him "*Barry, don't cause a spark, or we shall never, ever know anything else about it!*" -he almost froze on the spot! Anyway, we got some of the debris out, I turned the inlet off first, and then the backpressure came the other way. The pressure was so great, that whereas a pilot light in a little 'Ascot' sink heater would be about three quarters of an inch long, they were burning holes up through the top of the water heater! If it hadn't have been turned off when it was, if I hadn't have had the van it would have been a disaster. Of course then Cheltenham was informed who sent over about thirty odd fitters, loudspeakers, all the town and Northway had to be turned off and it was panic. Areas were delegated to each one. The 'big white chief' came over, and I remember Norman Simmonds who was a good foreman gave me the job of going around all the hospitals, doctor's surgeries, nursing homes that had gas to get them back on line. When I got back to the yard later that night about ten o'clock, all those who had been going around the houses were in the 'White Bear' being treated to all they could drink by the boss, and being that tired, I let them get on with it and went straight home! There was only one fire as far as I recall and that was at Mitton where they had a sink heater over the sink. The pilot light had lengthened and set fire to the curtains in the kitchen.

## **TEWKESBURY Y.M.C.A.**

### **The Beginnings.**

Dave's other great interest was the town's YMCA, which he says was his second home and his hobby. His friends would go to the pub, and not being too keen on a glass of beer, the YMCA was his hobby, where he would go perhaps seven nights a week.

The first YMCA meeting was at 66 Barton Street, which was the majority of the local clergy, but the chap who was the instigator of it was the very first national council secretary in London in the 1840's when the YMCA first started. He lived at Toddington and started it at Tewkesbury in 1884. There was no meeting place then, so they went down into houses in Spring Gardens, bible meetings in Double Alley and other alleys in the town. They then had a meetinghouse in the back of Avon somewhere at the bottom of Smiths Lane where the old slaughterhouse used to be. This was followed by Tolsey Hall where I think it was where they started the first Scout movement in Tewkesbury. In 1916, Mr Marment gave the existing building in Church Street to National Council for the people of Tewkesbury and we've been there ever since. In its origins, it was virtually one hundred per cent religion consisting of bible readings, of which there are some wonderful minutes in the club going back a hundred years or more. By the time I was involved, it was nothing like as religious and was more social, the aim then being to encourage activities in the town and to let people have a meeting place.

One of the great stories of Tewkesbury YMCA is that during the 1914-18 war, the club was asked, presumably by national council to raise £400 towards a hut to go on the western front. I don't know what activities they did, but instead of raising £400, they raised **£1200**, and they built and supplied this hut which enabled soldiers to have some shelter with reading and writing matter, a cup of tea and a quiet prayer for their colleagues on the front and those back home.

### **The Early Years.**

I joined the YMCA, quite illegally when I was about fourteen and a half in around 1944/45 and I've been a member ever since. You had to be sixteen to join. I eventually went on the committee, and I'm still the President now. I have been a member now for sixty-two years. I think I am the oldest member without a break. There are a few who have come back after doing other activities.

On a Sunday, the club was open for two hours in the evening, I think from seven till nine o'clock. We used to go to the pictures, first house, and then we'd have a hymn service in the hall, which was well attended, with people from the Methodist and the Abbey. There was a stage and a grand piano. I remember Hubert Walkley going. We'd sing hymns and everyone enjoyed themselves, even after a lot of theses people had already been to a church for an hour. Two of us would then go out up into the canteen and make tea and biscuits for everyone. Once everyone had left, we were allowed to go back and do the washing up and have a free half an hour on the snooker table!

Jack Wilkins would get down there with his accordion and piano. We had a secretary/caretaker there whose name was Young who was an ex-Singapore Police officer, a most handsome man. He was in the Abbey choir and would sing with us. I remember Les Rivers, myself –there were three of us young boys, and Youngy and we would sing a hymn between us and in all fairness, I must say **WE WERE GOOD**, although it was Youngy who carried us. Unfortunately, around this period the club went down hill although during the war the squaddies were let in.

### **Music and the Disco.**

We had an old solid fuel boiler down there, and I managed to get hold of a second hand 350,000btu gas boiler from I think down in Stroud somewhere. The gas board wagon was going down there one day, and he was good enough to pick it up for me, so we got it for £15! It had only been used for one season and I installed it for them.

