

FRANK SPIERS

A Life in Bidford-on-Avon



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GROWING UP AT THE BULL'S HEAD

I was born on 12 January 1925, the second child of Alfred and Victoria Spiers who kept the Bull's Head in Bidford-on-Avon. We often think about how old we were when we can first remember things. One of the things I can remember well was Dr Murray coming to see old Granny Spiers at the Bull's Head. I was 4 years old when she died. He gave my elder sister Dinah and myself a ride round Broom in the dicky seat of his car. That was the first ride we ever had in a car. When Granny Spiers died, I had started at the Infant School yet I remember things long before then. I must go back to when I was three.



Frank and Dinah

My Dad was a great handyman. He made us a rocking horse out of a Fair Ginny horse given to us by Mr Wilson, the fairground person, and Granddad to young Tommy Wilson whom I boxed six times and ran the Fairs in the later years. Dad made me a truck so I could collect the bottles back, or I would take big stone jars of water to people who had run out of water when the well ran dry. We only had a pump for fresh water and a cistern under the kitchen for soft water in the 1920s and early 30s and we only had gas lights and gas for cooking. Before

electricity came into Bidford in 1932 we had candles to go to bed with. Think how dangerous it was that the mattresses were made with straw. The water for washing and for having a bath in a zinc bath was heated in the furnace.



Outside the Bull's Head

Dad was a stonemason by trade, but one of his jobs, which we would watch him doing when we came home from school, was to paint the names on the breastplate for the coffins in black lettering for the local undertaker. Occasionally, when it was for a child, it was in white. There was no electric to do engraving. He would black a plate with smoke from a candle and then draw ships and other things in the soot.

Many people in those days made home-made wine. Dad was one of them. They made Parsnip, Plum and Dandelion. Alf and Fred Bennett and myself would go with our pack baskets up to Cally to pick dandelions to make wine. The trains used to come up Cally Bank from Broom via Bidford to Stratford. We put dandelions on the lines thinking the train would skid on the dandelions. The train was only going slow up the bank. We got told off by the driver and fireman but they laughed it

off. It was silly and we didn't do it again. But we were only boys. I have not mentioned Fred because he was only 4 or 5 at the time.

Dad always kept a pig at the top of the garden. Of course, us children made a pet of the pig. We used to help feed him. Some of his feed was the hops and malt from the beer barrel which he always seemed to enjoy. Once, when Dad was ill, Granddad Allen came and helped me. We gave him too much slops out of the barrel and the pig fell over and he was grunting as though he was laughing. With help we got him back on his feet. Another time a pig got out, ran down the garden through the pub, out of the front door and down the street. I ran after him and caught him. Dad followed and we managed to get him home.

When November came, it was time for him to be killed up the top of the yard at the Bull's Head. Mr Ernest Wilkes was the pig killer. Us children, Dinah, Fred and myself, were in the pub but we cried when we heard the pig squealing. The next day he would be hung in the passage at the pub for everyone to see and he would hang there for three days before being cut up. Granny Allen made the brawn. I held the chitterlings over the bath while Dad cleaned them with hot water.

On Sunday mornings about midday they would have air gun shooting at a target on the lawn at the pub. I remember well old George Gill lying down and kept missing the target. They pulled his leg and he got hot under the collar but the devils had only moved the sights. Poor old George! I was only a boy but the men used to get the home-made and cider down them. To me it was all good fun.

I remember well if I had to go somewhere far Dad would take me, sat on the cross bar of his bike. It was not unusual in those days. On Saturdays I would go with Ray Cowper with his horse Tommy and the coal dray to the Bidford railway siding to fill up with sacks of coal and deliver coal over the village. Mr Cowper sometimes let me have the reins to drive the horse and cart. When we had finished delivering, he let me ride Tommy to a meadow over the Bridge. He would then bring me back to the Bull's Head on the crossbar of his bike.

Of course, living in the Pub, I got to know all sorts of people and many of them real characters, also many fishermen from Redditch and Birmingham who would come by service bus or by coach.

From an early age, it was always my dream to go to Birmingham to see Aston Villa. Dad took me to Villa Park quite a few times. One of the customers used to take us in his car. Otherwise we would go by train from Broom Junction to New Street Station then by tram to Villa Park.

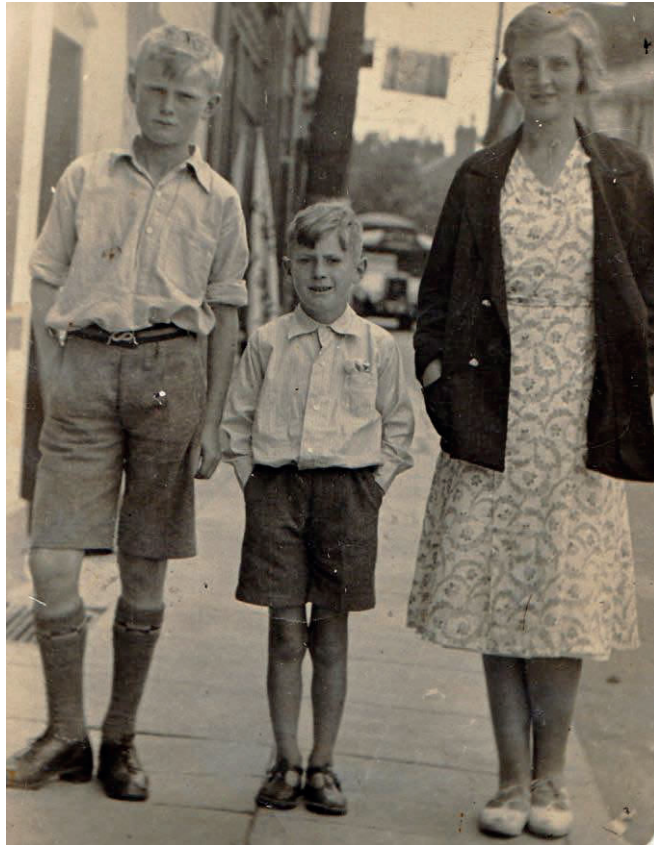
Christmas was always a special time of year. We always had a turkey in a wooden crate from Bulmer's Cider, and Mr Evans from Littleton always brought us a net of sprouts. Mr Langston from Marlcliff used to bring mistletoe and holly. My Dad was very clever with his hands and drew 'Happy Christmas' and holly in soap on the mirrors in the Bull's Head.

When the bells rang for midnight service on Christmas Eve, Mother said 'It's to call Father Christmas'. During the night when we were asleep Father Christmas brought us a pillow full of toys, clothes and sweets. We had presents from aunties and uncles as well as our parents. I remember getting a football, a meccano set, board games, and books, especially football books.

On Christmas morning we went to church, but then had to wait until after the pub closed at two o'clock for our Christmas dinner. We always made sure the people in the pub had all gone home before we sat down.

From the age of twelve or so, Jack Smith and myself went carol singing round the big houses in Icknield Street and The Grange. Dr Crawford, who lived in Blythe House, invited us in to sing, so did Sir Raymond Brookes, who lived at Avonside. They gave us five shillings each. We went to about five houses altogether and if we didn't get five shillings we got at least half a crown.

When Dad died aged 42, I was 9 years old, Dinah was 12 and Fred was 6. I helped Mother all I could. I was a big boy which you can tell from the School photos. Dinah did a lot of the cooking. Mother then took over as landlady of the Bull's Head. It wasn't easy in the 1930s. Men didn't have a lot of money to spend, and because she had a business she had no widow's pension to help keep us youngsters going.



Frank, Fred and Dinah

As I got older, I played quoits with the men. We also played shove-halfpenny and skittles. The men sat a lot and played card games, crib being the most popular. Although I was young, I helped Mother serve the beer and cider. Men drank a lot of cider, a lot of men especially the business men, just liked to talk. Darts did not come into the pub till 1935. The first dartboard we had was plasticine which we had to roll every night until the traditional dartboard came along. Very few families had a wireless, and every Saturday night at six o'clock men would come in the pub with their pencil and paper to take down the football results. The Sports Argus came round at 8.00pm, price 2d. At weekends a cousin, Dot Sandiland, aged 25, came from Redditch and helped Mother till we got older.

From 11 to 14 years I did a paper round for Mr Jones on the Bank. I would leave on my bike at 6.30am and deliver the papers up Victoria Road and Broom. Victoria Rd was just a straight road, Steppes Piece had only just been built, and Broom was less than half the size it is today. Papers were a penny a day and a penny a week delivery. The papers then were the Daily Mail, Daily Express, Daily Telegraph, Daily

Herald, News Chronicle, Daily Sketch, Daily Mirror, Birmingham Post and Birmingham Gazette.

On the way home I would see many people walking or cycling to Broom Junction to catch the train to Birmingham or Evesham. I returned home by 8 o'clock, I had my breakfast and it was time to go to school. In the evening I would meet the 6.20pm train from Birmingham with the Evening Mail and Evening Dispatch. It was going on to Ashchurch via Evesham. I was always interested to see the steam train. Sometimes it had a named engine. For my newspaper round I had five shillings a week.

The other little job I did was for Mr and Mrs Parker who owned Noakes & Crofts, the grocers in the village and lived next door to the Bull's Head. I had to pump the water up into the tank. For this I had 2s.6d a week and always a nice piece of home-made cake for tea. So with Mother giving me a few pennies for collecting the bottles I had enough money some Saturdays to go on the train from Broom to Birmingham for 11d, then pay 2d on the tram to Villa Park and 1/- to see Aston Villa play football.

