

Green and Pleasant

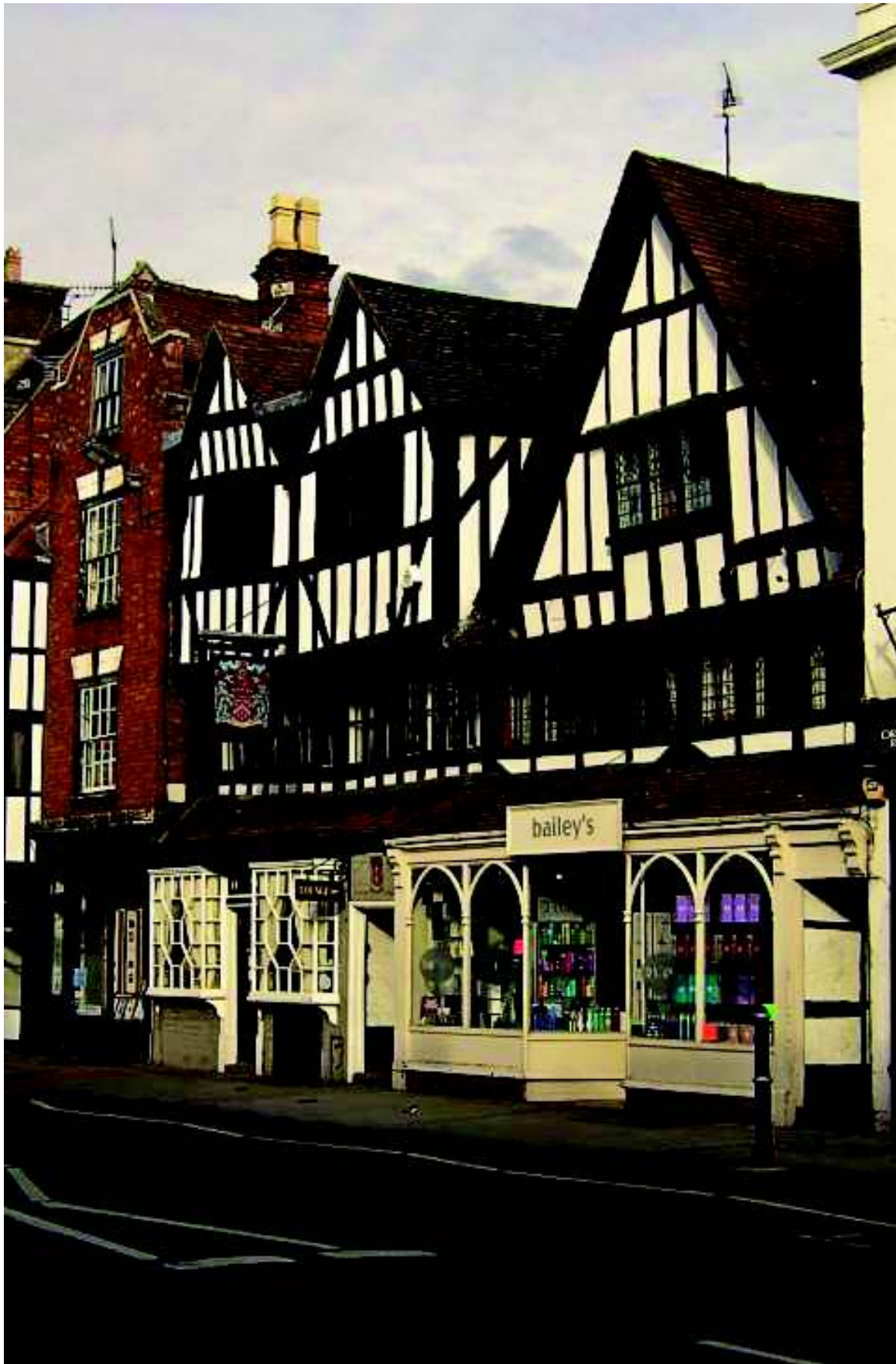
The Story

of my

Tewkesbury Boyhood

An Eclectic Series of Essays

John Sidebotham



Fifteenth Century buildings in the middle of Tewkesbury

Green and Pleasant

by

John Sidebotham

Eclectic Essays

of Boyhood in

Tewkesbury

Some time ago, after three friends of mine had died, I realised that I had memories of who they had been by their acts and deeds and our conversations. What I, and the greater community had lost, though, were their ephemeral, unspoken thoughts and opinions, which had been coloured by 'their' world around them.

Many of these essays, short stories, tall tales, long rants and minuscule mentions are almost entirely about my childhood in Tewkesbury; and the ability of modern technology to help me to return to the town, particularly now that I live such a long way away from it.

We are each brought up in different Tewkesburys. Our families are different, the people are different, and so are the shops. My mother's generation went to Malvern, for example, by train. My generation went there by bus, and people of today get there by car. Each station, bus stop and car park has an effect on our memories of how we got to Malvern and back. My thoughts and understanding of what Tewkesbury is, is defined by what I experienced in my childhood. This book may help you to understand life in the Tewkesbury of the Forties and Fifties.

Some of these pieces have previously been published in slightly different form on my blog,

moreberowrphotos.blogspot.com.

This is not a factual book, although it is full of facts.

I maintain that it is not a book of opinions.

It is a book of thoughts linked by reality.

Most thoughts are silent . . .

They are some of the few things we cannot bequeath to others.

All thoughts in this book are entirely mine.

Everyone else's thoughts are entirely different.

For my friends all over the world

and especially in Tewkesbury,

and for all those who love the town.

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Acknowledgments



Tewkesbury Abbey Choir

Fourteenth Century Glass in the Choir

*The architectural style is also a Fourteenth Century Decorated
modification of the original Norman apse.*

Preface and Introduction to the Fifties

I SUPPOSE EVERYONE'S FIRST LITERARY ATTEMPT is a work of love. Seasoned writers may have the discipline to write page after page about sometimes very little at all, but first timers have to have something to inspire them.

This book is a ragbag of essays. Some are about memory, some are factual, and some are rants, either justified or not, and more- or less- well informed. The only subject that unites them is my boyhood in the 1950s in the mediaeval, some would say middling town of Tewkesbury, in the middle of England.

Thanks to the technology of 2018, this book about my childhood in the 1940s and 1950s, can be easily *self-published* using nothing more than a *DTP program*, a *computer*, and an *email address* to *log onto*, an *on-line printing site*, and I can pay for it all with my *Debit Card*. The publishing company demands nothing more than that I provide my material as *pdf files*, and they will mail me the finished product.

None of those italicised words and phrases existed in the 1940s or 1950s in their current usage, if at all.

Another, and arguably more important reason that I wrote this is because inside this 72 year-old man lurks a 17 year-old youth who assumes that because he can remember Bobby Moore and Nobby Styles, then everyone must know about them, mustn't they? This isn't arrogance, it's the subconscious feeling that I haven't changed and neither has the world! We are (if we think about it), shaped very much by lives and events that surround us. My Mum and Dad were born in one World War and experienced a huge Depression and Second World War. We have witnessed equal (but fortunately less dramatic) changes which the "Millennials" can not relate to, and when you think of seminal events in our lives, and think how old a ten-year old boy then, would be now, you get some very interesting and frightening results.

If you were ten at the time, you would need to be 52 this year to remember the day in 1966 when England beat Germany 4-2 in the World Cup Final. You would be approaching 40 if you remember the Berlin Wall falling in 1989. A 55 year-old should remember the Assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, but I doubt if anyone save the fanatics would know that it was on the same weekend as Episode 1 of Dr. Who. You'd need to be the same age to recall the Great Freeze, also in 1963, and 57 to have travelled on the Last Train to Upton! If you ever saw the King and his mother, the Queen Dowager (Mary) and the Coronation, you'd be about 75! It wasn't a better world then, just a different one!

People born in the 1950s or earlier would know that 6 lb apples @ 8d/lb = 4/-, and 1 cwt would cost £3-14-8. If you were lucky, you might get a discount of 10% for wholesale purchases. Farmers and wholesalers would regularly perform mental arithmetic like this in the time taken to auction a single lot at market, without necessarily being able to read or write. When I was seven, in Mrs. Mew's class, I would have been expected to work those figures out on paper. I wouldn't have been able to use a calculator, because no such thing then existed.

A survival guide for time travellers

If you wanted to survive the Fifties, or even wish to understand this book about the Fifties, you'll need to know something about the ways we measured things back in those pre-decimal days.

Just to make things really difficult, unless you are an elderly **Englishman**, (the word "*Brit*" hadn't then been invented!) these were the common names for our coinage:

One quarter of a penny was a **farthing**. That's a Saxon term for a "*fourthing*".

One half of a penny was a **halfpenny** (pronounced "haypny")

One **penny** was a "copper" because old ones had been made from that metal. Policemen were also called coppers because they "*copped*" or "*caught*" criminals.

Several pennies were **pence**. The abbreviation for penny was "d". This was short for "*denarius*", meaning penny, and the ancient Roman name for a **shilling** was the Roman word "*solidus*" abbreviated to "s". Of course, it would be too simple to just call it a **shilling**. It was a "*bob*", and half a "*bob*" (or 6d) was called a "*tanner*". It was also called a sixpence.

Half of 6d was, of course, 3d. (Threepence). (Pronounced "threppence"). There were two coins of that value in circulation. One was the silver threppeny *piece*, while the other was a twelve edged coin called the thre'pny *bit*. It was a schoolboy riddle to ask how many sides a threepenny bit had. The answer, of course, is fourteen, because you have to add the top and the bottom! The silver coin, which was much older, was hoarded by Mums and Grans to put in their Christmas Puddings. Silver doesn't poison you like copper does.

Who would have thought that money could be so complicated?

We haven't finished yet.

The two shilling piece was called a florin, but it, perversely, did not have its own symbol, even though the Victorians tried (and failed) to introduce them to us as part of their own decimal currency. Ten florins equalled one pound. We also had half crowns, which were worth 2/6.

Crowns (5/-) were usually commemorative and they were not in general circulation.

In theory, the 10/- and £1 gold coins (half sovereigns and sovereigns) were still legal currency at face value, but they were never ever seen in circulation. In those days, the gold rate was fixed at US\$30 per ounce. Now they are worth the gold price of the day, and they are thought of as gold bullion.

A friend who worked at the Royal Mint told me that sovereigns are still made today, and that the minting machine used for making sovereigns, etc. is in a room that is locked and has an armed guard. The mint operators wear paper coats when they make the gold coins, which are burned at the end of the day to recover any specks of gold that may be on them.

There were three notes in regular use. They were the brown ten-shilling note, the green pound note (also known as a "quid"), and the £5, the five pound note. When I was very small, I can just remember at Christmas, Dad used to give Mum a "white fiver" so that she could buy her own present. This may not have been romantic, but it was generous. In 1949 it was probably about one week's wages for Dad! (Fortunately for him he was soon paid with the new blue "fivers" which were less desirable as presents.) I remember the white fivers. I was occasionally allowed to touch one. They seemed to a small boy to be like a large piece of newspaper. I never owned a white fiver. It was a beautiful thing.

On one occasion my father opened up his pay packet and pulled out a ten shilling note. He let me look at it for about ten seconds before he said "Tell me what the serial number is BACKWARDS, and I'll let you keep it" So I did, and I was right (I loved numbers), and he gave me the ten shilling note. After about two minutes, he took it back from me again, and he said he'd put it in my bank account, and he took me into the bank on the next Saturday morning where he put it into my savings book. I couldn't do it myself because I was too small to see over the counter. Ten shillings in 1950 was quite a lot of money, it was probably his beer money for the week.

He never asked me to do that trick again.

The pound sign is, of course, the £, which is a fancy curly “L”.

Thus it makes perfect sense to an Englishman that Pounds, shillings and pence should be £ s d, and never P s p. After all, P s p just wouldn't make sense!

In the 1950s, you didn't just have the wherewithal to buy things with your money, you had a pocketful of history which stretched right back to Saxon times, and even incorporated a failed attempt at decimalisation. Pennies as far back as 1860 were legal tender, and they were the coins from the reigns of Queen Victoria, four Kings, and later in the Fifties, Queen Elizabeth. There's something strange about the coinage of all those Monarchs. Their heads alternately change direction. Queen Elizabeth faces left. Her father, George VI to the right. Edward VIII didn't have any coins with his image on, but he would have looked left, if he had. Certainly, his father George V looked right, etc. When Prince Charles becomes King, the coins issued in his reign will have him looking to the right, as well.

Earlier, I wrote emphatically about Englishmen, because in these crowded islands, there were pounds issued by England, Northern Ireland, Guernsey, Jersey, the Isle of Man, and curiously, all the individual banks in Scotland. In theory, they were interchangeable for ordinary purchases, but in practice, you would have to take them to a bank to be changed for English Pounds. You would find it very difficult to change a Scottish note in a shop south of Leeds or Manchester!

Just to be really difficult, the currency of the Republic of Ireland (Punt and pinsin) were precisely the same size and value as British pounds, but they were NOT interchangeable. I asked my friend from the Mint, if this was a problem.

“Oh no!” he replied, “In fact we make their currency for them as well.”

If you wanted professional services, you paid in guineas. Ten guineas (10 gns), was ten pounds ten shillings or £10-10-0d. It was solely a name. There were no guinea notes or coins.

This Alice in Wonderland experience is not quite over, because a pound in money was a Pound Sterling (£), whereas the common unit for weight was . . . also a pound (lb), but this was a pound *avoirdupois* (French “to have some weight”)

As you no doubt have realised the “lb” was an abbreviation of “libra” (the Ancient Roman word for “pound”, and the astrological word for the sign of the scales!)

It sounds so very complicated in 2018, forty-seven years after decimalisation, but in fact the monetary system worked very well. We used to have far less small change then than we do now with decimal currency.

Three of our pennies weighed exactly one ounce, “oz.” and as there were sixteen ounces in a pound, then boy scouts could weigh things in pounds if they had four shillings in pennies

Confused?

Four shillings (4/-) might not weigh 1 lb, but forty-eight pennies (48d) which were equivalent to 4/- , always weighed 1 lb!

Now are you confused? Hopefully not.

Our arithmetic was spiced with acres and roods, chains and furlongs, all units of measurement that were based on real, everyday things, although we didn’t know it at the time. For instance, a rod, or a pole, or a perch were all different names for five and a half yards. Why were there three different names for the same odd distance? I didn’t find out for years.

One day, I happened to visit the Royal Mews at Buckingham Palace, where I looked at some of their magnificent carriages. As everyone knows, carts pulled by one horse have bits of wood on both sides of the animal that are called shafts, but if you have a couple of horses side-by-side, there is a central wooden pole between them.

If you have a coach and four, you need quite a long pole of wood, (sometimes called a rod, or perch), one which is usually just over sixteen feet long. This explains why a rod, pole or perch are names for five and a half yards of wood, the length of the haulage bar for a four horse vehicle like a stage coach.



Ploughing with Horses

Photo: Ralph Roletschek

Recently I was writing a piece on agriculture in the days when horses were used, and it was suggested (quite correctly) that a furlong was a “furrow long”, and it is 220 yards (about 200 metres). A chain is 22 yards long.

Now, the interesting thing is that a patch of ground 220 yards long by 22 yards wide comes to 4840 square yards, which is exactly one acre. What is the significance of that? Well, one acre was reckoned to be the area of average ground which a reasonably fit

horse could plough in a day! That doesn’t sound like very much, but the horse pulling a single share plough would travel nearly seven miles while ploughing that area if the furrows were a foot or so wide.

A cricket pitch used to be one chain (22 yards long), and so were many of the running distances in athletics: 220 yards, 440 yards, 880 yards, and 1 mile (1760 yards) which are 10 chains, 20 chains, 40 chains and 80 chains respectively. All these picturesque but complicated units have been superseded by metric measurements such as metres and hectares.

The Tewkesbury that I write about in the Nineteen Fifties was a world that had no ball points, no mobiles, no laptops. There was no national television until 1953, no commercial radio or television, no Health and Safety, no supermarkets, no delicatessens, no plastics, no transistors, and very few jet airliners or foreign restaurants.

We lived in a world of police whistles, bicycles, pen and ink, blotting paper, the “Tewkesbury Register”, film cameras, steam trains, and two letter deliveries a day. There were no disposable nappies, no frozen food, no freezers, no microwaves. Most of our overseas mail travelled by ship, but there were no shipping



English Ration Books

Wellcome Collection

containers and no container ships. There were transatlantic liners, films, and “going to the pictures”. London’s main airport was still Northolt for European flights. At Heathrow in the very early Fifties, the passenger accommodation was in marquees, and for 10/6 (half a guinea, notice) you could take a joyride in a BEA biplane) At Heathrow!!!

Also there was still some war-time rationing, which meant we had to have “coupons” or “points” in ration books; a Food Office, a Coal Office, Identity Cards and a new National Insurance Scheme. Everyone was given a National Health Insurance Card, and if you were sacked from your job you were “given your cards”.

In the thirty-two years before I was born, there had been two World Wars and a Depression. The Second War finished in August 1945, only three months after the end of hostilities in Europe. People still thought in wartime ways, such as using their gardens to grow fresh vegetables. Mechanisation in the war meant that we had moved past the Age of the Horse, thanks to Army Surplus trucks, but we had yet to enter the Age of the Car.

Quite a few people today who are under forty might have problems understanding what everyday life in the early 1950s was like, just as I would have found my grandfather’s world very difficult to comprehend, and this book of essays is primarily for them, so that they get a squint through the keyhole of history, at what we were like when we were young, and what sort of world we lived in. Even so there will be misunderstandings in our thinking, and tears in the curtain of time . . .

For instance, in May 2017 I was in Berlin. The modern architecture of the city is amazing, and young people think that Berlin is a “really cool” place to visit. The mid-Twentieth century has been consigned to

history. Only old people like me realise that many of the open spaces in that city were caused by intense Allied bombing which caused fire storms, or that my hotel, which was in Friedrichstrasse, had been in the Jewish Quarter, whence most of the population were sent to extermination camps. Young people think Berlin is a great place, and so it is. For me, though, there are many ghosts.

Tewkesbury is a long way from Berlin, and no doubt it has its own ghosts for some. What awaits us there in the town when we look back at the Fifties?

When I was born in 1946, the world population was only about half of what it is today. Many people in Tewkesbury lived in what we would now consider to be the most appalling housing conditions compared to modern-day standards. The first two years of my life were spent in a house in Chance Street with an outside toilet and a wash house where four families did their clothes washing. That was where our only water tap was, and often we would meet one of our neighbours filling a kettle. All water had to be brought into the house from that single tap. Hot water was heated in a large black kettle on the coal range in the back room. There had been gas light in the kitchen and an oil lamp in the attic. We had not heard of central heating. We had no fridge or washing machine. There was no spin drier. Instead we had a mangle, which had two large wooden rollers which squeezed the water out of the clothes. When we had a bath, it was in a tin bath in front of the fire. There were no showers. Our buckets and washing up bowls were made of metal and they were not to be made from strong plastic for a further ten years. This was normality. We did not feel deprived, and we were not deprived, because most of us lived in the same conditions.

When I was very young, possibly as late as 1949 or 1950, milk was delivered to Chance Street by a man who poured it from a large churn which was fitted in a two-wheeled horse-drawn cart which was called a milk float. If my Grandmother wanted milk, she took a large enamel jug out to the street, and she would pay for a quart (just over a litre) of creamy milk. The milkman had a quart measure on a long handle to pour the milk from the churn.



A milk float still survives today as a treasured historical vehicle. It is seen here at Kemerton on the occasion of the Centenary of the Women's Institute.

[Photo: Cotteswold Dairies]

The milk jug had a muslin cloth with glass beads placed round it, and it was placed in the house in the meat safe, a device designed to make the contents if not cool, then at least not warm, and the front was made of perforated zinc to keep the flies off.

When the float reached the end of our street, there was always a ten-minute break while the horse ate its oats from its nosebag.

Glass milk bottles made their appearance about then, but they had cardboard tops and not foil ones. At school we used to collect a metal crate with thirty small bottles in it. In winter we moved it into a cool part of the class room, and drank the milk with waxed paper straws at morning break. In the summer we usually left the crate outside in the shade in a place where a breeze would keep it cool. Sometimes we got a tea towel, wetted it, and placed it over the bottles to cool them down. If the weather was warm or thundery, the milk tasted dreadful. We used to play a game with the cardboard tops. We flicked them, and won any bottle tops that were covered by our bottle tops.

Worst of all was when the milk looked thin and grey and streaky when you moved the straw around, just as though it had been watered down. In winter, sometimes the milk froze, pushing the tops out of the bottles.

Thinking about it, we must still have had cardboard tops in 1952, because Mrs Barnfield, my teacher then, had a dart without the feathered flight (plastic flights were still in the future!) so that we could spear the milk top and remove it efficiently.

After the Age of the Horse, but before the Age of the Car, I was brought up in the Tewkesbury of the Push Bike.

The town has been written about many times before. Tewkesbury was Nortonbury in *John Halifax Gentleman* by Mrs Craik, and Elmbury in *Portrait of Elmbury*, and other novels by John Moore. It was the subject of a passage in *Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens, and it has non-literary associations with the novelists Henry Green and Barbara Cartland who both lived nearby.

The Tudor House Hotel used to be the Samuel Jones Academy, where Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Secker, was educated. Tewkesbury had a great reputation for Dissenters, and I have great pride as a Tewkesburian in knowing that the Established Church at the Abbey lived side by side with, and in sight of,



The former Monastery shops in Church Street



Thomas Secker

both Baptists and Quakers, which were officially illegal organisations, for over half a century before Parliament passed its Act of Tolerance in 1687.

Barnabas Davis, a Tewkesburian, crossed the Atlantic in 1634, on the “*Blessing*”, only fourteen years after the “*Mayflower*” sailed. He made the voyage twice more and he was one of the Founding Fathers of Charlestown, later Boston, Massachusetts.

Our experiences and memories of the same Tewkesbury will all be different. At any specific time, people will have memories of Tewkesbury which vary with time. All our Tewkesburys will be different



Tewkesbury Abbey

Across the buttercups of the Ham, just before the floods of 2007

because of our experiences there. This book is about my Tewkesbury, and the land around it. I know I'm often green, but I hope I'm pleasant, so like the land around Tewkesbury, I hope that I, too, may be considered as ***"green and pleasant"***.

* * *

My mother and my uncle both attended the events that commemorated the Eight Hundredth Anniversary of the Consecration of Tewkesbury Abbey in 1921.

They, and my father and I attended the Eight Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary in 1971, and I hope that I shall be able to attend the Nine Hundredth Anniversary in 2021, when I shall be an old man. A few years ago, I was in the Abbey when I thought how wonderful it would be to celebrate the One Thousandth

Anniversary of our amazing church, when it occurred to me that no-one, not even the youngest choirboy, would be there on that day.

The buildings of Tewkesbury give the town a familiar aspect through the centuries, but there is a tide of different people and families that flow through the town, doing whatever it is that is being done at that time. People go, families grow, but the buildings architecturally stay much the same, although they often change their function.

When I first lived in Tewkesbury, the Library was in the Old Hospital in Oldbury Road. Since then, whenever I visit, something is different. The Library moved to the Old Grammar School opposite the Abbey. Then the Library moved to the High Street while the Grammar School had long since moved to Southwick Park, before finally becoming part of Elmbury School on the Ashchurch Road. Another part of Elmbury School was moved from the Tewkesbury Secondary Modern School for Boys in Chance Street, which is now the Church of England Primary School. It moved there from the Oldbury Road, close to the Old Hospital (which by then, was no longer a library). Part of the Trinity Infants building became the Sea Cadets and the part on the other side of the Walk became a Freemasons' Lodge. The Post Office is no longer in Church Street near the Cross; now it is in the High Street, close to the Library, which you'll recall, was once in the Old Hospital. The Police Station has moved from the Bredon Road to Barton Street, and now out of the town altogether, and the ugly but loved Sabrina Cinema has been replaced by the beautiful but unloved Roses Theatre just round the corner. The Baptist Chapel is now in its third location in Tewkesbury, and the Roman Catholic church has come down from the Mythe to Chance Street. The "Bird Bath" and "Cascades" have, sadly, gone. The Malthouse became Dowty Electrics and it is now residential accommodation. Every time I come back to the Town, something else has changed. Bus routes change as well. How can I get to Bishops Cleeve unless I travel via Cheltenham? The wooden-seated bus to Tirley has long disappeared into history.

Memories change too. My memory of the horse drawn milk float, for example. After emailing the MD of Cotteswold Dairies, he stunned me by saying that his father, who founded the company, had never had a horse-drawn milk float. Could I have dreamt the whole experience, which is one of the most enduring memories that I have? It turned out that other milk suppliers of the time in Tewkesbury had had horse drawn vehicles, and presumably my memory was of one of the other milkmen's floats. I wouldn't have known, because I would have been about three, I wouldn't have been able to read, and at that age, I

wouldn't even have known what communication by writing, or reading was. Even the shape of letters and script would have been unknown to me in 1949.

Will Tewkesbury continue to change? The answer must be, of course!

The three main streets that meet at the Cross; and the Abbey will presumably always remain, as will the Ham.

Tewkesbury, though, is like a chameleon. Houses become shops and some shops become houses; businesses change hands and their functions, too, according to the needs of the townspeople and the parsimony of the Councils. I lived over a sweet shop in Church Street, which has now morphed into a restaurant.

This means that the town is always changing, and we can't forecast what the next twenty years will bring, let alone the next two centuries. Only one thing is certain. The town of Tewkesbury in 2038 and the town in 2218, will be different from now. That is all we can say.



Free Hop on Hop Off (HoHo) bus in San Gimignano, Italy



The six huge Romanesque arches at the west end of Tewkesbury Abbey

Essay 1

Where is Tewkesbury?

THERE IS A BUSY LITTLE MARKET TOWN called Tewkesbury in the South West Midlands of England, and it is where my mother's family lived. It lies, we always used to say, at the *confluence* of the Rivers Severn and Avon (without really knowing what confluence meant), and it is famous for its Abbey and its Battle.

The Abbey will be mentioned from time to time as it impinged on my life, but in no way are any of these essays guides. All the Abbey guidebooks are worth reading, and all are better and more detailed than this book is on the Abbey's remarkable history. Let's just say at this stage, that if you live in the United Kingdom, or if you are visiting the country, you will not be disappointed by Tewkesbury Abbey. It is one of England's most remarkable hidden gems. If you are less than impressed with your shoulder-to-shoulder visits to Canterbury Cathedral, Westminster Abbey or St Paul's, then go to Tewkesbury Abbey where you will be amazed in almost solitary awe.

Tewkesbury is a working town and it always has been, and this is part of the problem, I think, in raising its tourist profile like other mediaeval towns, notably (to pick just two examples at random) San Gimignano in Italy and Carcassonne in France. In both places the main roads bypass the towns. There are large car parks and coach parks around the perimeter. The main streets are pedestrian areas, also open to minibuses and taxis with strict and very slow speed limits. The minibuses connect the car parks to the pedestrian precinct and are free hop-on, hop-off services. They work very well in San Gimignano and Carcassonne.

Our town seems to rejoice in its ordinariness. Pressure was placed on the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway in the 1830s for the railway NOT to be constructed through Tewkesbury.

Tewkesbury was served by a quiet branch line with about five trains a day. In more recent years, a road bypass was planned. The southern part was built, but not the northern half. If it had, severe traffic problems might have been reduced. The reason it was not built was that an endangered species of glow worm was found to exist on the road line! I've never found out what the name of the species was, nor how widely they are distributed in the United Kingdom or Europe. If the real reason is something such as noise, there are very good noise barriers in use on roads right across the UK. Why not use them?



'The Kremlin'



The Tudor House Hotel opposite the 'Kremlin'

The Old Grammar School

Opposite the Old Grammar School



The Northern Bypass has not been built and it probably won't be in my lifetime, if at all. I think it was a chance missed, but who knows what the future holds?

In the 1960s, some old run down cottages were knocked down, and the site was developed. In the spirit of the Sixties the architecture did not blend terribly well with the surrounding buildings, but the feelings of the people of Tewkesbury about their "Kremlin" remain hostile almost sixty years later even though the development gave the town its first, and still its only, supermarket; a state-of-the-art library and a small theatre capable of screening films or putting on live shows. The building is not on a sensitive site. Yet nothing at all is ever said about the (usually vacant) red brick Old Grammar School, which is just across the road from the Abbey. Tewkesbury is just a normal English working town, and sadly, many of the people, me included, who are more aware of the town's charms, leave it and pursue their lives elsewhere. The Abbey is undoubtedly NOT ordinary. It was consecrated in 1121, nearly nine hundred years ago.

