

# "SMALL BEGINNINGS"

No 10

Summer 2005

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A group of Barling School ex-pupils, friends and partners occasionally meet for lunch. All are welcome. The next lunch is on Saturday May 21<sup>st</sup> at the Cherry Tree, Stambridge. We suggest meeting as early as possible so people can leave in time to watch THE MATCH. Dates and venues for the following four lunches have yet to be agreed and suggestions are: July 9<sup>th</sup> 2005, October 15<sup>th</sup> 2005, January 14<sup>th</sup> 2006 & May 20<sup>th</sup> 2006 at The Cherry Tree, Stambridge From 12.15 until 3.00 pm



## MEMORIES OF A PUPIL 1953-1959 BY ROY DEEKS

I can remember running across the playground to the toilet block in the middle of winter, in six inches of snow, with the snow falling very heavily, just for a pee. The garden at the back of the toilet block was owned by Mr Theadom. In better weather I remember seeing him hoeing his garden amongst an array of colourful flowers and vegetables, very reminiscent of Mr McGregor from the 'Peter Rabbit' stories. Do any of you also remember the smells of school? How about the old P.E. Store, a brick building at the side of the playing field, the aroma of dubbing, linseed oil and the leather of the medicine balls, that seemed as large as we were and just about as heavy! The lovely smell of school dinners that always seemed to consist of greens and tapioca cooking away, possibly together, however, I don't think Mrs Waller, the cook, would have done that. I also used to sometimes go to the School with my Grandmother, the School Cleaner/Caretaker, Mabel Bradbury. We cleaned the floors with a type of sand mixed with Jeyes Fluid, which she and I dutifully swept around the whole area of the School interior and then cleaned the sinks with Gumption. Those smells! Among others, that I promise I won't mention. I tried to think of the answer to the question raised, about the football shirts and where they originated. They were a little long but somehow they didn't seem to be too large. (Roy sent photos with this article, including one of the football team, but in the interests of efficient emailing, they have been left out. Ed). So were they really Great Wakering Rovers cast-offs? I also have memories of going to an open-air swimming pool at Battlesbridge, a weekly occurrence in the summer, in my later years at the School. The water was always cold and the sides of the pool were high, which made it difficult to get out. There was a springboard as I remember, which of course all the lads enjoyed using to show off their diving skills. The school relay team won the Essex Schools' four x one hundred metres one year and as a treat, the team was taken to London by Mr Learmond to see the sights. I think we went by steam train to London - what a great era. (Another photo is available of this event). Finally, I recall an incident in the R.I. class, with Mrs Horner. After doing my regular duty of filling the coke bucket before class, we started a Religious Instruction class with Mrs Horner. As was the way of our teacher, she used to get carried away with her story telling. Sometime into our lesson, standing next to the open fire, as she did to warm herself quite frequently in the cold winter months, she gave out a roar, promptly propelling the top set of her false teeth into the newly filled coke bucket. Without further ado, the slightly blackened teeth were hurriedly brushed off and returned

to their original position. Did we laugh, did we heck, we knew better than to do that, but of course, we did however, fall about laughing in the playground later. That was a story that went about for several months, I can tell you.

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### **Memories by Val Ridley (nee Mott)**