SCHOOL

I started at the Infants School, which is where the Church Room is now, when I was four years old. We had two classes and there were about sixty of us. Class 1 was taught by Miss Smith who lived in Marlcliff. Class 2 was taught by the Head Teacher, Miss Jackson, who lived in the School Cottage. We did reading, writing, English dictation, arithmetic and art. One memory that has lived with me for over eighty years was having to write 'said' one hundred times after spelling it 'sed'.

When I was seven, I went to the old Junior School in Victoria Road. The teacher of Class 1 was Mrs Warner, Class 2 had Miss Thomas, Class 3 was taught by Mrs Armitage, Classes 4 and 5 by Mr Dick Noise and Classes 6 and 7 by Mr Warner, the Headmaster. We used to do Arithmetic, English, History, Geography, PT and also gardening, where we used the allotments. Mr Warner was a good amateur actor. This rubbed off on his pupils and every year we performed plays in the Co-op Hall. Mr Warner would write the play on the blackboard and we would copy it into our books then learn the words.



Infants School 1932

GAMES I PLAYED AS A BOY

When we were children in the 20s and 30s, we were able to play games in the streets as there was very little traffic about. We had iron hoops and hooks and we kept running round the roads with them. We even took them to school and played round the playground. They were made in different sizes by Harry Wilcox, the blacksmith in Ickniel Street. We also played whip and top in the side streets. Then there was marbles. You had a bag of clay marbles from Mrs Elsmore's village shop. Some boys had a glass ally or a ball bearing. Each player put two marbles in a circle and whoever knocked the marble out of the circle kept the marble. In the conker season we played conkers on a piece of string and you would try to hit the other conker till it broke.

Another popular mixed game was 'Fox and Hounds'. One boy would go off as the fox and others would try to catch him. To know where the fox was the hounds would shout 'Holler' if you were far away and 'Squeak' if you were near. Another mixed game was Hopscotch, also Johnny On the Mopstick and Off Again. We also did a lot of skipping outside the Bull's Head and War Memorial, boys and girls sometimes together with a long rope. We would play many ball games with a rubber ball.

As we got older, we used to play football in the Co-op field, which is now Saxonfields, or go to a meadow which we called the Leys which is now

Crompton Avenue and was then owned by Mr Fred Holder at Marleigh who never minded us youngsters playing there. In those days we only had one ball between us. If the bladder burst and we could not mend it, we stuffed it with paper. It was heavy but it did not stop us playing. We would play in the fields round Grange, which was where the village cricket ground was in the early 1930s. Later in the thirties the cricket ground moved to the Big Meadow. Some boys went fishing usually with an adult close by.

In the summer months we would go down 'Dovehouse' Lane at the back of the Church and paddle in the river. As we got older, people would teach us to swim on rushes so that we never got out of our depth. It was too dangerous. Another dangerous thing we did was to climb up quite high on those tall trees in 'Dovehouse' Lane, never thinking how dangerous it was but as luck would have it, I can't remember anyone getting badly hurt.

We would play a lot on the lovely lawn at the back of our home at the Bull's Head. In those days the area that is now the Catholic Church and car park, Quineys Court, the Relief Road, Marleigh Estate and Blenheim Close, was full of meadows, orchards and smallholdings. A group of us youngsters used to go on some lovely walks round Bidford. We didn't have television or computers to worry about and not everyone had a wireless. We boys and girls played tracking. We did a lot of walking to Marlcliff and on to Cleeve Prior down by the Mill. At other times we walked round Barton or Broom. I remember a small wood called 'Singfields' which was full of beautiful violets. We always took a bunch home to Mother. In the winter when the snow came, it was the perfect place for sledging on those hills.

We always had something to do. There would be Boys Club on Mondays, when the Vicar, the Rev Harrison and Dr Murray always joined us in the Church Hall. Boys Choir was on Tuesdays, the full choir practice on Fridays, and Boy Scouts on Wednesdays.

CHOIR AND SCOUTS

During the 1930s, from the age of six to fourteen, I sang in the St Laurence Church Choir. We had a very good Church Choir under the choir master, JWP Styles (Jackie Styles). He was only a young man in his early 20s, and he cycled from Stratford every Tuesday and Fridays for Practice and Sundays for Matins and Evensong. There were fourteen boys, seven each side, six ladies mainly altos, and ten men, bass and tenors.

The Tuesday practice was for boys only. There would always be four boys, acting as probationers, ready to step in when older boys' voices began to break or someone was ill. The Friday practice was for the full choir including the Vicar, the Rev AW Harrison. We would sing descants to many Hymns, all different settings to Psalms, at Matins the *Venite* and *Te Deum*, and at evensong, the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*. On Festivals we always sang an Anthem with one of the boys singing a solo. On Good Friday we sang Stainer's *Crucifixion*, and on the Sunday before Christmas we used to sing part of Handel's *Messiah*. Jack Styles was the conductor and Peter Brough, who was the organist at Holy Trinity, Stratford, used to come and play the organ. A couple of soloists also came from Stratford.

I remember very well one evening in 1937, the whole Choir going by coach to a Choir Festival at the old Coventry Cathedral, three years before it was destroyed by the air blitz in 1940. We changed into our cassocks and surplices in the Law Courts, then processed into the Cathedral to partake in a wonderful service of choral singing.

For six years the boys won the Leamington Musical Festival for Village Choirs. The full Choir won it three times and Mr Styles even got the Bidford WI Choir good enough to try. To recompense us boys, Mr Styles organised football matches against Holy Trinity, Stratford, and Alveston Choir boys on the NFU ground where Mr Styles worked. He also took us to Pantomime at the Shakespeare Theatre at Christmas time. We also had a Choir and Bellsingers outing in a coach to Weston-super-Mare, Bournemouth and Aberystwyth. The day we went to Aberystwyth we saw King George V and Queen Mary in an open carriage. They had come to open the new Welsh University.

When I was 12 years old, Bidford had a very active Boy Scouts Group. We met every week in a room at the Bidford Brick Yard in Waterloo Road, the home of Scout Leader Howard Gallimore, land which is now the Industrial Estate. We also had a Patrol Leader, Horace Taylor, who lived in Steppes Piece. We did all the things Boy Scouts did: tying different knots, map reading and signalling. Twice a year in the summer, we would go on our bikes and camp in a field by the River Avon at Luddington for two nights, having a camp fire on which to cook our food and sing Scout songs round the fire. To us boys it was great fun.

I can remember well going to a big Jamboree of Scouts from all over the country in Handsworth Park, Birmingham in 1937. Another time I remember well was in 1938 when all the Scouts from Alcester, Bidford and Studley did a Guard of Honour to the Duchess of Gloucester at the opening of Studley Castle as an Agricultural College. Again ten of us cycled to Studley.

Then in 1939 when the War started, young men were called into the services and Bidford scouting lost its leadership. Scouting then moved on to Salford Priors who have had a strong Boy Scouts Group for years, which is good for Bidford boys who want to do scouting.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE 1930s

I often think of what people did for employment in the twenties and thirties. I remember well about 40 men working at the Bidford Brick Works. Most of the houses built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, like the houses in Icknield Street and Victoria Road, were all built with Bidford bricks. The brickyard was where the industrial estate is situated in Waterloo Road.

Many men worked on the farms and market gardens growing fruit and vegetables. A lot of the ploughing was done by horses pulling the plough. Some was done by steam engines from Bomford & Eversheds and Bomford Brothers at Pitchill. Mr George at Wixford Lodge would employ 20 men, Mr Longford employed many men at Tower Hill Farm, and Fred Holder at Marleigh and Harry Smith on Tower Hill employed many men looking after cattle and growing fruit and vegetables on land that is now Crompton Avenue, The Leys and the Marleigh Estate. Many were also employed at Broom Court and Broom Flour Mill. Other men

worked in the local building trade as bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers and electricians. Many cycled to Stratford to NFU and other businesses. Others would cycle to the Cabinet Works and Terrys at Alcester.

Many young girls went into service at the large houses and wealthy people in the area they lived in. Bickmarsh Hall employed a lot of labour from Barton and Bickmarsh but it is surprising the amount of people who had their own smallholdings and grew vegetables and fruit. I used to see men taking their goods by horse and cart to Bidford railway siding to go by train to Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. A few lorries took goods to Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester markets. Of course, many local people worked in the village shops. In those days people did most of their shopping in the village. You only went to Evesham or Stratford to buy a new suit or shoes.

Many women went off when the children had gone to school to do pea and bean picking, also fruit picking, especially apples, plums, gooseberries and strawberries. You would see them in their lovely white hats. There were some real old characters amongst them. They would push an old pram with their food and drink for lunch and probably a young baby. Not many families had holidays. They could not afford one, but everyone had to have a week off from work by law, so the men went fruit picking.