We cleared out over ten tons of ashes from the cellars which were huge, with arches in. Once it was cleared, we concreted the floor with about two inches of concrete. I went to the old council yard at Staverton, explained what I was doing and asked if they had any old road signs that I could have. They couldn't have been more helpful. I had about twenty or thirty of these old signs including a 'Keep Left' bollard! In the middle of the cellar floor was a post that we couldn't take out, so I cut the bollard down the middle, put a light inside and bolted it around the post, and the cellar was turned into a disco! We had the fire officer and health officer down there to make sure everything was done correctly. The fire officer wasn't too happy, as there was no proper ceiling, only what were the floorboards upstairs and we were told we must do something about it. He advised us to use a kind of impregnated hardboard fire resistant that wouldn't burn, or at least hold back any flames for a while. We did all this, and everything was *BLACK* which in fairness is what the kids wanted. I wasn't very happy with it, it just wasn't right, so one night, half a dozen of them, a couple of girls and four lads –and fair comment they were dead keen and would help a lot, went and got a kitchen bowl and some 'Walpamur'. They told me to take my shoes and socks off, turned up my trouser legs then the lads turned me upside down and I walked all over the ceiling and I believe my feet marks are *STILL* there now! I've had between ninety and a hundred kids down the cellars, they used to queue up at half past six in the evenings to get in as there was nowhere else in the town for them to go and they enjoyed themselves.

On one occasion, we had a policeman who had been on his night walk, and reported us for fighting going on in there and drugs. I will not name the policeman involved, but I called him a liar to his face in front of the sergeant as there had never been a fight in there –out on the public footpath yes, because if you weren't a member, you weren't allowed in, and of course on one occasion there *was* a punch up outside, but I told them I had no jurisdiction of what goes on upon the public footpath.

The sergeant then asked me if I knew anything about drugs down there, to which I told him to my knowledge definitely not, but if there was I'd close the place down tomorrow. I explained that I didn't know what they looked like, smelt or tasted like so being asked if I'd like to know, I told him I most definitely would. A couple of weeks later at home, a gentleman turned up on my doorstep with an attaché case announcing he was from the Drug Squad. We sat down in the living room, talked about drugs and I smelt and tasted this stuff and that stuff which gave me some idea of what kind of



smell I might have down in the disco and knew what was going on. LSD was the big thing at the time, and he showed me some, which was the size of a pinhead. He explained that I would have no chance of finding it, as they would drop it in a bottle or drop it on the floor and scuff it away.

There were a couple of young girls down there one evening, they must have been only about fourteen and they had a bottle of cider with them I approached them, took the bottle off them and said I was sorry but I would have to ban them both. This broke their hearts, especially the one who brought the bottle in but didn't drink from it. Apparently, neither of them brought it in, it was brought in by a boy who then left the bottle with them for some reason but I had to ban two poor kids who were not to blame.

We had a DJ but no live music, as it wasn't big enough and the noise from the amplifiers would have brought the building down! The 3A's plus B practiced down there and before them was a band with Frank Ricketts on cornet, Cecil Lewis on drums, Jack Wilkins on piano or accordion and Tom King on harmonica.



*The Jack Wilkins Band.  
l-r, Frank Ricketts, Cecil Lewis,  
Jack Wilkins and Tom King.*

### **The Flood!**

One day, I was at work in the shop and a policeman came running in. “*Dave, Dave there's water coming out everywhere from the YMCA*”. Of course, they all knew I was involved with the club. I went down there, and what a *TERRIBLE* mess. The mains water feed to the tank in the roof space had burst and it must have been running all night. There were one or two of the most ornate ceilings you could ever wish to see, they were *MAGNIFICENT*, and it had brought them all down. I had a young lad working with me at the time and it took us two hours to sweep the water out, I don't think at that time we applied to have the ceilings re-instated although we would have had insurance at the time.

We had the hall at the back, which was taken back after being leased to an engineering company which is now a skittle alley.

### **Membership.**

Our membership now is over a thousand, whereas one time, going back a long way it was about thirty-four! It was very close to closing, I think after the ceilings had come down and we wondered what we were going to do. It was only ‘tea and biccies’ then, and we had to pay a caretaker. Bill Roope, Ben's dad was our caretaker for a number of years, but the payment was a pittance as there were no grants of any sort at that time. Tewkesbury YMCA is self-supporting, Cheltenham have had grants left,

right and centre over the years! We were self-running, self maintained and everything was done by volunteers of which we had some *very good* ones. At the lowest point, the number of members going in for an evening was about five then we sold the 'Avonex' factory at the back and things looked up. We built a new snooker room in the back, toilets, showers, allsorts with mostly volunteered workforce and went forward in leaps and bounds. There was one character in town who I don't know how long he hasn't had a job, but he came down the club and without hesitation, he would do anything I asked him to do.