Growing up in Little Wakering were happy days. We led simple lives compared with today's living. Money was short but we never went without food, and had a lot of love from our parents. Norman Snow's nan always let me see children's TV after school. We had no such luxury so you can imagine what it felt like to sit and stare in wonder at this small square screen. Our house was one of the first to have bathroom built, again what luxury to think you could actually shut yourself away for a time and wallow in hot water not thinking to see all the steam running down the walls. Our bathroom never had time to dry out and poor mum was forever mopping up trying to stop the damp. There was also the memory of the toilet man who always used to turn up at lunch times just as we were eating. Mum used to shout out "Shut the doors" and it was worse in the summer. The smell was awful as you can imagine. We were never allowed to hang washing out on a Sunday, as it would upset our neighbours who were church people. Mum used to wait until they had left for morning service. If we did anything wrong it would always come back to mum and dad via Eva across the road who was always sitting behind the net curtains. You could see the nets twitching so you knew she was there. Still, we felt like we were millionaires as we lived in a tied cottage as dad worked for Mr Bentall. We would always look forward to our box of Cox apples sent to us from the boss at Christmas. I always kept to the same gang when we were allowed out to play. We loved playing hopscotch by Dam Farm, plus skipping and sometimes Knock Down Ginger. Once a crowd of us was asked to search for a lost dog. A strange man came over on his bike, and I was the first to say that I'd go with him, but my cousin Vi who was at the bus stop near The Castle pub asked where I was going. Within minutes I was taken home and getting a warning from mum and dad about the dangers of talking to strange men. To this day I never found out what happened to the man or his dog, and shudder to think what might have happened to me! Looking back now we had happy times, no worries about playing out in the street. There were not many cars about and no pressures like children go through today. How lucky we were.

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### **A VARIETY OF SHOWS**

#### **BY OLIVE BRADBURY AND PETER GRIFFITHS**

Around 1949, when we were 10 and 11, we used to sing duets to entertain members of the Women's Institute in Barling. At that time, Mrs MERCER, who lived at Little Wakering Hall, was President of the WI and Peter's mum, Vera GRIFFITHS, was the secretary. We were introduced as 'our young Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth', they being an adult duo who would sing light classics on the radio and in music halls. Our repertoire was of traditional songs and included 'Sweet Lass of Richmond Hill' and 'Oh, No John'. The latter consisted of various entreaties from Peter, each followed by Olive answering with 'Oh no, John, no John, no John, no'. But the last verse was framed in such a way that her denials meant 'Yes, John, yes, John, yes, John, yes'. For these concerts Peter, who was tall for his age, wore a pin-striped suit borrowed from Little Wakering coffin-maker and undertaker Bert BENNEWITH. Olive was dressed in her sister Yvonne's bridesmaid's dress. It was a lovely apple green and, with it, she sported a matching bonnet that her aunt, Olive HORNER, had made for her from crepe paper. We were also in some of the shows produced by

Mrs Hannah WATSON, an imposing woman who walked with a stick and lived with her small husband in a bungalow in Kimberley Road. We used to rehearse there. These entertainments were variety shows, with some singing, dancing, and a playlet or two. Peter remembers being in one at the Women's Institute that included a dramatisation of a children's story called 'The Giant Turnip'. As usual he had borrowed Mr BENNEWITH's suit, but he had forgotten about the black brogues to go with them. So, his grown-up smartness was offset by a pair of scruffy white plimsolls.

Mrs WATSON was sometimes the organiser of Maypole dancing, too. We remember this musical spree taking place once on the vicarage lawn and, in other years, on the green space near the sea-wall at the end of Little Wakering Creek. There was also a May Queen procession through the village, terminating at the Parochial Hall in Little Wakering. (Photos on Geoff BELL's 'Villages' website record some of this:

[www.barlingwakeringvillages.co.uk/index.html](http://www.barlingwakeringvillages.co.uk/index.html)) Olive was an attendant in the year that Pearl REYNOLDS was May Queen. She remembers gathering may blossom to make the crown and the little posies for head-dresses. She and the other attendants also carried garlands made of sprigs of laburnum and may.

In December 1949 the village enjoyed (We hope!) two different pantos. Olive was the Fairy Godmother in 'Cinderella' at the Women's Institute, while Peter played Hansel in 'Hansel and Gretel' at the school, alongside Enid EVE (very frightening as The Witch in her conical black hat) and others from Mr LEARMOND's class.