WARTIME

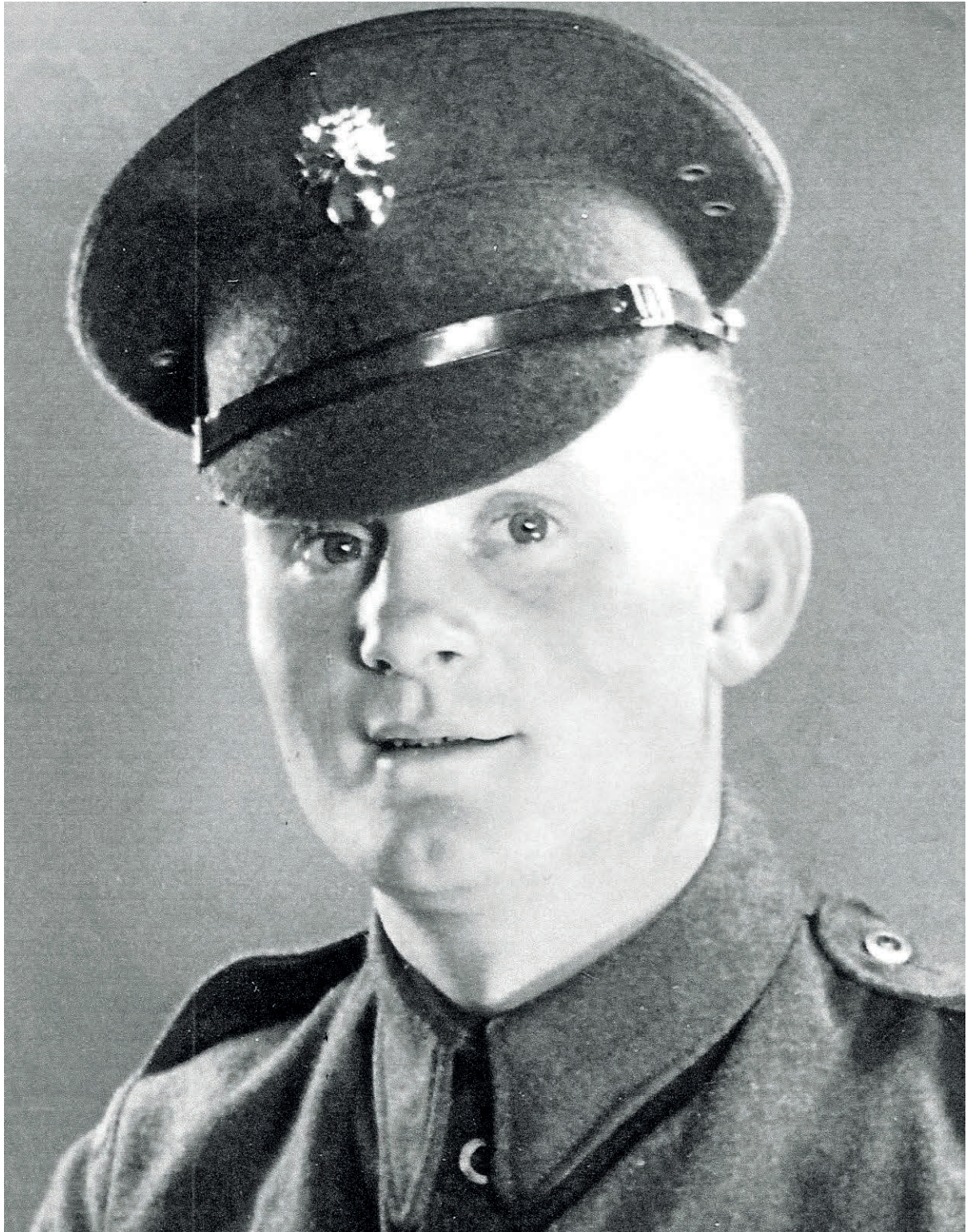
When I was 16, the war was on and everyone had to do some kind of service. Some men were Air Raid Wardens, some were in the Observer Corps, and others joined the Home Guard. A few of us younger lads joined the Home Guard as messenger boys. When on night duty, we slept in the cell at the Police Station with the policeman, Bill Munday. If any messages came through by phone, us boys used to run up to the Home Guard Platoon on duty in a house in Waterloo Road. I would come off duty at 6.00am, change my clothes, have breakfast, and by 6.30 I would be off on my cycle to work at the BSA in Redditch.

I enjoyed the Home Guard. It was like Dad's Army. You had the old soldiers from the First World War who took it very seriously, even though they were in their 50s. Our platoon formed up in Icknield Street at 9.00am on a Sunday morning. John George, from Wixford Lodge, was

our Lieutenant, Wilf Busby ('Cloggy') was the Sergeant, and the Sergeant Major was Mr Blakeman from Exhall who had been in the Army. We used to go in the fields round Grange and do drill and exercises. Mr Blakeman, who was a real good old Sergeant Major, taught us piling arms, a drill they did in the First World War. It was really effective. Not in all the time I was in the Guards did we ever do that drill. On Wednesdays we all met at the High School where regular officers and sergeants from the Army would come and lecture us on guns, ammunition, tactics and grenades etc. We would go to Ragley Hall and join up with the Alcester and Studley Companies, which together formed the Battalion under the Command of the Lieutenant-Colonel. Overall, the Home Guard gave me a useful insight for when I later joined the Guards. I knew how to march and handle a rifle and quite a few other things.

I still went off and did my amateur boxing every week. Boxing was more of a midweek activity. I went to places like Dudley Town Hall, Brierley Hill Town Hall, Evesham, Stratford and Wolverhampton. Many of the large factories in Birmingham and Coventry had Boxing Clubs, like me boxing for the Austin Boxing Club. In 1942, when I was 17 years old, Dr Murray took me to see Joe Louis, the Heavyweight Champion of the world, give a boxing exhibition at the American Army Camp. That was where Long Lartin Prison is now. How good of the Doctor to take a young village lad to see the Champion of the World.

When I was 18 in 1943, like most boys of my age, I was called up to go to Worcester to join the Forces. They wanted to put me in the Royal Warwicks or the Worcestershire Regiment but I wanted to go in the Grenadier Guards, so I had to volunteer. Off I went by train to London, then on to Caterham where an Army lorry was waiting to take 20 of us up to the Guards Depot. It was late at night so we had to sleep it a bit rough the first night. The next day we were sorted out to go to our respective Squads, and met our Squad Instructor, Sergeant Bundock, and trained soldier Glew, who looked after us in the Barrack Room, and taught us to look after our kit. We were soon on the Barrack Square. This is where my time in the Home Guard came in useful since it had given me a good idea of what to do.



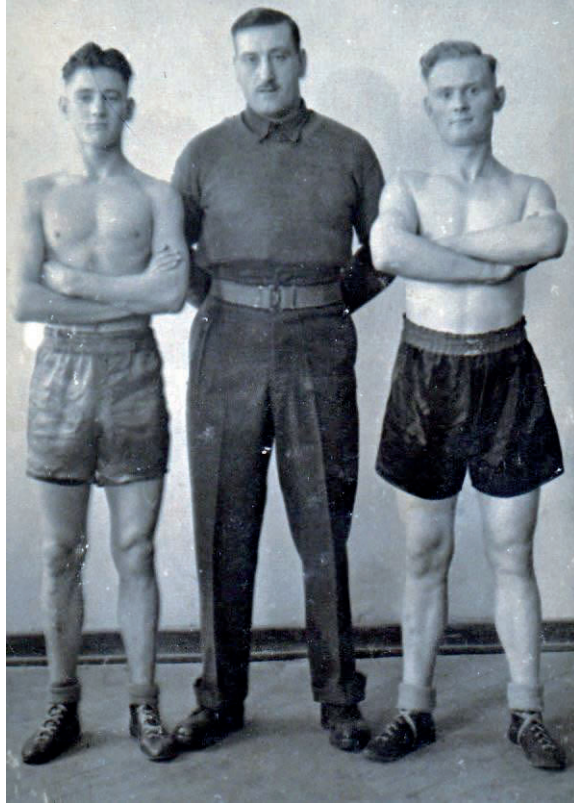
I had only been at the Guards Depot six weeks when the Sergeant Major came into the Barrack Room asking if anyone would have a go at Boxing for the Depot Championships. He was having a job to get anyone interested, but I said, 'I'll have a go Sir'. He said 'Good'. I had some training with some other Grenadiers, then came the Guards Depot

Championships between the Grenadiers, Coldstreams, Scots, Irish, and Welsh. I managed to win the Light Heavyweight division, then I along with a Scots Guard at Middleweight and an Irish Guard at Welterweight, were selected to go for the London District Championships at Chelsea Barracks.



Brigade NCOs 1946

The three of us went for special training in the gymnasium with a Sergeant Anthony of the Army Physical Training Company giving us special training in the evenings. He would then take us to the cookhouse where we had as much food as we wanted. After three weeks we went in the back of a lorry (there were no coaches in wartime), to Chelsea for the London District Championships Finals. Early afternoon I had my first fight and got through to the Semi-finals. Many Officers and NCOs came from Caterham to see the finals. Early evening came and I was getting a bit nervous with the atmosphere. The Semi-finals came, by which time I was feeling more confident and I had a lot of support. I went on to win quite easily.



Boxing for the Guards

The Final came quite late, about 9 o'clock, against a Sergeant from the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards. I felt quite good but a bit nervous. I was only 19 and he was about 24. Sergeant Anthony was good in my corner and I was cheered on by the Officers, Sergeants, and Guardsmen who had come up from Caterham to support me. I felt confident and won quite well. Of course, the next day back at the Guards Depot Caterham I had to go before the Commanding Officer to be congratulated.

Jack Gardner of the 1st Battalion Grenadiers won the Heavyweight division. Jack was stationed at Windsor and after I finished my training at the Guards Depot, I joined up with Jack at the Training Battalion at Victoria Barracks, Windsor. We both went on to represent London District at Boxing. To keep us fit, we would run to Slough Social Centre for extra boxing training. Jack went on to be professional Heavyweight Champion of Great Britain. He came from Market Harborough. Sadly, he died aged 54. The other two Guardsmen failed to reach the Finals of the London District at Chelsea.