There were many characters I remember, Ray Mulcuck, Eddie Coombes, Oscar Dickinson, and at one time we had three generations of the Bourton family –Harold, Les and Jim and their children.

### **Sport.**

**I**n those days, we had a very good football team, -there were one or two of them that really should have played professionally, two or three of them did have trials. There was Roger 'killer' Allen, the Simms brothers, Arthur Bennett, Les and Jim Bourton, Harold Cartwright, Bernard and Stan Goodwin, Tony Langley, Bob Sayers, Jimmy and Trevor Taylor, John Styles, Frank Ricketts, Harry Coombes, Stan Caudle, Alan Keating, Les Sircombe, Peter Guilding, Alan Kentish, John Day and many more. There were some great matches, Cirencester Town, Moreton Town, Bishops Cleeve who had a player called David Goring who played for Arsenal – there were two or three Goring brothers. Of course, if it hadn't have been for the late Robin Green, there would have been no football team, because it was his meadow up the Mythe and his meadow behind Oldfield, I don't know where we would have played. We did play on the Ham once, because there are apparently so many acres of the Ham, which is supposed to be laid down for public activities.

Many years ago, Paul King was one of the team; Bristol YMCA was putting on an athletics meeting to include Cheltenham, Gloucester, Yate, Tewkesbury, all of which were asked to go down. There were about six or seven lads that went from here, and of course we had no real amenities, not even proper tracksuits and the like and we were a bit of a laughing stock. However, we competed in a number of events, the javelin in particular which Paul took part in – he'd probably never held one in his hand before! However, he went up, threw the javelin and left them standing – he'd probably only thrown a withy stick over the weir before!

### **Fetes and Fun!**

**F**or charity or our own funds we used to run dances. We would go round the countryside and villages on Robin Green's old coal wagon -I think it may have been Festival Week, with Fred Collier who used to be the manager of 'George Masons', and Fred was a salesman – "*I don't want any of you lot back on this lorry with one programme in your hand, I'm telling you now!*" and we used to sell programmes at a shilling a time.

We also had motorcycle football on the Regatta Meadow, a fireworks display that went wrong, -I was up the meadow with one young lady and they'd rigged up this conglomeration and lit the fireworks underneath which went into the box. There were rockets going everywhere in all directions! How we didn't put people in hospital I

don't know! Of course, one could *DO* things then, although it was all done by the members. There were no grants from the council; you had to do it yourself.

We used to run a fete every year, and one year we made £7 profit after three months work, yet another time we made £400! That and the rent from a small factory was the only way we could stay open. In fact, we hoped that the money raised from the fete would pay for the winter fuel for the boiler, which we just about managed. We held our fetes on the Abbey Lawn, we used to get a lot of people there, and I'm talking of a thousand people going through the gates at sixpence a time, the kids getting in free, and this was what helped us keep the club alive. There would be lucky dips, vegetable stalls and all that sort of thing, anything that we could raise a bit of money.

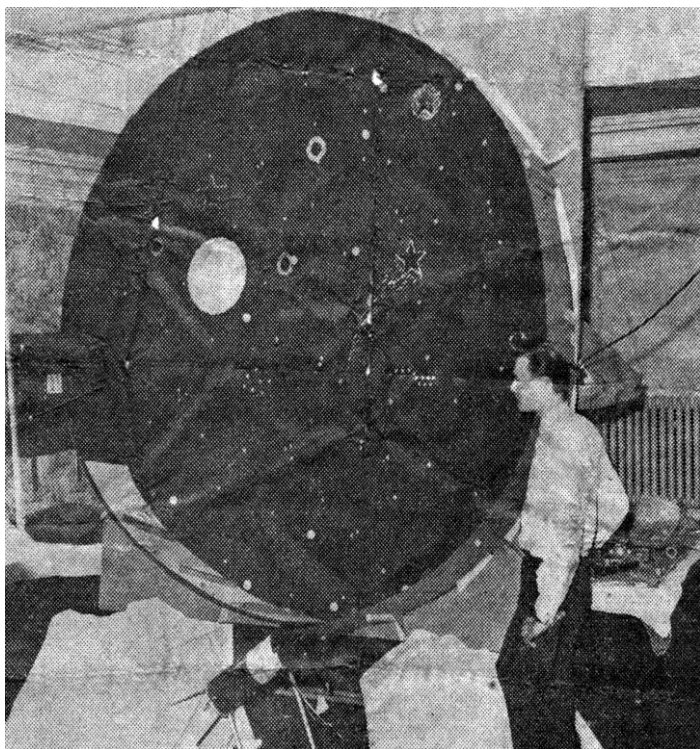
We had a game called 'The Rocket', which was always next to the Mulberry tree. The Gas Board had a rocket from an old display in the showroom, which they were throwing out. I asked if I could have it to which they agreed, so I devised this sort of 'Ben Hur' game. I put a spindle on the side of this rocket about two foot long and put it through the steps, a pair of very heavy duty ones I had that belonged to the Gas Board. The spindle had a long thread on the back nut I could put tension on. This rocket was spun round manually, sold twenty tickets, all of which we made ourselves so that nobody could cheat at a tanner time [sixpence], and it stopped on a number. I had to get the tension just right so that it didn't creep as you would get irate customers, and you couldn't afford irate customers because you wanted as much money out of them as fast as you could!

