

GROWING UP IN KINGSTON
(Near Canterbury, Kent)
Between 1942 and 1954
By Robert Coombs b. 6 January 1937

KINGSTON – FACTS & FIGURES almost 72 years later in 2014

SIZE OF VILLAGE Approximately 200 dwellings and 391 inhabitants are listed in the Register of Electors (1998)

SIZE OF PARISH Long and narrow (about five miles long and only a few hundred yards wide in many places) and approximately two square miles in area; if you visit you will find a parish map displayed in the playing field.

LISTED BUILDINGS The parish contains 15 listed buildings:- Black Robin Public House, Rectory Cottage, St Giles Church, Little Court, Kingstone Court, Ileden Farmhouse, Marley Farmhouse, Railway Cottage, Whitelocks, Whitelocks Farmhouse, Alley Cottage, Westwood Farmhouse, Barn, Stables and Granary at Westwood Farm.

ST. GILES CHURCH Largely rebuilt in the 14th. century but nave and chancel walls are 12th. century or possibly Saxon; pulpit Jacobean or possibly Elizabethan; replaced Norman font; King-post roof etc.

BLACK ROBIN PUB Built in 18th. or early 19th. century and named after a local highway man who ended his days on a gallows on Barham Downs.

THE BARN The village hall, 'The Barn', given to the village in 1931, supports a number of business, social and cultural activities, e.g. meetings of the Parish Council, Village Society, Wives Club, Model Engineering, Keep Fit etc.

KINGSTON BROOCH One of the artefacts discovered in a Saxon burial mound above Kingston in the 1770's was the Kingston brooch, of ornate gold inlaid with garnets, blue glass and white shell, and now kept at Liverpool museum.

RIVER NAILBOURNE Every few years the Nailbourne river runs through the parish; 'bourn' is the name for an intermittently running stream. Its source is in Lyminge and it eventually joins the Little Stour beyond Wickhambreaux.

ELHAM VALLEY RAILWAY Closed in 1947. This ran between Canterbury and Folkestone through the parish. The arched railway bridge remains in Cove Lane as well as traces of the railway embankment. During the second world war, a 250 ton 18" military gun, called the 'Boche Buster' was hidden in neighbouring Bourne Park tunnel and was to be used in the event of an invasion.

As recalled by
ROBERT COOMBS (aged 77)
72 years later, in July 2014



Robert Neil Coombs
1942
Age 5

Robert Coombs remembers living in Kingston between 1942 & 1954

For all my family this story began on the night of 1 June 1942. We were living at number 35 Lower Chantry Lane in Canterbury when a German (Baedeker) air raid devastated the eastern end of the town. A bomb dropped at the end of our lane and the whole row of houses in which we lived collapsed into rubble. Living just 25 yards away from where the bomb had dropped in the road we were fortunate that part of our house was still standing. We were sitting under a table in the front room when suddenly the street door was blown off. The door flew across the room taking everything with it. During a lull in the air raid we managed to crawl through the rubble and into a neighbour's Anderson shelter. I remember looking out of the door and, on the opposite side of the road, the school building was a roaring inferno having been hit by hundreds of incendiary bombs.

As soon as it became daylight, and whilst my mother and sister Sally, who was not quite two, sat out the end of the air raid, my brother Edward (aged 7) and I (aged 5) and my Uncle Bill left the shelter to try and get to safety. My mother decided we should try to reach safety in my aunt and uncle's house (Mr & Mrs A Gilham) in the western part of the town.

We left our bombed house, climbed over a wall into a cemetery, picked our way over dozens of unattended hose pipes amongst the burning buildings, and avoiding bomb craters and unexploded incendiary bombs, we headed west down Longport, Church Street, Burgate (past the cathedral), along the High Street and on towards the Westgate Towers. Crossing the railway line we saw two

dead horses in a bomb crater on St Dunstan's Road where we turned into Orchard Street and eventually arrived at their house in St Dunstan's Terrace.



As so many houses had been destroyed, and having nowhere to live it was decided we should move out of Canterbury. A few days later, with only the clothes we had on our backs, we travelled the six miles to Kingston in a horse and cart to stay with the West family who had a small holding along the end of Marley Lane. I cannot remember how long we stayed with Mr and Mrs West but it wasn't long and we were most fortunate to discover that number 27 Hoods Farm Estate was empty and we were able to rent the house and move in to start a new life. [I believe the house address is now 112 The Street having changed over time from Hoods Estate to its present The Street.]



I am unsure as to when the row of red brick houses were built (possibly after WWI) but they all had gas, electricity and water plus a small kitchen range on which to cook. I remember my mother regularly using the range until we could afford to buy a gas cooker. Electricity was provided for the two downstairs rooms with an additional light at the top of the stairs. There was a fireplace

in the living room and also in the bedroom above. None of the houses were connected to mains sewage but every house did have its own cesspit in the back garden. No one ever knew why the houses numbers started at 17. Living at the top of a hill in a highly visible row of red brick houses and six miles nearer to the enemy wasn't something that worried a growing lad who had no real understanding of what the war was all about.



It wasn't long before my brother and I settled into the village way of life and we were both enrolled as new pupils at Barham C of E School. The walk from home to school (along what is now called Valley Road) was about a mile and a half or a bit shorter if we made a diversion along the railway line or through what we called 'The Firs'.

During the war Italian prisoners of war helped lay a stretch of road at the end of Valley Road just before you reach the C of E School and the road junction with Green Hills. I remember that they were quite a cheerful lot and made toys in their spare time.