While at Windsor, the Training Battalion was inspected by the 18 year old Princess Elizabeth who was then Colonel of the Grenadier Guards. I

was 19 at the time. When she became Queen, she became Colonel-in-Chief of all Regiments. The Duke of Edinburgh took over as Colonel of the Grenadier Guards. I have a photo taken by the Daily Sketch as the Princess passes by us young Grenadiers.



After our training at Windsor, we travelled by train to Minehead in Somerset where we trained coming off the sea, did a lot of exercises with live ammunition on Exmoor, waded in the rivers and camped in our ground sheets. We had to work hard and be realistic that the war was still on. We had soon got to be ready for Europe, and after two months on Exmoor the Company came back to Windsor where we stayed for two weeks before going to Dover ready to go to Calais. There seemed to be no hurry as the war was coming to an end. When we got into Germany, it was to relieve the other Guardsmen to enable them to come back home. Our platoon of 40 men went into a large Mansion House. As we had no PT Instructor, with my fitness from boxing, I was selected to take the men for PT. I also played in the Battalion Football team and did Cross Country Running. When the 4th Battalion moved into a Barracks near Bonn, I was sent on a PT course in Bonn.

Bonn is the birthplace of Beethoven who is like Shakespeare is to Stratford. I have always loved classical music, so I spent some pleasant evenings at the theatre. Just after the war cigarettes were like gold in

Germany. I did not smoke and we had 50 cigs a week, so I had a good seat from the doorkeeper for a few cigs in return.

I joined the 4th Battalion at Eiskirchen Barracks near Cologne where I was promoted to a Corporal. All the Guards Battalions in Germany had a boxing team so I was soon roped into that, the only trouble was I wanted to be a soldier and get on but I enjoyed both. One of the duties we did was guarding Prisoner of War Camps along the border between East and West Germany. The Russians were on one side and us the other. After a while the 4th Battalion moved up to North Germany, near Hamburg. The city had been terribly bombed. However, the Opera House had not been touched so I went to a number of orchestral concerts there. I went on another PT Course in another beautiful city, Lubeck, which was near the Harz Mountains, an area we could go when we were on a short leave. It was too far to go from Cuxhaven to Hull then to Bidford. It would have been time to go back. Eventually, the 4th Battalion disbanded, the Guardsmen being demobbed and the Grenadier Guards reverted back to its peacetime strength. Some were demobbed from 3 Battalion whilst others went to other Battalions, but four of us NCOs went back to the Guards Depot at Caterham to be Drill Instructors to train recruits. That is where I stayed till I was demobbed.

I enjoyed my service in the Grenadiers, and so I was thrilled when my son John joined the Regiment at 17 years old. The first time Gian and myself saw him in his scarlet tunic and bearskin was at the laying up of the colours at Ely Cathedral and marching through the City of Ely. The Duke of Edinburgh attended the service and took the salute as Colonel of the Grenadier Guards. After the parade the Grenadiers dismissed to the Drill Hall in Ely. Gian and I went to see John and we were asked to go into a side room with six other parents. When John joined us, we were introduced and shook hands with the Duke. We were the only two where father and son had served in the Regiment. The Duke had a good chat with us.

Another time we felt proud was going to see John in the Trooping of the Colour on Horse Guards Parade. He was then in Queens Company which is the number one Company of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards. We saw him six times in the Trooping of the Colour, though not

every year, because he did two years in Ireland and also spent time in Germany and Kenya.

I don't think any army in the world would do the Trooping of the Colour like we do. In 2000, to celebrate the Duke of Edinburgh's 25 years as Colonel of the Grenadier Guards, the Queen invited all serving Grenadiers and old comrades to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. Six years later, I was invited to attend another Palace Garden Party to celebrate the 350th Anniversary of the formation of the Guards, Gian having sadly passed on by this time, I was able to take our daughter Jill. We were entertained by the Band of the Grenadiers, with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh and other members of the Royal Family walking round talking to people.

WORK

After I left school at the age of fourteen in 1939, I used to cycle twelve miles every day to Redditch where I worked for eleven shillings a week at the BSA factory, before moving to the Austin Motor Company at Longbridge where I stayed until I was called up in 1943.

When I came out of the guards in 1948, I was still a member of the Austin Boxing club at Austin Motor Company and they offered me a job straightaway. I just had two weeks off. I wondered about taking the job because it was 20 miles away but I had a motor cycle for two years. It was hard travelling in the winter and after sliding off three times I bought a sidecar to have three wheels.

I started in the West Works and was given the chance to do sheet metal work on car bodies. I joined the Sheet Metal Union. The workmen were very helpful and I enjoyed working with Birmingham and Black Country men with their Black Country talk of Aynuk and Ayli and they took to me, a lad from the country. They were really good and it was a joy to go to work. I was still boxing and lots of them used to come and see me box.

We would banter over football. Birmingham, Redditch and Bromsgrove men supported Aston Villa or Birmingham. Black Country chaps supported Wolves or WBA. At cricket it was the same with Warwickshire and Worcestershire. At that time both teams were doing well. Lots of men liked a flutter on the horses.

When I had been there about three years, an elderly workmate was going to buy a new A30 that had just come out. He said to me: 'Frank, I would love you to have the Austin Seven'. He had had it since 1938 and it was in perfect condition. So it was I bought my first car for £40.

I think of all the different models I worked on in those 40 years. When I started, it was the Devon 4 door and Dorset 2 door A40s, then the A30, the Somerset, Hereford, Oxford, Cambridge, the Italian styled Farina 1000 model, and the 1800 Sherline, which was like a small Rolls Royce. It cost £999 to be under £1000 to avoid tax. Then there was the Mini. Although I did not work on the Mini, I worked for a long time on the vans and lorry cabs. It was all sheet metal work.

At times the Unions thought they were fighting for our rights and we did have a few strikes, but I had a decent job for 40 years and good workmates which made life pleasant. Today I feel sorry for people and youngsters just leaving University and Schools who cannot get jobs

COURTING AND MARRIAGE

There was this lady who had worked with Gian's mother in London. Her name was Mrs MacIntosh, but we called her 'Mrs Mac' for short. She used to come up to Gian's mother in Alcester and then came over to my Auntie Elsie's because her husband, my Uncle Fred Houghton, was a stonemason and used to buy the stone for the gravestones from Mr MacIntosh who was a stone merchant. They lived in Croydon and had a son who was a fighter pilot who was killed in the Battle of Britain. When I was at Caterham in the Grenadier Guards, I used to go to tea at their house of a Sunday and went and rang the bells at Croydon Parish Church. She used to talk about Gian and her twin sister in Alcester. After I had left the Guards, she came over to my Auntie Elsie's and I thought: 'Here's a good chance to go to Alcester to see what this girl's like', but she wasn't there. She was in Alcester Parish Church Choir. They used to have a cup of coffee after and I couldn't stop too long because I'd got to get back to the pub to help Mother behind the bar.

However, in the evening, Gian used to come off the train at Alcester. She worked in Evesham at Blinkhorn's, the photographers. I'd be coming back at more or less the same time on my motor bike from Longbridge. I timed it so that I would arrive just as Gian would be coming

down from the station. If the train was late, I would hang back. Then I just had to pluck up courage and ask if she'd like a ride home on my motor bike. After that we started going to the pictures and that was the start of our courting.

Gian said that the first time she saw me was much earlier when the local battalion of the Home Guard held a Sports Day at Ragley and she watched me come second in the mile race. I was only 17 then and she was 14. I remember that over 100 people walked there from Bidford because there was no petrol for pleasure motoring.

We got married at Alcester Parish Church in 1953 and then we came and lived at Number 21 Icknield Street. The house had been put up for sale. Old Mr Shorey had died and Mrs Shorey went and lived with her daughter in Victoria Road. The house belonged to Miss Holder and I went and told her I was interested in buying it, but she said it had to go up for auction. I'd never been to an auction, so my Auntie Maud, who was used to going to sales, came with me to the White Lion. I was prepared to go up to £1000, but managed to buy it for £900. I spoke to Mr Willis, who was the bank manager then and lived in Grange Road. He told me: 'Take a loan out Frank and keep paying it back when you can, as long as you keep paying something'.

The house had no gas, no electricity and no running water, so I had these put in. My brother Fred put in the grate. I remember bringing these little brickettes from Redditch Building Supplies in my sidecar two nights running. He also built me a garage. The Husbands brothers from Evesham used to call in at the Bull's Head. They had just started a plumbing business and they came and did quite a few jobs.

After a few years I bought my first brand new car from work. It was an A35 van with seats in the back. It was the cheapest new car I could buy. It cost me £350. We had Jill and John by then. They were only little but did say: 'When are we going to have a car with windows, Dad?' It was then possible to have it done so for a few years I had a grey A35 van with windows. It took us miles. We couldn't be fussy in those days. We had no Joneses to keep up with. After a few years the Austin Motor Company merged with the Morris Motors Oxford. I was then able to buy a Morris 1000 Traveller but I had to go to Oxford to get it for £550. Two

years later I had another that cost £700. One was green, the other blue.
I then had a Marina Estate, an Allegro Estate and two Metros.



Frank and Gian on their Wedding Day 1953

I often think as I put pen to paper how lucky I was. I was married with two young children, and a house more or less paid for.