Tewkesbury's other main claim to fame is probably the Battle in 1471 which virtually ended the Wars of the Roses.

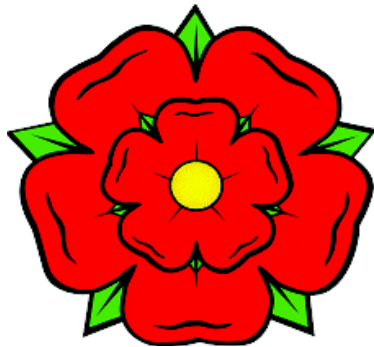
It should be famous for its mediaeval buildings, but their fame is only luke-warm. There should be more explanation of the Battle for visitors. There is a wonderful diorama in Tewkesbury Museum in the middle of town, but surely there must be a case for an exhibit overlooking the actual battle site visible from a top-floor tearoom in the Tewkesbury Borough Council offices close by the Battlefield?

Transport to and from the battle site could be by a free HoHo bus (see previous page) as used very successfully in many European cities.

It should also be famous for one of the finest early iron bridges, built by Telford, no less. But it isn't.

Tewkesbury has not one, but THREE pre-Victorian iron bridges, possibly more than any other town in England, and none of them are considered to have any value to Tewkesbury tourism.

Telford's bridge (the Mythe Bridge of 1826) could also be served by a HoHo bus.



King Henry VI



King Edward IV

Essay 2

The Battle of Tewkesbury, May 4th, 1471

IMAGINE A PRIMITIVE COUNTRY that is at war with itself. There are two main groups of assailants, each wishing to put their own King on the throne of England for their own advantage. The Yorkists have imprisoned the Lancastrian King Henry VI in the Tower of London. The House of York's leader is King Edward IV.

The badge of the Lancastrians is a red rose, and that of the Yorkists, a white one. This thirty-year civil war is therefore known as the "Wars of the Roses". By 1471, the War had almost reached stalemate. At the start of the year, the Battle of Barnet fizzled out like a damp squib. There was such poor visibility, that the majority of troops in the opposing armies marched straight past each other in the fog!

The Lancastrians, nominally headed by the young Prince of Wales, son of Henry VI, marched west to meet up with his mother, Queen Margaret of Anjou. She had landed with her army on the Dorset coast. They combined their forces before heading to Bristol to pick up some heavy ordinance.

King Edward IV, the leader of the Yorkists, heard about this march towards Bristol, and so he proceeded along the Thames valley from Windsor, and finally camped on the Cotswold Hills above Little Sodbury in South Gloucestershire. He sensibly sent out horse patrols to make sure that their camp would not be attacked that night. On the 2nd May 1471, the Prince of Wales and his Lancastrian forces, who were camped in the Severn Vale, did the same.

At night the only means of communication or illumination was by lantern, so everywhere was very dark.

Two patrols, one from either side, met up quite by chance in the village of Little Sodbury. This, to put it mildly, must have been a surprise. There you are, in the middle of the night, riding down a village street, when out of a dark corner, you bump into an armed person who you do not know. Both patrols immediately galloped back to their armies to report what they had seen. The two armies must have camped less than four or five miles apart from each other.



"The Bloody Meadow" Site of the Battle of Tewkesbury 1471



The retreat of the Lancastrians took them over the River Swilgate (marked by the trees) where many wounded soldiers drowned. The nobility of the Lancastrians unsuccessfully requested Sanctuary. Many were hacked down by the Yorkists inside the Abbey.

The Prince of Wales had two possible choices for his army. He could head for the Severn Estuary to try and find boats to get all his troops and equipment across the wide and dangerous river. This would take a long time, and he might not be able to get enough boats to carry all his army into Wales; or else he could head for Gloucester, where the first bridge crossed the river. He needed to be on the Welsh side of the Severn so that he could meet up with Henry Tudor and his army to combine their forces.

The Lancastrian army was stretched out along the road. The Prince reversed their marching order so that his Vanguard was at the back, and the Rearguard at the front, and immediately they set off for Gloucester, long before dawn. Meanwhile, in the Yorkists' camp, Edward sent out patrols in all directions to try and locate the (by now, moving) Lancastrians. It took until first light before he knew precisely where the opposing army was. They were marching as fast as possible along what is now the A 38 towards Gloucester, where they hoped to cross the river Severn and join their allies in Wales.

May 3rd was a hot dry late Spring Day, and the Lancastrian troops soon became thirsty and tired. They needed to march over thirty miles to Gloucester and safety.

As soon as Edward IV realised what was happening, he despatched riders on fast horses in relays to get to Gloucester before the Lancastrians and to order the Yorkist Commander of the Garrison City to close the City gates to the opposing forces. In closing the gates of this fortified city, the bridge would also be closed. The cork would successfully be put into the bottle.

Edward IV chased the Lancastrian army as fast as he could. His route was along the road which followed the escarpment of the Cotswolds. These hills are limestone, and therefore very porous. This gave the Yorkists dry roads to march on, but unfortunately there was little surface water to drink, and few trees to give shade. He followed the road, (now the A 46) northwards to Stroud. His troops needed a rest. Those lucky enough to be at the front of the column managed to drink from the occasional stream before the wagon wheels muddied the water, but this was proving to be an extremely arduous march for everyone. Back in Gloucester, as instructed, the gates had been closed against the Lancastrian army, who realised that even though it might well win a battle, it had no time to fight before the Yorkists were upon them.

Reluctantly, they moved on up the banks of the Severn, to Tewkesbury, where there was a ford. Even here the crossing is dangerous, but it would take two days to march to Upton bridge. These were two days that

they did not have. Tewkesbury would have to do, but it was already late in the afternoon, and the men were exhausted, having marched over forty miles that day in just over twenty hours. The Lancastrians camped by the River Swilgate near Tewkesbury Abbey. They had arrived too late that day to transport their army across the Severn, so they knew that on the following morning they would have to turn and fight their pursuers.

Edward IV and the Yorkists resumed their march north from Stroud, and camped for the night at Tredington, further up the River Swilgate between Tewkesbury and Cheltenham. They, too, had marched forty miles along the escarpment of the Cotswolds at a similar speed to the Lancastrians. As tired as they were, they knew that they had trapped the opposing army, and that the ground favoured the Yorkists.

The next morning, on the 4th May 1471, the two armies marched towards each other, each lined up in three groups called “battles”. King Edward also sent a detachment of two hundred spear men into a nearby wood with orders for them to remain hidden and attack if they saw a suitable opportunity.

The right-hand battle of the Lancastrians led by the Earl of Somerset attacked the left flank of the Yorkists commanded by Richard, Earl of Gloucester. There was a chance that the manoeuvre would make King Edward IV vulnerable in the centre battle, but it was not to be.

The Earl of Wenlock and the Prince of Wales in the Lancastrian centre had singularly not provided any support for the Earl of Somerset. Angry, Somerset left his Battle, rode back to the Earl of Wenlock who was supposed to be supporting him, and cleaved his skull with his sword, before attempting to join his own troops again. Whether this was meant to encourage the others or not, it had a disastrous effect on Lancastrian morale. At this point in the battle, the Yorkists’ mounted spear men, who had been concealed in the wood, attacked the rear of Somerset’s army.

Somerset was cut off from the rest of his troops, with Edward’s men on his left flank and in front, and Gloucester’s men able to attack his entire right flank, with the Yorkist spearmen reinforcing



The River Swilgate., the final obstacle to an orderly Lancastrian retreat

the rear. It was a rout. The Lancastrians fled, and were cut down trying to cross the Swilgate, which reputedly ran red with blood for several hours afterwards.

This was all viewed by some of the Tewkesbury monks from the Abbey tower, and when it became clear which side had won, the town immediately became Yorkist.

The Lancastrian commanders who were still alive sought Sanctuary in Tewkesbury Abbey. Unfortunately for them, by a cruel stroke of fate, Tewkesbury Abbey had never been licensed for Sanctuary.

Abbot Strensham tried to deny the Yorkists entrance to the Abbey, but they captured all the important Lancastrians, and imprisoned them. There was so much carnage in the Abbey that the church had to be reconsecrated a month later. The next day was a Sunday, but on the Monday, the Lancastrian nobles were taken to Tewkesbury Cross, where they were paraded, tried, found guilty of treason and executed.

At much the same time, the Lancastrian King Henry VI disappeared from custody in the Tower of London and was never seen again. He was almost certainly murdered by his Yorkist captors.

King Edward IV had in a few short hours disposed of all the opponents to his reign.

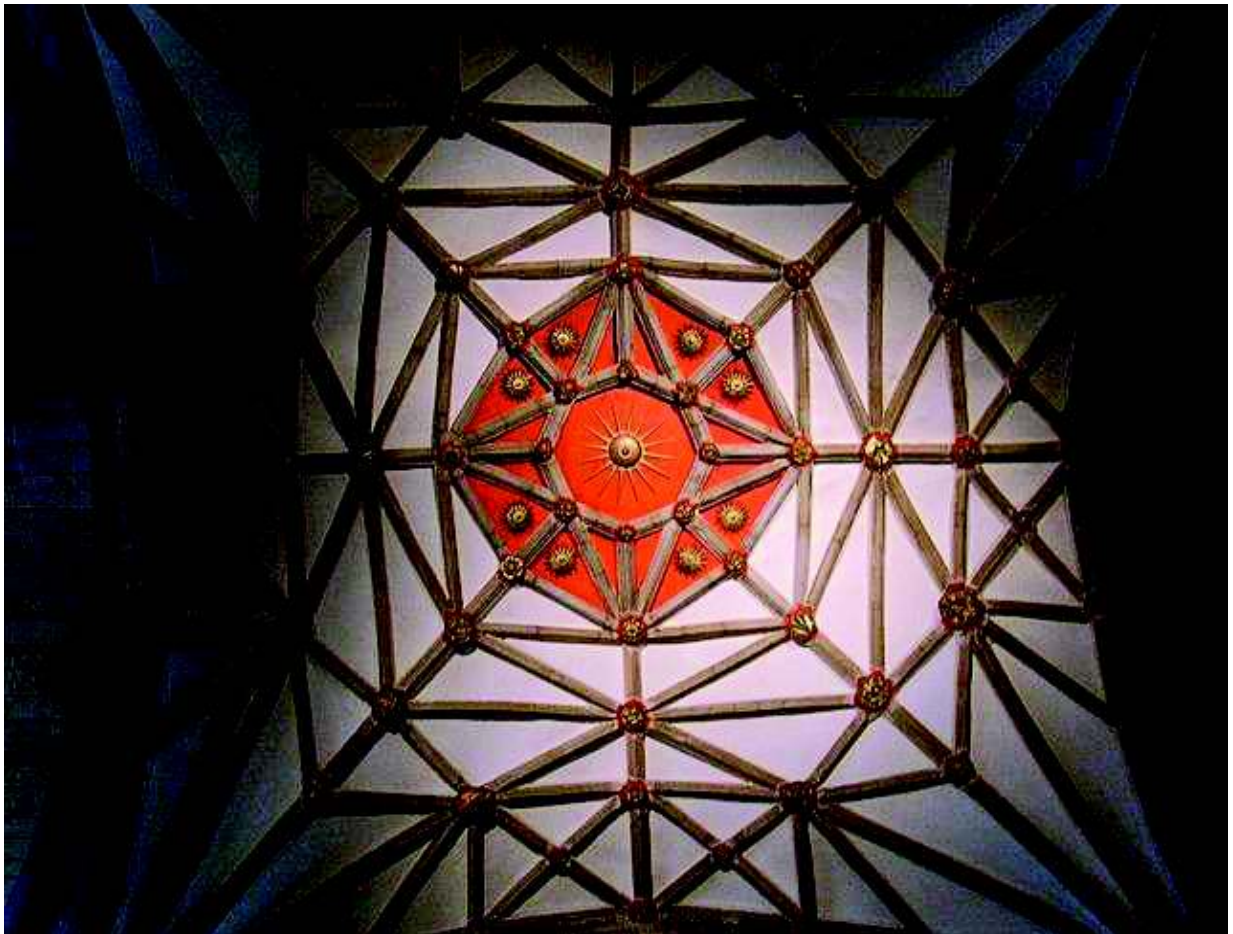
Very occasionally, particularly if the Swilgate has been in flood, a bone still sometimes washes up and corroded bits of metal that may once have been armour. There was a good secondhand market for undamaged armour. Damaged armour from the battle - some with arrow holes in it - was flattened by the Abbey blacksmiths and can be seen today where it forms a metal reinforcement for the Abbey Sacristy door.

Tewkesbury was a decisive battle. King Henry VI and his son, the Prince of Wales had been killed, thus ending the Lancastrian dynasty. Edward IV ruled the country in relative peace, and when he died, he was succeeded by Richard, Earl of Gloucester, who became King Richard III.

William Shakespeare's play "King Richard III" begins with the line: -

"Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this Son of York"

This is a reference to King Richard III, but also the very similar "by these Suns of York", which is a punning reference to Edward IV's "suns in splendour" victory at Tewkesbury, and the suns "made glorious summer". If you go to Tewkesbury Abbey, go into the Choir, and look up at the lierne vaults, you will see a circle of the Yorkist's badge of the Suns in Splendour. Edward IV commanded that they be placed there to commemorate the victory at Tewkesbury, Surely Shakespeare must have visited the Abbey at some time and seen them.



Tewkesbury Abbey Choir Vault

Photo: Andy Dolman

Essay 3

The Tewkesbury in my Mind

THE REASON WHY TEWKESBURY became the town that I remember. Some people consider that Tewkesbury folk are born with webbed feet. Certainly it might be an advantage given the large number of floods that inundate the town. Most floods occur in Winter or Spring and are caused usually by the River Severn, which passes by a mile or so from the town. The worst floods often follow a quick thaw after weeks of wintry weather, as in 1947, or more unusually, widespread thunderstorms and cloudbursts over the Midlands which generated the 2007 floods.

The main problem that Tewkesbury has, is the huge water catchment area of the local rivers. Every drop of rain or snow, from Plynlimmon in the Central Welsh Cambrian Mountains, which are not far from Aberystwyth; parts of central Wales drained by the Teme; most of Shropshire and the Black Country of Staffordshire, the County of Warwick, and even some of Northamptonshire's water, flows down the streams and tributaries into the rivers which flow through Tewkesbury. Every drop. If an excessive volume of water falls on the Midlands, the water comes through Tewkesbury and floods the town.

Tewkesbury is surrounded by streams and rivers, each with their own characteristics.



*The Chaceley and the Tirley. Grain Barges at Healings Mill,
Tewkesbury*

Photo: Severn Tales

The Severn is by far the largest river, and runs quite swiftly between deep banks on its way to Gloucester and the sea. This was a major trade route, and in my childhood it was common to see large motorised barges and oil tankers heading for the Midlands from Sharpness or Gloucester to Worcester and Stourport. Barges used to bring grain from Sharpness along the Canal and through Gloucester to Healing's Mill. There is an unmistakable smell of the sea by the

Severn Weir even though it is fifty miles inland, and Tewkesbury is at the far upper tidal limit when the Severn has very high spring tides.

The Severn Estuary is famous for its vast tides, which can be over fifty feet high, and it is well-known for its migrating fish.

Salmon return to this river in increasing numbers on their long



Atlantic Salmon

Salmo salar

USCAA



Tewkesbury weir and salmon run

journey from the Atlantic to the hills of Wales, where they spawn another generation of fish. Some of these returning salmon are huge, and the very largest can be well over two feet long. It is an exhilarating sight to see these giant fish use the salmon run or even jump the Tewkesbury Weir at high tide.

The other migrating fish are elvers. These tiny, almost embryonic eels hatch from their eggs in the Sargasso Sea and drift across the Atlantic on the Gulf Stream. No one quite knows how they navigate; (possibly they don't and their journey is entirely serendipitous), but somehow they arrive in the Bristol Channel and make their way up the Severn in their billions. Each elver is a perfectly transparent two inches of eeldom.



Elvers

In my childhood, elver fishermen used to scoop the elvers from the river at night using a large cloth shovel. The next day the elvers would be sold around town in parcels of wet newspaper for pennies. Most elvers survived this treatment, only to be sacrificed at breakfast time when they were fried in bacon fat, and a beaten egg was poured all over to make a sort of omelette containing these tiny white strands looking just like spaghetti.

Tamarlon

However, unlike spaghetti, at the end of each strand were two little black eyes, which made the first forkful somewhat difficult for the squeamish. This fish dish has the most delicate taste imaginable. You won't find elvers anywhere on the menu today, even though they are still caught in large numbers. They are auctioned off at incredible prices, (up to £300 per kilo!) and placed in water in special tanker trucks that speed them to eel farms in Western Europe where they are grown on to adult fish for the smoked eel trade or are sold as a fish delicacy called 'Anguilas'.

The elvers that aren't caught migrate up the Severn and its tributaries to the ponds and streams that their ancestors knew. When they reach maturity, the full moon compels them to leave their surroundings, and journey, even over wet grassland if necessary, such is their urge to migrate. Eventually they reach streams, from them eventually to the Severn, then across the Atlantic back to the Sargasso, where they breed and die.



The Sturgeon

The Severn also has two "Royal" fish. These are species that are so uncommon, and so delectable, at least to mediaeval palates, that if they are caught they must first in theory be offered to the English Monarch.

These fish are the sturgeon, a huge fish that makes the salmon look small, and the lamprey, which attaches itself to other fish as a parasite. I have to



The Lamprey

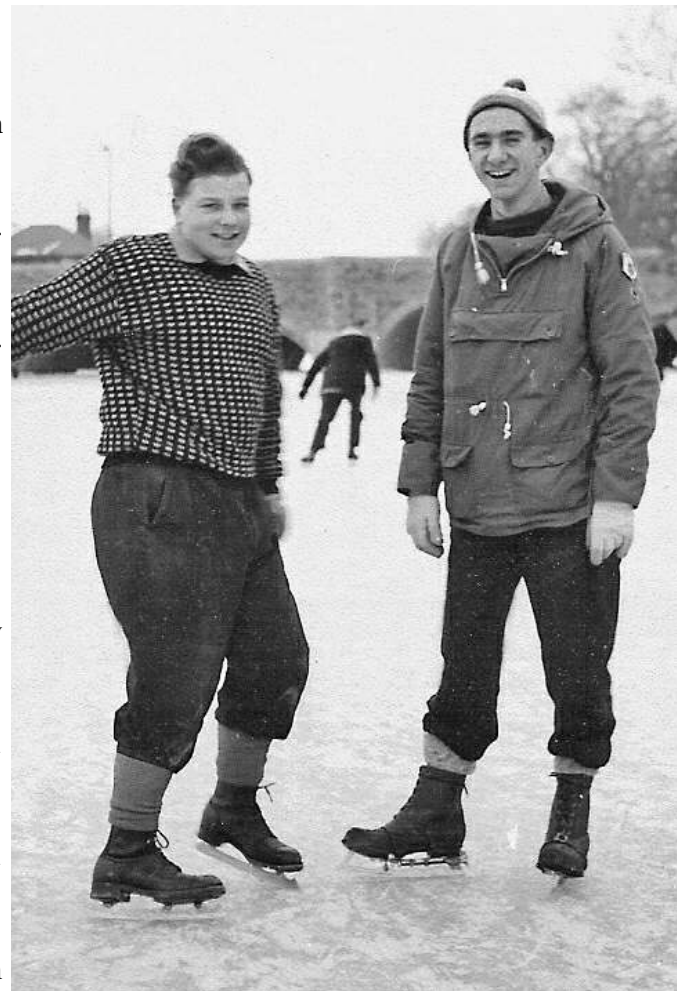
confess that I have never seen a lamprey, and the only sturgeon I have ever seen is the large stuffed one in Worcester City Museum. King John is said to have died from eating a surfeit of lampreys.

The other main river that runs close to Tewkesbury is the Warwickshire Avon or Shakespeare's Avon, to distinguish it from all the other Rivers Avon in England. The name Avon is derived from the Celtic or Welsh word *afon*, pronounced "Ahvon". The

Romans, in turn would have named it something like Avona fluvia, so that by the time the Mercians arrived it would have been called the River Avon.

Incidentally, about three miles upstream from Tewkesbury, there is a beautiful little village called Bredon. Behind Bredon stands an outlier of the Cotswolds called Bredon Hill. Again, because of the waves of settlers, each with their own language, Brae Dun Hill by the River Avon, is in fact, the Hill Hill Hill by the River River!

The Avon is everything the Severn is not. There is no commercial traffic, but the river is usually filled with leisure craft. Low-lying meadows line the banks of this slow moving stream, and fishermen are often to be seen angling for dace, roach, perch and chub. The Avon is a languid river at its busiest while the Severn is an active river at its quietest. Much sailing takes place on both rivers, and has done for over a century. Since their foundations, both the Avon Sailing Club and the Severn Sailing Club have moved



Richard and I in 1963 on the foot thick ice on the Mill Avon. King John's Bridge is in the background

Keith Durn

from their original homes, so that now, the Avon Club sails on the Severn, and the Severn Club on the Avon. Nobody has sought to rename these organisations, I suppose, because, (who knows?), in another hundred years, they may have returned to their original waters.

In the long, hard, winter of 1962/63, the Avon froze over to a considerable depth, making it possible to skate huge distances. One of the Doctors in the town surprised us by arriving on the ice one day with an ice



The Mill Avon

The spoil from the excavation has been used to raise the banks on both sides so that there can be a larger drop in water level at the Abbey Mill

hockey stick and a puck. We joined him the next day in an ad hoc ice hockey match using ordinary terrestrial hockey sticks. The town photographer recorded the scenes for posterity.

When the Benedictine Monastery was founded at Tewkesbury, it flourished so that in only about a century, larger and more reliable sources of food were required, particularly fish (for Friday fasts)

These were grown in large fishponds behind the Abbey, the water coming from the River Swilgate.



The Abbey Mill

Cereals were grown locally, but they could not be easily milled, because the Severn and the Avon were too far away, and the Swilgate was not suitable for a mill, as the river was much too small.

The solution was a stupendous one.

A canalised river was dug out by hand from the River Avon for about



*Some old
buildings
in the town*



a mile to the newly-built Abbey Mill. The mill race had also to be dug with the water reaching the tiny River Swilgate. A weir had to be constructed for the excess water from the Avon to follow its old course to the Severn, and consequently the weir raised the level of the Warwickshire Avon by enough to make it partly navigable. A system of locks and weirs were built on the river in the 19th and 20th Centuries, and the river is now navigable all the way to Stratford.

The River Swilgate is a tiny brook that has its place in English History. It meanders through fields peacefully, and trickles past the Cricket Field and round the back of St.Mary's Abbey, before being joined by the Mill Avon, eventually reaching the Severn at Lower Lode, a mile from the town.

Compared with the mighty Severn, the idyllic Avon, the busy Mill Avon, and the historic Swilgate, the fifth Tewkesbury river is no more than a stream: the Carrant Brook. It is only about ten miles long, but it marked the northern limit of Old Tewkesbury, including the Gloucestershire/Worcestershire county boundary. In summer, it is a babbling delight, but in winter, its flood can disrupt traffic at the White Bear. Its confluence with the Avon used to be the site of Beecham's Boatyard. Beecham's produced large river craft - cabin cruisers, hand crafted from wood. Each vessel with its hull carvel- or clinker-built, was a poem in polished varnished wood, with brass fittings. Now the site is part of Tewkesbury Marina.

It wasn't until I left Tewkesbury at the age of ten that I began to appreciate it for what it undoubtedly is: one of the most historic and picturesque towns in England. It was just a place where I happened to live. An ordinary town with ordinary shops and ordinary schools and unremarkable people, and a very remarkable Church. All I had to compare it with were places where I was taken shopping by my Mum and Gran. Places like Cheltenham where Great Aunt Emily (Nan Cook) lived, and there were lots of parks, cinemas, teashops, and a department store called Cavendish House, or "Cav.", which had a good toy section. Father Christmas lived there just before Christmas every year. On the other hand, Gloucester was a dirty, busy City. It had two railway stations and a Cathedral, and a department store called the Bon Marché (known by the locals as the Bon Marsh or even just the Bon!).

Worcester seemed to consist of lots of bombed or ruined churches, another Cathedral, and my Auntie Blanche, who lived in a delightful Victorian cottage on Perry Hill, with a great view of Worcester's Shrub Hill station. That was my entire world, apart from annual holidays to Ross-on-Wye, or Weston-super-Mare

to see my beloved Aunty Kate. (Why did we always spend our holidays in hyphenated places, I wonder? Did we have social pretensions?)

With the right renovation of both buildings and minds, Tewkesbury could be, and should be, one of the best, and most complete, mediaeval towns in Europe.

So, as I grew up in Tewkesbury, I thought of it as an ordinary town. If you were visiting the town for the first time, you would probably disagree with me. But we Tewkesburians live in a magical place, or at least it could be. We are used to seeing the buildings in High Street and Church Street and Barton Street. They are familiar places. Because of that they are difficult to look at any of the buildings of Tewkesbury, on their own merits. They, and the many more in the town are all of them amazing, and would be noteworthy buildings in many, even most, British towns!

A Tewkesbury lady asked me about the angel and the pelican., shown in the collage on one of the previous pages.

“Where are they?”, she asked.

“You go through that mediaeval carved door whenever you have a dental checkup”, I replied.



Some of these half timbered cottages were brick fronted until they were restored by the National Trust to their original condition

Two of the photos were of panels in the door of Cross House.

I don't know who built Cross House or why. I should imagine it was possibly for some religious reason, because the pelican is a Christian symbol. Mediaeval Christians thought that the female pelican pecked its breast to provide blood for its brood of chicks, presumably representing "Christ's Blood that was given for you" in the Communion Service. There is a pelican in one of the Chapels in the Abbey.

Incidentally, many years ago, the National Trust refurbished some mediaeval shops in Church Street. They removed most of the brick



Front: The restored shops showing the remaining brick front

facades, (which were built there in the early 19th Century to "modernise" the town) to reveal the mediaeval shops behind.

Brick frontages also disguise most of the buildings in Tewkesbury's main streets, hiding the half timbered structures that lie behind them.

Do you know how many buildings in Church Street from the Cross to the "Bell" are four hundred years old or over?

Amazingly, most of them!



Tewkesbury, when I first knew it, was basically just the old town, with almost five thousand people crammed into its fairly chaotic streets and alleys flanked by (in the main) cottages kept spotless by their

occupants. It made me realise that the town, even with the primitive housing available, had not really changed. The population would have been just as diverse centuries ago as it is now. There would have been good people, poor people. People who were ambitious or lazy. All human life has always been there. The town could not expand from its mediaeval size because building could not be undertaken on the flood plains, and so over several centuries the gardens or “burgages” of the houses on the three main streets were filled in with extra housing whose only access was by way of alleys.

There is a suburb with the delightfully imaginative soubriquet of Newtown, which had been built before the Second World War, and which straggled its way along the Ashchurch Road, and there were a few houses on the Gloucester Road. Priors Park was built just after the Second World War, but Oldfield and Mitton were still green fields when I was a boy. I remember tobogganing down the hill towards the Tirl Brook where Oldfield now stands.

By far the best way to approach Tewkesbury, in those far off days, was by road from Worcester. As you descended the Mythe Hill, there was the town a mile away across the meadows with its low roof line totally dominated by the high nave roof of the Abbey, and higher still that glorious square Abbey tower, which has been there for almost nine hundred years. As you travelled the last half-mile towards the town, you traversed the floodplain by the “Long Bridge”, (now a causeway), built at the command of King John,



The view of the Abbey from the Worcester Road only a few days before the 2007 floods.



The Original King John's Bridge was built in the 13th Century and has been rebuilt several times since. The present bridge was renovated in about 1960



before crossing the Avon and the Mill Avon by King John's Bridge. The Black Bear is on the right, supposedly the oldest pub in Gloucestershire, dating back to the fourteenth century. A sharp right turn here takes you into the top of High Street. Here is a wide thoroughfare with some fine brick houses, and the Sabrina Cinema was set back from the road. Some railway lines crossed at Quay Street so that there was access to Healings Mill and the Town Quay for the rail vans to take out the flour. The grain was brought to the mill by barge up the Severn from Gloucester or Sharpness.



