

Autumn 2015

Edition 30

# Small Beginnings

The newsletter of the former pupils of the old Barling School is published for the benefit of all ex-pupils, staff and friends of the school

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## Reunion Lunches

A group of us meet for lunch every few months to catch up on news, socialise and plan the main reunion events. We meet at the:

**Castle Inn, Little Wakering**

**Our Next Reunion**

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

**12.15 to 3.00 p.m.**

Anyone with an interest in our school or area will receive a warm welcome.

All friends and partners are welcome.

## Foreword by Peter Griffiths

### Lynne Askham

Regrettably, for reasons of poor health, Lynne Askham is unable to continue producing our 'Small Beginnings' newsletter.



I would therefore like to take this opportunity on behalf of every member of our group, to thank her for editing a really professional newsletter over the past eleven years, one that we have enjoyed reading. We all

hope that her health improves and that she is able to continue to join us at future lunchtime meetings.

### Laurie Street's Memories

In this edition, for everyone to savour, are some more of Laurie Street's memories about our villages - this time of events during the Second World War. Do they evoke similar thoughts in anyone else?

## ***Our Last Lunchtime Meeting by Peter Griffiths***

Another terrific turn-out at our social get-together at The Castle on October 10<sup>th</sup>. Nearly 40 of us gathered for a very lively session. We had thought that numbers might be down after our bonanza in July, but, in spite of not having a star from the Antipodes this time, we were boosted by the return of many regulars plus one or two newcomers. Welcome to everyone! We covered the following topics:

- thanks from Tony Alps for his reception by us in July.
- our intention to organise another big reunion in 2016.
- a presentation to Lynne (Marshall) Askham, for having edited our newsletter for over a decade, of pens engraved with 'Friend of Old Barling School'.
- news of our revived newsletter and new website, both now managed by Richard Kirton.
- finances (David Bailey).
- a talk by Laurie Street on some controversial local issues: the dilapidated Parish Hall (formerly the WI) in Barling; the proposed development at Dam Farm, Little Wakering; and the proposal to build about 130 houses between Barrow Hall Road and Oldbury Road.

## ***Rochford Airport was a Hurricane Station***

As we rejoice in the success of the Battle of Britain 75 years ago and remember with extreme sadness the pilots who were little more than boys who failed to return home I have resurrected my boyhood memories. At the height of the battle the youngsters of Bakers Grave seemed to have no fear of the war raging all round us. We gathered in groups at our front gates to Victory Cottages and watched in amazement at the battles in the air above us.

Max Bygraves was stationed at Rochford where he sang his emotional songs like, "Deck of Cards". We had a photo of him sheltering from the blazing sun by sitting under the wing of a Hurricane at Rochford. Rochford was a Hurricane station and although the Spitfire was undoubtedly the more glamorous the hurricane was the workhorse. We watched the droves of enemy bombers with their escort fighters head for London and the Hurricanes come to intercept them. The Hurricanes soared high above the clouds and screamed down on the enemy with guns blazing. Sometimes it was a Gerry that hit the water in flames, alas sometimes it was one of our boys.

When the hurricanes returned home they swooped low over Victory Cottages and other groups of houses and the pilot boys waved to the girls and gave a 'Thumbs Up' to the adults who also gathered. We waved back ecstatically. If the mission had been successful they dipped their wings from side to side in salute to a job well done. At times the hurricanes limped home hardly clearing the house rooftops with terrible damage to the aircraft but still the one and only Rolls Royce engines purred on and still the boy pilots waved in thanksgiving that they lived to fight another day. At times the inevitable happened and although we knew little of it, Hurricanes failed to return home and those same boy pilots waved no more.

*Laurie Street*

## ***Comment by Peter Griffiths***

I didn't know that Max Bygraves was at Rochford, though I'd heard that he had been at RAF Hornchurch. I do remember hearing 'Deck of Cards', though by other singers, in the 1950s. And I think I remember some afternoons in the school's air-raid shelters, when we would sing songs and listen to stories. That story about the dog is very poignant.

## ***Hornchurch was a major Battle of Britain station***

When I joined the RAF I was in fact stationed at RAF Hornchurch, although after the war. Of course Hornchurch along with Biggin Hill and others was one of the major Battle of Britain stations.

Hornchurch was steeped in memorabilia of the battle. The local School was named The Mitchell School after R J Mitchell the designer of the beautiful spitfire with the different Houses being named after battle ACES like Douglas Bader. The only spitfire that flew in the battle and is still flying flew from Hornchurch and crashed at least once only to be repaired and put back into the air.

But Hornchurch is another story including the story of "Binder" the station dog who was adopted by one of the pilots and the story goes that Binder always flew in the spitfire with his master but one day Binder was missing when the clarion bell sounded. That mission the spitfire failed to return home and the pilot was killed. Binder reappeared but eventually died and was buried just inside the camp gates.

All you dog lovers out there might be interested in the story of Binder who was just a scruff really but was taken in by one of the pilots. He lived a long life and seemed to have an uncanny sixth sense. Did he know that a spitfire would be shot down that day or was it just coincidence.

After the war Hornchurch became an aircrew selection centre where potential air crew came to be assessed. Recruits had to be the right size to fit the aircraft, to tall, to short, to fat and you were out. Recruits were cheaper than aircraft. Somehow Binder knew when an intake would be arriving and waited at the camp gate to escort the arrivals to the centre.

I have just found my book called "Hornchurch Offensive" a history covering many years. In fact there were three dogs involved, Crash, Scruff and Binder but only Binder had his own memorial on his grave. All this really shows is I haven't spent all my life in Barling but have crossed the boundaries to elsewhere.