SPORT

Local sport has always been a part of the local community especially in the pre-war days. In the 1920s the old men used to tell me how the Bidford Football Team used to go to places like Badsey, Bretforton and Littleton by horse and cart with plenty of home-made wine aboard, coming back by the light of oil lamps and getting back to Bidford by 8 o'clock .

Then in the 1930s us young boys used to go and see Bidford play in the second meadow on the Barton side of the road. The Big Meadow wasn't like it is today. It was full of grazing cattle. We would go to away games with the team on the coach. Bidford had a good team then.

The War did not stop us young men playing organised sport. We played a lot of friendly matches against Army teams from Long Marston and Kineton, and RAF teams from Honeybourne and Defford. Some had professional players. We had a mixed team of 17 year olds and older men who were exempt from going in the Forces. I remember well when I was 17 playing centre-half for Bidford against an RAF team from Wellesbourne and the centre-forward was a George Payne who held a record of scoring ten goals in one match for Luton Town in 1938.

When the War ended, some men returned to Bidford and the Football Leagues started up again. In the 1950s the Stratford League was very competitive with every town and village having a decent team, among them Bidford, Alcester, Shipston, Henley, Hampton (Evesham), Norton, Littleton, Alveston, Stratford WMC Royal Engineers, Brailes, Wilmcote, Ilmington, Mickleton and Binton.

We would play for the Stratford League Championship, the Stratford Hospital Cup, Stratford Nursing Home Cup, the Foster Shield, the R M Smith Cup and the Alcester Hospital Cup. They were all very competitive and played in front of good crowds, the Finals being held mainly on Stratford Town's ground. The Foster Shield Final, however, was played on the Rugby ground where I always remember the grass being that bit

longer which made it that bit harder play. The Alcester Hospital Cup was always played at Alcester.

The 1948-49 season was one of the best. We won the Stratford League and the Stratford Nursing Home Cup, and came runners-up in the Stratford Hospital Cup when we were beaten by Littleton in the Final. The team was: Victor Stone (goal), Bob Russell (right-back), George Green(left-back), Maurice Mumford (right-half), Frank Spiers (centre-half), Harold Bennett (left-half), Rev A Hoof (outside-right), Ernie Bennett (inside-right), Don Mayrick (centre-forward), Jack Clee (inside-left) and Bill Beard (outside-left).



1951 Football Team

Throughout these post-war years, we at Bidford had a good team made up of all Bidford lads who stuck to their village team. We had Jim Vincent or Victor Stone and later George Wood in goal. Backs were Les Gould Wilf Gould, Reg Beard, Tom Cole and Bob Russell. Harold Bennett was the best left-half in local football, Frank Spiers was a stopper centre-half and right-half was Maurice Mumford and later Rich Hancox. In the forward line, Rev Arthur Hoof, the Methodist Minister, played for two

seasons on the right wing, then young Gordon Locke followed. Inside-right was either Jack Clee or Ernie Bennett, centre-forward was Don Mayrick and later Alan Radbourne. Geoff Clee was inside-left and Bill Beard outside-left and they were the best left wing pair in the league. Unfortunately, at the age of 29, playing at Quinton, I broke my ankle and that was the end of my playing days.

Although football and boxing took a lot of my sporting days, I did like and took great interest in cricket. When I was thirteen, Bidford had half-day closing on Thursdays and had a Thursday cricket team. I always ran up from school in case they were one short of a player and I could get a game. In the 1950s when I had come out of the Guards, I captained a 2nd XI which was made up mainly of the football team.

I liked to see Warwickshire play so I became a member of Warwickshire County Cricket Club and Gian often came with me. It was great to go to Lords to see them win the Gillette Cup more than once. I remember well going to Trent Bridge, Nottingham on my motor bike to see the great Don Bradman on his last tour to England.

After breaking my ankle, I was kidded to have a go at football refereeing. I joined the Stratford Referees Association and started refereeing in the Evesham and Stratford Leagues.

You start at Class Three, then you progress to Class Two. After a while I progressed further and got my Class One which was good. It allowed me to referee in the more senior leagues in the Midlands. I was too old to ever be considered for the Football League, but I really did enjoy my refereeing. No, Gian wasn't a football widow. She came with me many times when I went to the big grounds all over the Midlands including Banbury, Worcester, Cheltenham, Leamington, Dudley and most of the Black Country towns. By the time I was 48, my knees were playing up. I was too old for senior football and my interest started to lean towards my daughter Jill who was doing very well at athletics. She was probably the best schoolgirl athlete we ever had at Bidford School. She belonged to the Bromsgrove and Redditch Athletic Club and was coached by a Bidford man, Colin Danks. Jill represented Warwickshire in the 1972 All England Schools 400 metres at Watford. She came second, but she was

a member of the Warwickshire 4 x100 metres relay team that won for Warwickshire.



Birmingham County Cup Final Referees 1965

In 1973 Jill again represented Warwickshire in the 400 metres coming second in the final at Washington, County Durham. In 1974 she again represented Warwickshire, this time at Bebbington near Birkenhead in Cheshire and managed to become All England Schools 400 metres champion, a great honour for Bidford High School which sadly is no more.

BELLRINGING

I learned to ring the St Laurence Church Bells in 1937 when I was 12 years old. When we boys were in the Choir some of us would put our cassocks on and go and watch the bellringers ringing for service. One Sunday, Arthur Shorey, Ringing Master, asked four of us big boys if we would like to learn to ring. There was Jack Smith, John Allen, Ben Kendall and myself. We all learned to ring. Just as we were ringing well, the 1939 War started and all ringing stopped. If the bells rang, it was because of fear of an invasion. Thank the Lord it did not happen.

In 1942 church bells resumed ringing. Of course many ringers had been called up for the services and many had to work in the factories and on the land. All four of us young ringers were in the services. I kept interest and when at the Guards Depot Caterham in Surrey, I went ringing at Caterham and Purley, and on Sundays would go to Croydon Parish Church. I found that if you can handle a bell well, you are always made welcome.

When I moved to Windsor, I was treated the same. We finished our training at Minehead and on Exmoor. The Exmoor ringers were so welcoming. They would take me to some of the lovely Churches on the moor. On those occasions I was on my own but local ringers were so friendly to me and I got to like the taste of 'Zomerzet' Cider.

After I joined the 4th Battalion Grenadier Guards, with the War still on it was Europe and Germany for 3 years. That stopped all the ringing as they don't ring the same on the Continent. The bells are rung mechanically with the press of a button. When I came back to Caterham as a Drill Instructor, I continued the same till I came back to Bidford where I started to ring straight away.

1954 was an important time for us at Bidford when we had two new bells donated, one by Captain Faire in memory of Mrs Faire, another by the Baron Trust. This made us up to 8 bells. The ringers when the bells were dedicated by the Bishop of Coventry were 1 Arthur Shorey, 2 Frank Spiers, 3 Sid Read, 4 Ray Moore, 5 Ken Wheeler, 6 Jack Moore, 7 Wilf Busby, 8 Fred Spiers. This widened our scope in moving on from ringing doubles to triples and encouraged more experienced ringers to ring at Bidford.

When Arthur Shorey died, the Ringing Master's job passed on to myself. I had many young men and ladies wanting to learn to ring. Michael Homans came over from Salford Priors to help me to teach these youngsters to ring and with the help of my wife, Gian, who could ring, we again had a band of ringers.

I got enthusiastic and went to Worcester Guild and Coventry Guild Meetings on Saturday evenings to improve my method ringing. In most places ringing has a good social life to it. You nearly always find a pub close to a Church to have a chat. The Four Shires monthly outings still

continue. One December outing, I remember, was local. The first Tower was on the 8 bells at Norton, then on to the 6 at Harvington where 30 of us crossed the road and had a good Christmas lunch at the pub. In the afternoon we rang on the 8 bells at Salford Priors, then on to ring on the 8 bells at Bidford, ending the day with tea cakes and mince pies to celebrate the 80th birthday of Phyllis Brazier who came over from Badsey most practice nights.



Winners of the 1987 Southern Branch, Worcester and District, Striking Competition

I have rung in every Tower in Warwickshire and Worcestershire and many in other Counties. One New Year's Day all the towers in Birmingham were open for ringing. I left Bidford at 8.00 am. The first tower was Harborne at 9.00 am. Altogether I rang in 28 different towers round the City, ending the day on the 16 Bells at St Martin's in the Bull Ring at 7.00 pm and getting back home at 8.30. Being New Year's Day, the City of Birmingham was quite quiet. When I used to go to Villa Park and St Andrews, I used to say to myself I would love to ring at that Church. Well, I did!

OUTINGS

As a boy, I remember Dad taking Dinah and myself three times to Blackpool on the excursion train from Broom Junction. There were quite a few from Bidford and Broom. We left Broom Junction at 2.00am arriving at Blackpool at 10.00am, went on the Big Dipper (we were

frightened to death), went up to the top of the Tower, saw Reginald Dixon on the Tower Ballroom Organ, and had a ride on the illuminated trams. We left Blackpool at 10.00pm getting back to Broom by 6.00am the next morning.

In the 1930s very few people had cars so coach and train outings were arranged by different organisations in the village. Outings I remember well were the Sunday School outings to the Lickey Hills by train from Bidford railway station to Barnt Green, then walking to the Lickey Hills. We did this three times. There was always a fair on the Lickeys and you could see all over Birmingham and the Black Country. I can see now an old man with a telescope charging 2d to look over Birmingham.