It was a lovely summer's day, and this old girl came up with her grandson. She had a couple of tickets, then more, then more and this went on and on. I don't know how much she spent. Now the prizes, if you could make them shiny and make people laugh, they would spend the money. This old girl who was about four foot nothing, and must have been in her eighties said *"I'm trying to win that gun for my grandson"*. I said, *"Well my dear, you must have spent an awful lot of money"*. *"E wants that gun so much"* she said looking at the little lad, so I said *"I'll tell you what I'm going to do, I can't do it myself, but on behalf of the YMCA, you've bought that many tickets, you've supported us so well, I'm gonna give you that gun!"* She was over the moon, she gave the gun to her grandson, the crowd were cheering and I never stopped taking money! The same afternoon, Dr. Phillip Holding came up. He asked me how I was doing, to which I replied *"Not too bad"*. He asked, *"What's the price?"* *"Sixpence each or five for half a crown sir"* I replied. *"Right"*, he said, *"I'll have half a crown's worth"* at which point I gave him five tickets and took his money. He put his hand on my arm, and retorted *"Sixpence each or five for half a crown? –You've missed your vocation!"* On one occasion, I was taking that much money that I had to have two younger chaps helping me because as soon as one game finished, you had to be at the rope selling more tickets for the next game 'cos you mustn't let your customers go. My pockets were so full of money that it started spilling out, the weight pulling my trousers down for that matter! One of the prizes was a plastic bucket [!] that I scrounged from the old International Stores on the Cross in which I put the money but I dropped a sixpence. A young girl, Des Bufton's daughter climbed under the rope and said *"Excuse me Mister, you dropped this sixpence"*, so I thanked her and said *"Thank you very much and what an honest kind girl she was, and for that, I'm going to put the sixpence in the funds but I'm going to give you a free ticket to have a go on the Rocket"*. Lo and behold, she won! –the crowd cheered and cheered and we were still taking their money, it was wonderful!

Another game was 'The Robot'! –about eighteen foot high, taller than a double decker bus! The legs were seven foot; I had two cardboard boxes for the feet, which were about eighteen inches in which we put scaffold poles from round the back of the abbey, as they used to keep them there. So there were the boxes, then rolls of linoleum wrapped round the scaffolding poles, then there was a platform, then a circle of about four foot in diameter of cheap lino that I got from Shenton's on the Cross which made the body. On top of that was an old fridge box from the Gas Board which was coloured and made the head with antennae on the top, which made it about eighteen foot high. I'd made this thing, and before I erected it, 'cos it could only be made in sections, I wondered what I was going to do with it 'cos it wasn't going to make any money! I had a change of plan, I cut the belly out and made a panel of twenty 'Heinz' baked beans tins with light bulbs in, battery powered. A chap would sit inside the body running a copper disc up and down two copper contacts and would stop wherever he felt which lit up a particular bulb and that was the winner. I think Chris Price and Chris Webb helped in the body, -another game at which we raised an awful lot of money. Charlie Halling was also a great help. At one fete, we all dressed up and we made Chris Price a stall where table tennis balls blew in the air and were caught in fish nets on a pole. We had Chris' vacuum cleaner in reverse to blow the balls out. It was a 'Prize Every Time' sort of thing, which again took a lot of money.