Tewkesbury High Street

Further down the High Street were the shops and pubs of Tewkesbury, most buildings being several centuries old. The Swan Hotel, Inn and Tavern, a large coaching inn, was on the right-hand side. It had a canopy

with a life-size replica swan on top. It is said that the swan disappeared during the Second World War. A young Tewkesbury soldier is reputed to have taken it with him through the steamy jungles of Burma. I'd like that to be true, but I suspect it's probably just a story. The Swan was a special place as it had a ballroom, and consequently was one of the social centres for the town.

Swan dances could be legendary.

So was the man that initially named it.

At the bottom of High Street is the junction with the two other principal thoroughfares of the town, Church Street and Barton Street, and it's where the Cross is situated. Now it is a roundabout connecting two busy routes and with the town's war memorial situated there. On exactly the same spot, British history was changed fundamentally forever where there is now a dirty roundabout in



The surprise view at Holm Pitch



*Through the Centuries in St Mary's Lane:
The 12th Century Abbey of Saint Mary,
The 15th Century Monastery Shops
The 16th Century House on the corner
The 19th Century Stocking Factory*



“A plain, flat and featureless, save one great tower,

And that’s all you see until you look lower”

Tewkesbury and the Vale from Cleeve Cloud

the centre of the town. This was where the Wars of the Roses were in effect won by the Yorkists, and England settled into relative peace under Edward IV and Richard III.

As far as I can recall, there is not even a plaque to commemorate this spine tingling event.

Then there is the surprise view that you get as you descend Holm Pitch. You go down the Gloucester Road, and the first view of the Abbey is not until you reach the bridge across the Swilgate. When you see the Abbey for the first time, you are within eight hundred metres of the building. If you didn't know the



Abbey was there, or probably even if you did know, it is amazing how such a huge building can be totally obscured until just before you reach it.

There is one more feature of Tewkesbury that must be mentioned.

The Rivers Severn, Avon, Mill Avon and Swilgate bound a very large flat field called the Severn Ham, or just The Ham. It floods every year, so there is no chance of building houses.

From Mediaeval times, the grass has been cut, dried and baled into hay.

The bales used to be made into ricks to form a “hay city”. The hay was auctioned off and the money from the sale is shared amongst the householders of the three main streets.

The stubble used to be allowed to grow into a second crop called the “Aftermath” and was then sold, but now I think they run sheep on it.

Essay 4

Is there anybody here from Tewkesbury?

I've been interested in Family History for over forty years, in the days before these computer programs were marketed that can tell you who your cousins were, but not whether you'd want to know them or not. Back in the nineteen-seventies., if you wanted family information, it was necessary to check the Indexes in St Catherine's House in London. When you found what you thought you were looking for, you ordered and paid for, the relevant certificate which was posted to you.

I knew that my Sidebotham relations (my father's side; nothing to do with Tewkesbury) came from Derbyshire, so that when I came across a likely candidate from West Derby, I ordered the Certificate. A week later it arrived. Unfortunately, West Derby is in Liverpool. This sort of thing used to be a fairly common occurrence, a sort of financial collateral damage inflicted on genealogists by themselves.

The Births and Marriages were the two busiest rooms in St Catherine's House. It isn't totally true, but it seemed that they were full of Australians and New Zealanders chasing Captain Cook; Canadians looking for George Vancouver, and Americans looking for anyone provided they were Dissenting Protestants from New England in the Seventeenth Century.

Personally, I preferred to cross Southampton Row and go into the Deaths. It was a tranquil place, a place for reflection, of day dreams, even '*sweet*' dreams of people from your own family, ancestors who were long dead. One of the things I reflected on was where did I come from? I don't mean biologically, or even where I first saw the light of day, but what factors in my ancestors' lives had resulted in my being a Tewkesburian?

Well, my Dad wasn't a local. Samuel Sidebotham was ordered to come to Tewkesbury by the Royal Air Force as a Corporal Electrician at RAF 238 MU Lower Lode. He was originally from Manchester, and he was only in town (he thought) for the rest of that social mixer, known as the Second World War. So the factor which brought him to Tewkesbury, was the construction of RAF boats at Bathursts boat yard.

What about my Mum? She was a Tewkesbury woman called Kath Waylen. The Waylens had been in Tewkesbury for years. Actually, not that many years. Her grandfather, who lived in the Oldbury in Laurel Cottages, was Edwin Wayling from near Marlborough in Wiltshire. Waylen, Wayling, Wailing. Poor illiterate

baptised, married or buried. The Vicar hearing their names and having to make a best guess as to the correct spelling. The inability of the participants to check their names in the registers. Indeed, if a name is totally oral, does it even have a correct spelling? Altogether I've found about seven variations of the Waylen surname, and as I've indicated, the continuity of any particular variation has more to do with the vicar's hearing ability than the genealogy of any particular branch of the family.

Edwin Wayling was an agricultural worker with a love of horses. He came north to become a coachman to a Mr. Gore of Overbury, who owned a school. One day, possibly without permission, he married Edmund Gore's grand daughter, Emily Teale, and he became an ostler at the King's Head, which was then a coaching inn.

Gran was born Florence Beesley, and there are about twelve variations to that name: everything from Beasley to Bezeley. Her father was a blacksmith for Walkers, at their Tewkesbury fairground roundabout factory. His father James was an engine driver for the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway, but before that he operated a stationary steam engine probably in a stocking factory. His family were frame knitters, but one of his ancestors came from Banbury, and may have made Banbury cakes, (Beeselys hold the recipe!) while another ancestor's wife, Mary Bruce, came from a silk ribbon maker's family in Coventry and they were married in Warwick, which is on the Avon.

Gran's mother, Ann Griffin, came from a family that resolutely resided in Withington in the Cotswolds and nowhere else, because they were agricultural workers with no transport, and thus generation after generation lived, loved and died in the same place up in the Cotswolds since records began, and perhaps even longer than that.

A Banbury man and a Coventry girl meeting in Warwick, maybe moving by canal and then coming down the Avon to Tewkesbury, both with textile skills; a Wiltshire man driving a coach for his grandfather-in-law because of his love for horses. James Beesley's wife, Harriet Wood, also in textiles was born in Stourport, so she must have travelled down the Severn to Tewkesbury

Tewkesbury was a hub of communication and people came to live in the town from several counties away, provided they had lived near a navigable river like the Severn or to a lesser extent, the Avon. This was particularly true after the Eighteenth Century when the turnpike roads were built, and the Mythe Bridge and Haw Bridge were constructed across the Severn, making it easier to travel to the west of the river. Before then, most people stayed in the area of their birth, so that they stayed in the town and surrounds. As visitors to Tewkesbury know, there are lots of alleys that leave the main streets so that houses could be built in the

gardens of the houses on the main street. The alleys were often named after the owner of the house in the main street. I have a Chandler and a Yarnall in my family tree, and so I am, presumably, related to a Court and an Alley. This is the story of Tewkesbury. We may all know we are Tewkesburians, but we come from all over the place. Tewkesbury had a main road which went south to Gloucester via Lower Lode Lane and the Severn river bank. The road via Gupshill Manor and Coombe Hill was very unimportant, if indeed there was a through route there at all. In mediaeval times, Cheltenham was a small village and was not on a main road. The main road north to Worcester had to cross the River Avon by King John's Bridge, following the banks of the Severn, and the next bridge to cross the Severn upstream was not until you reached Upton. If you were heading west, there was sometimes a ford at Lower Lode on the road to Ledbury and Hereford, but it was unreliable, depending on the amount of water coming down the Severn and the state of the tide. If you wanted to travel east to London you went via Stow-on-the-Wold and Oxford.

In the late 18th Century, toll roads (turnpikes) were developed and several turnpike houses are still to be seen in the Tewkesbury area. Thomas Telford built the beautiful Mythe Bridge which was opened in April 1826 after only three years for planning and construction. Telford himself wrote that ***"I reckon this to be the most handsomest bridge built under my direction"*** With a single 172 foot span leaping the Severn, one has to concur.

And yet . . . The bridge is no more than a mile out of Tewkesbury, but I doubt if more than ten visitors stop to look at the bridge in a day. This is mainly because there is no transport. If you travel in a car, there is nowhere to park. It should be on the route of a free hop on hop off minibus, and one has to ask the question, "Why is it not?"

Essay 5

The Story of 7 Chance Street

MY VERY FIRST HOME, from March 1946 until May 1948 was this house in Chance Street. I decided to look at the history of the building, and the people who lived there before us.

In 1946, Number Seven was in a very similar condition to when it was first built as an artisan's house sometime between 1840 and 1850. It would appear to have been built possibly by a speculative builder, as there was not only Chance Street, but also Providence Row, and at one time Speculation Place! It was a simple, unpretentious house, but it was one step above some of the houses that were being built at the time. The clue is in the bond and colour of the bricks.

The bricks are in rat trap bond. Alternate bricks are rowlocks (whole bricks, but look as though they are half bricks), and shiners (the whole bricks). They are laid like that next to a parallel wall, so that the rowlocks

tie both walls together leaving a small cavity. This substantially reduces dampness and increases heat insulation. If the rowlocks and shiners are different coloured bricks, interesting patterns can be devised

The house was part of a terrace, each house of which had a front door and a front sash window at ground level. Inside was the Front Room, which deserved capital letters, because it was extremely important and only used at Christmas, or when there were visitors. Behind this was the kitchen, and to one side and



7 Chance Street

boarded in, were the stairs to the first floor. Here there was a front bedroom and a landing from which there was a much smaller back bedroom. At the end of the landing (no windows or lights, so it was pitch black), was another staircase which took one up into the attic which was quite large and occupied the whole floor area of the house.

Nothing of the early history of the house is known until the 1871 Census revealed that the young family then in residence was the Posnetts. Thomas Posnett had been born in Leicester in 1843 and had learned to be a riveter in the shoe trade. At that time, Tewkesbury and many other small towns were places where lots of trades were practised.

What brought Thomas to Tewkesbury can only be speculation, but it may have been because he had a shop. His wife, Emma, was a local Tewkesbury-born woman of the same age as her husband who worked as a shoe fitter. Their daughter, Grace, had been born in Worcester. Her age is given by the census as being one, but it also says that she was a scholar! There is a likely transcription error here, and probably instead of being 1, she was actually 7. This would also suggest that she had been born when her parents were both twenty-one. Perhaps they had met and married in Worcester, had had Grace, and then had come to live in Tewkesbury to be close to the rest of Emma's family.

By 1881, ten years later, the Posnetts had moved on, and the Keen family had moved in.

The Keens had also moved to Tewkesbury. Henry had been born at Upton-cum-Chalvey in 1856 and had taken up the trade of Painter and Decorator. His wife, another Emma, was five years older than her husband, and she had been born in Tenbury on the Worcestershire – Shropshire border.

They had a new baby named Ellen who was almost certainly born in the front bedroom of the house. The back bedroom was occupied by a twenty-one-year-old boarder.

Isaac Stagg came from Chipping Sodbury near Bristol. He joined the Midland Railway which at some stage transferred him to Tewkesbury as a Railway Clerk. He was only four years younger than Henry Keen, but he was not married. The "Midland" had thousands of employees, and station staff in particular were often moved from place to place.

Although no record of an owner's name occurs in the records of this date, it may be assumed by the relative frequency of the change of families and by their occupations, that the house was regularly rented out to tenants.

The tenant's name is given as William Mellor and his family, who paid £11-4s-0d per annum in rent.

In 1891, the Price family had taken over the house. No less than six people lived there at that time. There was John Price, his wife Annie, her younger brother George Barnfield, and three sons, Archibald, Henry and Sidney. John Price was born in London in 1847. He would have been a small boy when the Crystal Palace was built and during the Crimean War. His wife, who was considerably younger, being aged just 28, had been born Annie Barnfield in Tirley, which is a small village a few miles downstream from Tewkesbury on the River Severn.

The eldest son, Archibald, was eleven – only seventeen years younger than Annie. Although he was born in Tewkesbury, it would be a reasonable hypothesis to suggest that John had been married before and that Archibald was the son from his first marriage. His mother died, so that John, the widower, married Annie and had two young sons, Henry aged four and Sidney aged two. They both might have been born in Number Seven. By 1891, Archibald, Henry and Sidney would have been old enough to sleep in the attic. John Price was a maltster by trade. (The malthouse was still in business in the early 1950s, before being turned into an electrical factory and later still into a residential block of flats. The building still exists and is virtually unchanged externally.) It is only just around the corner from Chance Street. George Barnfield also worked there as a labourer, so it would be eminently sensible for him to board with his sister and brother-in-law. It is possible, although highly conjectural, that he may even have introduced his sister to her future husband.

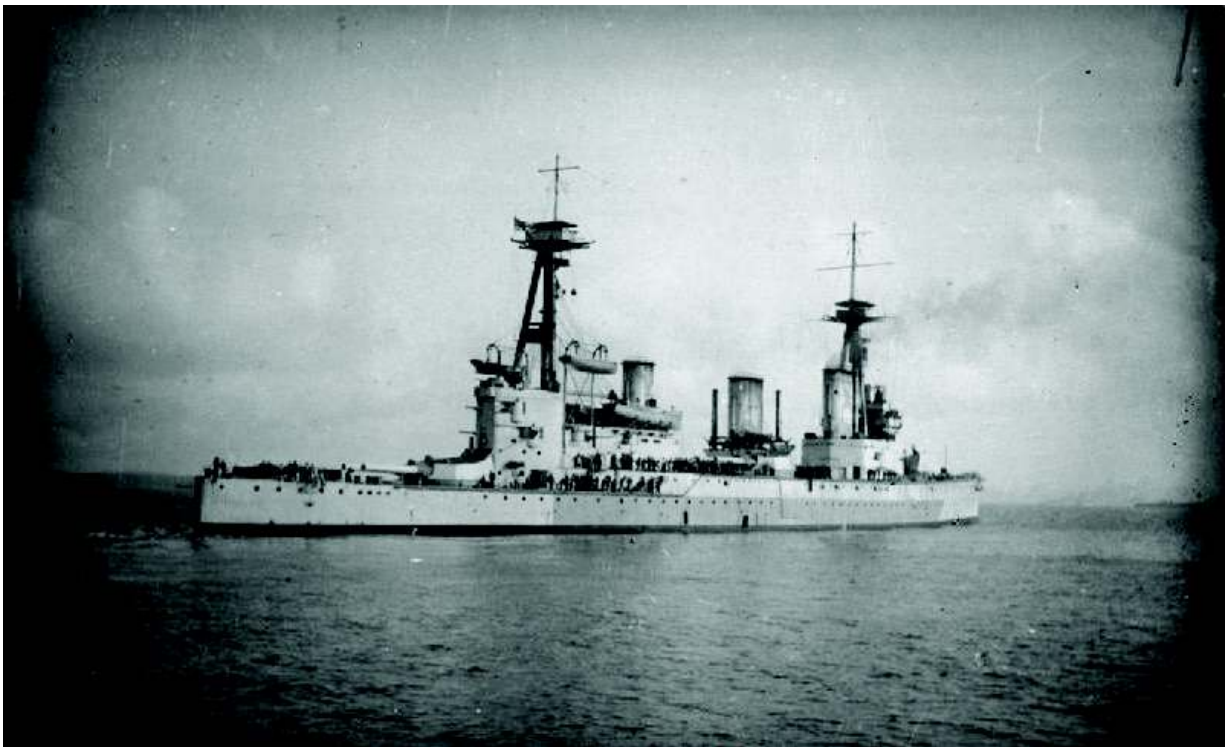
John Price had only four more years to live and died at the age of forty-nine. His youngest son, Sidney, would have been only six at that time.

Here it is interesting to digress from the history of the house for a while to talk about the life of Sidney Price. For many years, Sydney Heard Price, to quote his full name, lived in relative obscurity and at some stage went to London where he lived in Victoria Street in the parish of St. Paul's in the City.

Born in 1889, he would have been twenty-five at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Joining the Royal Navy as a Rating, he soon became an Able Seaman on *HMS Indefatigable*, which was a battlecruiser based at Plymouth. Battlecruisers had the firepower of a battleship, but in order to give them faster speeds and more manoeuvrability, they did not have the same huge weight of armour that gave battleships their relative impregnability.

In May 1916, *HMS Indefatigable* was in the North Sea in the Home Fleet commanded by Admirals Jellicoe and Beatty. The night of the 30th May was very foggy, and this persisted until mid-morning the next day. As the fog cleared, the Home Fleet found that it was within close range of the German Grand Fleet off the coast of Jutland. The ensuing battle was a decisive turning point in the War. Both sides claimed victory. The British claimed to have sunk more ships than the Germans did, but the British loss of life was much greater than the number of German casualties. Nevertheless, once the German Grand Fleet reached home waters, it never again ventured out on to the high seas for the rest of the war.

Jutland was a battle that exposed the weaknesses of the battlecruisers, each of which had a complement of over 1000 men. *HMS Queen Mary* received one hit amidships in the magazine and she sank in just ninety seconds taking most of the crew with her.



HMS Indefatigable, just before the Battle of Jutland 1916

Imperial War Museum

The German battlecruiser *Von der Tann* fired a salvo at the *Indefatigable*. As with the *Queen Mary*, shells hit the relatively unprotected magazine causing the *Indefatigable* to explode and sink. Of the ship's company of 1019, only two survived. Most of the dead were never found. Sidney Price was one of those unfortunates. He is remembered today with his shipmates on the Naval Memorial situated on Plymouth Hoe, dedicated to the thousands of sailors who knew Plymouth as their home port, and who were lost without trace at sea.

Ten years later, in 1901, yet another family occupied Number Seven. Once again the tenants were from out of town.

Tom Cartwright, born in 1875 in Kempston, Bedfordshire, was promoted by his employers, the Midland Railway, to the position of Railway Sub-Inspector. As was normal, the Midland sent him to a different part of its huge system. This was not a general policy of the railway, but at that time promotion in one place was a question of "dead men's shoes". Promotion went to the most senior person qualified to do the job. Young people almost always had to move elsewhere to take up more senior posts.



Plymouth Naval Memorial

Peter Francis

He brought with him his wife, Lydia, who was one year his junior. She had been born in Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, a town which was also served by the Midland Railway. Thus it would appear that young Tom had first moved from Bedford to Melton Mowbray, where he met and married Lydia, and then they both moved on to Tewkesbury. We get quite a detailed picture of the house in 1913, not long before there was a change of ownership from Ellen B. Morgan to Henry Westfield for £150. The house was advertised and the house details are given as:

“56 Sq.yds. Brick And Tile.

2nd Floor: 1 Bedroom.

1st Floor: 2 Bedrooms.

Ground Floor: Kitchen, Back Kitchen.

Outside: 1 Wash House and W. C.

Fair Repair.”

We know little about Mr. Westfield, but we do know that Ellen Morgan was the daughter of John Morgan, the then Head of Tewkesbury Grammar School. At the same time Fred Cook and his wife Emily were tenants of 5, Chance Street, which was at that time a baker’s shop. Emily was the elder sister of my grandmother, so this is a good place here to start to tell her story.



North East Terrace

The Birthplace of Florence Beesley 1892

Florence Ann Beesley was born just around the corner from Chance Street at North East Terrace in June 1892.

When she was in her teens, she became a housemaid.

She eventually went to London where she was a parlour maid to a doctor in Wimpole Street. She had followed her “Beau”, another Tewkesburian, called Edwin Bertie Waylen. When he left school he was apprenticed as a printer with North’s of Tewkesbury. (I still have two of the books that he printed.) He had obtained a job in Fleet Street working for a national “Daily” as a hot-metal compositor.



In 1913, they were married at All Souls, Langham Place, which is just north of Regent Street, where Broadcasting

Florence Beesley, my sole grandparent, aged about eighteen, went to London as a maid in the early Twentieth Century



Mill Bank

House was later built. They moved into a terraced house in Kilburn. It was not long before Florence gave birth to twins: my mother, Kathleen, and her brother, my Uncle John. A few year's later, certainly by 1920, the family had moved back to Tewkesbury and taken up residence next-door-but-one to my Great-aunt Emily and Great-uncle Fred who lived over the shop at number five. Here they lived uneventfully for many years while the twins grew up.

John later went on to British Railways (as it had become) at Cheltenham (Lansdown) station., after which he spent the rest of his working life at Dowty Seals.



Tewkesbury Abbey from the Vineyards

Essay 6

Life at Number Seven

ONE WOULD SAY THAT no-one who lived at Number Seven would ever call it a spacious house. There was a double bedroom at the front, a single bedroom at the back, and an attic. Into that small space lived my grandfather, grandmother, mother and uncle until January 1940, when Edwin Bertie died. By this time his son, John, had joined up with the Army, he had seen service in France on D-Day, and ended up in Belgium. At the end of 1944, my father and mother were married, and they were living in the single bedroom. I was “thought of” as they used to say, in June 1945 and the soldiers started to come home.

“What shall we do with my son John?” I can imagine my Gran say. The Army very considerably solved that problem for her. Instead of demobbing my uncle with most of the other soldiers at the end of the War, he was sent out to Deolali in India for an extra two years until India’s and Pakistan’s Independence in 1947.

In 1944, Kathleen was married to my father, Samuel, who had been born in Manchester in 1916. Owing to the housing shortage at that time, they, (and by that time, I,) also lived in the house until we moved to Priors Park, in 1948.

The house had not changed much since it had been built. Electricity was only installed in the 1930s, and up to that time the house had been lit by gas. Even so, I well remember an oil lamp in the attic, and candlesticks which were occasionally used in power blackouts. The back room was fitted with a cooking range which by the Thirties was only used for boiling kettles. At that date, a lean-to kitchen with a gas stove was built next to the back door. There was no water laid on in the house. There was a single cold tap in the wash house, from where all the water had to be obtained for four houses.

I can still smell that wash house across the brick paved back yard. It smelled of clean clothes and kindling and bicycles. A copper, used for boiling clothes, was in one corner of the wash house and next to it was a tea chest full of kindling. An old fashioned mangle was next to the back wall, and opposite the copper were some bicycles.



The block of four flush toilets was discreetly placed in its own short alley. There was no electric light, so a night call necessitated taking a torch with you! If the battery was partly used up, the dim light used to shine an eerie yellow on the whitewashed walls.



The backs of the houses overlooking the yard were bright and cheerful with boxes of scarlet geraniums on the windowsills. I noticed when I paid a nostalgic visit to the house in 2005 that the tradition of having lots of flowers continues to be upheld.

I walked down the echoing back alley which was also lime whitewashed and turned left past the door in the wall, just beyond the old bread ovens. I could still smell the warm loaves in my mind. I walked past the toilets and into the familiar back yard, where I had had some of my earliest memories:



I remember lying in dappled shadow, and I can only think that I was lying in my pram, with the sunshade on, and not the hood, so it was probably summertime in 1946 or 1947. I have a vague memory of my mother's bottle green dress. That's all I remember, I suppose of that time, but then I was only a few months old. I



also remember my first teddy bear. He was white and I called him “Brumas”, but actually that’s not really a ‘memory’, because Brumas is in the room where I’m typing this. We have been together, travelling the world, for seventy-two years.

The back yard was a riot of colour. Number seven was still home to pots of pelargoniums as it had been for over a century. After my grandmother and Uncle John moved out of the house in the early Sixties we had no further contact with it, although we used to go past it quite frequently. It became quite dilapidated, but then in the late Seventies it was transformed. The house was

rewired, plumbing fitted, and a new kitchen was built on the site of the old corrugated iron shed. The roof was replaced, and the house was modernised.

I had been invited in for a coffee, and I found it to be a small but very comfortable house with central heating. It seemed somehow almost irreverent to be drinking just a morning coffee in the front room.

As I sat in an armchair drinking the coffee in the carpeted front room, I could see only my grandmother’s Victorian furniture. The sideboard, the ottoman, the table under the window with a goldfish swimming around in its bowl, the wall paper, the greyish-green patterned moquette furnishings, the fireplace which never had a fire in it – they were still all there, even though they were only in my mind. It was in this room that I had my first couple of birthdays. It was here that I got my metal siren top for Christmas, and it was to this room that I always went on a Saturday for my tea after I had been trainspotting at Ashchurch.

I used to sit and have my tea in front of the television in that room. One afternoon in November 1963, after the News had overrun because of the Assassination of President Kennedy, there was Episode One of a particularly silly Sci Fi programme which involved a strangely dressed man being joined by a couple of schoolteachers, who took refuge in one of those old blue police telephone boxes that you used to see everywhere. Then the police box (which was much bigger inside than outside!) took off.

I hoped it would improve quickly. Those Daleks were clearly made of cardboard.

Exterminate!

I bet to myself that it would be Dr Who who would do that by Episode Six, and that was well over fifty years ago.

Another of my earliest memories - this one being from May 1948 - is of being in the front room of 7 Chance Street with my mother, and crying because I had just seen my blue-painted cot carried out of the front door by my father. I did not know then that we were just about to move into a new house.

Outside the house was an old Bedford truck, the sort that used to have a tow bar across the front of the radiator, like an old Army lorry. In the driver's seat was Bill Davenport who was the son of our next-door neighbours in Chance Street. He drove the truck for the Cotteswold Dairy. On this occasion, though, he was driving it for my Dad, taking all our belongings to our new house. Someone can possibly verify this for me (after all I was only two at the time) but I seem to remember that Bill had a very luxuriant moustache. Could that be so? Might that be correct, or is it just my imagination?



Essay 7

The Prefab

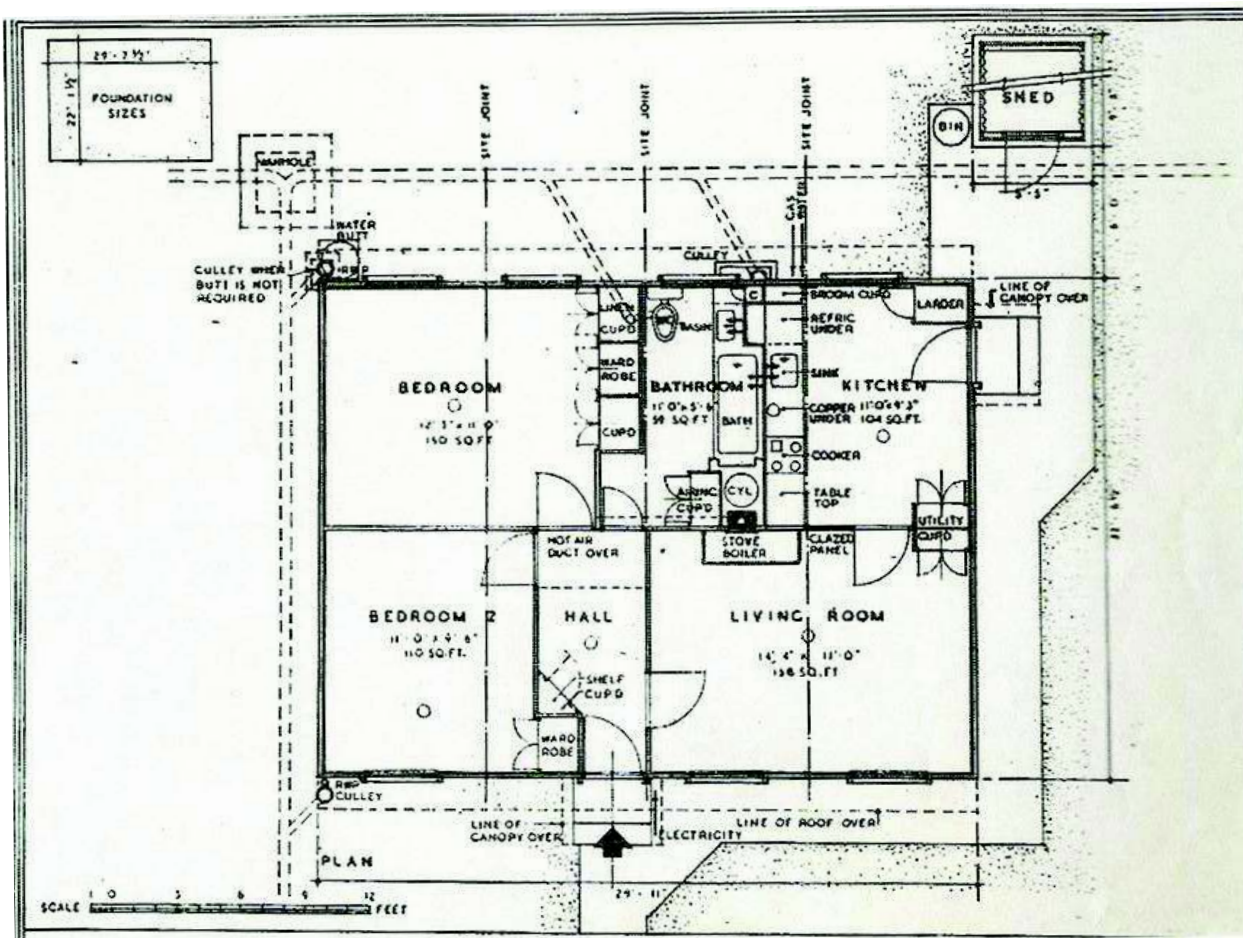
TOWARDS THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR in May 1945, factories in the U.K. were manufacturing several hundred aircraft per year. The materials were ordered, the manpower was already recruited; the assembly lines were being used. You can't just stop a juggernaut like that. The Rover Company of Solihull which made luxury cars, could not get the rationed steel needed to build them, but they could get lots of aluminium alloy sheet from the closing aircraft assembly lines; and with a minimum of body forming the first Land Rover was produced, starting a series of vehicles that are still being made to this day.