Another time we went by train from Bidford siding to Bishops Cleeve, near Cleeve Hill and Cheltenham, where there was a very good play area with swings, slides and roundabouts, which was a novelty in the 1930s.

In 1935 the older children from the Junior School in Victoria Road went by train to Liverpool from Broom Junction to Birkenhead by train, then by coach under the new Mersey Tunnel which had only been opened the previous month by King George V. We then went over the new Liverpool Anglican Cathedral which was only half built at the time and wasn't completed until the 1950s. We were also taken over a cargo ship, the *Accra*. I still remember the name of the ship. We returned to Birkenhead by ferry boat then by train back to Broom Junction, before walking back to Bidford.

The following year we went from Bidford station to Portsmouth going through Stratford and Honeybourne, and on to Portsmouth. We went on Lord Nelson's ship, *Victory*. We also went over a destroyer, and had a trip round the Dockyard, ending the day on the fairground at Southsea, before boarding the train back to Bidford.

The last outing we had from the old School in Victoria Rd was in 1937, when we went from Bidford Station to Paddington, via Stratford and Honeybourne. Having arrived in London, we did a lot of walking. I remember well the girls and younger boys going to Westminster Abbey, but Mr Dick Noise, one of the teachers and a real military man, took six of us older boys to Buckingham Palace to see the Changing of the

Guard. From then I always wanted to join the Grenadier Guards, which I did when I was 18 in 1943. We ended our day at London Zoo. When it was time to leave the Zoo for Paddington station, there was one boy missing. Mr Stratford, one of the teachers, stayed behind to look for him. Soon after we got back to Paddington, Mr Stratford and the boy arrived by taxi. We were all happily relieved and able to set off back to Bidford. In 1939 the War started so all outings were all suspended.

There were lots of outings from St. Laurence Church when the Rev Ken Bradford was vicar during the 1970s and during the time of his successors, Rev Tony Richards and Rev David Hall. Tony Richards took us to Oxford, and we went round the college where he had studied. The Rev Tom Parker, son of Mr and Mrs Parker who owned Noakes and Crofts grocery shop in Bidford, was the Principal of the College. On the way home we stopped at Warmington near Banbury, Tony's previous Parish. The day was enjoyed by all. People then said that they would like to go to Cambridge. This had to be organised to see how many people wanted to go and how much to charge, so Gian and myself did our homework and said we would organise the outing. This proved to be a great success. We had a full coach. My favourite building in the country is Kings College Chapel. Cambridge is such a lovely City.

One year we went to Gloucester and Hereford. Since they are close together, we saw both Cathedrals. The next year took us to one of the very old Cathedral Cities, Winchester, and on another occasion we ventured into Wales, first to Llandaff Cathedral, then on to the city of Cardiff. This gave us a chance to visit the Millennium Stadium which had not long been opened. We followed this by going to the Cathedral City of Lincoln. The next year took us to the beautiful City of York with its grand Minster and many interesting places.

I especially remember our outing to Liverpool. As with our trip to Cambridge, Gian and I did our homework a few weeks before. We went to the top of the Anglican Cathedral Tower by lift past the Bells and saw the four ton Tenor Bell which was the heaviest ringing bell in the country. In the middle of the River Mersey was the QE2 liner. What a great sight to see a liner in the river. We were also able to go to the modern, but very unusual, Roman Catholic Cathedral, called the Wigwam.

We also had a good day in London. We all met in the St. Laurence Church by the Guildhall in the City of London where we had a short service and sang the St. Laurence hymn. There was a wedding taking place at the church and the captain of the bell ringers, one of the best in the country, invited me to have a ring of the bells. It was a great thrill for me to ring with such good ringers. We all did our own thing in London. There is so much to see. Some of the party went on a boat trip. Amazingly, everyone was back at the coach on time.

Another good day was in 1994 when the Rev David Hall, who had come to Bidford from the Diocese of St Albans, took us to St Albans Cathedral where we had Evensong. We also visited Nottingham and Southwell Minster, places that many people had never been to before. Many of our congregation had never been to Canterbury. We all thought it was too far for a day, but the coach driver said he would take us, so we all went to Canterbury, to visit the Cathedral. Thanks that day to our wonderful driver. The next year we did keep it more local by going to Lichfield to see the lovely old Cathedral and City.

HOLIDAYS

In our young days we never went on holidays as Dad and Mother were too busy working and looking after the pub. But Dinah and myself used to go on the bus to our aunt and uncle who had two elder cousins in Redditch. Fred was too young to go. They took us to the Pictures which was a great treat for us in the days of Shirley Temple, Will Hay and George Formby. We also played in a recreation ground opposite with swings and slides which we didn't have in Bidford. When I was 12 and 14, I went on the train from Evesham to an aunt and uncle with two girl cousins at Reading. They again took me to the Pictures and to the parks, and also for a trip on the Thames. Those were the only holidays I had as a boy. The only time I saw the sea was on the Church Choir outing to Weston, Bournemouth or Weymouth.

When I was courting Gian, I only had a motor bike, but when at work an old workmate said, 'Take her on a Midland Red Coach Holiday to Cornwall'. We spent three days at Teignmouth and three days at Newquay. It cost £21 for each single room for the six days. When I got married, I had a motor bike and sidecar. We were lucky that Gian had an

aunt and uncle who lived somewhere by the sea at Folkestone. We had to travel right through London over London Bridge. There was no M25 in those days.

We also had holidays in Cornwall in the motor bike and sidecar. Later we went to Folkestone with Jill in the carry cot and Gian riding pillion. Other good trips we had were going to the Isle of Man to the TT Motor Cycle Races with Gian in the sidecar and brother Fred on the pillion all the way to Liverpool to catch the ferry boat.

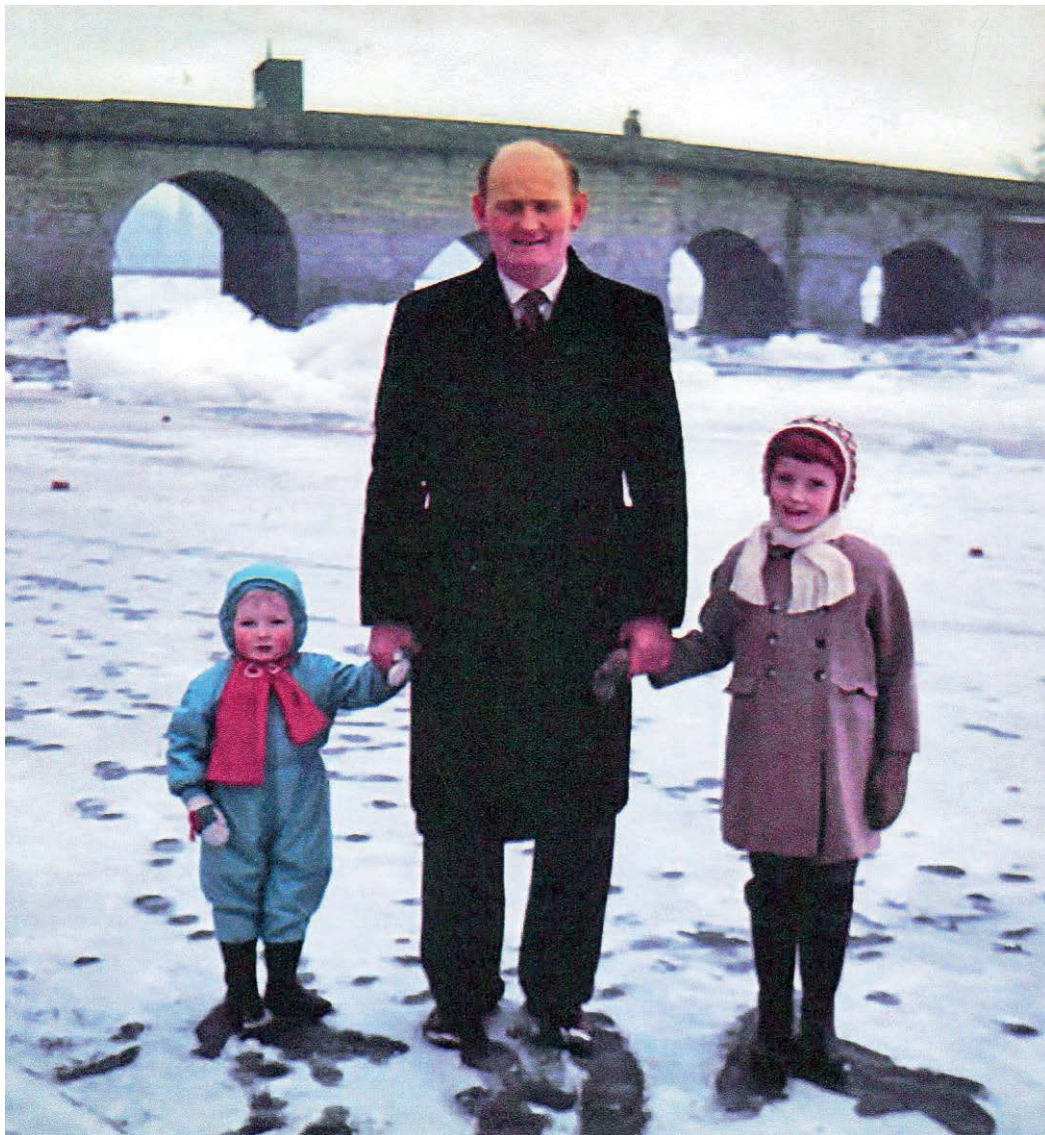
By the time John had come along I had my first car, a little Austin Seven Ruby, which took the four of us to Devon and Folkestone. After a few years I had a new A35. We then ventured right down into Cornwall. We started at 2.00am. It was before the motorways were built and we didn't get to Helston until about 4.00pm. Now you can get there in 5 hours.