Another stall I remember was 'Ten Tin Bowling!' which on the billboard looked pretty good! I remember the old 'National Dried Milk' tins –powdered baby milk, and we used snooker balls from the club to bowl into the tins along the lawn just like skittles. Whatever tins the ball went in, you totalled the number up got a prize –we didn't get rid of many prizes!

One year, I put a stall at the Mop Fair. One year, there had been a lot of publicity for the Cobalt Appeal at Cheltenham hospital. We made a game at the club called 'Fireball', Charlie Halling, Les Bourton and three or four others. It was eight foot by eight foot made from bamboo poles from Chapmans and Jack Jennings to make the frame, a vacuum cleaner in the bottom, twenty table tennis balls and what was 'space' –the sky, all planets and stars and the moon. I cut a paper drinking cup in half and stuck it on the moon. We charged sixpence a ticket. I explained to the lady who lived next door to the police station in Barton Street, which then had not been built, but was the site where Charlie Hampton's shops had been what I was doing, and she agreed to supply some electricity, being only to glad to help. The vacuum cleaner was blowing, not sucking. The balls were in the bottom and would blow up this pipe –I tried it without the pipe but they went everywhere! The first one that landed in the cup won a prize. By about quarter past nine in the evening, I had nothing left. I'd taken about £39 in sixpences with no help for the very first Cobalt Appeal! On this occasion, there were that many people going to help me but they didn't turn up. I was also somewhat worried at the time interfering with the fair people, but everyone I asked said it was quite alright providing it wasn't for personal gain. Of course, at the time it was very topical as at the time, the moon landings were in the press and I gained great admiration from the fair people who said it was fantastic. At the end of the evening, I had to load it all on the Gas Board handcart and get it out of town!



The picture caption reads:  
*'New Space Game Will Aid Charities - Mr C A Halling operating Fireball, a 10ft high space game designed and built by Tewkesbury YMCA committee member Mr David Wathen, to raise money for charities. The game which is entirely original will form part of the YMCA's contribution to the local cobalt appeal fund. Mr Wathen, who is 32, and organiser of several previous eye-catching stalls, including the Rocket and the Robot, has worked on Fireball for several months with a great deal of assistance from six or seven young members of the YMCA. Fireball will make its first public appearance at the YMCA fete.'*

*Charlie Halling operates 'Fireball'!*

### **A Helping Hand!**

We held numerous dinner dances and functions. On one occasion, our president, Mr Edwin Bigland arrived with his son and his wife. He was a Quaker, and not knowing their traditions asked if he would like a drink! –I redeemed myself by fetching him an orange squash! I must have been an usher at the function, and one of our lady visitors came up to speak to Mr Bigland and his family. Of course, they were full ball gown occasions at this time; she must have come back from the toilet as her gown was stuck in the top of her stocking. I approached her discreetly, distracted them in conversation and quickly pulled it out.

What I think was a camping club from Birmingham would come down to Tewkesbury and pitch their tents in the field where the bowling green is now. One year, we had torrential rain which swamped them right out. It was an awful sight to see, they had all their belongings lost or swamped out. We went down to see them, told them where we were, returned to the club and put the solid fuelled boilers on to heat up all the radiators so that they could bring their gear up and dry themselves out. They had the use of the cookers and enjoy the amenities we had which got them out a very difficult situation. I remember we had a very nice letter from them a week or so later.

Another occasion was when Barbara Moore, the first lady to walk from John 'O Groats to Lands End called in to share our hospitalities.

Michael Moxon was our padre in later years. We would hold dinner dances at which he attended. We were at one when we learned about the confirmation of his appointment to become the Queen's chaplain. At the end of the evening, he said "Please ask us back again, as we've had such a lovely evening".

At our centenary, we put on nine days of activities. He wrote to her majesty, we wrote to Runcey, the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time to which we had replies from both congratulating us. We had a party at the club with three cakes making the number '100' with a hundred candles on. The place was packed, including some quite nice dignitaries and the only person I forgot to ask was the Lord Lieutenant! We also had a commemoration service in the Abbey, which was attended by Mrs Cadbury.

One of the activities I organised during the centenary was a quiz night. The topic was the YMCA itself. There were thirty or forty questions, and the hall was packed. Everyone was seated when we realised half an hour before the start that we hadn't got the answers written down! They were silly questions such as 'how many steps are there up to the front door' and 'how many windows at the front'. I got stuck talking to Jim Bourton and everyone was panicking on me getting away to get the answers! Trevor Taylor won it, Trevor being another YMCA man, body and soul.