Another aircraft factory, Boulton Paul, made farm buildings. A consortium of aircraft manufacturers called Airoh designed and manufactured the Airoh prefabricated house. For all time, this will be known as the "Prefab". The Airoh was a groundbreaking design in several ways. The structure was virtually all aluminium; each one came by lorry in just four pieces, which included everything, even the curtains; and each one could be assembled in just four hours.



Airoh Prefab, St Fagans

Photo Dave Snowden



The Prefabs were “cold in winter and hot in summer” They were designed to last ten years. Some were still being inhabited in 2010, having survived almost sixty years of use. Bombed out families, homes that had two families in them, returned servicemen, meant that a lot of the baby boomer generation first saw the light of day in Prefabs. On entering one for the first time it was like “going into a spaceship” according to Neil Kinnock’s parents, and they weren’t wrong when you consider the conditions that people had lived in during the previous decade, when many children were better nourished under the rationing schemes than they had been in the Thirties.

This is what I wrote about them when I was about twenty and closer to “living the experience”.

“Our new home was a factory-built prefabricated house similar to thousands being assembled in all parts of the land to accommodate the huge demand in housing after the end of the Second World War. There was a housing shortage due to war damage and more people than ever before wanted homes – the ex-servicemen with their wives and babies. Such a lot of babies! We didn’t know it then, but our generation which started with the Baby Boom became known as Baby Boomers, and we still are.

Our “prefab” was very modern, with its careful design . . . it was light years away from the sort of houses where so many of us had lived in conditions that had not changed that much since mediaeval times.”

The house was detached. Our garden was particularly big because our prefab occupied the corner block between Queens Road and Warwick Place. By the side of the house there was a toolshed and a coal bunker.

When I woke up on a winter's morning, there was often frost on the inside of the windows. There were wonderful leaf patterns of ice, and if you breathed gently, your warm breath would melt the ice, and water would trickle down the window pane. Often, my mum would put my clothes on my bed so that they would warm me IN bed, and then I would have warm clothes to wear when I had to get out. We had a solid fuelled back boiler in the sitting room. We also had a Valor Heater which I think we put in the hall. It was a grey paraffin stove. It was warmer than the surroundings, but that's not saying a lot!

The house itself had a coal fire (enclosed with fire doors) attached to a back boiler which was right in the middle of the house. On one side of the fire was the room fitted out as a kitchen. It was very modern. It was inside the house, not in a shed like Gran had; and there was no obvious fireside in the room, but there was lots of preparation space, a hot tap and a cold tap, *and* a gas fridge. Through the door was the sitting room, which was the main room and was used regularly. This was where the fire was. Through the door opposite was the hall, with the front door on the left and the other two bedrooms and the bathroom at the end, fed by a hot pipe that passed through an airing cupboard.

There were two hot taps and two cold taps serving a wash basin and a bath. There was also an indoor toilet. I had the front bedroom, and my parents had the back bedroom. I was not allowed into the back bedroom without permission.

(When I was clearing out my mother's bedroom in a different house, fifty years later, I still felt uneasy being in her bedroom, even though she had not lived there for six months or so, and had passed away a few days earlier!)

* * *

Isn't it amazing that as late as 1948, many working people thought that hot taps, a fitted bath, an indoor flush lavatory, and a fridge, should be thought of as luxuries and not necessities?

We didn't have a car until 1949. It was a 1936 Ford 10, JB 9112, and it cost Dad £200.

We got our first television in 1956, a radiogram in 1956 as well, and also in 1956 a garage next to the house. In 1958, using the television as the left channel and a VHF radio for the right channel we experienced Stereo for the very first time. "Telstar" brought experimental transatlantic broadcasting in 1962. About then I bought my first transistor radio, and had my very first Indian meal, a biryani, in the Indian restaurant in Cheltenham churchyard. In 1967 I received a telephone call at work in Cheltenham from Australia. This was so unusual that several colleagues clustered round my desk during the call. It wasn't until my wife and I bought our first house in 1975 that we had central heating. In 1972 I used a portable computer at work. It was mounted on a horse trailer and had a wire wound memory of 75 Kbytes. That's right! Kilobytes! My first domestic computer was a Sinclair ZX80 in 1980, and my first "proper" computer, which had a hard disk (of 150 Megabytes) arrived in 1991.

About three years ago I bought a "smart phone" This is technology too far. Perhaps it's a sign of me getting old, but am I too much of a dinosaur if I don't use my phone to find a restaurant, or see a film, or check on the weather?

Are we in danger of having a lot of information, but no real understanding of where it comes from? Are we losing contact with reality, an eye on the screen instead of a view out of the window? Also, if we can get information from elsewhere, what information can people elsewhere get on us? Is it sensible to conduct financial dealings on-line? Coins and notes can be stolen, but it is more difficult to steal them physically from a bank.

But one thing worries me more than anything else

In a few, a very few, years, how can we check what is real anymore? Will we check the weather on a screen instead of looking out of the window?

Essay 8

Playing in the Prefab

FOR CHRISTMAS, SANTA BROUGHT ME a tin plate spinning top with a siren. The kitchen floor was covered in linoleum (lino). I suppose the nearest modern floor covering similar to lino would be vinyl flooring, except that vinyl hadn't been invented then. It was washable and ours had a wood block pattern. The kitchen table was made of black-painted wood of some description and it had a cutlery drawer. There was coconut matting on part of the floor near the back door. When I was small, one



Dressed up in my dungarees and playing in the front room at Christmas 1948, with my spinning top which emitted an air raid siren wail

of my favourite places to play on wet days was under that table. I don't remember having building blocks, but my mother had quite a lot of metal canary pudding tins. These were conical with flat bottoms, so that they could be used to make small castles and anything else which I could imagine. At one end of the kitchen was a small box which was my "toy cupboard". Inside it were all sorts of things, including quite a few Dinky Toys.

My godmother, Aunty Kate, lived in Ross-on-Wye, and every time we visited her, we made a pilgrimage to the nearest toyshop where I was allowed to select a new Dinky Toy. I had quite a few cars, but my favourites were three large eight-wheel trucks. I also had a primitive elevator with which I used to fill the

trucks with some of my mum's green dried lentils. They made an ideal load, although they did get scattered across the floor to provide a trap for the unwary. To avoid too many accidents, my Mum insisted that I keep all the lentils up together, so for part of the time I was hunting these hard little green bullets all over the floor.

I also had some wind-up tinplate toys. One of them was a blue car which ran along the kitchen table, but when it came to the edge, a fifth wheel came into play so that it turned around. That way, it never fell off the table. Another large toy was "John Cobb's Car". This was a silver monster that looked more like an aeroplane without wings than a car. (I saw the real thing many years later at Beaulieu Motor Museum. It was the Napier-Railton Special in which John Cobb broke the land speed record).

As I got older, I had a Hornby "0" gauge clockwork train with quite a few goods wagons. I never got any passenger coaches. One isolated memory I do have was going to Haywards in the High Street in early December, I suppose. In the window they always had a "00" gauge Hornby-Dublo electric train layout



with an express passenger train, which I coveted, going round and round. After looking in the window for a bit, Dad took me inside where it smelled that wonderful ironmongery smell of hairy string and methylated spirits and bags of garden fertiliser. He said something to an assistant, who removed two slim dark red boxes from the large choice stacked on the shelf. These were points for my Hornby train. One was a left-hand point and the other a right-hand one. When we got them home, Dad said a strange thing. "You can't

have them now. They're a Christmas present, and I've got to post them off to Father Christmas." Although at that time I believed in Santa Claus, I remember being puzzled as to why Dad would go to the trouble of sending these points to the North Pole, when Father Christmas would have to bring them all the way back again. As if he hadn't got enough to do on Christmas Eve!

Another wonderful present that I didn't appreciate at the time was some "Man's Lego". It came in a two drawer red box and was Meccano Set number Six. I had always wanted Meccano Set number Seven



because that came with a clockwork motor and some gears. All it would have taken to get it would have been to have bought the relatively inexpensive Accessory Set number 6A. But in truth I played around with Set number Six. I never made a whole project out of the catalogue. I realise now that Dad must have been so sad and frustrated with my ham fisted efforts that eventually he built me a low loader articulated truck with proper mechanical steering. I played with it for a couple of weeks and then dismantled it, and then carried on as I had done before, just bolting up pieces of angle iron and making . . . Nothing.

I'm getting a bit astray with my chronology here, but I'll mention my toys and get them out of the way, before returning to the "march of time"

I had three means of “personal transport” in those days. My pedal car was very special and I have never seen another one like it. It was an American Army “Jeep” complete with a removable jerry can on the back.



I also had a scooter. My first one was home built from welded steel gas pipe. I don't know who made it, but my, it was heavy! It was painted blue, but to be honest it was much too heavy to play with a lot. Its successor was a Mobo scooter which was red with yellow wheels. It also had a footbrake which you operated with one of your heels. But I didn't get that until my eighth birthday.



This used to be my preferred mode of transport to go to and from school. Finally, I had the inevitable pair of roller skates. It was a time when there were still lots of metal-wheeled skates around which were very noisy. My skates were some of the first with rubber wheels and ball bearings.

They were quieter and more comfortable than those with metal wheels and they had better traction, too. Unfortunately this had a downside.

One of the problems with all skates was what occurred if you happened to run over a sizable

A Mobo Scooter. Nick had one as well, and we always went to school and back on them.

piece of grit. The metal-wheeled skates used to slide to a halt, but if you had rubber wheels, woe betide you! The wheels used to lock, and being rubber, the skate used to stop suddenly, thus flinging the wearer forward into a (usually painful) fall. In those days, knee and elbow protection was unheard of, and the only helmets were worn by motor bike riders. Even had they been available, I don't think we would have wanted to wear such “sissy” things! Many of us seemed to go round with permanent scabs on our knees. Bad scabs were often blue where they had been painted with something called “Gentian Violet”. A really large patch of blue was a badge of honour!

Essay 9

Our garden



WE HAD LOTS OF SNAPDRAGONS AND MARIGOLDS and dahlias along the borders, purple pansies, lupins and large red poppies. Elsewhere there were roses and a small lawn. And I think, sweet peas, whose flowers were so fragrant. One thing we didn't have, that many of our neighbours did, was a boundary hedge. We had a primitive post and wire fence which dated back to when the house was first built, and a gate that didn't close without a good shove. My father had made the most of our corner plot, and he grew vegetables. He grew runner beans, french and dwarf beans, broad beans, potatoes (two varieties, Arran Pilot and King Edward, I think), peas, sprouts, cabbage, curly kale, purple sprouting, brussels sprouts, carrots in rows, rhubarb in the corner, tomatoes. There was a water butt, but Dad had filled it with liquid fertiliser which smelled terrible. One year, Dad tried a new variety of runner bean. It was large and tasty, so he let two or three beans grow on to see if they got stringy with age. It was then that he had his Wonderful Idea.

He allowed two of them to grow to their maximum size, then he cut the beans on a diagonal so that they could be joined together with Sellotape and wrapped up with a label describing the bean, together with a false Latin name. He also had a jam jar with some beans in it to give away. The "bean", (which had had a string attached to one end, looped, and tied to a filing cabinet handle), must have been over three feet long.

Dad loved a "slow-burning" joke, and it was the following year when some of his workmates came to see him and said that although they had had some prize-sized beans, they had had nothing to compare in size with Dad's "*Beanus giganticus*"

We grew lots of vegetables, but we did not have any hens. Even for a short time after I was born, rationing was severe. People don't believe this, but it is true. The egg ration was one fresh egg per month! We used to barter some of our fresh vegetables for eggs, and they were preserved in a bucket of waterglass (awful!) under the wash basin. Another way around the egg problem in cakes was to use powdered egg. When you were lucky enough to procure a fresh egg to boil, it sometimes had bloody veins at one end because they were all free range and occasionally the egg had been fertilised.

Truly, the Curate's Egg. Good in parts! Mum was most unsympathetic. If I had an egg like that, she used to say, "Eat it up, John. Just don't eat the bloody bits!" I was shocked that Mum said "bloody".

Food could be an adventure in the Forties. The beef substitute in those less enlightened days was usually whale meat. Depending on the part of the whale it came from, your steak could be bitter, beefy, or fishy.

I found that Nasturtium leaves were hot, but my favourites were the seeds provided you ate them with malt vinegar. It was to be years before I realised they were a type of caper. Nick's father grew a lot of peas,

and Nick and I used to sit in the gaps between the rows eating the raw peas. Then one day, I ate the pod, and it was fantastic. Now, of course you can buy pea pods with very tiny peas inside called mange tout or snow peas. I invented them! (I like to think so, anyway!) I was a precocious lad, who often had an idea without having the necessary background of facts.

For instance, we had a friend who worked in Southampton Docks who got passes for us to go and see the old “*Queen Mary*” getting ready for her voyage to America. So many carcasses of meat were going on board. I thought that we were exporting beef to America, not realising that they were just a few days’ stores for the thousands of meals that would be eaten just on that voyage one way to New York!



*RMS Queen Mary at
Long Beach California*

Jezzred Photo

Essay 10

A Road Accident . . .

THE OTHER MEMORY FROM ABOUT THIS TIME was of much greater significance. Our house was at the top of a small hill in Queens Road, which in turn was just round the corner at the bottom of the steeply sloping hill up Warwick Place.

I remember quite clearly that late one afternoon I was playing in our garden with a small stick, and I threw it into the road.

I also remember lying in the gutter crying my eyes out.

What had happened (apparently) was that as I dashed into the (normally empty) road, a young man on a bicycle came speeding round the Warwick Place corner into Queens Road and hit me so hard that I was knocked over and I hit my head on a kerbstone. I don't remember being taken to our doctor, but I'm sure I was, and that he rendered first aid. A few weeks later I was diagnosed with epilepsy, which of course has changed and limited my life ever since. I have, for instance, never been able to learn to drive, which has limited my mobility tremendously.

I personally don't recall it, but the young man was off to a tennis match. He apparently had his racquet in one hand and a box of balls in the other, which meant that he was riding without holding the handlebars, so that he couldn't swerve or apply his brakes. The strange thing is, that since that occasion, whenever I have heard that story told, I have never had any feelings against the fellow. I don't even know his name. As far as I am concerned, it is just Kismet, Karma, Fate.

After a short while I started to have small "turns". My brain seemed to be switched off, then on again, and I didn't even fall over. Mr Anderson, my specialist, prescribed phenobarbital to work on the epilepsy, and benzedrine to wake me up from the sleepy side effects.

The general public perception of epilepsy has changed (for the better) dramatically.

Up until the Second World War, severe cases were placed in lunatic asylums and subjected to shock therapy. People could be very unkind to epileptics.

My mother was a wise woman. I remember her saying that I was not mad, and that if ever anybody was nasty to me because of my illness, it was not my fault. It was theirs because they didn't know anything about what it really was.

I was on amphetamines and barbiturates, (uppers and downers), at the age of three.

I have never, ever, understood the attraction of "recreational drug use."

The electroencephalogram (EEG) was just making its appearance. It was being developed at Oxford University, and the nearest specialist hospital was at the Radcliffe Infirmary. It was so early in the brainwave research programme, that they used to ask me to stop my medication in the hope that I would have an "absence" while I was wired up. They were never successful. On one occasion I had an absence about five minutes after they had removed the last electrode.

I feel dreadfully old to think that I was used to calibrate what is now a standard tool for any neurosurgeon.

When I was about ten, my doctor, Doctor William Hopper Shephard, thought I should go to a different neurologist. He had a friend in Harley Street who wrote back to say that he was not taking any more public patients, but he recommended two possible neurologists.

These were Doctor Roger Bannister, of four minute mile fame, and recommended by the Harley Street man, or Doctor Whitty, Professor in Neurology at Oxford University.

"I know Bannister's a good runner" my doctor said, "but I don't know what he's like as a neurologist, so I'll send you to Dr Whitty". He was an innovative neurologist, and very, very, good. Nearly every neurologist that I ever saw while I lived in the UK had been trained by him.

Dr Shephard's house was his surgery. (He lived in Hereford House in the High Street). There were no appointments, and Mrs Shephard was the receptionist. She answered the front door. The waiting room, at the back of the house, overlooking the garden, had a billiard table in it, covered with old "Punch" magazines.

Essay 11

Learning to read

MY MUM AND DAD DIDN'T TEACH ME THE ABC, instead, years before it became generally used, my parents taught me a sort of phonetic alphabet.

"Ah, Buh, Cuh, Duh, Eh, Fuh, Guh"

They also bought me some readers. These were books with simple sentences.

"Sing, mother, sing"

"Mother sings to Mary"

"Mary sings to John"

"They sing together"

and,

"The cat sat on the mat"

"Tuh huh eh".

"No John!, the TH is always called 'Thuh' or 'Thth']

"Thuh cuh-ah-tuh (cat) Suh-Ah-Tuh (sat) Oh, nuh (on) [good, John, well done!] Tuh, huh, eh [we've already done this]. Remember it's 'Thuh' 'Muh, Ah, Tuh, (mat).

"So what's that all together then]?"

"The cat sat on the mat"

"Well done!" said Mum. "You can read!" But of course I couldn't . . .

Not really.

We went through the orange book, the blue book, the yellow book and even the red book, but I knew, and Mum knew, that I had memorised sentences.

One day, when I was about four, my mother was running my bath preparatory to my bed time. I was looking at a sentence and I was able to work out for myself: "Sing mother sing".

"Mummy, I can read" I shouted as I headed for the bathroom. I was promptly scooped up and returned to the books. "Look Mummy!"

"Sing mother sing". [Very good! What's the next bit?] "Mother sings to Mary" [Very good!]" Now she turned to another book, and opened up a page.

"What does this say then?" she enquired.

A sea of letters swam into my eyes. But I took little bits and gradually put the shapes of the letters together. "The cat sat on the mat and had some milk."

My mother was already purring. I was in bed when Dad came home from work. He came into my room and said "I hear you can read". Almost certainly (although I don't remember it on this occasion) he would have given me his special smile, which was reserved for very special occasions (and ice cream!)

Very soon afterwards, I was taken into Smith's in Tewkesbury High Street. The books were kept in a separate room right at the back of the shop where it was very quiet, One or two people could be found there standing and reading. Dad bought me "Thomas the Tank Engine" by the Rev W. Awdry, and that introduced me to the joy and possibilities of reading. I never had to bother with "Sing mother sing" again. Instead I had a proper book, with real stories, about Thomas, a blue engine, his carriages Annie and Claribel and the Fat Controller. It was the first book I ever owned.

It was 1950, I was four, and I could read. I can't really remember much else about 1950. It's not that I don't have any memories. It's just that I don't have any events to link them with.

When I was about eight, I joined Tewkesbury Library in the Old Hospital. My Uncle John got me the tickets. One library ticket was for Fiction and the other was for Non-Fiction. I always got my books back on time (I think we had a fortnight to read them). Any longer and you incurred a penny fine.

Essay 12

Infant School

Mrs Cook

I STARTED AT TRINITY INFANTS' School in Tewkesbury in March 1951. The School was in two buildings, one on either side of Trinity Walk. The school on our side was brick with great big windows and it was divided into two classrooms and a large space where we did PT, slept in the afternoons, and had assemblies. We didn't seem to have lessons.

Mrs. Cook was of an indeterminate age. She was obviously older than my mother, and almost as old as my Gran, which probably made her about fifty. To a five-year-old, though, she seemed as though she had been alive for ever.

We played with toys that had been played with too often, and we had to try and sleep in the afternoons (which I hated, but I can't remember why) and then we played games and sang songs until it was time to go home. I had better toys at home, and there I could sleep, more or less, whenever I wanted to.



Trinity Infant School in Trinity Walk.

Tewkesbury Sea Cadets

I didn't know what the point of school was as I could do so many of the activities at home, but I gradually made more friends, and overall I liked going there a lot.

I can't say that I remember anything at all about the first day or the first week or the first month that I was at school. All I remember were the children. I was the only child in our family, so girls came as a bit of a surprise. They wore ribbons in their hair and dresses. Of course, I'd seen girls before, just not in quantity

or close up. My friend Nick had a younger sister, but she never played with us at the pond, and I think she played with two girls next door, Carol and Christine, who were affectionately called the “Twinnies”.

Europe had just come through a war, and I suppose partly because of this, we didn’t have the (usually sensible) safety practices and checks. We lived in a non-litigious society. We didn’t live in a world with tea cups that said “Contents may be hot”, because it was assumed that if you had a cup of tea you would know that the cup would be hot. You were expected to use your common sense. Consequently, places weren’t made as safe as they might be today.

Our playground was a case in point. I remember it as a fairly small square of hot tarmac surrounded by brick walls. On top of the walls, there was a lot of broken glass set in cement, glinting brown and green in the sunlight, put there to discourage intruders. In one corner of the yard was an area where there had once been a building which had been demolished and the ground had been flattened. In levelling the area, not all the bricks had been removed and they lay there, partly buried in the earth, at crazy angles so that only the points of the corners of the bricks were exposed. One playtime, I came an absolute cropper. When I stood up, my clothes were bloody and I noticed some dark drops of blood dripping down in front of my eyes. I was given some first aid and then I'm not sure what the sequence of events was. I remember my Mum arriving. I don't know how they contacted her as we didn't have a phone. I think we must have gone to hospital, but I had cut my head open so badly that I bear the scar to this day.

Going Home

Memo to Mums and Dads. Please make sure you arrive at your child's school BEFORE the end of the school day. The worst thing I hated about Mrs. Cook’s class was the way that when school finished for the day, we were kept in the classroom until one of our parents collected us. My mother was pretty punctual, but she never got there first, so I had to wait until some of my school friends had escaped to freedom before me. I was probably detained for less than five minutes, but that sometimes seemed like a lifetime.

Essay 13

Sunday school

I LOVED GOING TO SCHOOL SO MUCH, when I started in 1951 at the age of five, that when I heard that you could go to school on Sundays as well, I really wanted to go. My mother mysteriously said that it was not like ordinary school, but if I really wanted to, I could go along on the understanding that I couldn't drop out, I would have to keep going. This should have been a hint to me, but the idea of a sixth day at school made me so happy I somehow missed that oblique warning.

I, and several others were shepherded into the main room of the National School near Tewkesbury Abbey. The penny did not drop.

After all, just about everywhere in our small town was near the Abbey. We went in, and several nuns (there were nuns at the Abbey in those days) sat us down in rows.

The penny dropped with a resounding clunk. We were in the front row because most of us were smaller than the older children. A nun

gave out some tatty hymn books, but not to the front row. Someone played the piano, and most of the children sang or mumbled a hymn. I did not know the hymn, I did not have a hymn book, and I suppose I felt foolish. Afterwards we had to sit on the floor in circles and listen to stories about God.

It wasn't as exciting as Thomas the Tank Engine.

Then we stood up in our rows, tried to sing some other unknown hymn without hymn books, and then row by row we were allowed to leave. I don't think I was bored, but I was upset, because it was nothing like the day school, and I couldn't understand why I had been denied a hymn book. I had had to promise Mum that I would continue to go. I went week after week, becoming unhappier and unhappier, until eventually I



The National School

The home of the Abbey Sunday School



The only photo of Tewkesbury's Second Baptist Chapel that I could find

Photographer Unknown.

cried. Mum wanted to know what was wrong, so I told her I never got a hymn book.

All right", said Mum, who had a wicked sense of humour, "tell the nuns that because you aren't being given a hymn book, you

will go with your teacher to the Baptist Chapel!"

And like a very small, totally unguided missile, that's exactly what I did. The Baptist Chapel was far more fun, I got my very own hymn book, and best of all, my teacher's father was a lay preacher. Whenever he became impassioned, (what the Welsh know as "Hwl"), he sounded just like a sheep!

My spiritual enrichment at the Baptist Chapel in Barton Street lasted for two or three years, maybe a bit more, but then I found out that if you became a choirboy at the Abbey, they actually paid you to turn up to two Sunday services, and also three practices a week. As a probationer I got 2d a time, that was 10d a week, 3/4 a month. My weekly pocket money at the time was only a shilling. This choir job almost doubled my pocket money!

The Baptist Chapel was over for me.

I thought I'd profit more from high Anglicanism.



We got paid once a month, and then Nick and I used to make a slight detour via Barkus's chip shop in Barton Street. We used to buy two penn'orth of chips which would be wrapped up in paper. We made small holes in our chip papers, just big enough to extract a chip, but still keeping all the others warm.

I've just remembered one bizarre thing. If we were singing a hymn or something else loudly in the very large Abbey, (which is about 100 metres long), the sound went down the nave, bounced, and then came back again.. It was the Three Second Wait. When we sang hymns we waited for about three seconds at the end of each line before we started to sing the next line.

**“Hills of the North rejoice,
“River and mountain stream,
 (One Two Three!) . . .
“Hark to the Advent Voice,
“Valley and lowland sing,
 (One Two Three) . . .”**

This allowed the sound that had been building up had a chance to disperse.

Mr Huskisson Stubbington was our Organist and Choirmaster, and our “home” was in the Chapel that has since been converted into the shop. The Head Chorister was Joseph Bartlett, and the Choir was made up of local boys only.



Tewkesbury Abbey Choir

Essay 14

Remarkable Visitors to the Town

IN ABOUT NOVEMBER OR DECEMBER 1951, probably at a weekend, we all gathered near the Cross with Union Jacks to wave, as King George VI and his mother, Queen Mary, swept through Tewkesbury in their big black car. They were the only “Major Royals” I’ve ever seen.

We saw them for maybe one or two seconds, but I remember being very disappointed. Neither the King nor Queen Mary were wearing crowns or any gold at all. The King didn’t look at all well. We waved, . . . they went, . . . and then I suppose we all went home.

* * *

We also went to wave to the Gloucestershire Regiment who had come to Tewkesbury to receive the Freedom of the Borough. Some of us knew only two things about the Glosters. Some of our boys’ fathers served in the Regiment, and they wore two badges on their caps and berets, to represent the time, long ago, when they had fought back to back in Egypt.

It must have been about late 1952, possibly even a little later, that we were taken to the High Street with Union Jacks in our hands to wave at them. Many of the soldiers were thin, but they were all proud. They had just come back from the Korean War, and because of their amazing exploits, they were called the “Glorious Glosters”. They had won two Victoria Crosses, a George Cross, and many other medals for bravery at one particular battle. That of the Imjin River.

One of the best descriptions of their action there is given in the US Presidential Unit Citation which was presented to them.