We had some lovely holidays in Wales down south round Tenby and in the middle round Barmouth. It was lovely up north Wales near Llandudno. I remember walking to the top of Snowdon with Jill when she was only nine years old. Gian and five year old John went by train. It was beautiful on top and so clear that you imagined you could see Bidford.

Another year we went to the Lake District staying at a B&B just outside Keswick. This was beautiful countryside with the lakes and mountains. Another time we ventured into the Yorkshire Dales with the lovely waterfalls like the Aysgarth Falls and High Force, the impressive moors and abbeys, the Pennine Way and the Dales National Park. It really is lovely countryside we don't know much about.

We ventured up into Scotland when a workmate of mine at the Austin retired and bought a boarding house in Dunoon, so Gian and myself with Jill and John, who were only young, went and gave him some trade. It was our first time in Scotland and it really is beautiful. A trip on a boat down Loch Lomond was great. The whole week was lovely. At the time I had a Morris 1000 Traveller. For our second week we always went to Gian's aunt at Folkestone. We left Dunoon at 9.00am thinking we would get south of Coventry and get B&B or come home and go to Folkestone the next day. The M6 did not start till Lancaster and ended at Wolverhampton, then the M1 started the other side of Coventry, so on

we went through the outskirts of Birmingham and Coventry to the M1 which took us to its end at Brent where we had a break. The children were so good. We then had to plough through London over Vauxhall Bridge past the Oval Cricket Ground, then on to Maidstone and Ashford (there being no M25) arriving at Folkestone at 8.00pm, a bit tired. Thanks to Gian for her navigating, also to Jill and John for their patience. I certainly slept well that night. When I left Dunoon, I had no intention of getting to Folkestone in the day.



John, Frank and Jill on the ice

Gian, Jill, John and myself went to Scotland a further three times. You could get B&B quite easy for £1.50 and after two or three days we would

phone a friend and they did the same. It worked out very well. One night we stopped at a cottage right under Ben Nevis and we stayed up. It was the first time a man landed on the Moon. You could get a meal for a £1. Another time we stayed at North Berwick, a lovely place with a coastline of beautiful sands, and within easy reach of Edinburgh.

We did B&B in Northumberland, another lovely County full of history. We stayed in farm houses by the sea. The children loved it and people were so friendly. We went over to the Farne Islands by boat to see the hundreds of seals. We also went to see the fishermen smoking the kippers in the vats and then brought some home. On the way home we called at Durham Cathedral and saw the tomb of the Venerable Bede. We also stopped at Alnwick Castle, the home of the Percy family, the Dukes of Northumberland. When I was in the Grenadier Guards, two young officers were Percys, nephews of the then Duke.

Gian had two aunts and uncles with two married cousins living in the USA. The two aunts were Gian's Dad's sisters born in Shipston-on-Stour. One aunt and uncle came to England and stayed with us in Icknield Street for three weeks. By this time, Jill was married and John was in the Grenadier Guards. One of the highlights of their visit was that we were able to take them to see John in the Trooping of the Colour in Queens Company Grenadier Guards. They were lucky to see the Queen and such a great spectacle.

They then invited us to go to the USA. So two years later Gian and I went out to Los Angeles in California. I was able to get four weeks off from work. We travelled from Gatwick to Los Angeles on Laker Airways. One aunt and uncle and two lots of married cousins lived in different parts of the City. We had two weeks there going to Disneyland and Hollywood Studios. It was the first time we had ever heard of or went to a Macdonalds. The next two weeks we flew in a small plane to Sedona in Arizona and stayed with Gian's other aunt and uncle who lived in the town. Arizona is real red rock country with the Grand Canyon the big attraction. The uncle had a camper van so he took us out and we camped on the banks of the Colorado River. The next morning we went on a boat trip down the river to the Rainbow Bridge, a huge natural red rock bridge spanning the River Colorado, and we stopped at different parts of the Grand Canyon. It really was worth seeing.

The other holiday we had abroad was a week in Switzerland in Interlaken. It really is beautiful with the mountains and lakes and we did go 8,000 feet up the Jungfrau.

PARISH COUNCIL

In 1970 I was approached by many people to put up for election to the Parish Council. I thought that at 45, happily married, with my sporting days running out and having lived in the village all my life, I would have a go. So started over 40 years' service to the village on the Parish Council.

In those 40 years Bidford has grown so much. After three years in 1973, I was elected Chairman of the Parish Council. We had a hard time in getting a road to relieve traffic away from the congested High Street. Some people wanted an outer by-pass cutting through Victoria Road and organised their own protest group. The inner relief road we have now was the plan of the Ministry of Transport. In the Parish Council all but one member supported the Ministry of Transport because it was the one they could afford. In 1974, as Chairman, I had to call a public meeting in the Crawford Hall. The hall was packed. I went to Birmingham with Angus Maude, our MP, Reg Hillman, the County Councillor, and Reg Parnham, the District Councillor, to thrash it out with the Ministry of Transport. The protest group still kept making a nuisance by holding meetings to no avail. In 1979 the relief road was officially opened.

In 1975 there was a threatened closure of the Bidford Fire Station in Icknield Street. Again, being Chairman of the Council, I called a public meeting of the whole village in the Crawford Hall. We had Mrs Bloxwich, Chairman of Warwickshire County Fire Brigade Committee, the Chief Fire Officer of Warwickshire and other senior Fire Officers. After an excellent meeting we not only saved our Fire Brigade, we had a new fire station and have now got one of the best village Fire Brigades in the county.

Next in 1983 was the fight to try and save Bidford High School from being closed and demolished. To think a brand new School was opened at Easter 1938. At the age of 13 I was elected the first Head Boy by Mr Budden, the first Headmaster. I left school aged 14 at Easter 1939. My

two children, Jill and John, both went to the school. Sadly, however, we lost the fight and the School was closed in 1985.

Since 1984 I have been the Bidford representative on the Perkins Education Trust which gives grants to young students attending University or local Colleges, living in the Parishes of Salford Priors, Bidford-on-Avon, Harvington and Cleeve Prior. I have also been involved in the Dudley Charities for 30 years.

In 1987 it was a shock to us all when our long serving Clerk, Colin Bryan, died suddenly. Colin had been Clerk for 30 years.

Two special occasions I remember well. In 1974 as Chairman, I and my wife Gian were invited guests at the opening of the Upper Avon Navigation by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, at Stratford-upon-Avon, opposite Holy Trinity Church. Then in 1984 I was pleased when asked to make the speech at the retirement presentation to Dr Doherty in the Crawford Hall. He was a well-liked Doctor, a District and Parish Councillor and a Magistrate.

One of the main highlights during my time as Chairman was in 1982 when the radio programme, *Down Your Way*, with Brian Johnston, came to Bidford. The people selected to meet him were Wally Blake, talking about his top show chrysanthemums which he grew on his allotment, Shelford Bidwell on Bidford Boats, Muriel Bateman on the work of the local WI, and myself as Chairman of the Parish Council. I spoke about Bidford. Looking at the Falcon, I spoke the Bidford Legend ending *Beggarly Broom* and *Drunken Bidford*. I chose *Scipio*, the slow march of the Grenadier Guards, played by the Band of the Grenadiers. Brian Johnston and myself had something in common in that we both served in the Grenadier Guards.

CARNIVALS

For many years Bidford had a Carnival on the lovely meadows by the River Avon where you could have stalls, hold a Fair, Sports and many other events. You can see old photographs of decorated horse-drawn carts carrying adults and children. Even before the turn of the century the Fair was in the Village Square where the War Memorial is now.

I go back to the 1930s when Gymkhanas were held in the first meadow round Grange Road where the old cricket ground was. These were organised by Miss Longford whose father farmed and lived in Tower Hill Farm. She always rode side-saddle and dressed in a long skirt and wore a top hat.

We children used to walk dressed up behind a Brass Band, which came from either Alcester or Bretforton. There were a few small lorries in the procession but it was mainly horse and carts. I remember having a professional boxing show which included one or two local lads from the area like Seaman Edgar Pulham, who had come out of the Navy, and Alec Fernehough from Honeybourne. There were greyhound races, even motor cycle grass track races and plenty of local athletics for children and adults. When the 1939-45 war started, the Carnival did not stop but it was difficult to organise events since many of the men had gone off to war, and the remaining men and the women were at work in factories and on the land to supply the food.

In 1947 the Carnival was revived mainly to raise money to build the Crawford Hall in memory of Dr Crawford who had served this village for 40 years not only as a Doctor but also for many years as Chairman of the Parish Council. The Carnival Committee consisted of Dr Murray, Dr Doherty, Sam and Brian Slaughter, Jack Locke, George Crompton, Mr Stone, even though he was blind, and many more young people who did a lot of the work. When the money had been raised for the Crawford Hall and got it built and running, the Carnival eased off. With no one now willing to take it on, for a while there were no Carnivals.