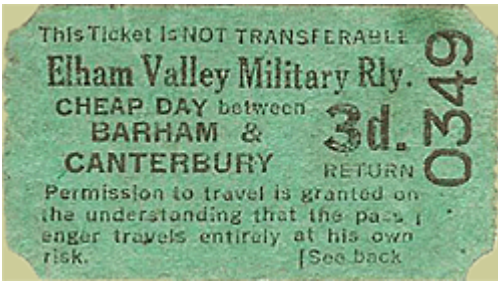
If my memory serves me correctly there were 104 people living in the village for almost all of the time I lived in Kingston and it wasn't long before we knew the names of almost everybody from the far outreaches of Covet and Marley Lanes to the top of Black Robin Hill.

[See Hoods Estate list on page 23]

Some of the men in the village were away serving in the Armed Forces, as was my father, who was a member of the Royal Air Force Regiment and, prior to taking part in the D Day landings, was employed on anti aircraft guns and later the security of airfields. The men who hadn't been 'called up' were mostly agricultural workers, and those fit enough were enrolled into the Home Guard. The Kingston Home Guard HQ was in a house halfway down 'the hill' which, after the war was rented to a Mr & Mrs Beardsell. At the top of the road, at the beginning of Marley Lane, was a locked tin hut in which the Home Guard kept their explosives and ammunition and whatever they needed for the defence of the village.

As the war progressed an anti aircraft gun emplacement was dug and a gun installed a few yards along Westwood Road just past the road sign to Molly's Hole and Lynsore Bottom. However, during the war there were no road signs anywhere as they had all been removed in case of an invasion. Every large field, including Charlton Park, had a forest of poles set out in all of the open spaces so as to damage any enemy gliders that might try to land. Down in the valley, adjacent to the water pumping station, in Covet Lane, a searchlight unit was set up and during air raids we could see the bright light searching the sky for enemy aircraft.

I can only recall one incident when a weapon was discharged in anger and that was when Mr Bardsley fired at a German aircraft with his rifle whilst on his way home from a Home Guard meeting. One night though we were all woken up by the sound of the anti aircraft gun being (accidentally) fired. Luckily the barrel was depressed and the shell disappeared into the night across the railway line and on towards Barham Downs. We never did hear where the shell landed. On another occasion after dark, a haystack, located in the field just opposite the first 'red house' (No.17) at the top of the hill, caught fire and a rumour began that it was done deliberately to signal to German aircraft on their way to bomb the railway line or Canterbury. Only one bomb fell on the village during the whole of the war. The bomb just missed the iron railway bridge that used to span the road by about 20 yards and thankfully did little or no damage to 'Whitelocks' nearby.

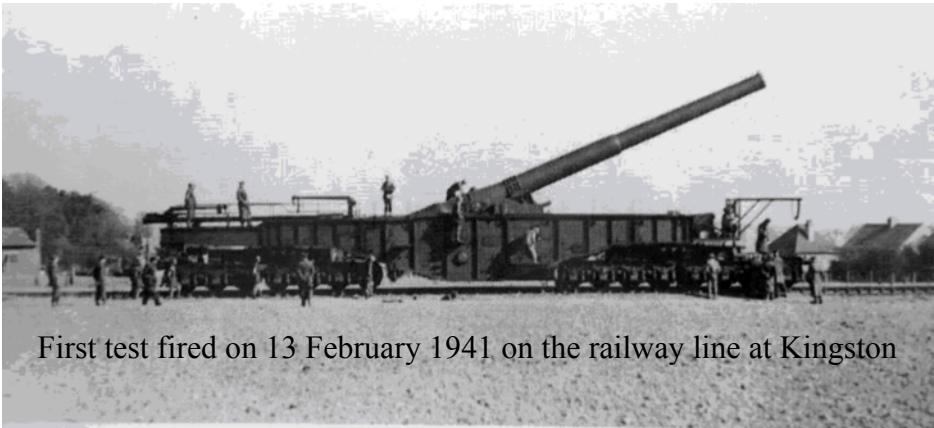


The single railway line that ran through the village carried passengers and freight between Canterbury and Folkestone. The train did not stop in Kingston but did in Barham and Bishopsbourne.

[Note: On Friday 1st December 1940 the Southern Railway officially withdrew the passenger trains and the line was handed over to the Railway Operating Troops.]

I recall one afternoon, whilst playing outside in the garden, seeing two aircraft flying very low over our heads towards Canterbury. Being boys we waved and shouted to them as they flew past until we realised that they were not British but German. As we watched we saw a train puffing its way from Bishopsbourne towards Barham and, at that very moment, one of the enemy aircraft turned around and began machine-gunning the train. We later heard that both the engine driver and fireman were killed and the train halted somewhere in the vicinity of Barham station. News broke later that this particular train was supposed to be carrying the American President's wife, Mrs Roosevelt, that day but she had been delayed and travelled the following day. [See photo on page 39]

During the war an enormous gun called 'The Boche Buster' (No. L4) was hidden in a railway cutting approximately half a mile from Kingston in Charlton Park tunnel on the Bishopsbourne side of the village.



First test fired on 13 February 1941 on the railway line at Kingston

Only occasionally was the gun run out to fire about four or five one and a quarter ton shells across the channel. I can remember being up close to it one day whilst it was being serviced and amazed to see that the barrel was

so big a man could crawl inside. We never knew if shelling France did anything to shorten the war but what we did know was that every time it fired some of our windows were broken and ceilings fell down. The line, itself, suffered little damage during the war despite a few attempts to destroy it. It was reported locally the one bomb did manage to land squarely on the track at Kingston but failed to explode.

Kingston village lay on the 'flight path' from Germany to London and enemy aircraft were often seen flying over the houses. Some of the grown-ups used to call the Elham valley 'bomber alley' because of the number of German bombers passing overhead at all times of the night and day. Everyone could recognise the distinctive sound of the aircraft flying overhead and after dark I sometimes heard my mother remark, "That's one of ours." On one particular night, when all of us children were fast asleep in our beds, my mother heard a tap on the front door. Upon investigation she heard a voice asking, "Where is this?". My mother replied, "Kingston.". "Kingston-upon-Hull?" enquired the voice. We learnt in the morning that a Canadian airman had parachuted out of his crashing aircraft and had been sitting on our front step for hours wondering if he was in Germany or France.