“The 1ST BATTALION GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT, BRITISH ARMY . . . cited for exceptionally outstanding performance of duty and extraordinary heroism in action against the armed enemy near Solma-ri, Korea on 23, 24 and 25 April 1951. The 1st BATTALION and TROOP C were defending a very critical sector of the battle front during a determined attack by the enemy. The defending units were overwhelmingly outnumbered. The 83rd Chinese Communist Army drove the full force of its savage assault at the positions held by the 1st BATTALION, GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT and attached unit. The route of supply ran

Southeast from the battalion between two hills. The hills dominated the surrounding terrain northwest to the Imjin River. Enemy pressure built up on the battalion front during the day 23 April. On 24 April the weight of the attack had driven the right flank of the battalion back. The pressure grew heavier and heavier and the battalion and attached unit were forced into a perimeter defence on Hill 235. During the night, heavy enemy forces had by-passed the staunch defenders and closed all avenues of escape. The courageous soldiers of the battalion and attached unit were holding the critical route selected by the enemy for one column of the general offensive designed to encircle and destroy 1st Corps. These gallant soldiers would not retreat. As they were compressed tighter and tighter in their perimeter defence, they called for close-in air strikes to assist in holding firm. Completely surrounded by tremendous numbers, these indomitable, resolute, and tenacious soldiers fought back with unsurpassed fortitude and courage. As ammunition ran low and the advancing hordes moved closer and closer, these splendid soldiers fought back viciously to prevent the enemy from overrunning the position and moving rapidly to the south. Their heroic stand provided the critically needed time to regroup other 1st Corps units and block the southern advance of the enemy. Time and again efforts were made to reach the battalion, but the enemy strength blocked each effort. Without thought of defeat or surrender, this heroic force demonstrated superb battlefield courage and discipline. Every yard of ground they surrendered was covered with enemy dead until the last gallant soldier of the fighting battalion was over-powered by the final surge of the enemy masses. The 1st BATTALION, GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT . . . displayed such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing their mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions as to set them apart and above other units participating in the same battle. Their sustained brilliance in battle, their resoluteness, and extraordinary heroism are in keeping with the finest traditions of the renowned military forces of the British Commonwealth, and reflect unsurpassed credit on these courageous soldiers and their homeland.”

We had heard that they had occupied a hill to delay the invading Chinese Army. They ran short of ammunition, they used their rifles like clubs, and eventually they used their fists. About 500 soldiers were captured and had a dreadful time in the Chinese POW camp. No less than forty died in the terrible conditions. The Glosters, only about 1000 of them, had injured or killed about 10 000 Chinese, which was about a third of the Chinese in the area. This meant that that particular Army had to be taken out of the front line, and this enabled the UN forces to prevent the Chinese from capturing Seoul.

It was later described as the greatest delaying action in the whole history of the British Army.

We didn't know all, or indeed much, of what had gone on in Korea, except that we knew that the soldiers had been brave, but they had had a bad time when they were captured by the Chinese and put into a POW camp.

But one thing we did know.

These men were very brave and very proud, and we were proud of them too.

They must have been very brave because they had all just been given the Freedom of the Borough of Tewkesbury, and you would have to be very brave to get that.

We not only waved our Union flags, but we cheered them loudly, too.



An evening as the sun sets over the Cricket Field and the Abbey

Essay 15

Childish Complaints

BACK IN DAY SCHOOL, we were soon divided into two groups. One group went to Miss Smith in the other classroom, while our group went across the Walk to the main school, which I understand is now a Masonic Lodge.

Every morning at day school we used to be greeted by our teacher with a "Good Morning Everyone", to which we replied "Good Mor-ning Miss Ste-phens" in that slow chanting way that young school children have when saying something together. Then she would mark the Register, with a little circle that denoted children who were absent because of illness or other reasons. There were quite a few maladies that we grew up with.

I used to suffer from croup very badly. When I coughed, the noise woke people up at night. By the time the noise woke up half of Queens Road, Doctor Shephard was called and he arrived in his black Wolseley car. He was an old man especially to a child of my age, and quite forbidding. He seldom removed his jacket. He listened to my chest with his stethoscope, tapped my chest with two fingers, and said "You've got croup, John. I'll give you something to cure it, and I'll come and see you again tomorrow."

He then delved into his bag and pulled out a glass syringe, a small saw, a small jar of dry penicillin powder, and a glass ampoule of distilled water. With the saw, he made a small nick in the neck of the ampoule and snapped it off. Next he fitted a needle to his syringe and drew up the distilled water from the ampoule, which he then threw away. It was fascinating. Then he put the needle into the jar containing the penicillin powder, and squirted in the water. Next he pulled out the syringe (and needle), pushed his spectacles back onto his forehead, and gave the jar a good shake. Lastly he put the needle back into the jar through the rubber seal, and sucked up the penicillin solution into the syringe. He motioned me to turn over and the next thing I knew, there was a sharp pain, followed by a quick swab with some meths. (I recognised the smell from my Dad's camping stove).

Next morning, he would arrive as promised and repeat the treatment.

Tuberculosis was still around, and large white vans used to come to schools. They contained a portable X ray machine. We used to have to strip to the waist, push against a white plate, which was ALWAYS cold, there would be a whirr and that was that. I assume that anyone who had a chest infection was summoned to their doctor.

The reason I mention all this illness is because of TB. My mother used to cough from cigarettes. She smoked Players Navy Cut. Aunty Kate smoked Craven A, "For Your Throat's Sake". Uncle John had Senior Service "as recommended by doctors" Dad smoked "Exmoor Hunt" in a pipe. My mother had an X ray, but fortunately (!) all she had was a scar on the lung which required bed rest. We were provided, thanks to the Government, with a "Home Help" who came from nearby and was paid to do domestic duties. There was no link between smoking and lung cancer then.

Thinking back, there were, nevertheless, some pretty nasty illnesses still around in the Fifties. Measles, German Measles, Scarlet Fever, Polio and Pneumonia were all caught by some of my classmates. There were no inoculations for some of those diseases in those days, although we had "had the needle" for diphtheria as babies.

Polio was a particularly nasty disease that seemed to be transmitted in summer near swimming pools. Even in a place like Tewkesbury, which had no pool but lots of places to swim, there was an awareness that it was "polio season" and we kept away from places where we would normally swim. Polio was a quiet killer. At the very least it could disable you and shorten your life.

The cure for chicken pox, on the other hand, was almost pleasant. Almost!

If you knew someone who already had it, you simply went to play with them until you caught it, and then another child would come and play with you. Because you could catch it only once, if you were lucky you got a few days off school, survived a contagious disease, and improved your social life by making two new friends.

Doctor Shephard delivered me in Cheltenham. One day, when I was about five, he went into a neighbour's house, carrying his black bag. "He's delivering her baby" Mum said.

The milkman delivered milk bottles in his crate; Mr Wilkins delivered bread in his basket. The black bag seemed too small to have a stork inside.

I was confused.

Talking of women and babies, and Doctor Shephard, he was a very humane and caring man. I was born in 1946, before there was any National Health or free medical care. Like all new mothers do, Mum used to

go along for post-natal check ups. Every time she went along, she was NOT presented with a bill. After a few weeks, she felt that she should mention something about it.

“Oh No!” said the Doctor. “You young parents have such a lot of expense when you have a new baby, I never send out my bills until a year after the birth”

That was the sort of man that he was. He sometimes used to take my Grandfather out on his country rounds. He felt that my Grandfather needed all the fresh air that he could get. Granddad Waylen died in 1940, six years before I was born, and twenty-three years after he had survived a gas attack on the Western Front.

We were very lucky to have Dr William Hopper Shephard as our doctor.

We were also very lucky to have Gran. She could often come up with all sort of old-fashioned medical cures, potions and other ointments, many of which worked. Syrup of figs was particularly effective, as you knew it would be, because the taste was so foul. Oil of menthol (better known as mentholated oil) was kept in a large green ribbed glass bottle with a cork. (The ribs were to warn people that the contents of the bottle were not to be taken internally.) Mentholated oil was rubbed on the chest to help keep your airways clear at night if you had a cold.

Granny also came into her own with her poultices. If you had a heavy cold which had gone down onto your chest, Gran would strap a brown paper parcel of steaming hot wet bread to your chest just before you went to sleep; when you woke up, or in the middle of the day, or whenever you felt that you should stay in bed, Gran was there to remove the cold poultice and replace it with a fresh scalding one. It always worked. The prolonged heat thinned the “matter” making it easier to cough up. On a couple of occasions I got a septic cut. A couple of poultices on the cut later, and Gran would say “It’s starting to draw the pus out”, and promptly slapped another one on to complete the job. Other cuts would be treated with yellow acriflavine which stained your skin (and bandage) yellow. Gentian violet, (used for treating grazes, stained everything it came into contact with a shade of purple. A fabric plaster or bandage with discolorations of brown blood, gentian violet, and yellow acriflavine earned you the total respect of the class!

In 1948, the Labour government’s Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan, brought in the National Health Act, where most doctor’s consultations, medicines, and dental work was all carried out “free” - in fact, financed by a levy on everyone that earned money. All the medicine labels changed overnight. Gone were the trade names, which were replaced by “The Tablets”, “The Linctus”, “The Suspension”, “The Ointment”, and so

on. We also had tins of National Milk and bottles of National Orange Juice and National Cod Liver Oil, all free thanks to the NHS levy on everybody's wages.

It took a long time for many people, such as my Gran, to get used to the new system. She would say things like "You can't go and bother the Doctor, John. He's got sick people to see to"

It's become an unfortunate habit with me, too. Doctors say "When did you first get this pain/ache/rash?" I inevitably reply "About six months ago."

Many of her home remedies were amazingly efficacious. I got a particularly nasty rash of urticaria which was then known as nettle rash. Gran bathed me in front of the fire with a solution of baking soda, which didn't get rid of the rash, but did stop the itching. When Doctor Shephard was eventually called, he said that she had done just the right thing. He decided to try out a trade sample of something new called an "anti-histamine" and two days later the spots had gone. The power of modern industrial pharmaceuticals over home remedies!

There was only one "remedy" of Gran's which I heartily hated, and that was her idea of recovery after a dental procedure. Our dentist was a Mr. Akehurst (I called him Ache hurts!), and if I had to have anything done, Gran used to insist in cooking me "something soft". It was always, always, tripe and onions cooked in milk. To this day I cannot eat, or even look at, tripe cooked with onions.

Essay 16

Infant School (again!)

Miss Stephens

THE FOLLOWING SCHOOL YEAR I went into Miss Stephens' class.. That would be in September 1951, and I was in her class until July 1952.

* * *

About four decades later I happened upon her while she was doing her shopping.

"Hello, Miss Stephens," I said, "How lovely to see you"

"Please, John, call me Edna" she replied.

(She could remember my name after almost half a century?)

"By all means!" "Edna it is, Miss Stephens" I said rather lamely.

By this time I was in short trousers and it was 1951 again.

"I haven't seen your mother for a while" she said.

(She definitely knew who I was!)

"She's very well, Miss . . . Edna".

She grinned.

* * *

Nobody else smelled quite like Miss Stephens. I think she was a Red Cross volunteer. She smelled of hospitals. She was young with black hair and she had a blue dress that I always thought made her look like a nurse.

For the first time, we had desks. The ones in Miss Stephens' classroom were two-seaters. There was a heavy cast iron frame which held the desk at the front and supported the tip up seat. This made them very

heavy and difficult to move. The sloping, tipping part of the desk was used to write on, and the ledge beyond had a groove for pencils and pens and a hole for an inkwell.

Miss Stephens started to teach us to “learn our letters”, put them together, and we learned to print in pencil in our own grey writing books. The books had room to write your name on the front and the class. On the back cover there were about ten road safety hints.

Trinity School had a large playground, again surrounded by high walls with broken glass on them, but part of its fascination lay in the fact that Trinity Walk went through it, and so we got to see people that we knew going about their business. Some of them would be heading to or from the little house next to the school, where Mr and Mrs Warren kept bees and sold honey. Although our yard was open to the public, as far as I know we never had anybody straying from school. We were trusted not to leave the playground and wander off.

Miss Stephens’ class was the first one where I remember doing “schoolwork”. This was where we learned to print letters and where many people began to read. It was also the first class where the members of the group established their identities and became “characters”. There were the clever ones, the noisy ones, the naughty ones and the quiet ones.

Although Miss Righton was the principal of the little school, I cannot recollect ever being taught by her; only given the occasional reading test, usually, for some reason, after one of my misdemeanours in the playground. We used to have to line up into three or four lines after playtime. On one occasion, as I went past her, I kicked the boy ahead on the calf. (Without realising it, I had dead legged him, so that he fell to the ground.) I was sent to her office and made to pronounce lots of words which were arranged in lists. I think I got most of them right, but I distinctly remember getting “official” wrong. I thought it was “OFFIKIAL”. I was sent back to my class, and the two girls who sat behind me chanted very quietly “John has be-en naughty. John has be-en naughty!”

Later Miss Righton told my Mum that I had a reading age of thirteen, but I don’t think I got tested because of my playground antics. At least I hope not.

Miss Stephens (I never could call her Edna!) was responsible for one of the early embarrassments of my life.

One day in class she enquired who wanted to do knitting. My hand went up . . . together with all the girls.

Then she asked who wanted to do clay modelling.

Up went all the boys hands, including mine!

But it was too late. Much too late. Miss Stephens had her trophy for the staff room. A BOY who was doing knitting!

“You can’t do clay modelling, John. You’ve already said you want to do knitting.”

The class laughed. Boys didn't knit in 1951, but I would have to.

I felt my cheeks redden as the class laughed. But that is what I did.

I knitted.

Off I started.

Miss Stephens cast on twenty stitches in green wool, and showed me how to knit plain stitch. Painfully slowly I went along a row. The girls were going much quicker, while all the boys (except for me) were making clay cows – in fact clay more or less anything you wanted provided it was in clay. My knitting was full of holes, and although I didn't know how to cast on, something miraculous was happening. As row after row of knitting was constructed interminably slowly, the knitting grew, but not just by the row, it was getting wider too! Eventually, my green wool was used up.

Would I get to do some clay modelling at last?

Miss Stephens provided the answer: a hank of yellow wool. I was taught fisherman's stitch, and purl as well as plain stitch, but by this time the rows were taking so long to do, because they had grown so much.

I know this to be true, because my Mum kept the "object" until the day she died.

About ten years ago I came across this woollen monstrosity once more as I was sorting out my mother's things. No wonder the rows took forever. I had somehow acquired no less than ninety-two stitches onto my needles!



The Swilgate in flood

Essay 17

The King is dead. Long live the Queen!

MEANWHILE, THERE HAD BEEN OTHER CHANGES. The people who had lived next door to us at 2 Warwick Place had moved to Bishops Cleeve, a nearby village, and had been replaced next door by a newly married couple who became lifelong friends, so much so, that I flew back from Australia to the UK specially in 2012 when they died, so that I could attend the scattering of their ashes. I had known them for over sixty years.

Across Queens Road lived my friend Nick. I was so envious. His house backed onto a pond, and I'll swear to this day that there was a crocodile just floating there. (At other times it was a ship, but mostly it was just a long tree branch). There used to be real grass snakes there on occasion which would swim across the pond. But most of all there were Pirates living round it. Nick's father had been a sailor, and with his expert eye, he recognised the signs. He found the odd old penny from their Treasure, and showed us some oyster shells which was all that was left over from their dinner. No doubt with an eye for some free gardening, Nick's dad reckoned that the Pirate's Treasure was buried somewhere in his back garden. Instead of neatly digging rows to discover where the Pirates had hidden their Treasure Chest, we decided we would dig down. We would be bound to come across it if we dug deep enough. So Nick's Dad ended up with just a rather large hole in his back garden.

Mervyn and Diana, our new neighbours, made a path from their prefab in Warwick Place around to our kitchen door, which went underneath the window of my parents' bedroom. Mum, at this stage of her illness, was bed-bound.

One day, when I was playing in Mum's bedroom, Diana came along the path and shouted across to us the immortal line,

“Yoo Hoo, Kath! The King's dead!”

We switched on the radio and there was lots of sad music being played, when normally it would have been “Housewives' Choice” or “Workers' Playtime”, but not that morning.

The King had died in the night, peacefully, of lung cancer. He had been a heavy smoker. The date was 6th February 1952, and we had a new Monarch.

Princess Elizabeth, the wartime motor mechanic, had become Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of all her Dominions and Territories Overseas.

For a month, the red mast heads of the Daily Mirror became purple in mourning for the late King. He lay in State for several days in the 900 year-old Westminster Hall. She heard of the death of her father, the King, when she and her husband were staying at the Treetops Hotel in Kenya, where the rooms were actually up in the trees. She therefore became the only person in English History to assume the throne while up a tree.

The Queen and the Duke were on their way to South Africa in a modern British jet airliner, the Comet, for a tour before going on to Australia and New Zealand. She left as a Princess, became Queen in Kenya, before coming straight back to England.

The National Anthem was always sung in those days after a film, a concert or a play. For as long as I could remember I had always sung "God Save the King" As you can imagine, a lot of people got half way through the last word, before changing it to "Queen", with the result that God saved the "Kiqueen"

For a short while, I almost believed that when King George died, his daughter Princess Elizabeth became Kiqueen Elizabeth until her Coronation when she would officially become Queen. (It was childish precocity and lack of knowledge again, like the export of beef to America on the "*Queen Mary*".)

The King's reign had been marked by armed struggle against Germany, followed by a dour period of rationing, when shops were half empty because there was so little to sell. It was called Austerity, and it certainly had been a grim time. Everyone had their own Identity Cards and Ration Books. (Pessimist that I am, I still have mine!)

The Queen was pretty, young, and she had a beautiful smile. She was only twenty-six, and her reign belonged to the future – the New Elizabethan Era, where there was less rationing, Peace, and better weather. And the best thing for we children was that there were going to be a lot of parties on June 2nd 1953, Coronation Day; and Woolworths and other stores made sure that the party would go with a swing by producing decorations - Coronation decorations.

Overnight, the world had changed from a dismal grey place into a bright golden one.

Mrs Barnfield

My new class teacher was Mrs. Barnfield. Many of the children didn't like her. She didn't smile as much as Miss Stephens and she wasn't as pretty. She also encouraged you to work hard. Needless to say I adored her.

She taught me the basics of arithmetic. We learnt from a series of cards, each with ten questions. The most basic were the "A" cards. You could do the cards in any order: A1, A3, A7, A2, etc., but you had to finish all the "A"s before you could do any of the "B"s, and so on. Some of us had a race to see who could be the first to get to the "G"s.

We must have done some English and Art, not to mention Religion and Games, but I only remember Mrs. Barnfield for her arithmetic.

Of course the upcoming Coronation provided decoration of the walls of our classroom. We could tell Dukes from Marquesses; Viscounts and Earls from Barons; and also all the paraphernalia used in the Coronation. The two crowns, the orb and sceptre, the ampulla and spoon. We drew them, we painted them, we wrote compositions about them, and all of it went on the wall.

Mrs. Barnfield's classroom was a-glitter with gold that seemed to get more golden as we got closer to the ceremony.

Soon the year was over, and we had to choose which Primary School we were going to go to. There was the Barton Road School, run by Mr Griffiths, known as the "Junior Council School" where my mother and uncle had gone many years earlier; and there was the Church of England Junior School in Oldbury Road



headed by Mr. Robinson. His school was still at that time sometimes called the "Abbey Boys", but usually it was just "Boss Rob's".

As we lived in Priors Park, closer to the Junior Council School, naturally Nick and I went to Boss Rob's!

The Crown Jewels

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Essay 18

In the fields

NICK AND I WERE IN A GANG which consisted of Nick and I. We spent most of our time in two of Mr Steele's fields. Two very small fields. They were ideal. They were mainly for mowing grass to be grown for hay. Both fields were bordered on the east side by the Swilgate

The other five boundaries were hedges. There is a general rule that you can tell the age of a hedge by the variety of plants in it. There were willows and briars and sloes and hawthorn and blackberries which would indicate that the hedges were about four hundred years old. To get to the fields I could go to Nick's house, then go through his back fence across some waste ground, or I could follow an indistinct path behind the first four prefabs to get onto the wasteland which would get me to the same place. The pond.

The pond was on our right, complete with its own crocodile.

We passed through a gate into the two fields, and we only came out for meals. Our parents trusted us not to get into trouble and generally speaking, in spite of what we actually did, we had a good sense of danger which was our guardian angel. I only fell in the pond once, I couldn't swim, but I managed to hold on to a willow root, and with Nick's help I got out. I was soaking wet, smelled of pond water so I ran the short distance home, where I expected to get a good telling off. Instead my Mum took my clothes off, towelled me down, took me to the bathroom and gave me a warm bath. I dried myself and put on clean clothes before going out to play again. All thanks to Mum, who like most Mums at that time, stayed at home and were our support system.

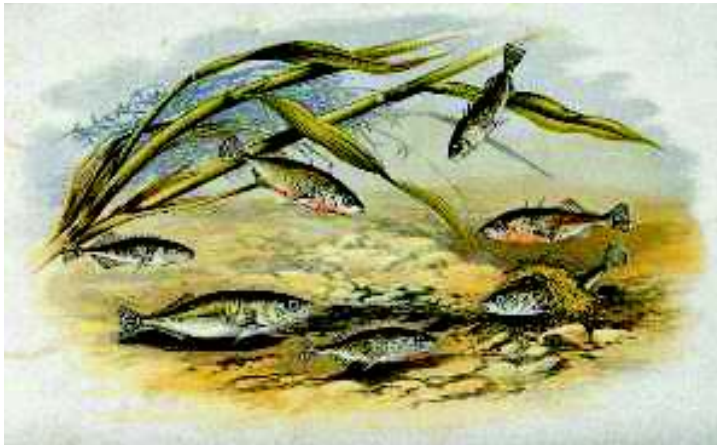
We might have had more money if Mum and the other Mums had worked, but our lives were much richer because of their sacrifice in staying at home. Child minding it wasn't, however, because we were hardly ever *at* home. For much of the time we didn't play with our toys. They were for rainy days. We were out in the fields making dens or sort-of tree houses. Or we were making our own bows and arrows so that we could play Cowboys and Indians.

We climbed willow trees. We must have been young because we were small enough not to be able to reach all the branches. When we managed to climb near the top we used to rock the tree top backwards and forwards.

The hedges were covered in hawthorn blossoms in Spring and they looked as though they were covered in snow. Dog roses were a pretty pink and in Autumn they produced red hips. The company which made rose hip syrup came to the school one year and offered to pay one penny per pound for hips. I (and I seem to remember Mum and Dad too) picked eleven pounds (that's five and a half kilos) of rose hips for which I was paid eleven old pence (11d) which is slightly less than five decimal pence (or one cent Australian per kilo)

You couldn't go past a wild damson tree. You could try, but sooner or later you would feel bound to taste one of the blue succulent fruit. These were called sloes, and sloe gin was made from it. I've never tried it. Raw sloes must be the sourest of all fruit I'm sure. One bite and your tongue and teeth went furry.

The Swilgate was great fun. It was small enough and shallow enough to let us put willow branches in the water to make a sort of dam, or else we strengthened it to make a "bridge" We might get a couple of "shoefuls" but it meant we could cross to those fields on the other side of the brook. We could even get to the very tall elms which I could see from my bedroom window and we could also have picnics at Walton Cardiff near the red brick chapel, but usually we did those longer trips with our Mums.



Sticklebacks

Wellcome Collection

Occasionally we used to get nets (from the seaside) and jam jars which we filled with stream water. We would go netting for sticklebacks, or tiddlers, tiny fish that they were. There was the three spined stickleback and the seven spined stickleback which had more stickle on its back than the first one. The pond was also great if you wanted some frog spawn.

On one notable occasion, Mum told me, Dad tipped the frog spawn down the drain. Two or three weeks later, tiny frogs started to jump out. Dad couldn't stand frogs, so after that I had to return all our tadpoles to the pond. We sometimes lay in the mowing grass in the sun and looked at the clouds in the sky. It was amazing what you could see up there. Horses, castles, even the odd dragon or two.

We "helped" Mr Steele and Victor with the haymaking, being careful not to fall into the mower or the baler. We tried to lift the bales but we couldn't even get them off the ground.

Then there was our perfume project. When I think about it we had lovely neighbours.

For this project we went round many of our neighbours' gardens and picked all their roses. Then we crushed them all up in some jam jars with some water until we had an evil smelling liquid which we thought was perfume, and then we poured it into clean fish paste jars, or jars about that size, and went round selling them to our neighbours for 2d a jar!

The fields were our world and the world was such a happy place.

And then there was the barbed wire incident. Nick and I both witnessed this.

One day, we were on one side of the pond, when Mr Steele arrived on the other side with his tractor and trailer on which his son, Victor, sat with a large ball of barbed wire. They had come to mend a fence next to the pond. They both got down and Victor carried the barbed wire across to the pond. I can't remember now, whether Victor tripped, or whether he just wasn't paying attention, but he dropped the barbed wire into the pond. As I've said, it was a deep pond. There was a pause, then Mr Steele said,

"Victor you bloody idiot, you've bloody dropped the bloody barbed wire in the bloody pond. You're bloody useless!"

What happened after that, I don't know, because I ran back to our house, where Mum and Dad were in the kitchen.

"Mum, Dad!" I cried, "You'll never guess what Mr Steele just said to Victor!"

I then repeated what I had heard, word for word. Swearing was disapproved of in those days, so I let rip. My father's look darkened.

"I didn't say that!" "Mr Steele said that", I said.

I had discovered inverted commas!

“ ”

The Hedger

ONE DAY WHEN WE WENT DOWN TO THE FIELDS, we thought we saw a man cut one of our hedges down.

In fact he was exercising a craft that stretched back almost since hedges were invented. Hedges grow, they become wild, animals can break through the hedges, and they can cover too much pasture which dies off in the shadow of the hedge. Nowadays, it's quite common to see a hedge cut down to a uniform height by a circular saw mounted on a tractor, but Nick and I were privileged for a few days to see a man ply his craft as a hedge layer. He must have been one of the last in the North Gloucestershire area. We watched him work. He had a hatchet-type cutting tool with a hook on the end which I think was called a billhook. He first of all had to clean the hedge. He cut out all the trailing plants like dog roses and blackberries, and burned them on a large bonfire. The next job was to look at every woody plant in the hedge and cut off most of the side branches. Most of that was also consigned to the flames. Some of the side branches were

fashioned into thick stakes, which were hammered into the ground at regular intervals.

Then came the clever bit. With his billhook he half cut through the tree stems, and laid them at about 45 degrees, all the time weaving the flexible stems in and out of the stakes. He continued to do this right along the hedgerow, so that the hedge had been much reduced in height, but its bushes were still alive. The result was a neat green hedge that would still grow for many years and be strong. He must have taken a week or more to hedge the five small field hedges. It was not a cheap job, but it would only have to be done once or twice in a farmer's lifetime.



Tewkesbury Floods

In Summer I played in the mowing grass
Among the buttercups, cornflowers and daisies,
I heard a chaffinch make its call.
In the hedges with briars and elm trees so tall
They seemed to be crowned with white clouds every one
While I warmly basked in the Gloucestershire sun.

Moving on . . . now the elm trees have gone.
Killed with disease . . . just a few linger on.
A plain, flat and featureless, save one great tower
That's all there is until you look lower
And see the town, and three rivers that flood.
(The Swilgate once ran ruddy with blood)

For nine centuries now, St Mary's has stood
Proud on an island just clear of the flood,
For the builders knew nicely just where the land
Was best to let the huge Abbey stand.
Just above levels of flood and of tide
The Abbey stays dry with no water inside.

Five hundred years ago townsfolk designed
Half-timbered houses and similar kind
Up higgledy streets, down piggledy lanes
Dwellings were built just above the flood plains.
The Abbot and townsfolk continued to keep
An eye on the waters so they didn't run deep.

Our shattered last Century was scattered around
So that cars, trucks and tarmac covered the ground.
More people! More houses! Oh! Why don't we build
The houses in suburbs - where flood land was tilled?
Now, when it rains hard, we sandbag the doors.
"There's mud in the kitchen and dirt on the stairs.
But last year was worse, you can tell by that stain
On the wall". But alas, every year, homes are flooded again.

No cornflowers are left in the mowing grass high,
The Abbey looks down where I played, and men sigh.
For hundreds of years, old Tewkesbury was dry
But now, every winter, the water comes by.
And the blind men, the deaf men continually cry

*"The water comes by
But we don't know why"*

John Sidebotham

Essay 20

The Mop Fair

AS CHILDREN, I THINK IT WOULD BE TRUE to say that we got just a little bit excited once we reached October, because November was Firework Night and Christmas was in December.

But October! We yearned (I think that would be the right word) for the Fair nights which were held at Michaelmas on the 9th and 10th of October. Tewkesbury Mop was originally a hiring fair, when farmers and landowners would look for workers of various types to hire for a Year and a Day. In the days before general literacy, workers for hire would exhibit some tools of their trade.