In 1973, as Chairman of the Parish Council, I called a meeting of the Sports Association, the Cricket Club, Football Club, Hockey Club, and the Fishing Club, to build a new Sports Pavilion in a different position. We had to apply for a grant from the Playing Fields Association, but we also had to help ourselves, so we ran a '200 Club', had weekly Bingo sessions in the Church Hall and collected waste paper.

Then, in order to get extra money for the pavilion, with great support from Brian Slaughter and my wife Gian, I decided to renew the Carnival. The Carnival would be held on August Bank Holiday Monday. What a successful time it was! I can only thank my wife Gian for the great help

and encouragement she gave me. One of the first things we had to do was to select a Carnival Queen and two attendants, so we held a dance at the Crawford Hall. This was our first success as 20 girls wanted to be our Carnival Queen. We could then start to advertise the Carnival again. I had wonderful men in the trade who did all that work. Many thanks to all the owners of lorries who never refused when I asked for a lorry, to the drivers who were only too pleased to drive the lorries, to all the people who decorated the lorries and to all the businesses I asked to sponsor an event to do with the Carnival. It was time consuming but so rewarding, people were so good. I was helping brother Fred one night in the Bull's Head when a customer came up to me and said: 'Frank I am going to sponsor you for a £1,000'. I could not believe it. I thought: 'That will help pay for the Band marquees, other expenses we take will be profit'.

Since we were raising money for a sports pavilion, I got a sports personality to come and crown the Carnival Queen. I went and asked them personally and not one refused to come and in most cases brought their wives: Chris Nichol of Aston Villa; Vic Crowe, Aston Villa player and Manager; David Duckham, Coventry and England rugby player; MJK Smith, Warwickshire and England cricket Captain; and Bidford's own Michael Ball, who, though busy with a show in London, still made time to come back to support dear old Bidford.

In the morning, as early as 7.00am, Martin and Michael Paddock with their tractor and a dozen other men would be putting up all the tea tents, marquees and stalls, ready for the WI ladies with their lovely teas and the Mothers Union with the cake stall. The Churchmen would be on the gate early at 9.00 o'clock because people came early in their cars to have a lovely day by the river at Bidford Carnival. Other organisations had their money raising stalls. Tommy Wilson brought a good Fair from Redditch to Bidford Carnival and was very generous to us.

At 11.00 o'clock I had to get ready to meet the judges for the Procession at the Bidford High School. Gian said: 'You must dress up and lead the Carnival', so during my dinner hour at work I would go to the Repertory Theatre in Birmingham and sort out a costume for the day. I tried on eight different costumes before the Top Hat and Tails which I got from a rummage sale in the village. The processions were brilliant.

People put so much effort into it. The most lorries we had was 28. I cannot see that happening again, though I hope I am proved wrong. We had Alcester Town Band, then Avonbank Band from Evesham.



Pram race 1963

One of the highlights was the Pram Race. About 20 of us men with a lighter man in a pram would race from the Bull's Head up street along Waterloo Road to Broom, drink a pint of beer at Broom Tavern, then carry on through Broom down Victoria Road to the Pleasure Boat, have another pint, then ran up the High Street finishing at the Bull's Head. The crowds of people in Broom, Victoria Road and all up the High Street were terrific, it kept us going.

STREET PARTIES

Over the years we have had a number of good organised street parties in the village. The first one I remember well was for the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary at Holland's Tea Gardens in 1935 when we children were presented with an aluminium mug with the King and Queen's head on it, made by Josephs of Stratford. Another was the

ending of the War in 1945. I was then serving in the Grenadier Guards advancing towards Germany. We had a party with what we could get.

When different parts of the village organised a party, those of us who lived in Icknield St combined with Church Street and Grange Road. One was for the Coronation of our Queen in 1953. We went round Grange Road to Avonside where Lord and Lady Brookes gave us the freedom of Avonside and garden again with drinks, refreshments and games.



Another one was for the Silver Jubilee of our Queen in 1977. We had all the drink on my front lawn and refreshments under the archway opposite. You can see how we enjoyed ourselves by the photos

Before the bungalows were built in Icknield Street we always had a Bonfire Party on the waste land with hot dogs, roast potatoes and home-made wine.

Then what a wonderful day we had on the Wedding Day of Prince William to Kate Middleton in Westminster Abbey on the 29th April 2011. We rang the Church bells for an hour before. The Church was full of people. A large screen covered the Chancel screen and we all stood

and sang the Hymns and the National Anthem just as though we were in the Abbey. The men dressed for the occasion with bow tie and top hats, and the ladies wore lovely hats. We then went over to the Church Hall for lovely refreshments and drinks.

SPECIAL MEMORIES

We all have memories of something special that happens. In 1932 when I was playing in what was the Co-op field where Saxonfield is now, a huge airship, the R101, came over quite low. We had never seen anything like it before or since. We were never allowed to go down to the bridge, but we did and saw it go over towards Bickmarsh and out of sight. Only two months later it crashed in France killing 80 people.

About the same time, three big brown open roof Daimlers came on the bank by the War Memorial. There were very few cars about then. It was Oswald Mosley and his Fascist Party canvassing for the parliamentary elections. He stayed for about 15 minutes speaking and issuing leaflets. They were just like Hitler-style troops in their brown uniforms.

I then remember Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary and our Member of Parliament, speaking in the Jubilee Hall on behalf of the Conservative Party. He came to Bidford often as Dr Crawford was Chairman and Mrs Bidwell Secretary of the Warwick and Leamington Conservative Party to which constituency Bidford belonged in those days. Soon after the 1939-45 War, the Stratford-upon-Avon constituency was formed and John Profumo became our MP.

In 1937 a Blenheim Bomber crashed in a field in Georges Elm Lane. We had never seen a crashed aeroplane before so in the School dinner time four of us boys ran up to see it. On returning late after dinner time, we received the cane, one on each hand from Mr Warner the Headmaster.

In 1951 after I had come out of the Grenadier Guards, I was playing centre-half for Bidford Boys Club when at half-time John Profumo with the Vicar, the Rev Harrison and Dr Murray came and shook hands with us players.

Another good memory was in 1991 when Michael Ball gave a concert in St Laurence Church as he was starting on his wonderful career. He had just reached Top of the Pops with *Love Changes Everything* from

Aspects of Love. I was a Churchwarden at the time when Michael with his family came to Midnight Communion Service on Christmas Eve. I asked him if he would come and sing a carol on Christmas Day Morning Service, but unfortunately he couldn't as he was returning to London. When I took the January Church Magazine to Blythe House in Grange Rd, where Tony and Ruth, Michael's parents, lived, they told me Michael had been saying he would like to give a concert in Church for Church funds. I could not get round to the Vicar, Tony Richards, quick enough because it was up to the vicar to say yes or no. We had Kathy McGowan as compere, the Mountain Ash Male Voice Choir from Wales, Michael's backing girl vocalists, The Stephen Hill Singers and a four piece Band. The lighting was done by Clive Morris, a Bidford resident, who was a lighting engineer at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Thanks to him for the wonderful lighting in the Church, also to Dudley Simpson for the sound and the many people that helped to get the Church ready.

The Church was packed for the afternoon and evening performances and now over 20 years on and Michael is a great star in England and America. Michael later came and crowned our Carnival Queen, and opened the Carnival. What a great man to do that for our village!



Frank and Gian on their Ruby Wedding Anniversary

INVESTITURE

Most people have heard of the Queen's Birthday Honours List, and the New Year's Honours List. Twice a year the Queen gives out honours, i.e. medals, to people whose names have been recommended to her by the Prime Minister. They are all people nominated by those whom they represent in town or village. No one knows they are going to be honoured by Her Majesty until they receive a letter from the Prime Minister. This happened to me one morning in May 1995 when I got this letter from the PM's office telling me I had been nominated for the MBE. I was not allowed to tell anyone about it till the Honours List was published on the morning of Her Majesty's Official Birthday on June 16th so for a month I had to keep this great honour a secret. The citation told me that I had been honoured 'for my services to Bidford-on-Avon'. I was summoned to Buckingham Palace to be presented with my medal on December 12th 1995.

I had to be at Buckingham Palace by 9.30am, so with my wife Gian and daughter Jill we left Bidford at 6.00am to give us plenty of time at a busy time of the day. We reached the Palace by 9.00am, where our son John was waiting for us. After having my car searched by the police, we drove through the Palace gates right into the inner courtyard. There were 60 people to receive honours, all wearing military uniforms or morning dress. Buckingham Palace looks rather grey from the outside, but inside it is magnificent, plush red carpets, gold painted stair rails, the walls hung with beautiful paintings. We were told where to go by very smart but friendly ushers, then a Guards Officer gave us very detailed instructions about what to do when we met the Queen: 'Wait by the usher till your name is called, then walk forward for Her Majesty to pin the medal to your chest. She will then talk to you, then shake you by the hand. You then take three steps back, bow and walk off'.

I was a bit nervous waiting for my turn as I got near to the entrance to the huge State Ballroom where the Queen was waiting. She was standing on a small stage in front of two gold red thrones. I could see Gian, Jill and John sitting in the third row of the audience. I heard the Lord Chamberlain announce: 'Frank Spiers, for services to the community of Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire'. I felt so very proud to

hear the name of the village where I was born and lived mentioned in Buckingham Palace.

Then suddenly there I was walking as smartly as I could to face the Queen who pinned the medal to my chest and then asked about all I did in Bidford. Her Majesty then shook hands with me and off I marched feeling very honoured with my bright new MBE medal pinned on my chest. After the ceremony, everyone gathered in the forecourt for official photographs to be taken.