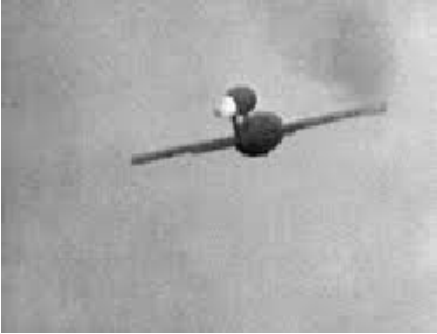


In 1941 the government decided that as many families as possible, who didn't have a back garden in which to put an Anderson air raid shelter, should have some protection fitted in their homes against air raids.

This inhouse shelter was called a Morrison Shelter. The shelter, made from heavy steel, could also be used as a table. People sheltered underneath it during an air raid. The Morrison shelter was approximately 6 feet 6

inches long, 4 feet wide and 2 feet 6 inches high. How we, with a largish back garden, happened to have one delivered and fitted in 1943 will always be a bit of a mystery to me. However, my mother put it to good use as a table and we played underneath whenever an aircraft flew overhead.

Towards the end of the war the Germans started to bombard the country with what we called 'flying bombs or doodle bugs'. These were unmanned jet-propelled 'aircraft' launched from Continental sites in their hundreds. Lying in the long grass and looking up into the sky we could sometimes see four or five flying overhead at one time. They were mostly



aimed at London so we were very lucky that none fell in Kingston. On occasion we would see a British fighter do its best to intercept and shoot them down. I only saw this happen once, in the sky above Bishopsbourne. The V1 blew up just in front of the aircraft which had to fly through the debris. Luckily the aircraft survived and flew off into the distance.

Even though the war was on, nothing ever stopped my brother and me joining forces with other boys from the village to roam the countryside and getting up to all sorts of mischief. We went scrumping for apples, climbed the trees in Charlton Park to collect rooks' eggs for our tea and, in season, collected sacks of sweet chestnuts from 'the woods' and blackberries from along the side of the road. The 100 acre field behind the row of houses was also a source of wild mushrooms and occasionally a beautiful wild orchid. Not knowing how rare they were we almost always picked them to take home for Mum. The 100 acre field was never ploughed during the war and only sheep and cattle were kept there to graze. One year all the sheep were infected by a disease and there were so many dead and dying they were all left to rot and decay where they lay. There were skeletons everywhere for quite a long time.

Along Marley Lane, just before you reached what we called Pettit's Hill, (now Jesse's Hill) there were special hazel nut bushes called Kent Cobs. I believe the man who lived in the house nearby considered them to be his property so when nuts were in season we had to sneak quietly along the lane in the hope that he wouldn't hear us picking them off the trees. With no entertainment to divert us we used to do all the things boys did which today would be banned by H&S. We all had catapults and a supply of staples with which to harass the bird population and every boy had a bow and arrows. The best arrows could be found along Marley Lane where we often climbed the trees, wait quietly, and then jumped out to surprise passers by. Marley Lane was also a good place to find young ash trees from which we cut lengths of new growth with which to make whistles. Every 'with it' boy had a pocket knife of sorts and using it he carefully cut a line around the twig, and after gently tapping the bark, could slide the bark to and fro to make a whistle. We also made a nuisance of ourselves by knocking on doors and ringing door bells before running away to hide. In season we all played conkers. The best conkers came from the horse chestnut trees in Charlton Park.

Unlike today, every adult in the village was a surrogate parent. Woe betide any youngster caught doing something they ought not to be doing. A clip round the ear and a telling off was something we never told our parents about because, if we did, we would get a second 'good hiding' even if the first one had not been entirely justified.

We lived during a time when people didn't naturally lock their doors, even at night, and often left the 'milk money' in an envelope under the empty milk bottle. A policeman rarely visited the village and when he did it was always on a Velocette motor cycle. These motor cycles were not very large or powerful but they were almost silent as they cruised along. On several occasions some of us boys were almost caught scrumpling when we didn't hear the policeman approaching on his motor cycle.

Like many folk today we grew what vegetables we could in the back garden and also kept rabbits and chickens for the pot. It was always the 'job' of my brother or me to go out every day collecting bags of wild parsley and dandelions to feed the rabbits. The chickens used to survive on household scraps and boiled potato peelings and a little bran that one could buy in the village shop. During harvest my brother and I used to follow the tractor and binder round and round the field in the hope of catching a wild rabbit but never did have any luck.

We also had two pet cats. One was black and we named him Tinker and the other, a long haired grey one, we called Miller because he always looked as if he had just climbed out of a bag of flour. I never saw mother feed our cats except to give them the occasional saucer of milk so I can only surmise that they lived on mice and birds they caught in and around the house.

No one had a refrigerator and during cold weather the meat was put in a metal-meshed meat safe in the shade outside the back door. Milk was usually drunk quite quickly but sometimes in the summer my mother used to stand the spare pint on the back step with a damp cloth over it. However, this sometimes didn't stop the milk going off so we used it to make junket. Sometimes we boiled the milk and then 'creamed' off the top to put on our jam sandwiches.



As we kept chicken there were often a few spare eggs. These would be kept in a bucket of isinglass mixture and only brought out when and if needed.