*One of the many fun nights at the YMCA. 'Lady Dave', on the left - dressed to kill struts his stuff!*

## **65 BARTON STREET –A NEW BEGINNING.**

**H**aving been made redundant after twenty-six loyal years with the Gas Board, I ended up on the dole. Being known everywhere as ‘the Gas Man’, I had plenty of work and so started up business on my own.

I eventually bought 65, Barton Street off the Borough Council. It was ready for demolition and had a closing order on it. I approached my bank, Barclays for a loan that was turned down, my expertise and knowledge of the gas trade, together with new business for the bank meant nothing. I tightened my belt further and went for it.

From the ground floor of 65, you could look up through all the floors above and see the sky so I knew it had to be totally re-roofed. The roof of course had no felt, the tiles being laid over the lathes and held on by a dab of mortar. I borrowed scaffolding from my friend Ken Daniels, and with my old pal Bryan King, we did the work ourselves. Bryan would work twenty-five hours a day and had a heart of gold.



After re-roofing and making sure it was water tight, I made a start on the top floor ceilings. They were so rotten that they had to go, and, of course they were the old split lathe and plaster. I made a ‘T’ shaped tool and knocked it all down from the roof space above. The mess and dust was *INCREDIBLE*, I could not even see my hand in front of my face. I had to leave the building for about an hour until it all settled. It is impossible to pick up lath and plaster with a shovel, the lath having to be picked up piece by piece leaving the dust behind. Luckily, I had an old galvanised bath that was used years ago. I filled it with the debris and slid it down two flights of stairs –it was worth its weight in gold!

*The ceiling removed*

Amongst all this debris, I found a pile of folded papers. When I eventually examined them, I was amazed at what I had found. They all related to ‘Tewkesbury Mills’, sixteen sheets in all. Wage sheets of different factory floors. Other than the top sheet, they were in perfect condition, pale blue in colour and the most *BEAUTIFUL* ‘Britannia’ watermark. They related to wages in the mill, eight sheets to the year 1853, the others to 1854, all hand written. For a 58hr week, the pay was two shillings and six pence, ‘time made’ added three pennies! I still have these and very often have a look at them and it certainly makes one think of the wages and work conditions

years ago. Apart from these documents, I found some very old coins, some in mint condition,

With all the interior work, it took about eighteen months to complete, and of course, during the day, I had to earn a crust of bread!

In the back roof space, I came across some fantastic oak carved panels that had decoration on them in the shape of a diamond. The floor was totally rotten –I had dry rot, wet rot, and even death-watch beetles in the property, so I ripped it all up. The joists were in quite good condition. They were about 4”x4” and each one was numbered in Roman numerals, I-XIV which had been cut into the timber with a hammer and chisel.



*Carved oak panels.*

Many visitors came to look at the property, not only from the local Council but also from Gloucester Historic Society. A gent from Birmingham University and one from Bristol University who were very knowledgeable, looking not unlike Arthur Negus came down and suggested that the panels I had found had been cannibalised from elsewhere as they were much older than the property. They dated the panels around the late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Another ‘find’ was an oak door that I assume was made out of a complete piece of wood. It was quite small, probably about three foot wide by less than six foot high that led into the dining room. I called it the ‘cigar door’ as it was elaborately carved in all sorts of shapes, but mainly had two rows of what I can only describe as cigars cut in half from top to bottom and laid in rows, side by side separated by rows of other carvings. When I showed it to the chap who came up from Bristol, he nearly fell over! “*Show it to me*” he said sharply. When I told him I couldn’t clean it, so threw it away, he gave me a strong telling off [to put it mildly!].



As 65 was a listed building, I obtained a grant from the Borough Council who were very good to me all the time the work was in progress. During the removal of the old fireplace, I made a time capsule of a metal box sealed with underground wrapping and bricked it in. I placed in it present day coins, details, names and various bits and pieces.

The shop being finally ready, was 'officially opened' by my grand daughter, Emily Jane, who stood at the door and cut the ribbon on her first birthday!



*The 'Cigar' door.*



*'Open for business'. D. Wathen & Son, 65 Barton Street.*



*'Have van, will travel' -two of the vans used by D. Wathen & Son.*



*Sister Ruby's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations at the Watson Hall with all the family.  
l-r, Dave, John, Ruby, Ken and Alan.*

Photographs from Dave Wathen, Bill Treen, Dave Carter, Charlie Halling.  
Thanks to Cliff Burd, John Dixon, Don Freeman, Jack Stephens, Charlie Halling and Norman Holder for additional information.