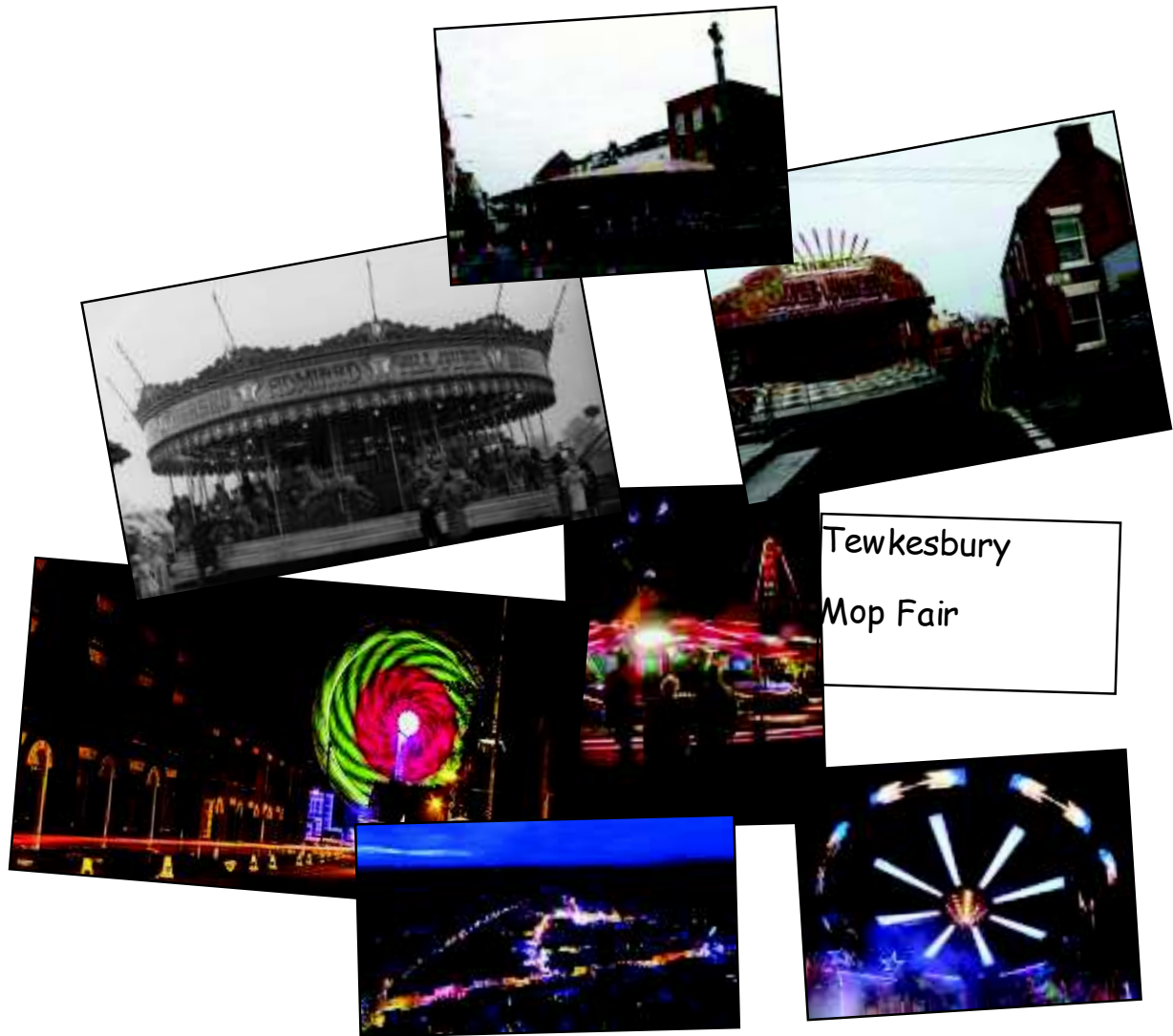
Housemaids carried a mop. The days of hiring fairs have long gone, but the name has stuck for the amusement fairs that have taken their place, mainly still in the streets.

Cirencester has a Mop Fair, too; as do Gloucester, Stow, and Stratford among others. Warwick not only has a Mop Fair, it also has a Runaway Mop Fair. This was for workers who had found that their new employers were in some way mistreating them. You could cut and run to the Runaway Mop and get hired by someone else! But Tewkesbury Mop Fair is the largest in the South West, and it occupies four long streets and a large car park.

Many of the fairs had been hiring at every Michaelmastide for a very long time. The Tewkesbury Michaelmas Hiring Fair started in 1199 and was given a Royal Charter from King Edward III, over eight hundred years ago.

We knew the fair was coming when, one morning on our way to school, there were strange thin white lines painted on the roads. These were mainly rectangular with a number in the middle of them. These were to delineate the places for all the stalls and rides. A few days later, trucks and vans began to arrive and park by the sides of the roads into Tewkesbury. Late on the 8th, long after we were in bed, Barton Street and East Street, Nelson Street and Oldbury Road were closed to traffic, which was diverted round Chance Street and Station Street.

In the darkness, the Fair began to take shape. By next morning, the fairground folk had still not finished, and so, as we had two days off from school, we raced down Orchard Court to see the Dodgems being put together at the end of Barton Street. Next to it was a Big Wheel, where men dangled to gradually and magically turn pieces of metal into a giant wheel, before putting the seats in place.



Tewkesbury
Mop Fair

What Health and Safety would have thought, goodness only knows. At the Cross was another set of dodgems, and in between were lots of stalls being put together. The Helter Skelter was built at the end of Oldbury Road, getting higher and higher with every section that was put in place. Next to that was the Rotor and the big Roundabout, with its mirrors and lights and bright paint, and its own organ. You could ride on a galloping horse, or strangely, a goose, or a chicken, all of which were supported from the roof by shining barley sugar twist shaped metal rods.

I didn't know it then, but the roundabout might have been made in the same street, because Walkers of Tewkesbury had made fairground roundabouts and other rides. I didn't know either that my great grandfather had worked for them as a blacksmith. How wonderful to have a job which helped to give so much pleasure to people. My favourite, though, was not a ride or a conventional stall. Kimberley's Fish and Chips were in their usual position at the end of East Street.

When darkness fell, the lights came on, which turned the fairground into a fairyland. The Mayor of Tewkesbury, wearing his mayoral chain round his neck, and a representative from the Fair's community laid wreaths on the War Memorial at the Cross. The Town Band played, and the Mayor got into a dodgem car with his wife, and off they went. The music changed to loud funfair mode and the Mop was open. The night of the 9th was Hospital Night, when much of the takings were given to our local hospital charity. Many of the stalls were not open, but all the rides were, and moreover they were half price! Most of the people of Tewkesbury came out to see what was going on. People you hadn't seen since the previous Fair Night. The human community of Tewkesbury was on display.

A fair in your own town's streets is a wondrous affair. The buildings themselves seemed to be in festive mood with all the coloured lights reflected on their walls and windows. If you got on the Big Wheel, you could look OVER the roof of a house which you saw every day, and into your neighbour's back yard which you only ever saw on Mop Night.

There are advantages in being a child. Relatives have to buy you a bottle of pop, some candy floss, some more pop, followed by treacle toffee or gingerbread, then another bottle of pop, then a ride on the Waltzer, then nausea, then home. If I still felt well enough, we wandered along East Street to Kimberley's for some chips and a bottle of Tizer, which I used to take to my Gran's house in Chance Street, where Gran would make us a cup of tea before Mum, Dad and I walked home.

On the 10th, the whole fair started in the afternoon, and carried on until well after my bedtime. The 10th was proper Fair Night, when the stalls were open. I went to see the seven-legged sheep, the snake lady, the midgets (as they were known then) and so on. Then there were the penny machines, the "Alltwins" (a misnomer if ever there was one), or Win a Goldfish with a ping pong ball, or Hoopla.

There was a coconut shy in Nelson Street and Swing boats and the Waltzer in Oldbury Road, and a device where you hammered something which shot up into the air and rang a bell. A few more rides and bottles of pop, and it was time to go home. Next morning, it was off to school.

The Fair had gone!

The white lines were still there, but the tented city of pleasure had vanished into thin air.

The Fair had completely gone!

Totally!

Had it all been just a dream?

No.

It had been . . .

Magic !!

Essay 21

Junior School

IN SEPTEMBER I WENT TO A NEW SCHOOL. It was called Boss Rob's but its formal name was the Tewkesbury Church of England Junior School. (Which is why it was called Boss Rob's for short!) For a few weeks, Nick and I walked to school. In total, there and back, it must have been about three miles, so quite soon, Nick and I acquired our red and yellow Mobo scooters.

The School was similar to our Infants School, only it was much busier at breaks. There were two classrooms on either side of a wide corridor. The walls of the corridor were covered in posters and pupil's very best artwork, but also there were framed pen and ink drawings with titles like "A Century of Railways", or "The History of Cars", or perhaps a diagram (in colour) of the Battle of Tewkesbury with drawings of Knights in Armour, Kings and Bowmen" Down at the bottom right hand side of each one (and there must have been at least six) was the name "Geo. Robinson"

At first Nick and I went straight to school, but then we diverted slightly so that we could buy four "chews" for a penny. Only a farthing each! Usually you only got two ha'penny chews, or a single penny chew. In the morning we went straight to school for registration and "Prayers"

In the afternoon we enjoyed our new found freedom. I don't recall Nick and I ever going along the High Street in those days. It was a very busy street (it was on the main road from Birmingham to Bristol and beyond), and it was the main shopping street of the town, so there were always a lot of people walking along a narrow footpath.

We found two different routes, and sometimes we varied those, too, along the alleys of the mediaeval town. Sometimes we'd go down Oldbury Road. That way we'd get a very good view of any steam locomotives in Tewkesbury shed, and then we'd duck down Nelson Street and Yarnall's Alley to the Iron Bridge. Sometimes we'd go past the malthouse to see one of the men, who, when he saw us, used to waggle his ears! If we turned down Chance Street we could nip into Gran's for a glass of Tizer before going up Orchard Court and over the Iron Bridge and back home again. It was the first time Nick and I had tasted freedom and a certain amount of independence.

Mrs Mew

Our first Junior School teacher was a pleasant lady who lived at Shuthonger, a tiny hamlet near Tewkesbury. She taught us “joined-up writing”, or “double writing” though I don’t know why it was called that, and it was also she that first taught us how to use a pen. We learnt how to write “compositions” - little stories, often inspired by a photograph of some event like a Cycle Race, for example. My compositions were extremely short stories. Usually they would only take up half a page. What was there would be good work, but I never managed to build up enough speed to write a really effective story.

At school we had desks with tip-up seats and inkwells. We learnt how to write with steel pen nibs and school ink. Blots were common, and we soon became adept at using blotting paper, not only to dry our written work but also to clean over-inked nibs.

Mrs Mew was also musical, and besides playing the piano, she tuned into the BBC Schools Programme on an old wireless so that we could listen to “*Singing Together*” and “*Rhythm and Melody*”, two BBC school programmes that were great fun. Mrs Mew (I suspect at the suggestion of Mr. Robinson) was a member of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, and she treasured a letter which she had once received from Mr. Cecil Sharp, who was very famous for collecting folk songs. He used to sign his letters with a musical note that was, of course, C sharp!

On one afternoon a week, the partition between our classroom and the next one was folded back to make one large room. The desks were moved to the side to leave a large space for Country Dancing. The first dance we learned was “Brighton Camp” followed by “Long Eight”, “Flowers of Edinburgh”, “Circassian Circle” and others I’ve now forgotten. We learnt the technicalities such as “double casts” and “stars”. Our minds buzzed as we counted “Eight to the left” or “Eight to the right” silently to ourselves. The boys in Mr Robinson’s class learnt Morris Dancing, and wore the traditional ribbons and bells.

On one occasion he took the older children to the tree opposite the Black Bear which he called the “Morris Tree”. There we were treated to a piece of “Morris cake” while we watched a team of Morris dancers. George Robinson believed in taking us out of the classroom. Especially once we had settled into the Old Grammar School, we used to learn some history in the Abbey, and look for wild flowers by the Swilgate.

We must have danced to a reasonable standard, because one year, we took part in the Malvern Festival which had an international cast, including the Ukrainian State Dancers, and also on another occasion (sadly after I'd left) the School danced at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Locally, we used to go to infrequent dances held in the ballroom of the Swan Hotel in High Street for a charitable group called "*The League of Pity*".

At lunchtime, each of the classes in Oldbury Road used to have to join hands with someone else, and we used to walk in a long line, called a "crocodile", along Hollams Road into Cotteswold Road to go to the Boys Secondary Modern School, where there was a canteen, so that we could have our School Dinners.



Yum! Pink Custard again!

Essay 22

School Dinners

SCHOOL DINNERS WERE INTERESTING. We were served two hot courses per day for about 3/9 per week, 9d a day (less than 4p in today's money!). There was no choice of menu. We got our food, put it on the table, and remained standing. Then we said or sang a grace, and

from a standing start, from Amen to a sitting finish about to eat the first mouthful, was usually about three seconds. I can still remember a snippet of one of the Graces that we sang:

. . . Thank you for the World so sweet

Thank you for the food we eat

Thank you for the birds that sing

Thank you God for everything . . .

In winter we had disgusting stew, or mince, or if we were lucky, a couple of slices of roast meat. You could smell it as soon as you opened the door of the Canteen. I never did discover what that meat was. (It was usually better not to enquire.) It was almost always accompanied by mashed potato or boiled potatoes - we never ever had any chips. School mash had lumps in it of half-cooked potato, which were impossible to eat.

In summer, when potatoes were sometimes expensive, we were given white bread and margarine instead. School cabbage was awful, and the carrots were not much better. You always knew what the Bad Food of the Day was. You slipped on it where it had "fallen" on the floor. But at least you could see it if it was beetroot you were about to step in.

Also in summer, we sometimes had salad. It was always grated cheese salad. It was made from the outer leaves of lettuce, part of a tomato if you were very lucky, and diced beetroot. It was the only vegetarian dinner we had. Except that the lettuce was not always washed as thoroughly as it might have been, so that it was still gritty, and it was not unknown for small caterpillars (either alive or dead) to be found sometimes, usually on the end of your fork!!

The puddings were much better, except for the semolina, which was like eating milky sand. It could only be eaten by stirring a generous spoonful of jam into it. I liked the other milk puddings, though. Rice pudding and tapioca (or tapioco as we used to call it, also known as “frogspawn”) were lovely. So, too was roly-poly pudding, spotted dick and a sponge with currants in, which was known as “cake and custard”. And the custard was almost always pink.

Special treats included lemon curd tart, those cornflake tarts, treacle tarts, and jellies and blancmange. At Christmas, we had a proper Christmas dinner with turkey and roast potatoes, ending with Christmas pudding. Sadly, for one or two in the school it was the only Christmas dinner that they had because their families were so poor.

Nothing was wasted. Any food left over was put in the “pig bin” and later boiled up as pigswill to feed the pigs.

Just before the end of the Summer Term, a boy joined our class. His name was Philip Mew and he was Mrs Mew’s younger son. He was bright and lots of fun, and I remember he had almost white curly hair. We used to play together in the school playground.

Miss Merrell

In September we moved up to Miss Merrell’s class. She was younger than Mrs Mew, but I don’t remember her very well at all. She was quiet, and she hadn’t yet become a ‘character’ like the other teachers. She was probably the youngest of the four. Not only did our teacher change, but we changed school buildings to the Old Grammar School at the other end of the town, across the road from the Abbey. Also across the road was a magnificent avenue (maybe eight trees, but it seemed as though there were more, the trees were green and shady. In conker season we would be over in the churchyard, throwing sticks into the foliage to knock down the ripe conkers. Later on, the lovely trees were cut down, and the space was made into a car park for Abbey staff. We had our own little dining room and kitchen, so we didn’t have to walk miles to get our School Dinner.

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Philip was there again, but he said he’d only be with us for about a week. Apparently he had earlier won a Scholarship to Rendcomb College, about twenty miles away, and because his school was a boarding school

and they worked at weekends, their terms were shorter. As his Mum taught at our school, poor Philip used to have to come to our School until we were on holiday as well. Sure enough we saw him for a couple of days before Christmas and a week in January. We got quite used to seeing him around.

We played all sorts of games. Tag, of course, including the more dangerous Chain Tag, where the chasers had to be in a joined-up chain. If you were on the end of a long chain and it suddenly changed direction, you had to run very fast indeed! Every game had a season. Marbles were played for “keepses” where the winner took all; there was hopscotch and other games which all had their own season. Nobody could tell you what games would be played when, but all of a sudden a different game would appear, and just as quickly disappear, then in Autumn there was the conker season, when we used to frequent every horse chestnut tree in the town to collect as many conkers as possible. These had holes drilled through them, and a string or an old shoelace was pushed through the hole and knotted. Then into battle we’d go, alternately trying to hit each other’s conker until it broke. If you had a fresh conker and you broke another conker that had broken another (a twoer) yours became a threer. But if your threer destroyed a fourer, your threer became a sevens, which would be a topic of conversation in the classroom. Of course, the more games the conker was in would damage it and make it less able to win. As with many things, knowing when to stop was a good skill to learn!

Some unprincipled boys would harden their conkers by pickling them or baking them in the oven, but generally it was fairly easy to spot these. In winter, we made ice slides and threw snowballs at each other. The girls skipped, or played games with tennis balls. Their games were a mystery to me. Their games were nearly all accompanied by chants, and fragments floated across to where the boys were playing.

“ . . . *How many crosses in a churchyard? . . .* ”

“ . . . *the last one’s OUT!* ”

“ . . . *‘I owe you five farthings’ said the bells of St Martin’s . . .* ”

“ . . . *Down came the rain, and washed the spider out . . .* ”

“ . . . *Ee aye addio, the Farmer’s in the dell.* ”

Hundreds of children's voices must have echoed in the school's playgrounds over the years.

Several games had died out before our time. My mother could remember bowling a hoop to school, and playing "Tipcat". The latter involved sharpening a short hazel stick at both ends, rather like sharpening a pencil with a knife. This was the "cat". The pointed end of the "cat" was hit sharply downwards with a long stick about the size of a hockey stick so that the 'cat' spun rapidly upwards. In that instant, the hitter had to try and whack the spinning "cat" as far as possible. This was great fun, if you managed to hit the 'cat', but maybe one of the reasons it died out, was because it was just too difficult to hit it.



As I've said there was an avenue of Horse Chestnuts in the Abbey Churchyard, just across the road from our school. These trees produced an excellent crop of conkers, but it was another tree that caught my imagination that year

In the play ground was a very old Mulberry tree.

The horse chestnut seed or conker.

The bandaged hand was from a bad fall.

It was so old that some of its branches were propped up so that there was a little bower underneath the branches. It was here that I came to appreciate the joys of kiss chase, which was another tag game, but one where you didn't necessarily run fast to avoid capture. If you thought the girl chasing you was rather nice, you slowed down, but you ran fast if some unattractive girl was chasing you! If you were chasing a girl, you ran faster or not quite as fast if you liked her. I liked kiss chase! Unfortunately, my mother was a playground supervisor, which caused me many embarrassing moments, and my grandmother worked in the kitchen, so I continually had a red face.

Philip didn't turn up in the week before Easter, and I didn't think anything of it, but when I didn't see him in the first week of the new term, I mentioned it to Mum, who was a friend of Mrs Mew. Mum told me that in the previous term at Rendcomb, he had climbed a tall tree. There was a thick carpet of leaves surrounding it. He slipped, and fell head first onto the one visible root. Philip had been killed at his boarding school, and

that's all I know to this day. I suspect that Mum was just grateful that "my" cyclist had not been going any faster, or maybe, I, too, would not have survived.

Miss Humphries

The following September we moved to Miss Humphries' class. She had dark hair and a sun browned skin. She was stylish and above all, she was exciting. I used to see her occasionally out of school hours playing tennis. Everything she did, she did with enthusiasm and always seemed to have a smile on her face. I still use some of the Christmas decorations which I made in her class nearly sixty years ago. She was an avid country dancer and seemed to be in love with life itself.

Whenever we had our birthdays we were allowed to choose the hymn for morning assembly. I always seemed to choose no 143; even after all this time I still remember it started off :-

*"When a knight won his spurs in the story of old,
He was gentle and brave, he was gallant and bold . . ."*

She was an excellent teacher, and I was very sorry to have to leave her class and all my friends when my father's job took Mum and me out of the area to live a hundred miles away in Bournemouth.

Mr. Robinson

Unfortunately I was never in Mr Robinson's class. That was not to say that he never taught me. He used to take us for some lessons, and he was an inspiration in and out of school. It would be possible to write a book about Mr Robinson, but a few paragraphs will have to do.

I can see him in my mind's eye very clearly indeed. As he taught us, he would sit on an empty front desk, polishing his glasses, and repolishing them. He came from the North East of England, and he told us many stories from his boyhood. He was amazingly accomplished. Having done some teaching myself, I find it difficult to comprehend all the different things he must have done outside his class teaching. All his class preparation and his extra tasks as a headmaster must have taken many hours from his out-of-school time.

He was on the then Tewkesbury Borough Council, and he was made Mayor of Tewkesbury, and he was also Reader at Tewkesbury Abbey. He was an accomplished artist and calligrapher. He drew the many detailed posters, which I've already mentioned, which hung in the main corridor of the school. He taught us football, and he organised country dances. Most of all, and I appreciated it not only as a pupil, but also speaking as a former teacher, I admire him because he knew every pupil and what they were capable of.

That is a very rare skill.

It was he who shared his passion for the Abbey with me. Often we would go into the Abbey for a history lesson. He was a strict but fair disciplinarian by the standards of those days. He used the cane, but not often. (He called it "Coughdrops", because it would cure anything!) A master of psychology, he used to put it in a visible place in his study, so that it was the first thing you saw on entering his room. I don't know what effect it had on the others, but it used to scare me stiff! (I never did get the cane.)

He didn't believe in gold stars. If you did a neat piece of work that was all correct, you were sent by your teacher along to his study. He would ask you a couple of (easy) questions about your work, and then he would sign it, "Commended. Geo. Robinson" followed by the date. I suppose because it was more personal than a gold star, 'commendeds' meant a lot to the cleverer ones, who used to see who could get the most. I was able to read at a very early age. Recognising that, he lent me books about the Greek Myths, and taught me how to pronounce difficult names like Thucydides. He also introduced me to Arthur Ransome's books which I devoured.

If we managed to not miss any school in a term, we got an attendance certificate, and if we were good enough we got a school prize, and all of them were written by him in beautiful calligraphy. I have a couple of prizes on a shelf near me as I write this, "The Iconium Mystery": 1953, and "The Black Bog Mystery": 1955. I can't remember who won the prize in 1954. Another mystery, presumably!

At the school near the Abbey, he found that he had a smallish room that was too small to be a classroom. Up to that time, each class had had a nature table, upon which we grew daffodils and hyacinths with the bulbs resting on top of milk bottles filled with water. (We used to have a school daffodil competition). We also used to have an Easter egg competition for which we boiled up eggs in all sorts of things to colour them, and then we would add details, like faces and hats. There would also be a jar or two of frog spawn at that

particular time of the year and one or two other oddities. I remember one year that someone found some wild orchids which were placed on the nature table.

But this little room had great possibilities! Mr. Robinson decided to have a school museum, and we were encouraged to bring into school old things that would be suitable for inclusion in the collection. I took in a small stone statue that my Uncle had found on Bredon Hill. The museum was opened by the then Mayor of Tewkesbury, Mr Bannister, who owned a chemist's shop in the High Street. He talked to us about Tewkesbury for a little while and he then congratulated the school for starting a museum even before the town of Tewkesbury had such a thing.

I could carry on with descriptions of the days off that we used to get for Ash Wednesday, and Ascension Day, and I've already mentioned Fair Day. I could tell you more about the work that we did and the games that we played, but memory is a strange thing, and although I think my memory is correct, some of the things I have mentioned may be in the wrong place or the wrong year; but they all happened, and they all contributed to my education, happiness, and my enduring love for Tewkesbury.

All the children in Tewkesbury Primary Schools also used to get the "Mayor's Treat". I don't know what exactly it had to do with the Mayor, but we were sent in crocodiles to the Sabrina Cinema in the High Street, and we would watch a film. These films were usually about twenty years old. They were black and white "Second Features" from the days when there used to be two films and the Pathe News shown at cinemas every afternoon and evening. Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, George Formby, all amused and "educated" the children of Tewkesbury.

In 1954, we got TWO "Mayor's Treats". We were taken to see the film of the Coronation, and also "Ascent of Everest"; because Mount Everest had been climbed for the first time in May 1953 and the news arrived on Coronation morning.

There is one little footnote that should be added to my account of the C.of E. Junior School, and it is so unbelievable . . . Well, judge for yourself.

Long after the building ceased to be a school,
long after our teachers in the 1950s had passed on.

Long after I had moved to Australia, I saw my old school on television.

There had been the most incredible storms right across the country, and so in 2007, Tewkesbury suffered its worst flooding for two hundred and fifty years and countries from all over Europe sent help.

So it was that moored in the floodwater outside the front door of our little school, was a small ***Italian*** Search and Rescue hovercraft on active service.

When I left that door for the last time on my way to Bournemouth in 1956, if someone had predicted that that was going to happen, would I have believed them?

Would you?



The Avon Lock

Tewkesbury

Essay 23

Walks with My Uncle

WHEN IT CAME TO COUNTRY WALKS, Uncle John was one of my most frequent companions. He was a gentle man in the truest sense, self-deprecating and shy. He got on with his life, worked on the railways, went out in the evenings for a couple of pints and looked after his mother. Doing some research for this book, I came across one or two surprises. He joined up in the Royal Artillery in 1939, and I have absolutely no idea where he was or what he was doing for the first five years of his military career.

I do know that in 1944, he was in the Invasion of France and crossed on D-Day with the Second British Army. He acted as driver for a senior officer during the Liberation of Belgium. By early 1945 his European War ended, and he was billeted with a family at Bergen-op-Zoom just outside Antwerp after the liberation of Belgium. They sent cards to each other every Christmas until 1979 (he died in July 1980).

After May 1945, all Allied troops were looking forward to being demobbed, but Uncle John was sent to Deolali, about 100 miles north of Bombay (Mumbai). He was not shipped back to Britain until just before the Independence and Partition of Pakistan and India on 1st January 1947.



We used to go almost everywhere together. We walked round the Ham. We watched the remaining water wheel turn at the Abbey Mill. In those days it was the one nearest the road. Then we would walk the paths through the mowing grass until we reached the Severn weir to see if the salmon were leaping. The two of us walked to Tewkesbury Quay which when I was small, still had a couple of railway sidings, and up the road between the Mill buildings to see the flywheel rotate when the Mill was still steam-driven.

Another favourite walk was to Ashchurch station to see the trains. We walked through Newtown until we reached the Spa, the well that was going to be Tewkesbury's rival to Cheltenham, but never was. It was a most unlikely building to find in a small field. But stranger things were still to come. There was a milestone by the side of the road. Uncle John said I should spit over the stone to the other side for luck. Every time we passed the milestone, we spat over the top of it. I have no idea what particular luck it was supposed to bring. Perhaps it was a quirky thing which he had done in his own childhood, or maybe it was just a bit of fun on his part.

On reaching Ashchurch, we would watch the trains for half an hour or so, and very, very, occasionally we were let into either the Junction or the Level Crossing Box. Sometimes we would go back to Tewkesbury on the train if there was one due for departure, or else we would wait for the number 62 bus from Cheltenham to Tewkesbury which was always a green double-decker. All Bristol buses were green, but Gran used to call them "Bristol Blues", possibly from a long vanished era? Talking of long-vanished eras, the 62 used to go to Tewkesbury Crescent. On the way to the Crescent it used to stop outside the Plough Inn (a former coaching inn); and on the way back to Cheltenham, the first stop was at the Kings Head (also a former coaching inn) almost on the corner of Chance Street and Barton Street.

Traffic was sporadic, even on the main roads. Vehicles were commonly two or three hundred yards apart. Traffic was slow, too. The roads hadn't been straightened in those days, and lorries were limited to twenty miles per hour. VERY occasionally, you would see some smoke and a puff of steam above a hedge, and a steam road roller would go past at not much more than walking pace, with a trailer carrying bits and bobs, and sometimes also a little trailer with windows. There would be a narrow pipe with smoke lazily coming out of the roof, indicating a warm dry cabin, and possibly a bed for the night.

Uncle John was also not averse to us walking back to Tewkesbury, but never the same way. Occasionally we would walk along Northway Lane past what had been the "custard factory" (this was before Dowty's) and follow the lane through the fields where they were still building the Northway Estate, until we reached the main road again near the turning for Walton Cardiff. On at least one occasion, we took the lane from Northway to Bredon's Hardwicke, and then back to Tewkesbury along the Bredon Road. That was quite a long walk for a small boy like me. We also used to walk down Lower Lode Lane, and more interestingly for me, the walk from Tewkesbury up to Twynning and back over the Avon Ham and several fields.