All the houses in Hoods Estate had a brick built outhouse with a tin roof in which there was a large 'copper' under which one could build a fire to provide hot water. With coal being at a premium and at a price most families could hardly afford, it was up to us children to take our home made truck up to Charlton Wood, 'the woods', to collect as much fire wood as we could safely carry home. No one ever challenged us whilst collecting fire wood so we grew up believing that it was God-given for all to take. My mother used our copper to boil sheets, and anything else which required very hot water, before putting them through an enormous old mangle. Once a week the copper was used to heat water for our weekly baths. Down from the wall came the tin bath which was then put into the shed and filled with a mixture of cold and hot water. If one was lucky the water was still warm when it was your turn to sit in 'the soup' as there was only a limited supply of hot water for the whole family. I remember one evening, whilst sitting in the bath, we had visitors who just stayed and stayed so I had to sit quietly getting colder and colder until they left and I could come out of the shed.

I cannot recall any social life at all in the village during the war except for maybe something arranged by the church. However, the Ministry for Information occasionally brought films to be shown in the village hall in Bishopsbourne. They weren't love stories or cowboys and Indians films but were all about 'coughs and sneezes spread diseases' and that we were 'not to use too much toothpaste' (it showed a man being pricked on his bottom for breaking the rules) and, of course, 'loose talk costs lives'.

Keeping in touch with what was going on almost always revolved around owning a radio. We had an old one which required a large dry battery to heat the valves and a wet accumulator which had to be recharged quite often. The only place one could get the wet accumulator charged was at a garage halfway between Kingston and Barham. We were tasked to take the accumulator to the garage on our way to school and to collect it some days later. I remember seeing all the glass accumulators sitting in a row at the back of the garage happily bubbling away as they were charged.



Besides listening to the news, after the war my mother used to listen to 'Mrs Dale's Diary', an afternoon broadcast in which Mrs Dale was always "Worried about Jim." and on a Saturday evening either 'In Town Tonight' or 'Saturday Night Playhouse'. As children we didn't listen to the radio very much but I do remember that at 6.45 p.m. every week day we used to crowd around the radio to listen to 'Dick Barton, Special Agent'. Not unlike today's teenagers we listened to 'pop' music which was broadcast from a radio station called 'Radio Luxemburg'. Reception was never very good due to an adjacent station causing a loud whistle but we listened all the same. During the war the radio station was taken over by the Germans and used to broadcast German propaganda by William Joyce, known as '*Lord Haw-Haw*'

After my father returned from the war he started buying a newspaper, The Daily Mirror. After he had read the paper it was put to good use either to light the fire or hanging in squares in the toilet. Children's comics once again came into their own and I remember getting my hands on some of the first copies of 'The Eagle' in which featured Dan Dare and the evil Mekon in a space adventure.

Although families never seemed to have enough money we all celebrated Christmas and our birthdays. I remember attending one party where we had jelly with bread and butter and not much else. At Christmas time all the children used to go out picking holly and ivy with which to decorate their house. We made paper chains out of old newspapers and, if we had some coloured paint to hand, painted them before hanging them from the ceiling. In our house we used drawing pins to pin them from a position around the central electric light rose and out to the picture rails. Over time the number of holes around the rose grew and grew and we used to worry that the ceiling would fall down. On Christmas Eve we'd lay our stocking at the foot of the bed before going to sleep and in the morning (early) wake to see what Father Christmas had left. Typically we would get a pencil, rubber, crayons and paper, an orange and maybe a few sweets plus newly knitted socks or gloves.

Back in the 40s and 50s winter always used to be winter and one could almost guarantee plenty of icy roads and playgrounds on which to make a slide. With snow deep everywhere we made sledges out of any old wood we could find and sledge down the slopes in the 100 acre field behind the house. Some boys even tried their luck on the road down 'the hill' and often came to grief up a bank or in the hedgerow. Living on 'the hill' we were also ideally placed to slip and make slides on the frozen surfaces. However, the grown ups were not as pleased as we were. One day the lady who delivered the milk had a nasty fall and my mother brought her into the house and gave her a shot of brandy to settle her nerves.

Every few years (locals always said it was seven) the river Nailbourne would rise and, much to the joy of every child, we would spend many happy hours splashing about and fishing for tiddlers. Sometimes the amount of water was sufficient to flood some of the properties along its path and to spread the river into the adjacent farmland. I can remember walking all the way from Kingston via Mr Bardsley's farm and Charlton Park to Bishopsbourne *without keeping my feet dry*. The water also used to flood the Black Robin Inn and all the adjacent land, known then as 'The Peak', and often the road all the way to Barham.



Black Robin Inn

There used to be a Post Office and shop in the village, along with a red telephone box. It was a wooden building situated halfway along Church Lane, the road that ran from the Black Robin Inn up to the church. Just past the Post Office, on a bend in the road, there was a short cut called 'The Alley' which brought one out onto the road that runs all the way through the village, now known as The Street. At the end of the alley were two small houses and in one of them lived an old cobbler who used to repair shoes. I can remember calling at his house one day and was surprised to find that it had dirt floors. No doubt it has been much improved since I left home.



Due to a shortage of money my mother used to buy pieces of leather and, using an old fashioned steel foot, sit cutting and hammering away to make the only pair of boots you may have possessed serviceable again. It may be hard to believe but I still have a similar foot amongst the odds and ends in my garage.

St Giles church is at the centre of the village and alongside the church there was a fairly large vicarage. I cannot recall whether our vicar ever lived there only that at Communion on a Sunday the service was often taken by a complete stranger. With so few people living in the village the number of people in the congregation was never large but we did have a Sunday school of sorts. My mother sent us to church for every service on a Sunday starting with the 8 o'clock Communion, then the 11 o'clock sung Communion and again at 6 o'clock. When we were older we were also expected to attend at 3 o'clock for Sunday School.

Most of the children in the village attended church and it was at St Giles on November 29th 1949 I and some other children were confirmed by the Rt. Rev The Bishop of Dover. Our first Communion, taken by Rev Dr Wright, took place on Sunday December 4th 1949.



