

Memories of a Titchfield schoolboy during the late nineteen forties and early nineteen fifties. By the late Colin E. Palmer (Catisfield resident)

In those far off days (in some respects it seems only yesterday,) if we children, were blessed with a good snow fall in winter, dozens of us would make our way up to Old Fareham Hill, the field under the Radio Transmitter, and slide down the hill on anything that we could lay our hands on. The lucky ones had homemade sledges, and one family the local bakers, St. Johns, had a proper sledge with metal runners and sides which had the ability to be steered and go very fast. At this time it must be remembered, that to get to Stubbington from Titchfield you went down the hill, through the Square and down Bridge Street, not across the bottom of the hill as we do now, so the slide down the Hill was much longer

. One or two of the local Privet family, by fair means or foul, confiscated the St John's sledge and off they went, unfortunately for them it went much too fast for them to control, going through the hedge at the bottom of the hill. This hedge had barbed wire laced into it, which cut the joy riders pretty badly. Fortunately for them, Dr Ellis, who was also on the hill at the time with his children, was able to slide down the hill on his sledge and administer first aid.

Titchfield Primary School was relatively new then, with Mr Wilkins being the Head Master and the teachers that I can remember are Mrs Riche, Mrs Gardner and Mrs Croucher.

I remember the only three school trips we had. The first was a walk down to the Tannery, which is now the industrial estate, where we were shown how leather was made and the workings of the factory, then we walked back to school. The following year when we were older, it was a much longer trip; we were taken down to the Gas Works in Frog Lane and shown how they made the gas and coke. There was a Gas Holder there then.

My third outing was a real treat going by coach to Chessington Zoo. There for the first time in my life, I was ten years old then, I was able to marvel at wild animals, (no TV then). Sadly it must have been where I caught Chicken Pox from someone, as I was confined to bed for a few days on my return.

Round at the back of the school was the allotment, where the football pitch is now, there we were encouraged to plant seeds and nurture them until we could pick or dig up the fruits of our labour. In the front of the school there were no trees or car park on the playground then, we would play football and cricket during our playtimes and lunch breaks.

Each day Mr. Steve Harris would deliver the vegetables in his small lorry, for our school lunch which was cooked on the school premises. These school lunches must have been some of the very best in the country, as they were prepared and cooked by local ladies from the village. The milkman would deliver crates of one third of a pint glass bottles for our mid- morning break, if you were a milk monitor you would put your friends bottles on the radiator to warm up.

The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth on June 2nd 1953 was an event that only Titchfield with its expertise in organising Carnival's could do, most of the residents of the Village arrived at the Recreation Ground around lunch time.

There everyone was entertained with a Sports Day, with runners of all ages racing each other in all sorts of competitions, egg and spoon, slow bike race etc. for monetary prizes, and then at the end of the day a real Titchfield Bonfire Boys Firework Display. This display was orchestrated from the door-less tin hut, which was about 6m x 4m as were all of the Bonfire Boys firework displays. This hut which was at the top of the recreation ground in the centre, behind where the bonfire was normally situated. It was normally used by the Titchfield Football Team as their changing room. The huge bonfire was built during the two or three weeks before the Carnival, with lorries and trailers arriving from all around the area with anything that would burn. This was a good time to cut hedges and prune trees and throw out old furniture.

At the end of May when the river had warmed up a bit, us children would make our way up to Stony Bridge (Anjou Bridge), there in the field on the Titchfield Mill side of the bridge parents with small children would lay out a blanket and have a picnic sometimes there could be up to thirty families enjoying the sun and a paddle in the shallow stream on that side of the road.

In the field on the north side of the bridge was where the big boys and girls who could swim would go, if you couldn't swim you would soon learn as you would be caught and thrown in. The river was at that time, five or six foot deep, this was because Captain Mallinson from Segensworth House, who owned the fishing rights from the Iron Mill down to Titchfield Mill would have the river dredged, if you look today you will see that the river banks are higher alongside the river than farther out in the fields. This was caused when the river mud was left there by the dredger and was done to encourage the fish upstream, and we kids took full advantage of the deep water and it became our swimming pool.

On other summer evenings we would turn up at the Recreation Ground and play football or cricket, this was dependant on who had provided the equipment, you just turned up and were told which team you were in and away you went, numbers being totally irrelevant, footballs, I remember seemed to be quite plentiful, these footballs were made of leather with a lace to keep the bladder in, which if you caught the lace when heading the ball, would be rather painful, worse than that, if the grass was wet the ball would soak up the water and make the ball very heavy, which was like heading a concrete block, no plastic covered balls then. Cricket gear was less plentiful. The boys who played cricket had to thank Michael Taytor, whose father was the Manager of the Tannery for the use of his cricket equipment most of the time.

The school cricket and football teams would play their home matches across at the Recreation Ground where there was a gate opposite the school, (a gate post can still be seen there) and for away matches, played normally on Saturday mornings, we would meet in the Square and catch the No. 45 or No. 45a, Southdown bus into Fareham, where there were four or five other schools to play against. The 45 Southdown bus went from Warsash Clock Tower all the way to Southsea. My favourite cricket match was against Portchester, played inside the Castle grounds. Although the 45a would take us round Cbmerway Lane and drop us off at the White Hart Public House in Castle Street, not far from the Castle, we preferred to catch the 45 bus to the centre of Portchester (no motorway or by-pass then) and drop us off at Portchester Crossroads (no roundabout), there we would go into Wheelers the Bakery and buy a pennyworth (old penny 240 in a pound) of broken cakes these we would eat as we walked down to the Castle.