Whatever walk we did, long or short, he would share his country knowledge with me.

And all the time on any of Uncle John's forays into the countryside, we kept stopping. Maybe he would point out a bird and we'd look for its nest. To me, it seemed a pointless exercise, because if we found one, he wouldn't let me look for the eggs "because it would scare the bird". He could be very modern-thinking when in those days, collections of birds eggs or butterflies were thought to be perfectly acceptable hobbies for young boys.

He seemed to know the names of all the wild flowers, but I'm sure he made up the names for the ones he didn't know! He knew country lore. He'd find wild sorrel and ask me to taste it, and he'd tell me about the bread and cheese plant. He could identify birds from their songs. He taught me the difference between the three different types of nettle, so that if you were stung, you could look for a dock leaf nearby which would take away the pain.

Another walk I remember was to explore the Mythe Tute (pronounced 'toot' as in 'foot'). It's supposed to be the last place in England where woad grows wild. We climbed up the little road past King John's Castle, but on top of the Tute there were no blue plants at all. Then, by the side of the Severn we went to look at the old Brick Pits, before trespassing on the railway to walk through the Mythe Tunnel. The darkness and the echoing, and the possibility of a train coming, always used to make me a little frightened particularly when I was very young, but we would then go and inspect Telford's magnificent Mythe Bridge (over which we did NOT spit for luck!) I must have been very slow on the uptake, or else I just didn't believe him, when I said I hadn't seen any blue plants on the Tute at all, just yellow-flowered weeds.



Woad - only found on the Tute?

"That was the woad", he said, "The yellow flowers make the blue dye"

He could have told me that earlier!

Early one morning in July 1980, he made a cup of tea for his mother, and he sat down in the next room to drink his. Gran heard the clatter of a cup and saucer falling to the ground, and she got out of bed to see Uncle John sitting in his favourite easy chair, apparently asleep, but actually having died, quite suddenly at the age of sixty-six. His heart had just decided to stop.

Essay 24

Travelling on the Tewkesbury Flyer

MOST SATURDAYS WERE SPENT in the same way. I got up early, had breakfast, packed a small bag with sandwiches made by Mum, together with a tomato sauce bottle full of orange squash or something similar. In my pocket I checked that I had a biro and a small notebook. Occasionally I also took my camera.

Off I went, walking briskly down Queens Road, crossing over the River Swilgate by the Iron Bridge, then going up through the alleys, cutting across to Chance Street, and then along what seemed to be an interminably long private road to Tewkesbury railway station.

Somebody once asked why the station was such a long way from the centre of town, and a local wit replied that he thought the Midland Railway probably wanted it somewhere near the tracks. But there was a good reason why it was where it was. The original line had a station right in Tewkesbury's High Street. This was one of the oldest stations in the country, dating back to 1840 when the line was first opened. Together with other stations on the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway, it was one of the first stations in the World to use the Edmondson pasteboard tickets that for so many years were the standard railway issue. Through a dreadful act of vandalism, this historic station was demolished in the 1930s, and a supermarket now stands on the spot, right opposite the Anchor on the corner of Quay Street and High Street. Unfortunately, the old Tewkesbury station was in the wrong position for a through line to Malvern, so that when the extension was built, a new station had to be built on the edge of Tewkesbury to serve the new line.

I entered the (usually empty) booking hall, and purchased my fourpenny child's third class return ticket to Ashchurch, and then went through another door onto the platform where the train was waiting.

Steam trains are either dirty, or they are romantic. It's always one or the other. If you think they are romantic you don't notice the dirt, and if you think they are dirty you fail to see the romance of a train journey. I must be a romantic, because I was never really aware of the dirt. For me the whole experience was a delectable assault on my senses. The locomotive was there, and even though it was stationary, it issued different sounds: the fireman shovelling coal onto the fire; the injectors whining softly; the hissing of

steam; dribbles of hot water issuing from the cylinder drain cocks; and the smell. Oh that smell! The smell of hot oil, steam and chimney smoke must surely be one of the most evocative smells on Earth.

Getting into a compartment in the single coach train was another sensory delight. First, the clunk as the carriage door closed behind me. Then there were the wood veneers inside the compartment, often labelled “Crown Elm England” or “Spanish Mahogany Brazil” (That one always set me wondering, but I realise now the wood was Spanish Mahogany). There were pictures of far away places elsewhere on the railway system flanking a somewhat dirty mirror on which was inscribed in capital letters as if in code “BR (M)”.

Lastly that wonderful dusty smell of world-weary cut moquette. If the morning was fine, I’d lower the window by pulling the large leather strap that hung down on the door, so that I could breathe in the fresh air, perfumed in spring by May blossom, and also hear the sound of the locomotive more clearly.

After a few minutes, other unseen carriage doors were slammed shut. Clunk, clunk clunk, clunk! There was the sound of a guard’s whistle, followed by a brief reply from the engine, and then slowly, very slowly at first, we started to move.

As we left the platform behind, you felt a regular but not unpleasant movement to and fro, back and forth, as the steam pushed the pistons ever harder and faster. As we passed the signal box at all of ten miles per hour, we crossed over onto the left hand running line and continued to accelerate until we had reached about twenty-five miles per hour. The fields and houses went by, and that wonderful engine smell came through the open window. After five minutes, we slowed down, passed under a bridge, crossed some points clickety clack, moved to the right with a screaming of flanges, and pulled into the curved platform at Ashchurch Junction. Often there were three other trains already in their respective platforms. On the main line were trains for Birmingham and Bristol, and on the far branch platform, another train that took a roundabout route to Birmingham via Evesham and Redditch.

We trainspotters tended to head for the end of the Birmingham platform, where we were out of the way of other people using the station. Ashchurch did not have any London trains. It was a cross country line which connected Bristol and the South West with Birmingham, the East Midlands, York and the North East.

Steam engines could pick up water at speed, but they had to come off trains to be refuelled with coal. On summer Saturdays, Shed Superintendents frequently had trains with no suitable engine. For instance, a train running from Newcastle to Cardiff would have engine changes at Leeds and Gloucester. Where possible, it made sense to refuel the Newcastle locomotive at Leeds and send it back to Newcastle; the locomotive that



The old Ashchurch Junction Station. To reach the platforms you had to cross the Tewkesbury line on a crossing, not a bridge.



This "Hall" class locomotive is probably hauling an empty iron ore train back to the East Midlands. The ore was mined near Corby, and taken by train to Stratford, then via Broome Junction, through Evesham and Ashchurch then via Gloucester to the steelworks of South Wales

A "Royal Scot" class locomotive hauling an express van train up the main line from Bristol to Birmingham.

The building behind is the refreshment room from where we procured our Lyons Fruit Pies



hauled the train as far as Gloucester should take a train back to Leeds, and the Cardiff loco would be returned on a train to Gloucester.

Saturdays in summer were different. There were more trains than locos, and so the Shed Superintendents would look around their sheds and choose ANY suitable locomotive to haul any train. Thus it was that on a Saturday at Ashchurch we never quite knew what we would see coming down the line.

Devon and Cornwall were real operating headaches. From Exeter to Penzance there was only one main line in and one main line out of the whole South West peninsula, and Saturdays were the days when everyone left their boarding houses to go home and another huge crowd arrived. It was not unknown for trains not to have enough carriages to leave holiday resorts because not enough carriages had arrived. This problem was frequently solved by sending giant trains of empty carriages (up to three trains' worth of coaches hauled by large goods locomotives). That got the coaches into the South West to divide up into trains for tourists who wanted to leave, but stations and junctions would be congested, so it was just as necessary to get trains out of the South West, preferably without delay.

An extreme example of this was the 2.42. This train ran from Penzance to York. According to the timetable, it didn't stop at Plymouth, Exeter, Taunton, Bristol or Gloucester. Its "first" stop was Ashchurch Junction. A single engine would have run out of coal, and so the locomotive was probably changed at Exeter, and we saw the second loco. By the time that it arrived at Ashchurch to take water, the coal tender was almost empty. The train was routed off the main line to Birmingham via Worcester, so that a fresh engine could be put on to take the train to York.

From our point of view, this resulted in an unusual locomotive, usually from the Exeter area, and it was almost always previously unseen by us.. The main line through Ashchurch was dead straight, so that we were able to look at an oncoming train and identify what the class of locomotive it was by the silhouette of the front. The regular classes, such as "Jubilees", "Patriots", and "Black Fives" were easy to spot, but one lunchtime, a train approached us with a very unusual outline. It looked like a modern 9F freight engine, but it was going too fast. Surely it couldn't be a Britannia? Most of those were operating from London to Norwich. We really had no idea what it might be.

As it came under the roadbridge, I saw that the first digit of the number was a 7, and locos with numbers in the 70 series were “Britannias” - highly unusual. So it was a “Brit.” after all! The next figure, however, was totally unbelievable. It was a “2”. The loco was 72005, named “Clan McGregor”. There were only ten “Clan” class locos in existence, and they were all based at Glasgow or Carlisle. They hardly ever came south of Manchester. Our theory was that as usual, it had been hauling a Manchester, or more possibly a Leeds train. The usual Bristol based loco can’t have been available, and so another Leeds or Glasgow based locomotive would have taken the Glasgow train back to Scotland. A shortage of locos for trains to the South West on a busy weekend meant that the “Clan” was put on a train to Bristol! The Bristol shed would have returned it on a northbound train, (which was when we saw it) and then the following day it would have hauled a Glasgow-bound express back to its Glasgow shed.

It wasn’t only locomotives that ended up in strange places. Tommy the tabby also roamed the network. I don’t know how Tommy entered railway service. Perhaps he was born into it. I never saw him, but I understand he was a very burly tomcat that normally patrolled the cellars of Bristol (Temple Meads). Rats vanished very quickly. How many were eaten, and how many decided that there were safer places to lurk than in Temple Meads cellars, I don’t know, but it wasn’t long before he searched the platforms, and this soon led to hunting on trains. Passenger must have been very surprised. Guards were under instructions to capture the cat, give it to the stationmaster at the next stop, who would put it in a wooden box (if possible) and return Tommy to Bristol.

No, I never saw Tommy, but I am rather pleased that I was not the guard who was expected to catch him!

I moved away from Tewkesbury, and moved to Bournemouth with my Mum and Dad, and it was not until 1960 that we returned to the town. Gran and Uncle John still lived in Tewkesbury, but we lived in Bishops Cleeve. I still met up with some friends at Ashchurch, but I had lost contact with my former class mates. I still used to go to Ashchurch, and I was there to be on the last train to Upton-on-Severn, and the last train to Tewkesbury. At the time, we were trying to get people to move out of our photos, but now almost sixty years later, we wish we had taken photographs of the people, most of whom are now no longer with us.

It was on the 12th August 1961 that the last passenger trains ran along the Upton branch. Many of us still have our green pasteboard tickets.



Last Train at Upton on Severn 12 August 1961



The very last passenger train entering Tewkesbury Station at about 6.15 pm on 12 August 1961

Essay 25

Time Away from Tewkesbury

I DID TRY MY BEST when we moved to Bournemouth, I really did. Tewkesbury was a small old town of about five thousand people from old families, so that the whole town seemed like an extended family, and possibly it was! Bournemouth, in contrast, was a modern place (it wasn't a community) of about 150 thousand in the winter and almost twice that (at any one time) in the summer. I went to East Howe County Primary School. People weren't very friendly, after all, I was the new boy. There were no Commendeds or dancing, and there were more children and teachers and I hated it. There were no fields and streams, no trees to climb. I felt terribly isolated. Our church, St Andrew's Kinson, was old but it was very small compared to the Abbey. The one place I really liked was Bournemouth (Hurn) airport.. This was where Dad worked on the propellers of the Vickers Viscount. Security was not tight in those days and so I was able to walk round the factory (under strict supervision) and see the aircraft being made.

In 1957, very few planes could fly directly across the Atlantic, so that most planes refuelled at Gander, Newfoundland; Keflavik, Iceland; and Shannon, Ireland, before finally landing at London Airport. There were also only very primitive blind flying systems, so that if London was shrouded with fog, the planes were diverted to Bournemouth, which became a very busy airport. The passengers would get off their planes, be



A BOAC Lockheed Constellation arrives in Britain after a very long Transatlantic flight. Today it is about six hours or less direct. In 1957, It might take more than ten hours with refuelling stops.

put into taxis, and sent to Bournemouth station to catch specially chartered Pullman trains.

In 1959, Dad was recalled back to Tewkesbury where we had a flat over Mrs Goodlock's sweet shop in 78 Church Street opposite the Crescent, and really handy for the buses. Then Dad dropped a bombshell. I

would be going to Cheltenham Grammar School, not Tewkesbury Grammar, because Dad was having a house built in Bishops Cleeve about six miles away. I made new friends and I seldom went to Tewkesbury.

I gradually lost touch with my friends, and by 1974 when I graduated from Bradford, after four years in Yorkshire, I felt that if I walked down Tewkesbury High Street I wouldn't see anyone I recognised, and no-one would recognise me. I last saw my classmates when I was ten. Now all of us were twenty-eight and many of the girls would be married and have different names.

I felt I was a stranger in the town where I grew up.



*Number 78 is the second from the left. It is an unassuming four windowed brick fronted shop.
Behind the brick sits a 16th Century timber building.*

Essay 26

The Internet, and in particular, the “Tewkesbury Voice”

I FELT LIKE A STRANGER until about 2002, when we first got a computer joined up to the Internet. I was “surfing” one day when I found a site called “Tewkesbury Voice”, which is still going strong, although in a much modified version, on Facebook. Gradually I linked up (many of us linked up) in cyberspace from all over the world. I knew some of them, some were my old school friends. Many of the members lived overseas. The postings on the Voice were a bit like conversations in a Tewkesbury pub.

One day someone in Tewkesbury, posted something like “We’re all looking at our screens. Why don’t we Tewkesbury members have a pint together? Then, I think it would probably have been David, who lived in Western Australia, posted “Wait till next year and I’ll join you”

A miraculous thing happened. A date was set. October 1st 2005. David from Western Australia wanted to come, then two from Queensland, me from New South Wales. Four from Australia alone! But it wasn’t just the Aussies, two came from the Persian Gulf, two from Canada, three from the USA, and I’m sure there are some I’ve forgotten quite apart from the people living in Tewkesbury and the rest of Britain.

We had our first Reunion. The beauty of it was that you never knew who you would meet in Tewkesbury. You had the chance to visit old haunts and meet old friends. But because we had met in our old home town, it meant that we were able to see people that we could never expect to see in the normal course of events. The Town Mayor came along, and a reporter from the Echo who asked me lots of inane questions such as “You’ve come all the way from Australia, did it take you long to get here?” “Did you notice any differences in Tewkesbury from when you left?”

We met again in 2007, and in 2009, and again, for the last time in 2011. A few also managed to meet up in the years in between.

I came back to Tewkesbury for a funeral in 2012, and possibly my last visit in 2017, but I still feel there's one more trip left in me. Maybe it will be in 2021, the Abbey's 900th Anniversary, but whenever it is, one brilliant thing has happened.

I no longer feel like a stranger in my own town.



The "Voice" 2005 Reunion

Essay 27

And Then There are the Others . . .

MOST YOUNG PEOPLE THESE DAYS in the normal course of events, get to know their parents and their grandparents and possibly even their great grandparents. In 1946, there were a lot of people around who had lost their relations to disease or war.

I had one great grandfather who was still alive when I came into the world and his wife, my step-great grandmother. Tom Beesley, and his wife Louisa lived in Richardson's Almshouses in Gander Lane. There was some sort of feud in the family, and I only ever saw them twice. He had been born in 1864 and he died in Tewkesbury Hospital aged 90. All that I can really remember about him were his bloodshot eyes. He had been a blacksmith, and at one time he had worked for Walker's, the Roundabout makers in Oldbury Road.



My maternal grandfather, Edwin Bertie Waylen. He died in 1940 after suffering the effects of poison gas for over twenty years

My maternal grandfather was in the Royal Field Artillery on the Western Front. Born in 1885, he died in 1940 aged 55.

Gran always maintained he had died of TB like my paternal grandmother had in Manchester in 1923, and that Doctor Shephard used to take him with him when he went on his rounds. A Doctor would NOT take a patient with TB with him, but I did discover by chance what Edwin did die of. He had been in the Royal Field Artillery on the Western Front and he had been gassed, not severely, but he suffered some of the after effects for over twenty years. THAT is why our doctor took him out, so that he could get fresh air into his lungs. His brother, Harry, served with the Glosters on the Western Front, and also Salonika. He had been a gardener in Tewkesbury. He did get TB. He was sent home, and died in Laurel Cottages. He is buried in

Tewkesbury Cemetery and his grave is marked by a



military headstone. One of Tom Beesley's sons, also called Tom, and also Royal Field Artillery, was killed in the skirmishes in the aftermath of the Battle of the Somme, and he is commemorated on Tewkesbury Cross just across the road from where he worked at Frisby's the shoe store.

What I would give to spend a few evenings in the pub with them, listening to their yarns of *their* Tewkesburys, in a world which I could never fully relate to. It would be an interesting story set in my old haunts. This book tells my story in Tewkesbury in the 1950s, and quite possibly someone is already writing about Tewkesbury as it enters its Twenty-first Century. "History is written by the Victorious" it is said, but personal history is just as important, maybe even more so.

Personal historical ephemera, (yarning about *my* Tewkesbury) is the purpose of this book.



Tewkesbury's flooding problem. This wonderful photograph by Adam Gray looking north, shows the flooded Severn flowing downstream from the top of the photo, and down to the left edge of the photo. The Warwickshire Avon comes into the picture half way up the right hand side, and the Swilgate is marked by a line of trees on this side of the Abbey. The huge lake in the middle is the Severn Ham.

Tewkesbury Abbey is built on a tiny island, and most of the old town (to the right) is above flood level - usually) The modern housing developments out of the photograph beyond the right hand margin were inundated in 2007, the worst floods for two hundred and fifty years.

Essay 28

“The Elephant in the Room”

THE SO-CALLED “ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM”, which I’ve hardly mentioned so far (although it has a way of creeping into photographs), is, of course, the Abbey of St. Mary the Virgin. It is huge, (its Romanesque tower is the largest and finest in Europe according to Pevsner, (the authority on English Architecture)), the architecture is beautiful, it is immensely bound up with Mediaeval Families of such unimaginable power that they sometimes had more influence than the King himself, and my parents were married there, I was christened there, and I was briefly in the Choir. It is in many ways, Shakespeare’s Historical Plays made real by the stone monuments to the greatest, and richest families in the land, but not necessarily the nicest. Equally, however, St Mary’s Abbey is the Parish Church of Tewkesbury.

The Lord and Lady of the Manor would marry there and walk that long, long way down the Nave of the Church, and so, too, would two poor stocking knitters. It was very much the church that looked after all the people of the Parish. My ancestors for generations have been received into the Church here when they were christened.

I’m going to keep out of guidebooks, (but get one, as good a one as you can afford, because the history of the Abbey is England, and England’s story is also the Abbey’s.) **If you do go to Tewkesbury Abbey, spend half a day there, and then, *please*, go to Gloucester Abbey, only twelve miles away, which is now the Cathedral.**

But also remember that Tewkesbury is more than the two years of 1121 and 1471, it is a product of the ephemeral thoughts, deeds, and dreams of generations of people who have lived in the town at some time since before building of the Abbey commenced.

* * *

I am convinced that for hundreds of years as the two Abbeys were being built and modified, that the Master Masons of Tewkesbury and Gloucester knew each other, and passed on tips of a technical nature to

each other, and that they built very similar churches, except for one thing, the way the two Abbeys' constructions were financed.

In the Medieval church, there were two ways of making serious money which often had an effect on the church architecture.

Mediaeval monks, in theory at least, were supposed to receive their finance through gifts. They might pray for you and your family, and they asked you to "contribute" to their expenses, which is a long winded way of saying you paid and they prayed. This was particularly true then. There were a number of ways that you could raise lots of money, (and you needed lots of money to build and maintain buildings like these). Like Tewkesbury, you can have rich patrons, who in the Middle Ages had unimaginable wealth, enormous power, and no income tax, so they could pay for themselves to go to heaven (the Tewkesbury way) or, you could adopt the Gloucester method.

There was a very unpopular King called Edward II, who was verging on the treasonous. He was imprisoned in Berkeley Castle in South Gloucestershire. The Bishop of Salisbury sent a short message to Edward's gaolers, in Latin, the gist of which could have meant "Kill him!"

Or else it might have meant "Don't kill him!". Latin words can be put in almost any order in a sentence, which can be very useful at times. He had been perceived quite rightly as a very bad man.

Gloucester Abbey agreed to take his body, and shortly afterwards, miracles started to occur around his tomb. Pilgrims turned up in large numbers, and the more they came, the more they paid, the more miracles occurred and so much more cash poured into their Treasury, that they were able to modernise the Abbey with lierne vaulting and the most glorious tower anywhere.

Tewkesbury was surviving very nicely, but it had no stone vaulting, the roof consisted of huge oak timbers to hold up the roof. Even today, you can see where the roof was joined to the tower.

Enter a very rich and powerful man, the Patron of the Abbey at the time, Sir Hugh le Despenser, who lived in the early 1300s and he got his immense wealth from his wife Elizabeth Montacute, and his mother Eleanor de Clare, who owned a lot of Eastern England. He was a truly evil man. To give you an idea what he was

like , he stole the ownership of huge tracts of land in England and Wales, he raped his wife, he was exiled so he took to Piracy in the Channel. He murdered, and he tortured. He broke every bone of a woman's legs and arms because he claimed that she hadn't paid overdue debts. Eventually, he was caught, hanged, drawn and quartered for high treason. The whole gruesome saga is in the history books.

Elizabeth, his wife, must have loved him dearly, as in spite of everything, she wanted Hugh to go to Heaven. So fabulously wealthy were the Clares and Despensers that she paid for all the lierne vaulting to be



constructed in the Abbey. as an act of contrition This was in the early 1340s. (That date is significant), and she is unlikely to have lived long enough to see it all finished.

For a long time, (right into my generation) it was said that the monks had the best vaulting in the Chancel, and the most beautiful windows (all given by Isabella) and the vaulting in the nave, where the ordinary people sat, was not of the same

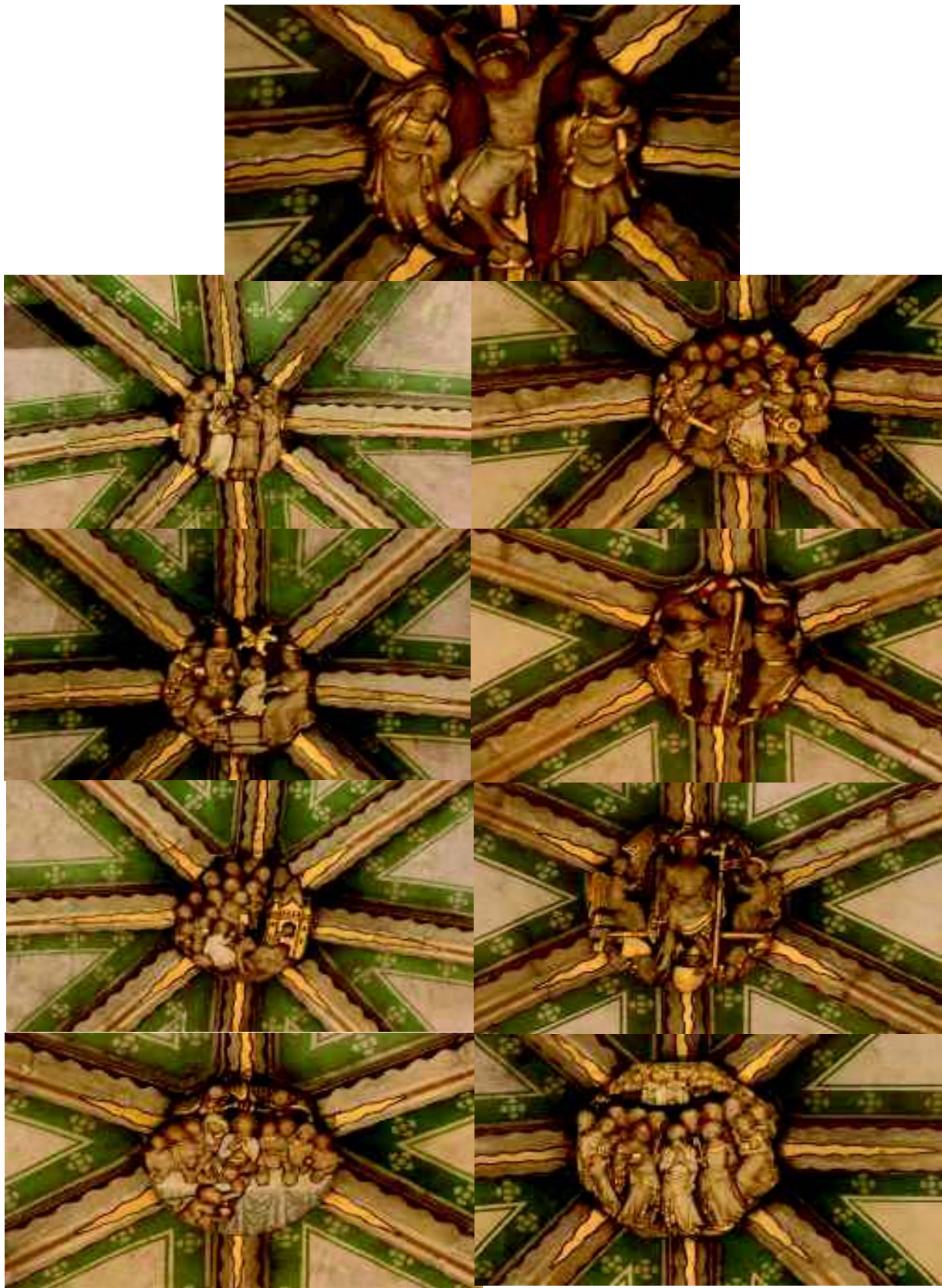
At Gloucester, the vaulting started from the bottom of the clerestorey windows, allowing a high and very complex lierne vault. Note the arches constructed to support the vaulting over the space in the transept



quality.

In the 1990s, following a large bequest, the vaulting was renovated, and then coloured to make it look as it would have done in the 14th Century. As the masons and decorators made their way from the choir to the nave, sure enough the quality did deteriorate, but when they reached the eighth bay, right at the back of the church, they came upon a small prayer for

The beautiful Perpendicular tower Of deliverance Gloucester Cathedral, and the Cloisters, the painted on the first example of Perpendicular style



Some of the nave roof bosses in
Tewkesbury Abbey



Gloucester Cathedral (Abbey) Nave



Tewkesbury Abbey Nave

wall. It was a poignant relic of the Black Death which had started in Britain in 1346. The quality of the vaulting had indeed deteriorated, but it was sadly because most of the best masons had died in the epidemic.

The Mediaeval Patrons of the Benedictine Abbey were the rich and powerful families, many of whom had inherited the “Honour of Tewkesbury”. These started with the Fitzhamons, and then through marriage of the women who had inherited, the Patronage was transferred to other fabulously rich and powerful families, such as the Fitzroys, followed by the Clares and King John, followed by the Despensers and finally the Beauchamps (pronounced Beecham), the Nevilles and the Clarences.



The Crecy Memorial Window

“Bigger than a tennis court”

East End Gloucester



The six concentric arches

West End

Tewkesbury

When prominent members of these families died, their heirs paid for masses to be said or sung daily to ensure that that member of the family (and later, of course, several members of a family) would be sent to



*The remains of
Tewkesbury's
cloisters in 14th
century
Perpendicular
style*

*Gloucester
Cathedral's
cloisters in 14th
century
Perpendicular
style*

heaven. Special “Chantry Chapels” were built at the East End of the church for each family so that the masses could be sung or chanted.

Owing to the large number of mediaeval families associated with the Abbey, the building has acquired more Chantries, Chapels and Monuments, than any other British Ecclesiastical Foundation except for the Abbey of Westminster. According to Roland Paul’s plan of the Abbey which appeared in “The Builder” in 1894, there were no less than ten chapels (nine have survived) around the outside of the Ambulatory and Transepts, plus, of course the demolished Lady Chapel, and six chantries or monuments surrounding the Presbytery.