The organist for much of my time in Kingston was a Miss Rogers who lived at the top of Black Robin Lane. We all called her ‘Minnie’; why I cannot recall. The church organ was an old pump organ and the boys were expected to pump it on a Sunday. When it was my turn I used to watch the lead weight, which was attached by string to the bellows, slowly descend under my exertions on the pump handle. It was mostly tedious and not too strenuous until Minnie pulled out the loud stop whilst calling round the corner, “Faster boy, faster.” The church had one or two small paintings on the walls but was mostly just plain white throughout. A short row of choir seats were situated on the north side of the aisle opposite to where the vicar sat and almost within view of the pulpit. The pride and joy of the church was a large brass lectern with an eagle at the top. Upon the eagle’s wings sat the Holy Bible. [On a later visit to the church I was surprised to find that the lectern had disappeared and no one knew to where.] Being such a regular church goer it wasn’t long before I became a member of the small choir. One Christmas,



much to my mother’s pleasure and delight, I was chosen to sing a solo of ‘Silent Night’. Inevitably I also ended up being a server at Communion. In those days the service was always taken from the Book of Common Prayer and, at the appropriate moment, I had to ring a little hand bell following the words Holy (ding-ding), Holy (ding-ding), Holy (ding-ding). Once I reached my teens I was promoted to Sunday school teacher.

Alongside the south side of the cemetery wall there was a short path running from the playing field to the lane that ran past the church, Church Lane. If one took this path there was a further short cut at the end of the wall where one had to turn right down an alley past the house that stood on the corner. This route took one down a slope into a small orchard,

across a field and joined Church Lane almost at the point where Covet Lane began. The owner of the corner house kept a dog and whenever we boys with our bicycles took this short cut the dog always heard us and came out to bite our heels.

During the winter, after the end of the war, the church used to be heated by a fire lit beneath the aisle. Several large metal grates covered the steps and the fire below and these had to be lifted to provide access. How it came about I cannot recall but helping the sexton light the fire before the 8 o'clock service was another 'little job' I was volunteered to do. Often the fire was difficult to get started so I was dispatched to the back of the church to find more paper. Looking back I often wonder how many of the church records went up in smoke each Sunday during the winter.

The sexton was a Mr Dick Luckhurst who lived within a stone's throw of the Black Robin Inn in a house a few yards up Church Lane towards the village shop. Mr Luckhurst used to grow the most beautiful dahlias in his back garden some of which stood well over four or five feet tall.

Besides digging graves and lighting fires Mr Luckhurst used to ring the three church bells – two with his hands and one with his foot. One of the bells was cracked and we'd often laugh when we listened – ding, dong, clunk. Like many old churches the bell tower and roof timbers in churches were often infested with Death Watch beetle and St Giles was inevitably struck down with this pest. When not on church duties Mr Luckhurst was employed by the local authority to maintain the hedgerows and verges in and around the village. As a sideline he also cut boys hair for sixpence. Although the hedgerows were kept in good order the road surfaces were not. One day after the war the road workers did turn up to repair parts of the road which had been damaged by tanks and heavy vehicles prior to the D Day landings. The repairs were very basic – down with the tar and on with the grit. I remember that a steam driven road roller did once come with the repair team and sometimes was used to 'dig out' a particular troublesome hole.

Unlike today there was not a continuous row of houses from the top to the bottom of 'the hill'. At the very top where the road splits there was a small field. One year Mr Butterfield planted it with corn. When the corn was ripe he cut it all by hand, laid the loose corn on a large tarpaulin and using a flail (two sticks joined together with string) he spent hours separating the corn from the stalks. Between the first red house and the one used by the Home Guard was also another small field. Between the field and the road was a mixed hedge of sloe bushes, brambles and weeds. Once again Mr Butterfield tried his hand at 'farming' and it was here that he tethered two goats. One was a billy goat and I remember quite clearly that he wasn't at all sociable and smelt to high heaven.

The most exciting time for us boys was just before the D-day landings in June 1944. The army occupied every field and parking space in and around the village. Tanks and bren gun carriers staged mock battles and smoke from the dummy shells often obscured the view. Everyone complained about the smoke as it made the washing smell and got into all of the houses. Soldiers on exercise hiding in hedgerows would do



their best to shoo us boys away but we were having none of it. At long last the troops all disappeared on their way to France and we were left with all sorts of 'treasures' in the hedgerows and woods. A group of us found a small cache of rifle bullets under a tree in Charlton Park and, boys being boys, we lit a fire in a large tin can, threw in a few bullets and ran for our lives. The crunch moment, as it is called, came when the bullets seemed all to have exploded and one of us had to go and kick the can to make absolutely sure. One day my brother Edward found a hand grenade which was promptly stolen from him by a boy named Benny Keeler. My mother suspecting that we were up to no good found out about the grenade, spoke to Benny's mother and the hand grenade was found under Benny's pillow.

As the war entered its fifth year and the plans for the invasion of Europe were being made there was strict censorship of the mail, especially if the letter or card had been written by a serving soldier. If the writer inadvertently mentioned the name of the place where he was stationed the censor used to mark over the word with a heavy black pen so it could not be read. One day we had a young woman quite unexpectedly turn up looking for somewhere to stay. As we had a spare bedroom at the time she stayed with us for a week or so. I found out much later in life that the woman had managed to decipher the place name and had come to Kingston to see her husband before he moved on. No one ever knew for sure what was going on when masses of troops arrived then disappeared or what we should do if we were invaded.

Many years after the war I was surprised to discover the disturbing information that, if there had been an invasion, the first line of defence would begin on a line in the vicinity of Highland Court at the top of the hill leading out of Bridge towards Dover. Kingston would have been on the wrong side of the line. I am not entirely sure but I believe that there are still signs in the hedgerows on the old A2 and between trees, near Highland Court, of this defensive line.

Another small village feature, long since gone, was the village pond. The Pond was located just below what was Hoods Place Farm. The farm was located on the right hand side of the road, when coming down 'the hill', and was right alongside the road. As boys we believed the old tale that the pond was bottomless so were very wary of actually entering the water. During the winter the pond froze and we got much braver walking on the ice.