For both of us, a highlight of that same period was the treat of monthly film shows at the Parochial Hall. A couple from Thorpe Bay, the husband being a former manager of Southend Odeon, would bring all their equipment – projector, cables, speakers and cans of film – in a van and set up in the hall an hour or so before the showing. The projector would be towards the back of the hall. You got a better view of the screen if you sat in front of it as, otherwise, some of its light would get in your eyes. Among the, always black-and-white, films that Olive can remember seeing there are 'The Lady Vanishes', with Margaret Lockwood, and 'The Arsenal Murder Mystery', both of which are still to be seen occasionally on early afternoon TV. In the 1950s, Mr LEARMOND, our Headteacher, also showed films there, as he also did in school sometimes, he being a bit of a film buff. In the early 1950s we were members of Barling Youth Club Drama Group, whose productions were also put on at the Parochial Hall. The shows were produced originally by Mr and Mrs GILES. Olive thinks that the latter may have been a professional actress in rep. Later, Geoff BUTLER, always enthusiastic and encouraging, took over as leader of the Drama Group. Arthur CHITTOCK, a talented and versatile actor, often played the lead in these productions; for instance, in Agatha Christie's 'Peril at End House'. Although Peter didn't remember it until Arthur showed him photos at the 2002 Reunion, his own first appearance was in 'Flare Path'. We first acted together in 'The Happiest Days of Your Life', in which we played the young teachers from two schools allocated to the same billet during World War Two. We were also in 'The Ghost Train', a comedy thriller by Arthur Ridley, later famous for his appearances in 'Dad's Army'. Other plays were 'Reluctant Heroes', a farce in which Peter was one of a group of RAF personnel, including Rodney STEWART and Roy BARKER, who were billeted at the house of Derek GROVES and Mary WILLIAMS. Pauline SMITH played a young woman who was not averse to a bit of fraternising. Every year or two, youth drama festivals were held in Rayleigh and our Drama Group used to enter the competitions. Olive remembers being there with John DUFFY, Arthur CHITTOCK and others in a scene set on a bus, when they were all speaking with American accents. In another piece, she and John DUFFY were twins and they were

awarded a prize for their performance. Later, Peter won an award with Derek GROVES for their acting out of the opening scene of 'St Joan' by George Bernard Shaw. Sadly, the drama group was closed down when a youth from Great Wakering threatened Peter with physical violence for kissing his girlfriend as part of a rehearsal for the next production. Those dramatic presentations by young people of the villages were over.

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### NEWS

The villages website is back on line at: [www.barlingwakeringvillages.co.uk/index.html](http://www.barlingwakeringvillages.co.uk/index.html) . Many thanks to all those who so generously donated money so that we can enjoy the website. It is possible that, early in 2006, we shall be trying to gather a similar amount for a further year's pleasure. Many thanks, too, to Dawn and David for collecting all the contributions and to Geoff for getting the site up and running again. Just a reminder that Geoff will welcome additions to the site at any time. You can send them direct, via the link to him on the Home page of the website, or via Peter Griffiths. Photos or text or combinations are equally welcome. Wouldn't it be good to have more families represented? No doubt people have some good shots of Reunion 2004 too. Sadly, Paul Abercrombie's mother, Lucy Lola Abercrombie-Hill (Ola), died on April 6<sup>th</sup> following a short illness. She was the aunt of the 'Griffiths boys', and many of us knew her from reunion events. The sad and unexpected death took place in December of Diana Jeffries, wife of Peter Jeffries of Great Wakering. Diana was secretary at Barling School for many years. Neil Punnett, who now lives in Devon, was in touch with Geoff Bell and, as a result, additional names and photos were added to the website. Neil attended the school from 1959 to 1965 and can name some of the children on the Nativity Play photo on Past 1 - Adrian Rogers, one of the Mumford twins (Gary or Terry), Jill Budrey, Steven Clapp, Neil Punnett & Alan Rule. The photo must date from c. 1961. Neil's brother, Laurie, and cousins Peter Brown, Bonny Brown, John Pavelin and Billy Pavelin, also attended the school. His mother, Barbara Punnett, was school secretary from 1960 until 1970.

*Paul Abercrombie's legacy of "Small Beginnings" continues under the united editorship of Lynne Askham (nee Marshall), Bob Avery and David Freeman.*

If you would like to contribute to "Small Beginnings" please contact:

Lynne Askham

Mulberry Cottage 48 Thomas Bell Road Earls Colne, Essex CO6 2PF

Phone: 01787 224237

Email: [lynneaskham@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lynneaskham@yahoo.co.uk)