*Laurie Street*

## ***Frankie Howerd in Wakering***

Laurie's WWII memories have started the ball rolling again with this comment from Robin Nicholls about Frankie Howerd "Frankie Howerd could be seen on Wakering High Street with a mobile anti-aircraft gun and up Alexandra Road at the old army camp there. He mentioned that he was at Shoeburyness on a TV programme (which I have on VHS somewhere)!"

Rather than hoping for a showbiz tour of military hotspots, Frankie had to settle for life in the Royal Artillery. As Gunner Howerd of B Battery, Frankie found himself defending the coast of Essex from the Luftwaffe but not to be deterred by his posting to Shoeburyness Barracks, he soon saw himself organising and starring in weekly concert parties. Frankie Howerd's quite sad Biography can be seen here:

[http://www.televisionheaven.co.uk/frankie\\_howerd.htm](http://www.televisionheaven.co.uk/frankie_howerd.htm)

*Richard Kirton*

## **Frankie Howerd at The Exhibition**

I knew that Frankie Howerd sometimes drank at The Exhibition in the 1950s, but not that he'd been local during the War. Another interesting piece of information about Frankie Howerd: Les Gilkes has written to say that the great entertainer lodged with the Bennewith family, ie opposite where Les and I lived, in Little Wakering. Bert Bennewith was the village undertaker and coffin-maker. He was a short man and so, when I was about eleven, I was able to borrow his suits to wear in plays and shows at the Parochial Hall and Women's Institute.

Here is a very poignant website about Little Wakering people who died in the two World Wars: <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Essex/LittleWakering.html>.

Amongst many other things, it indicates that one of the Bennewiths died during the First World War and that he had lived at The Castle.

*Peter Griffiths*

## **Frankie Howerd was stationed at Shoeburyness**

Frankie Howard was stationed at Shoeburyness for a while. He stayed with Mrs Staples, next door but one to me, when we lived in the bungalow. He used to play the piano on occasion.

Winnie Staples married Jimmy Kiss, whose son lives on Run Corner, Jimmy was in a Japanese camp for years. I can remember him coming home.

Also, I can remember my dad coming home from being in the desert, when I was in Barling School. June Smith came down to the school on her bike to tell me my dad was home.

*Janet (Collicutt) Claydon*

## **Frankie Howerd was well known round here**

I think Norman Bennewith was also an undertaker and he is buried in Little Wakering churchyard. I remember Janet lived in the last bungalow before Victory Cottages I thought the Staples lived in the first council house. The Groves family lived in the next house I thought but might be wrong. June Smith lived next door to us at 17 Victory cottages. June lives now near Little Wakering Corner. She and her family went to Wakering School.

Of course the Groves family have strong connections with the East Coast floods, Nellie the daughter of Nellie married and went to live at the camp on the common and were seriously flooded. Nellie had a daughter Anne who was rescued at 2 years of age, her brother aged 4 lost his life as did her mother Nellie. Father survived but don't start me off about the floods.

Frankie Howerd was well known round here, his pianist was Madam Vera Roper who lived in Royston Avenue. Southend and performed many concerts. Vera's husband Alf was a sergeant in the then Southend Force. The police had a concert party and performed to old people, etc. Vera played the piano and Frankie often joined in.

*Laurie Street*

## Great Wakering Sports and Activity Centre

In September 2011, Great Wakering Sports Centre closed leaving the community with no access to sports facilities. Now, great new sporting opportunities have been created at Great Wakering Primary School, thanks to a National Lottery Award. Awards in excess of £72,000 have funded improvements to the school's sports hall, including a sprung floor. A climbing wall has added and outside existing hard areas have been converted to provide two floodlit ball courts. The sports pavilion has been refurbished with new changing room and showers. You may know of some group of people in the village who could benefit from all of the activities on offer.

There are also other great facilities including:

- Badminton Court £10 per hour
- School Hall from £20 per hour
- Netball Court / Playground from £10 per hour
- Field / Football Pitches (5,7,9 a-side pitch sizes) from £10 per hour
- Climbing Wall (own instructors) from £25 per hour
- Bouncy Castle Parties £100 for 2 hours
- Climbing Wall Parties from £130 for 2 hours

All parties have the use of the Dining Hall with tables and chairs for their own refreshments.

Telephone: 0770 859 2013

Email: [sports@greatwakering.essex.sch.uk](mailto:sports@greatwakering.essex.sch.uk)

## Website Statistics Report

The report below is typical of that sent to Peter Griffiths each week. The week shown highlights the actual number of people visiting the site for the first time along with those returning from subsequent weeks. The report also indicates the number of individual page loads per day.

Weekly Stats Report Summary: 14 Sep - 20 Sep 2015

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total	Avg
Page Loads	11	19	75	5	3	3	51	167	24
Unique Visits	4	6	24	5	3	2	17	61	9
First Time Visits	2	4	16	3	1	2	13	41	6
Returning Visits	2	2	8	2	2	0	4	20	3

*Richard Kirton*



## **Villages Websites**

Our new website - Barling and Wakering Villages Plus - is expanding all the time, as site-manager Richard Kirton adds new photos frequently. If you have any pictures showing people or places in the area, please do get in touch. We would love to add them to the thousands already there.

It is easy to get from the new site to the old one and vice-versa. The new one can be reached here:

<http://www.barlingwakeringvillages.co.uk/plus/index.html>

The Original Website can be reached here:

<http://www.barlingwakeringvillages.co.uk/index.html>

*Peter Griffiths*

## **Situations Vacant**

We are still looking for a volunteer (or more) to edit our newsletter. It has been suggested that the job could be split, with one person being responsible for content and another for layout. So, if you would like to help, please don't be shy in offering your services, even if only for one or two editions.

*Peter Griffiths*

**There will be  
More Happy  
Memories in the  
next edition**

## **Contacts**

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