Below the pond was a bungalow set back from the road. It belonged to a Mr Ernest Cole whose wife was of German extraction so she unfortunately had to be interned during the hostilities. After the war I did actually meet Mr Cole and vaguely recall him having a life size plaster St. Peter statue which he said that he had carved himself. There was also a rumour that he and Henry Moore designed the Pentagon in America. Whatever he claimed he was he did seem to me a bit of an academic and insisted in teaching me what a 'preposition' was.

The house opposite Hoods Place farm was originally occupied by a Mr and Mrs Black, a retired couple. Mr Black told me that he had been a school inspector working in the Far East, a place I had never ever heard of. After the war Mr Black had a bungalow built on ground next to Hoods Place and moved in. It was Mr Black who gave me my first job cutting his lawn every Saturday and doing odd gardening jobs for which I was paid the princely sum of two shillings and sixpence. Some Saturdays Mr Black sent me on his bicycle over to Bishopsbourne to pick up two rabbits which he cooked for his cat called Buggar (!).

I can only recall two people in the village having a car and Mr Black was one of those. His car was a two tone Austin with a pre-selector gearbox. The other car was owned by a Major Haslam who lived in the 'posh house' (Whitelocks ?) below the Blacks' bungalow just before the iron railway bridge. It was here that the village post box was located. Opposite 'Whitelocks' was a much neglected area of ground containing a few old fruit trees.

For most villagers life was hard. The Welfare State, as we know it today, did not exist so parents often had to make do and mend and sometimes go without for the sake of their children. I believe it wasn't until 1948, when the National Health Service was formed, that everyone finally had free access to medical care. I remember one occasion pre 1948 when a member of our family was quite ill and the doctor was called. As we didn't have any money to pay the doctor my mother 'paid' him with a box of chicken eggs. I also remember one year going with my mother hop picking at a farm the other side of Bridge. There were families there from London's East End also hop picking who, after work, had to live in small wooden structures not much bigger than chicken houses.

When I reached my teens I was fortunate enough to be able to go farming during the summer holidays and earn much needed money to help pay the bills of a large and growing family. For about three summers I used to cycle to Mr Fagg's farm (Westwood Farm), which was almost as far as Pett Bottom, where I joined other lads doing just about every job a boy was capable of. We picked strawberries, we drove tractors, and we did potato picking, built hay and straw ricks and helped thresh the corn – a job that left you quite unrecognisable due to the dust and dirt. If the weather was wet we used to sit in the barns repairing old seed sacks.

One year I worked for another farmer who had a flock of sheep. The farm was along Covet Lane. I only did a couple of weeks work which mostly entailed going around the fields in the pouring rain re-stacking the sheaves of corn that had been blown or fallen over. One wet day I was asked to assist in trimming the wool around the sheep's bottoms and getting rid of any maggots. All in a day's work, as they used to say.

Towards the end of May 1944 my mother was approaching the end of her confinement so made arrangements for my brother Edward and me to stay with a friend who lived in Tunbridge Wells. One day during our stay we were amazed to see hundreds of aircraft, some pulling gliders, flying over our heads. Being only seven years old I had no understanding that what I was seeing was an historical event - the beginning of the D Day landings in France on 6th June 1944.

Almost three weeks later, on 28th June 1944 my brother Nicholas was born, the only one in the family to have ginger hair like grandfather Coombs. So now we were, including our parents, a family of six

One other event that stands out in my memory was the celebrations held in Barham following the end of the war. An enormous bonfire was built and an effigy of Hitler stuck on top. When it was well alight I remember seeing a string of firecrackers hanging from Hitler's trousers which, to everyone's delight, went off with a loud bang.

After the war life gradually returned to normal and all the men who had been away returned home safely; as far as I recall no one in the village lost a family member.

Having moved away from Canterbury because of the war my father found it difficult to find work locally. Before the war he had worked as a butcher, baker and a, sort of, commercial traveller travelling in and around the villages outside Canterbury. After much deliberation I'm sure, and using the small resettlement grant money he had received from the government, he and Mr West, bought an area of woodland in Marley Wood, near the end of Marley Lane, and went into business making wattle gates,



fence posts and also selling logs and firewood. My father bought an old lorry and the business began. I remember going with my father at the weekend to help strip the bark from the tree branches before they were split and made into fences.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason, the business failed. My father eventually got a job offer from the East Kent Road Car Company driving buses and he continued to work for the Company for the rest of his working life enjoying the fellowship of the other drivers and conductors. Living so far from the

Canterbury bus depot my father had to buy a bicycle and cycle the six miles into Canterbury every day and then home again at the end of his shift. Some days his first (split) shift started at 6 a.m. until 10 a.m. followed by another starting at 4 p.m. until 8 p.m. My father spent a lot of his life in bed recovering from shift work each week. Thankfully he eventually saved enough money to buy a motor cycle which made life so much easier for him. Not needing his bicycle he passed it on to my brother Edward who promptly took up a paper round in the village.

Other than the two cars mentioned earlier none of the families I knew had any means of transport other than bicycles so life was very much confined to how far one could walk. The double-decker buses ran hourly (No. 17) from Canterbury to Folkestone along the Elham valley but the bus often had to wait at the side of the road near Derringstone as the road was too narrow for the bus from Folkestone to pass the one from Canterbury. There was also a number 16 bus which passed along the 'top road' (A2) on its way to and from Dover.

On the 24th October 1946 my sister Victoria (who now lives in Bekesbourne as Mrs J McPherson) was born making us a member of the growing number of large families in the village.