Wheelers delivered their bread by horse and cart in some outlying areas then. A lady who lived opposite the White Hart Pub would sell us grapes off her vine if we were there when

they were ripe. There were very few cars around during the day, those that there were would do a little shopping and then be on their way.

There were very few cars parked in the Square. The shops I remember, were Fluff Adams opposite the Queens Head (paper shop). Smiths Greengrocer (next to the Methodist Church) with St Johns the Bakers opposite. Collieholes Haberdashery (One Stop today), the Sweet Shop. next to the Bugle driveway, Mrs Bungy, (toy shop) on the corner of Church Street, Mr Arthur Hails, (carpet shop) who made up old bicycles out of old bits and pieces then painted them with ex-army paint. New bicycles were unobtainable, as the cycle factories had not yet got into full production after the war. Opposite were two shops owned by the same people called Lancaster and Crooks, one was a hardware shop, the other a butchers. In South Street were another two shops owned by the same family called Williams (Oily), the shop on the left was mainly a store for paraffin oil which Mr Williams would deliver all around the area each week, there were very few items that he did not have in that lorry lots of them hanging on hooks around the outside. Further down South Street was another butchers shop and another bakers shop, together with a Chippy and in the last building on the left, was the Post Office.

The Surgery, (Dr Ellis) was at the bottom of Coach Hill opposite the Pub (Coach and Horses). The last building on the right in Bridge Street was the Brewery Tap, another pub, owned by Fielders

Winter evenings were spent playing tag around the Square and Cemetery. There were very few cars then and maybe to finish off the evening, if you were lucky, a bag of chips from the Chippy in South Street.

Titchfield's Mobile Cinema was held during the winter months in the old Drill Hall (The Community Centre is built on the site now). The Drill Hall was basically a large wooden shed covered in roofing felt. On Friday evenings the mobile cinema turned up and after setting up the one projector, the film was shown until the first reel of film had run its course, then all hell broke loose as the projectionist had to rewind the shown film before starting the second half of the film, this took several minutes and a lot of patience to restore order

. Unfortunately, after one of these film shows, the Drill Hall caught fire and burnt down to the ground, I think it was put down to an electrical fault, so for a few weeks we were without a Cinema. Eventually the Friday night Cinema was re-instated in the Parish Rooms. Some of us lucky ones progressed to the Saturday Matinee at the Embassy Cinema in Fareham (there were two cinemas in West Street then), bus fare, three old pence just a little over a penny today.

What would Titchfield be without its Carnival, fifty or sixty years ago all the schools in the area would have Carnival day off. The floats would assemble at Bellfield for the afternoon procession; from there it would go via South Street, The Square, East Street and then out onto the Bypass, up the Hill past the school to St Margaret's Lane and back to Bellfield- No safety barriers then, traffic was just stopped until the Procession had cleared the road.

The Procession would be maybe up to a mile long with Bands from all the military services. Prices School, a Boys Grammar School in Fareham, and Cadets from around the area. Floats would appear as if by magic from barns and hidden yards around the village, the evening procession was a very dangerous time as fireworks were thrown about in the crowd, the Health and Safety brigade would have had palpitations if this happened now.

At the Mill end of the Recreation Ground the Fun Fair would arrive about a week before the Carnival, it normally rained most of the week that they were setting it all up. So by the time the big day arrived there was just a sea of mud all around the Fair, there was no tarmacked car park then. The Fair owners would buy huge amounts of straw from the Mill to help absorb the mud, but everyone usually got rather muddy.

Us children (mostly boys), would gather in the Rec. the morning after the Carnival, there we would look for fireworks that had failed to go off the night before, if we found one and there were plenty to be found, we would throw them into the remains of the bonfire which would still be smouldering and await the bang! Some boys would earn a few shillings (20 shillings equals £1) helping to dismantle the fair.

The grass at the bottom of the Rec. would just about recover from all the damage caused by the fair the previous year, only to be subjected to more damage by the fair again the following Bonfire night! Mr Russell, the Manager of the Mill, would make himself very unpopular with the farmers upstream from the Mill, when in the winter; he would close the sluice gates in the river to allow the water level to rise, flooding the fields on both sides of the river, up as far as Fontley, on occasions. This flood of water gave him plenty of power to do his milling. Today, if you look up, having entered the new Mill Public House and Restaurant, you will see a trap door in the ceiling, through this door, sacks of grain would disappear on the end of a very long chain, to be stored, on the upper floors, all this was powered by the river, turning the water wheel.

The whole Mill was like a living museum as when the water wheel was being used there were different sized wheels turning all around the ground floor each having wooden teeth fixed to them, making them into cog wheels. The whole Mill seemed to be alive as it vibrated. I remember seeing about six sacks hooked onto hooks fixed onto the side of the mill being filled with various forms of crushed or ground corn ready to be sold.

Colin E. Palmer. 1947-1952