The vaulting in the Warwick Chapel

Tewkesbury Abbey

The modern patronage is unusual in that there are two different Patrons.

The Patrons of the Parish of St Mary the Virgin, Tewkesbury,
with St Mary Magdalene, Twyning
are nowadays:

THE CROWN (twice)

appointed for HM The Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister

and

Christ Church Oxford (once)

in rotation.

The Abbey is in effect a “Royal Church”,
and so the choirboys traditionally wear red cassocks

APPENDICES

Appendix One: The Heavenly Twins

Appendix Two: The ABC of John Wyche

Appendix Three: The Iron Bridges of Tewkesbury

Appendix Four: Mrs Martin from Bredons Norton

Appendix Five: The Demise of the Elms

**Appendix One: The Heavenly Twins,
Tewkesbury and Gloucester Abbeys.**

EARLIER IN THIS BOOK I suggested that visitors spend half a day in Tewkesbury Abbey, and half a day in Gloucester Cathedral, (formerly Gloucester Abbey). The two buildings are only twelve miles apart, and they have very similar construction histories. They were both built for the Order of St Benedictine. The start dates and construction dates are similar; the consecration dates are similar, the stone columns in the Nave are almost identical in diameter, material and height, and much of the vaulting that is still visible in the nave and choir is lierne vaulting. The fan vaults of the Gloucester cloisters show the first examples of Perpendicular fan vaulting; the small remains of the ruins of Tewkesbury’s cloisters, and the ceilings of some of the chantry chapels also show signs of fan vaulting. The Warwick Chantry shows a hybrid lierne and fan vault development on the lower level, and lierne vaulting on the higher level. The overall skills and designs of tombs in both buildings are so similar. (cf. Edward II at Gloucester, and Hugh Despenser and Elizabeth Montacute at Tewkesbury), that the Master Masons of Gloucester and Tewkesbury Abbeys must very likely have known each other, and have consulted each other over particular technical problems that they were experiencing.

A comparison of key dates is interesting

	Gloucester	Tewkesbury
Foundation	681	c 690
Church Rebuild started	1089	1106
Consecration	1100	1121
Romanesque Vaulting	1242	none
Lierne Vaulting	1337	1340
Edward II tomb	1327	Despenser Tomb 1348
Largest East Window	1357	Largest West Arch c1200
Bays in Nave	8	8
(identical dimensions)		

There were also two major fires, one at Tewkesbury and one at Gloucester. At Tewkesbury, some monastic buildings were lost next to the South Transept,. Traces of burnt stone can still be seen.

At Gloucester Abbey, the South Aisle of the Nave caught fire, and it nearly collapsed. When it was partly rebuilt, a higher clerestory was included which enabled the new lierne vault to spring from above the windows, whereas at Tewkesbury the vault springs from the bottom of the clerestory so that the clerestory windows are incorporated into the vaulting. This makes the vaulting feel slightly oppressive.

Gloucester had had a Romanesque barrel vault until the fire, when it was replaced by its lierne vault in the new Decorated fashion. Tewkesbury had always had a wooden roof until it was similarly vaulted to that of Gloucester. Only about three or four years separated the start of the two projects for a very different reason. A lierne vault is rather like a bridge whose arch from column to column supports the vaulted ceiling, and is kept in place by a key stone. The difference between a vault and a bridge arch is that a vault has to support the ceiling in two directions, and so extra arches have to be built to hold the vault in place.

These in turn also have to reinforce the ceiling. For example, if we look at column 5 on the left hand side of the nave, the arches (the liernes) are built between 5 on the left and 3 on the right, 5 across to 4, and 5 to 5, 5 to 6 and 5 to 7 on the right hand side, and of course, the other way as well. The position of the keystones of the arches coincide with the junctions of the liernes, and these are called bosses. In the nave, they are typically about three feet across. They are usually carved, and most have some sort of theme. The ones along the central ribs of Tewkesbury Abbey are highly decorated and illustrate the life of Christ, but it is impossible to see their detail from the ground with the naked eye.

The liernes, of course become further apart as they leave the bosses and arch to the columns, and so secondary ribs called tiercerons have to be fitted to give extra support between the liernes. Every junction of these also had to be given bosses. At Tewkesbury they are angels playing musical instruments

It is not a huge leap to allow the liernes to form fans which result in a flat vault. There was possibly some conservatism with the new vault. At Gloucester, the first fan vaulting was carried out on the still extant cloisters. At Tewkesbury, early fan vaulting (just eight fans) can be seen in Hugh Despenser's Chantry. Gloucester Abbey was saved by becoming a Cathedral, hence the survival of their cloisters.

At Tewkesbury the cloisters were all demolished except for one bay next to the church, which demonstrates glorious fan vaulting. It is held that Gloucester's fan vaulting is earlier than that of Tewkesbury, but not by much. Certainly not more than the difference in age of an old experienced mason and a young progressive one who may have had some conversations somewhere between Tewkesbury and Gloucester, picking the older man's brains, and possibly looking for inspiration from radial structures such as water lilies or horse chestnut leaves that they saw along the Severn river bank. Perhaps the Perpendicular period fan vault was first thought of, somewhere along the river bank on the road from Tewkesbury to Gloucester.

The main difference between Gloucester's and Tewkesbury's Abbeys at the time of construction was the way the finance was provided. In Essay 28 "The Elephant in the Room" I wrote that Gloucester had the good fortune to have the body of Edward II put into a shrine. Miracles happened which provided a large number of pilgrims who provided a constant stream of finance for new building and maintenance. It also had royal preferments. A Coronation had been held there, and William II's Domesday Book had also been written there. Consequently Gloucester Abbey kept its Norman plan, but it was able to become the latest in styles. The main church was Norman, and then Decorated, with the usual tombs about the choir, and finally the first flowering of the English Perpendicular style: the first Perpendicular window, the largest Perpendicular window. (One of the largest windows of the mediaeval world and surely one of the oldest war memorials, commemorating the Knights who fought in the Battle of Crecy in 1346), and finally the first large arrangement of fan vaulting in the Cloisters.

As a Cathedral, the head church of a Diocese, (after the Dissolution of the Monasteries,) it was expected to be impressive, and the ultimate sign of a church is, of course the crossing tower. Local Abbeys such as Malvern Priory, Worcester, (the resting place of King John) and Gloucester, all have towers that look as though they have been designed and built by the same group of masons. In an age when God, the Devil, Heaven and Hell were certainties for everyone, these large churches were the latest developments of certainty; the NASA Cape Canaveral of God.

Tewkesbury received its money in a different way. Hugely rich families owned "The Honour of Tewkesbury" and were Patrons of the Abbey. The line of descendants occasionally changed because of the lack of a male heir. The rich female heir inevitably married into another very rich family.

The Norman Abbey was constructed by the FitzHamons who fought beside William I. The FitzRoys were the illegitimate relatives of King William II, then came the Clares, who endowed Clare College Cambridge from their huge lands in East Anglia, then the Despensers who owned Glamorgan and much of South Wales, followed by the Nevilles, the Clarences, and finally the Beauchamps. Following the mediaeval fashion, they paid to have priests say daily masses at the tombs of their ancestors.

The number of rich families, many of whom tried to outdo the previous families, employed the very finest masons to design and build chantry chapels, so that today, there are more side chapels and chantry chapels than any other church in Britain except for Westminster Abbey, and as already stated, Tewkesbury's vaulting and many of the 14th Century windows at the east end of the Choir were massive atonements by both a shamed Mother and the Wife of Hugh Despenser. The masons of Tewkesbury were able to express themselves more experimentally, as the Warwick Chapel shows with its assymetric two-storey design with totally unique columns.

It is not a huge leap to allow the liernes to form still extant cloisters. At Tewkesbury, early fan vaulting (just eight fans) can be seen in Hugh Despenser's Chantry.

The reason that Tewkesbury Abbey was saved, was because it was sold to the townspeople for £453, and Gloucester Abbey was saved by it becoming a Cathedral. This was thanks to three very powerful men in the mid 16th Century, namely, King Henry VIII (Defender of the Faith), Head of the English Church; Thomas Cromwell; and an ambitious ecclesiastical administrator by the name of John Wyche.

Appendix Two: The ABC of John Wyche

John Wakeman, Abbot, Bishop, Confessor

I SUPPOSE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF GUILF, or gamesmanship is required by prominent leaders to reach and maintain their positions. Sometimes, quite by chance, their progress is of general benefit to the people they come across, and John Wyche was the ultimate benefactor to the Abbey as a Monastery. His influence saved the church for us all to admire. It could so easily have become a ruin in the 1530s when it was just over four hundred years old. Today it stands strong after almost nine hundred years. John Wyche, through his influence with the Tudor hierarchy has given us almost five centuries denied to Glastonbury, Malmesbury, Tintern, and many others.

John Wyche was a Worcestershire man of God who was extremely ambitious. In 1534 there was an election for one of the top jobs in the newly formed Church of England, that of Abbot of Tewkesbury.

Wyche, (or Wakeman, as he had become by that time, had extremely powerful friends, and who knows what persuasion was placed on the Electoral Committee.. It is probably safe to say that Wakeman's election was rushed through. Thomas Cromwell had persuaded the senior brethren at Tewkesbury for the election to be made "at the King's Pleasure."

Wakeman had also secured his own appointment by intrigue, Thomas Cromwell, and King Henry VIII himself. They both visited Tewkesbury Abbey by the end of July 1535. Abbot Wakeman supplied information on disaffected brethren. (Not all brothers were happy with the newly established Church of England, nor its leader, the King). Wakeman further ingratiated himself with Thomas Cromwell by presenting him with a superb gelding, and £5 to buy a suitable saddle. This was a considerable sum, virtually half of what an ordinary monk would get in a year. Through Cromwell he met King Henry. Not long afterwards the position of Abbot of Tewkesbury became vacant. How much time he spent at Tewkesbury is moot. He must have been in London quite frequently to have had regular contact with Thomas Cromwell and the King. We know that he was a Confessor of King Henry, and jumping ahead a little, he was present at the death of King Henry in 1547.

There is always a *quid pro quo*, sometimes one or two quids pro quo! Tewkesbury was surrendered to the King in 1541, but Wakeman managed to save the Abbey from destruction by claiming that it was Tewkesbury's Parish Church, and he saved it on condition that the town paid £453 for the Nave. That doesn't sound a lot, but it took the residents of the town two years to pay off the debt. Most of the Monastic Buildings were destroyed, including the Lady Chapel.

Wakeman had managed to get Tewkesbury to be the last monastery to be dissolved, presumably because he couldn't see where the next senior church appointment would come from. All the Abbots were losing their positions, and the Bishopric of Worcester was not vacant. Wakeman was given, what today would be called a year's sabbatical and 400 marks. He spent most of the time in London and his Abbot's Palace at Forthampton. Meanwhile, the Diocese of Worcester was split into two, and the new Diocese of Gloucester was set up. It seemed appropriate that John Wakeman should be the first Bishop of Gloucester. The job seemed to have been made for him. He didn't even have to change his country residence. Forthampton Court became the country palace of the Bishop of Gloucester. In 1541, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer consecrated Wakeman as Bishop of Gloucester.

Wakeman was a scholarly man, and in 1542 he translated much of "Revelations". He attended the funeral of King Henry VIII in 1547, and he himself died in 1549.



Abbot Wakeman is best known these days for the Wakeman Cenotaph in Tewkesbury Abbey.

It is a tomb without a body. There has been much discussion about when it was constructed.

Some suggest that certain details look as if they are 15th century, rather than 16th Century, while others suggest that the Cenotaph was constructed at the same time as Wakeman's tenure of the Abbey. Some parts of it look decidedly like the Warwick Chapel, one of the

The Wakeman Cenotaph



Warwick Chapel, Tewkesbury Abbey

most beautiful parts of the Abbey. Might he have wanted something similar for his tomb? The top masonry frieze is similar in both structures.

The Cenotaph is famous for its gruesome corpse being eaten by mice, snakes, and all manner of nasty things, to demonstrate the decay of Man's body after death. When the body is interred, that sculpture covers the grave at ground level, and a more usual carved image of the dead person as a sleeping person is placed at the normal height of a tomb effigy. Finally, Tewkesbury has a Royal Patron. Tewkesbury Abbey was indeed sold for £453, but to make this possible, we almost certainly have to thank Abbot Wakeman of Tewkesbury, Bishop Wakeman of Gloucester, and Confidant of the King, John Wakeman. Why is it not, therefore a Royal Peculier? These parishes have royal patronage but are not controlled by the Bishop of the Diocese. Might John Wakeman have wanted to keep control of Tewkesbury Abbey by keeping it as a Parish Church in his Diocese?

Appendix Three: The Three Iron Bridges of Tewkesbury

Have we more to find out about them?

I WOULD WAGER that if you asked the average Tewkesburian how many iron bridges there are in Tewkesbury, they would have to think, and then say one, and it is true to say that in reverse chronological order, the newest is the most dramatic. The Mythe Bridge, with a span of one hundred and seventy two feet over the River Severn is a magnificent structure. It was built in 1826.

If I hear that any of my friends are passing through Tewkesbury and stopping for a day or two, I always say that they should see the Abbey (of course!) They should also see Tewkesbury's other wonder, Telford's



Thomas Telford's magnificent Mythe Bridge of 1826 with a span of 172 feet

superb Mythe Bridge, which is graceful, light, almost two hundred years old (only fifty years after the very first Iron Bridge), a marvellous asset to the town. The next time they see me they rave about the Abbey, but say that they couldn't stop to see the Bridge, because there was no parking place nearby. Why can there not be a small car park near the Mythe Bridge with signage? It is only a relatively small distance between the town and bridge. It would be the ideal site to be served by a free HoHo bus.

Up until 1826, Telford's bridges had almost all got solid abutments. The Mythe Bridge, over a fast flowing river prone to flood, needed more. Each abutment is composed of six brick Gothic narrow arches to ensure that flood water could pass the bridge easily. Thus Telford admired this bridge for its engineering as well as its beauty, and he wrote:in his diary that ***"I reckon this to be the most handsomest bridge built under my direction"***

The second oldest bridge, only four years earlier, is the Quay Bridge over the Mill Avon. Tewkesbury Quay used to be a very busy, thriving river port.

The town had been reached by an inadequate old stone bridge, and a replacement cast iron bridge was completed in 1822, over the Mill Avon, only four years before the Mythe Bridge was built. A couple of



The Quay Bridge over the Mill Avon

generations later, a light railway was constructed over an adjoining bridge to connect the new steam powered Borough Mills to the railway system, and provide a rail connection to the Quay.

The third bridge is the “Iron Bridge” over the Swilgate. It never appears to have been given any other name, and its history is obscure. It must always have been a foot bridge, because of the comparative narrowness of the bridge, and it may be “about 1850”, as suggested by Verey. (Buildings of England



Gloucestershire (The Vale and the Forest of Dean) ed. Verey)

It depends on what you consider is “about”.

If the bridge were to be routed from the town, via an alley to Perry Hill, there would be no need to site the bridge at an angle. There are several sites where the bridge could be positioned north-south rather than north east-south west which is its current orientation. This suggests a path straight from the end of Orchard Court or one of the alleys, to Lower Lode Lane, across what is now the cricket field, to the junction of the



General view looking upstream showing the orientation of the bridge at the bend of the Swilgate

old main road to Gloucester, and also the Gupshill Road, the route to the relatively new town of Cheltenham via Tredington or Combe Hill. Why was it built? Now it serves as a way of reaching a Housing Development (Priors Park, 1946), but in 1850 there were no houses there, and so it is more likely to be heading towards Lower Lode.

Secondly, its construction is primitive. It is almost as though the builders weren't

aware of the properties of iron and built it like a stone or brick bridge. (The very first Iron Bridge, built by Abram Darby in Coalbrookdale, which was opened in 1781, was constructed using methods used in wooden bridges).

Thirdly, it consists of two very short primitive spans and it is reminiscent of any clapper bridge found in the West Country, where there are short spans because of the lack of strength of the stone walkways. Clapper bridges are ancient, and like this iron bridge, the spans are not arch-like.

The fourth item of interest are the abutments with their elliptical brick arches. They are brick and not iron, and they are elliptical and not circular. I.K. Brunel built a large elliptical arch in brick over the Thames at Maidenhead in the mid-1830s. He was probably familiar with small elliptical arches like these, where there was a small load, because although there would be a slight increase in sideways thrust compared with a semi-circular arch, it would not be significant, and the arch would have fewer bricks in it. The central pier with its cutwater probably causes more sideways thrust on the bridge through water resistance from debris, than it would receive from water currents.

Also, the iron parapets/railings are joined to the decks by reinforcing scrollwork in common use from about 1780 to 1810, as railings and balconies in the new town of Cheltenham. The ends of the hand rails have been shaped.

This might suggest the work of a skilled blacksmith at the end of the reign of King George III, maybe working to crude drawings not prepared by an engineer.

It is as though the

Iron Bridge Photos by

Dave Mason



Upstream side showing cutwater on brick pier



Deck and railings



Downstream side of bridge

person responsible for this structure had never seen an iron arched bridge, which would mean that its date of construction would predate that of the Quay Bridge by several years.

The bridge walkway is made of four sections. Only the inner two are made of wrought iron plate. The outer two sections taper inwards to the narrower iron sections, as though the designer were a little suspicious about the new material., or else there wasn't much of the "new" material available

And finally, why is it such a substantial structure, when a simpler form would have sufficed? Why is it not made from wood or stone unless it were important? Did the Iron Bridge have an importance which has been lost in the last two centuries?

My opinion maybe incorrect, but speaking as a Chartered Materials Engineer, I would estimate the date of the bridge to be not Verey's "about 1850" (however he came to that year), but about 1800 to 1810, at the latest, which, if accurate, would make it a very early iron bridge indeed, and almost half a generation older than the Quay Bridge and the Mythe Bridge of the 1820s. My deductions are necessarily subject to confirmation by someone on the spot, because I am hypothesising using photographs only

Since I wrote the above, I have come across a map of 1811, and the bridge is marked on it. This makes it the Swilgate Iron Bridge Tewkesbury's oldest iron bridge by at least eleven years and it is well into its third century!

Might the simple fact that it was, and always has been called "The Iron Bridge" suggest that it was the iron that somehow made it different from all other bridges in the area. That it was the very first bridge made of iron anywhere in the vicinity. There are comparatively few river crossings in North Gloucestershire. There were no railways at that time. Canals had brick bridges so might it be the oldest iron bridge in the Three Counties?

Might it even be dated back to the end of the Eighteenth Century?

Appendix 4: Mrs Martin from Bredons Norton

The Unusual Life of Victoria Woodhull Martin

MRS MARTIN WAS A RICH LADY, and perhaps she was thought of as a little eccentric. . Her interest in education allowed her to start a Primary school in her village of Bredon's Norton. She had had very little formal education herself and she realised from her past life the value of having a good, basic education.

She had had the most unusual start in life for any lady from Worcestershire. Her full name was Victoria



California Claflin Woodhull Martin, and this is her remarkable story.

She lived at Bredon's Norton, where she died in 1927 at the great age of 88. She was known locally as Victoria Martin, but in the United States she was known and is still well-known, as Victoria Woodhull.

All visitors, but perhaps especially American visitors should know something about the remarkable Mrs Martin.

She was born Victoria Claflin on 23rd September 1838 in Homer Ohio. She had a sister Tennessee ("Tenny C")

(Her father really was a snake oil salesman!) She had only three years of formal education. She is famous in the United States as a proto-feminist, and there has even been a Broadway Musical about her!

Victoria became a lifelong spiritualist and stated that she was guided by Demosthenes on the production of theories of "Free Love".

In the 19th century it didn't have the connotations that it has now. It meant that a woman should be free to marry whomever she wanted to, and, equally, a woman should be able to obtain a divorce. She married first a "Doctor" Woodhull in November 1853 when she was only fifteen. She had two children, a son, Byron and a daughter, Zula, who came with her to England. Woodhull was an alcoholic and womaniser and so she divorced him.

In 1870, she became the **first female editor and joint-owner of a newspaper**, the "Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly." This was a radical publication on woman's suffrage, birth control and free love. (The newspaper later published the **first translation in to English of the Communist manifesto!**)

At about this time she found that Cornelius Vanderbilt, the railroad tycoon, shared her interest and beliefs in spiritualism. With his help, and some financial assistance from him, she became the very **first female stockbroker on Wall Street, and possibly in the World**. Her newspaper reported the hypocrisy of the preacher Henry Ward Beecher in his adultery. He eventually stood trial in 1875, over three years after the disclosures.

In 1872, she became the **FIRST WOMAN candidate for the PRESIDENCY of the United States**. Her allegations of adultery between Henry Ward Beecher and Elizabeth Tilton led to her imprisonment only a few days before the Presidential election. Although she stood again for election in 1884 and 1892 she obtained negligible votes..

When Vanderbilt died, his family gave her considerable money to travel to England, where she met John Biddulph Martin, the banker, who attended one of her Spiritualist lectures in London. They married and moved to Bredon where she helped to found Bredon's Norton Primary School. She died in 1927, and was cremated, (itself a very modern thing to do at the time). Her ashes were scattered in the English Channel off Newhaven.

In 1939, her daughter Zula Woodhull donated in her Mother's memory some land that she owned around the East End of the Abbey, which became known as the Abbey Lawn. An Abbey Lawn Trust was set up to administer the land which has been much used for Abbey Fetes, and other outside events



The Abbey Lawn at the East End of the Abbey

Appendix Five: The Demise of the Elms

The Change in the Vale Landscape

WHILE I WAS RESEARCHING THE AGE of Tewkesbury's iron bridges, I looked at quite a few maps of the Vale, Tewkesbury, and across as far as the Cotswold escarpment, and there was one dramatic difference in the maps before the 1960s and today. It brought back to me how much the countryside has changed, inconceivably to those who have not experienced it personally, but much of the countryside of Southern England, and sadly around Tewkesbury, was completely transformed as a result of Dutch Elm Disease, known by foresters and arborists as DED; very bitterly because the affected trees could not be cured - they were dead, or they were going to be dead.

To be honest, I had forgotten the devastation, the trees with no leaves in June and July. The sounds of chainsaws, and the smell of bonfires. You would look at a group of old, fully grown elms, maybe two hundred years old, that you had seen most days of your life, and over the space of perhaps four to six months, you would watch them die. They would lose their leaves, the bark would start to fall off, and you knew that the next elm in your favourite row, and the next elm after that, and further elms would die, until they were all dead, all cut down and every one burned. It was like watching your childhood haunts being taken from you one by one.

Children from Tewkesbury go to Elmbury School. John Moore's novel about Tewkesbury is called "Portrait of Elmbury". There is a village called Elmstone Hardwicke. How many older houses are named "The Elms"? Many of the very old cottages in the countryside were half-timbered using elm. Elm was the wood used for making coffins.

I had another shock when I realised that to remember the devastation, to truly recall what the Gloucestershire landscape used to look like before Dutch Elm Disease, you would have to remember the mid-Sixties. If you were born in 1960, that would make you almost sixty today.

To take as an example, a 1811 map of the area, which was one of the earliest I have found that is cartographically accurate, there were two almost unchanging features. If you were a stranger riding your horse, you would want to know which direction in which to travel to your destination. With no road signs,

how would you know how to get to your destination? One method, which I've mentioned earlier in the book, was to navigate by inns and churches. They were all positioned on the map. And so were certain Elm trees. Very tall trees had been planted many years previously, or had just grown up at a turning to a village, or a fork in the road.

Some of the older trees in 1811 could have been saplings at the time of Elizabeth the First! Traffic was slower in the days of the horse, or even the days of the push bike, and these trees became so well-known, that often they were given names.

This is a list of the elms which guided travellers in 1811, but first, there is a pub near Staverton called the "House in the Tree". Many of you will know it. In 1811, the inn was known as the House in the Elm, and it marked the lane that you would take to get to Hardwicke Elmstone. I don't know when that village became Elmstone Hardwicke. Is there a Hardwicke family who might have been squires?

There is a Bredon's Hardwicke, or maybe it was just that the two villages started to be confused because they were both known as "Hardwicke".

There were two "Cold Elms". One was at Corse Lawn at the cross roads on the road from Forthampton to Pendock, and the other was at Norton where the road turned off to go down to the Red Lion at Wainlodes on the River Severn. "Deadman's Elm" was between Bishops Cleeve and Oxendon, and "Isabel's Elm" was near the White Swan at Aston Cross on the Bredon Road.

There was a row of elms called the "Chadstone Elms" between Treadington and Gotherington, and nearby there were the "Beckford Elms" which signalled the Beckford turning at Toddington Crosshands.

Probably the two best known trees were "Piff's Elm" at the Boddington Junction on the Comb Hill and Cheltenham Road, and "Maud's Elm" which has now given its name to a small suburb of Cheltenham.

I don't think any of those trees survive anymore because of this disease which is incurable.

In 1970, I moved from Bishop's Cleeve to the University of Bradford in Yorkshire, where the houses and mills are built of stone, and there are very few trees in the landscape. At the end of each term, about every ten weeks, I used to go home to Bishops Cleeve, and you could always see just a little further across the

Vale, and notice that it was flatter than you remembered it. By 1974, the countryside was much as you see it now. The magnificently tall elm trees have gone and the Vale is flat and comparatively featureless.

Who would plant an elm these days, or an oak? They take three generations of growth before they approach maturity; more like six to reach their full majesty. Why would anyone, in the day of the car and the road sign, plant something that they would never see. So, pun intended, it is

VALE ULMI !

We shall never see your kind again.



The Elm Tree Avenue at Broomfield Park London N13 in 1971

From the same viewpoint in 2008

Every elm has died. Some lime trees have been used for replanting.



Epilogue

WHEN I STARTED TO WRITE THIS BOOK, my intention was to express my thoughts about Tewkesbury, and to a greater or lesser extent I have succeeded. One is not totally in control of one's authorship. You keep thinking of fresh thoughts to put in. This must include a preliminary investigation of the Swilgate Iron Bridge. Of course, I knew it as a boy, and crossed it daily on my way to school, without giving any thoughts at all about its history. How old is that bridge? Might it even be 18th Century?

Then I realised, just as I was finishing the book, that the most traumatic change in the Tewkesbury area was one I had almost forgotten about, or at least, had filed away in my mind, and which is in danger of passing into history without remembrance or comment. Soon, none of the witnesses will still be living. Tewkesbury was not exactly in the middle of a wood, but its field hedges, including those along the roads, were studded with hundreds of elms in various stages of development.

And then came Dutch Elm Disease which completely changed the landscape, and many of those who saw it happen are approaching the day when they, too, will be interred in their coffins (which will not be made of elm) and another phase of life in the Vale will have passed.

One other bee in my bonnet is the pedestrianisation of the town centre from Trinity Street to the Crescent, and along Barton Street to Nelson Street, but this, although a thought, an opinion of mine, has no real place in this book. I live too far away to be up-to-date with the issue, but surely it is ESSENTIAL that some main road link should be made from the Ashchurch Road roundabout to the Worcester Road to bypass the town, if only to get traffic out of Tewkesbury. This would be beneficial to traders who would find their profits would increase and not decrease. But the bees are buzzing in my bonnet and this epilogue is about finishing this book.

The fact is, that I feel the way I do, not because I am an expat baby boomer, but because I am an individual.

Most people born in 1946 will have had similar experiences to mine, but their ways of life, their education, their experience, their friends, and many other factors, make them think the way that they do, which will be slightly different from the way that I do.

So please realise that when you read a biography of the town, you should be talking, not in blocks of people, but in the individuals themselves, and that the “Tewkesbury in the book”, however well intentioned in its writing, can not be the Tewkesbury that you know.

Tewkesbury Church of England Junior School



Mrs Mew, Mr Robinson (HM), Miss Humphries, Miss Merrell



My class in 1956

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Suggested Reading

Cathedrals	M.R. James	GWR	1926
Abbeys		GWR	1926
Tewkesbury Abbey,History Art and Architecture			
	Ed. Morris and Shoesmith	Logaston	2003
The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire 2: (The Vale and Forest of Dean)			
	Verey D.	(“Pevsner”) Penguin	1988
Tewkesbury	Jones A.	Phillimore	1987
Tewkesbury and District	Map	British Library	1811

No town is just a collection of buildings; every town is a mixture of buildings and people.

Thus, very importantly, in order to gain the flavour of the town and its inhabitants in the 1920s, please read:

“Portrait of Elmbury” (three novels

“The Blue Field” by John Moore)

“The Waters under the Earth”

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I should like to hear from you.