Year 1947 was a year we all remember well. Snow fell somewhere in the UK every day from 22 January to 17 March. The country was locked down by continuous sub zero temperatures and deep snow. Road and rail transport were all

but shut down and nowhere could one buy a sack of coal for it was all frozen solid where it lay at the pit heads. Some buses did try to get to the villages and I remember them

slipping and sliding up and down Bonny Bush Hill on their way to and from Canterbury. We all went to bed early to try and keep warm and woke up with ice inside the windows and the north wind lifting the linoleum in the living room.

My life had its second major change when the 11+ examination was introduced into schools and in 1948 two Kingston children won scholarships to the Simon Langton Grammar school in Canterbury – Margaret Nicholls and me. (Much to my parents' delight, in later years, three other members of my family were also successful – Sally, Nicholas and Victoria all went to the same grammar school in Canterbury.) Every week from Monday to Friday Margaret and I caught the 8.20 a.m. bus to Canterbury and the 4.05 p.m. home. We did this trip together for the next six years and became good friends until we went our separate ways.

The Simon Langton School had been badly bombed during an air raid on Canterbury on the **1st June 1942** and the remaining buildings housed the boys half of the school. For many years the girls had to go all the way up St Martins Hill to a former asylum. The boys' school used to occupy a large area (now the Whitefriar's Shopping Centre) adjacent to the Marks and Spencer's shop which somehow survived the air raids because of its concrete roof. The boys' school continued at its old site until a new school was built in Nackington in November 1959

Some while after I had started my education at the Simon Langton a Mr & Mrs Beardsell moved into the village and were responsible for starting the Youth Club which met regularly in The Barn. We had Barn Dances and a cricket team of sorts although I don't think we ever did play another village at cricket. I believe Mr Beardsell was a tool maker by trade.



The only other 'organisation' I can recall was a scout troop which had been formed in Bishopsbourne. My brother Edward and I joined and for several years we went on Scout Camp travelling in the back of a furniture lorry. (No H&S then!) The meetings were held in what we called 'The Hut', a well built wooden affair which stood back from the road opposite the church in Bishopsbourne. I believe only the brick chimney still survives on the site of The Hut.

The last event I can recall taking part in before leaving home in 1954 was the celebration of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2nd June 1953. A crowd of us all went to a house up Black Robin Lane where we watched the Coronation on a nine inch B&W TV with a large magnifying glass in front of it. Also that June we had a fancy dress parade in the Barn and a picture of some of the entrants can be found in this booklet or on the village web site.

In 1950 my brother Edward, aged 15, who had finished his education at Aylesham school, joined the Royal Air Force as a 'boy entrant' to train as an Electrical Mechanic. It was following this event that I inherited, via my brother, my father's bicycle. This turned out to be, in a sense, a gateway to freedom. I could now reach places as far away as Canterbury.

During the war, and up to about 1950, no new houses were ever built in the village until a young couple bought a piece of land from Mr Bardsley and started to build their own bungalow on a site almost opposite the house in which the Bardsleys lived just below The Barn. Later two other properties were built on land behind where the old Post Office used to be.

When I reached the age of 15 I joined the Air Training Corps in Canterbury. The Corps met every Tuesday evening and eventually we were all issued with a semi-RAF uniform. On these Tuesdays I caught the last bus home from Canterbury arriving at the bus stop at 9.20 p.m. and whistled my way home up the dark road past Railway Cottage and under the iron railway bridge. Railway Cottage did not have electricity and had to rely upon oil lamps after dark. I often saw them through the window flickering in the gloom.

I cannot recall exactly when it happened or who organised it but sometime during my teens I visited the coal mine at BETTESHANGER. During the war us boys had no idea that coal was being mined in Kent by miners from Wales so it was something of a surprise when I was invited to 'go down' a local coal mine.

On the day of my visit, after arriving at the pithead, we took the lift down the mine shaft and, following a rocky ride and long walk to the coalface, we were allowed to crouched down and swing a pick in the cramped two foot high space. We were later informed that we had been digging coal under the English Channel. There were three other mines I believe at CHISLET , SNOWDOWN and TILMANSTONE.

[I later discovered that to house the miners new villages were built at Aylesham, Elvington, Hersden and Mill Hill near Deal. The last colliery, Betteshanger, closed in 1989.]

My education at the Simon Langton which began in 1948 was to end in 1954. In January of that year I attained my 17th birthday and it was

imperative that I should seriously begin thinking about my future. (One must remember that although the war had been over for almost nine years nothing much had happened in and around Kingston and the only jobs (if any) were in farming.) What was known as National Service was coming to an end and it was likely that when I reached age 18 I would have been drafted into one of the three services. Not wanting to join either the Army or the Navy my choice would have been the Royal Air Force (RAF). It therefore almost goes without saying, with my father having served in the RAF during the war and having an older brother currently serving, my thoughts turned towards the same horizon. I decided that I wanted to fly and, during the spring of 1954, I attended an aircrew selection board. I quite clearly remember the day of my interview. Whilst waiting to be interviewed I noticed a Whittle jet engine on display so took particular note of what it said on the attached card in the hope that I would appear more knowledgeable than I really was. During my interview I was asked whether I wanted to be a pilot, navigator or radio operator. Much to the interviewer's surprise I chose 'radio operator'. "Why?", he asked. "Because, in the future there will be more opportunities for a radio operator than a pilot." I replied. Now began the long wait to see if I had been successful. I left school at the end of term and almost immediately a letter came instructing me to present myself at the recruiting centre in Chatham from where I was eventually to be sent to RAF Swanton Morley in Norfolk to begin my training as an aircrew Radio Operator.

Mid August 1954, twelve years after arriving in Kingston, I was to leave home for the last time. I caught the bus to Canterbury and spent one night with my Uncle and Aunt (the Gilhams) **in the same house I had taken shelter in in June 1942**. The following morning my Aunt presented me with half a crown, (two shillings and sixpence), and the rest of my life, and another story, had just begun.

Some of you may be wondering if my decision to become a radio operator when interviewed in 1954 was the right one.

