

Robin Nicholls – His Experience and Interest in Great Wakering

[In his own words]

26th February 2013

I grew up in Great Wakering in a good family group created by Charles Wiggins and his wife Lillian Harknett. They had moved from Southend to the village in 1913, when Charles had built his home in his spare time at 250 High Street. They brought up 6 children there. My mother, Doris Wiggins, and father 'Les' Nicholls lived next door to Percy Beales' Post Office at 179 High Street where I was born in 1942. Charles was a boatbuilder as were two sons, Don and Joe, and his son-in-law Bill Sutton. Boats and yachts provided an inspiring background in my childhood. In addition, for reasons unknown, I had an early interest in scientific measurement and radio and recording technology.

My early education was at Gt Wakering primary in the days of Sammy Chandler (Headmaster) and his marvellous staff. They did well. I passed the 11+ but there was no place for me at Southend so I stayed on at Wakering until 13+ when I was bussed to Rayleigh Sweyne school.

University was not an option for me so it was off to work and in 1959 I became a Scientific Assistant, a good 'entry level' job, with AWRE on Foulness Island. Here I was to benefit from good colleagues, good training and the opportunity for 'further education' at Southend Municipal College - in that lovely building on Victoria Circus (now gone). I continued in my scientific career, and with part time studies, and in 1983 was awarded an MSc. I was lucky to be able to balance the scientific challenge at work with broader leisure time horizons in arts and history offered by The Open University.

My two daughters', Deborah and Susan, early schooling was in the 'new' village school and years later they graduated from Aberdeen University. Although I didn't need much prompting, it was my daughters who suggested I compile a family history. This was fascinating and I was able to draw, in part, on work already done by Gwen Rawlinson (Wiggins family) and John Benford (Nicholls family). I set the family history within the context of the history of SE Essex and Great Wakering in particular.

Many questions from the Roman/Saxon period have been raised and from that period covered by Philip Morant in his "History and Antiquities of the County of Essex." There is much work to be done and I am pleased to note that both professional and amateur studies are contributing to the knowledge in this digital age.