Following my discharge from the RAF in 1962 I was recruited as a radio operator into what was loosely called Government Communications . Following nine months of training at Bletchley Park I was posted to a War Office Radio station in Leicestershire run by the Army Department Signals. The station had been part of the wartime Y service and was eventually absorbed into the little known Composite Signals Organisation. (CSO). Several years later it became part of what today is known as GCHQ. Initially as a Radio Operator and later as a Supervisor I worked for GCHQ overseas and in the UK until my retirement in 1998. Unfortunately having to wear headphones for almost all of those 44 years my hearing has suffered and, with the onset of old age, my memory isn't what it was either.



Edward Coombs and Dorothy Joyce COOMBS 1957

My father was the first to die, in April 1988, and two years later my mother in December 1990. My link with Kingston, after 48 years, had finally been broken.

I am unsure as to whether it still exists but my brothers, sisters and I had a wooden bench sited halfway up ‘the hill’, on the right hand side of the road below ‘the old Home Guard House’, in memory of our parents. Why did we choose this particular spot? Because my mother always used to say, on her way home from shopping in Canterbury, “What this place needs is somewhere to sit down halfway up the hill!”



Hoods Estate Kingston Residents

No.27

Hoods Estate.



17. Waldy (?)
18. Nicholls
19. Hogben
20. Butterfield

21. Battersby
22. Nash
23. Carter
24. Twyman

25. Mummery
26. Stewart
27. **Coombs**
28. Glover

29. Jay
30. ?
31. Beardsell
32. Tyler

33. Stacey
34. Deverson
35. Baker
36. Keeler

37. Cheesman
38. Rumsey
39. Cottrell
40. ?

41. Baker
42. Howard
43. Lee
44. Saunders



Nicholas Ian
Sally Joy
and
Victoria Anne
COOMBS
1954



Dorothy Coombs and her eldest son Edward
outside 27 Hoods Estate in 1957



1953 outside 27 Hoods Estate
Robert, Sally
Victoria, Nicholas
Coombs



**Kingston (seniors) Youth Club in King George's Playing Field
Possibly 1952**

**Back R: Jimmy Bardsley, Mick Hearn, Peter Beardsell, (?) Robert Coombs, (?)
.. Curtis, Margaret Nicholls, .. Curtis, Brian Bushell**

Front R: Brenda Nicholls, Elizabeth Hogben, ..Long?, Sally Coombs, April Nash

Sally Coombs, Brenda Nicholls, Peter Beardsell, Robert Coombs



Victoria Coombs, Deggy Butterfield, Jimmy Bardsley, Tommy Beardsell

Coronation of Elizabeth II fancy dress outside The Barn Kingston



Kingston Majorettes. Possibly 1958
April Nash Brenda Nicholls
Elizabeth Hogben Hollingsbee (?)
Susan Bardsley Christine Howard



Kingston Boys Club Cricket Team in the playing field 1952

Back Row: Peter Beardsell, Mick Hearn, Robert Coombs

Centre: Stanley Twyman, Nicholas Coombs, Tommy Beardsell, Ronnie Baker

Bottom: Chris/Nigel Mummery, Jimmy Bardsley, John Hogben, Dicky Bardsley



Dorothy Coombs with Victoria & Nicholas
Possibly 1948

Kingston Mothers' Union possibly 1948

Village Outing in 1955





Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to Barham in 1942
accompanied by Clementine Churchill



Robert Neil Coombs at
RAF Swanton Morley,
Norfolk at the beginning
of his flight training as a
Radio Operator
(Course No. DE 119)
Spring 1955



Outside 27 Hoods Estate
whilst on leave in 1955

Post Script - RAF career 1954 -1962

Until I joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) I had never ever travelled (not counting the Scout camps) any further from home than Whitstable. I was naïve and as unworldly as anyone could have been. What an adventure life turned out to be for a lowly country lad. I had the privilege of visiting places completely unspoiled by civilisation and others even less so. The British Empire was in its death throes and colonies were beginning to yearn for independence. Not everywhere I went did we find the welcome that existed before the war. Nevertheless I deemed it a privilege to have visited large parts of the world before they changed for ever.

As a member of RAF Transport Command (38 Group), for eight years I flew to destinations as far apart as the Arctic Circle to the lushness of Kenya and east as far as Zanzibar, the Persian Gulf and Aden. I was involved in the invasion of Suez, served for three years in Cyprus and Aden and flew supply air drops on the Yemen border. I also served in Iraq on detachment at RAF Habbanyia, outside Baghdad, in 1956 helping the evacuation of British forces from Jordan. Mid 1958, from RAF Khormaksar, Aden, my squadron supported the Aden Protectorate Levies and Trucial Oman Scouts fighting insurgents in the Arabian Peninsula during which time I did supply flights to many desert airstrips, forts and oil exploration sites.

In the autumn of 1958 I returned to the UK and after 'conversion' on to the Beverley four engine aircraft I served at RAF Dishforth and then RAF Abingdon for the rest of my RAF service. This Long Range heavy lift aircraft took me on parachute and supply drops in Norway and also on 13 hour flights to Uganda, Nigeria and into jungle airstrips along the African Gold Coast. During one period of crisis we flew almost non stop from the UK to Kuwait when Saddam Hussein threatened his first invasion.

As often as possible I came home on leave to find that Kingston was slowly changing. The iron railway bridge was taken down and (much to my dismay) houses were built either side of the road. Parcels of land which had been empty for so many years began to be filled with new homes. The orchard that had belonged to the vicarage was also filled with houses too. St. Giles church became rather neglected – as the village population grew from 104 to 404 the congregations became smaller and smaller. The Barn still stands and is, I believe, well used as is the King George playing field. I sometimes wonder just how many families who previously lived and grew up in Kingston between 1942 and 1954 still live there or have a connection with the village

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