

Childhood Memories of the 1930s and 1940s

*Mavis Burley (née Gay)**

My sister and I came into the world on 8 February 1933. It was a cold snowy night. My father was out at his club in Winchester, and my mother had to call out of the bedroom window to summon help as there was no telephone. We were several weeks premature, and no one expected or suspected twins. We weighed 3¼ and 4¼ pounds. We were bathed in olive oil and wrapped in cotton wool, and laid at either end of a dressing table drawer. My sister Daphne was born with a club foot, which was rectified by daily massaging for 2½ hours by a qualified nurse, for the first 18 months of life. This nurse looked after us. Another maid was employed to help in the house, while my mother went back to teaching after three weeks.

When we were small my sister and I used to go with our nanny to play in the gardens of Abbots Worthy House, owned by Lady Northbrook and later by Mr Guy Baring of Barings Bank.

Local Defence Volunteers

Soon came the 1939-45 war, when life changed considerably. No more family parties at Littleton, and the uncles were called up. My father regretted being too old to serve in the Army. He became one of the founders of the Local Defence Volunteers, later to become the Home Guard. One of my earliest memories was looking out of the bedroom window to the school playground, where father would take a parade of the Local Defence Volunteers. One had a broom, another a rake, another an army forage cap. They all sported armbands with LDV stamped in black across the khaki cloth. Nearly all the men, some old, some 17 years old, wore heavy army boots, the first items of uniform to be issued. I think father was the proud possessor of a rifle! He later became Platoon Commander, Captain Gay of the Home Guard! I remember he was hardly ever at home, spending every evening, and sometimes all night, on manoeuvres.

* The author is one of the Gay twins, daughters of Mr and Mrs Gay who ran Kings Worthy School for many years and lived at the School House in Abbots Worthy. An article about Mr Gay by Norman Cox appeared in *Worthy History*, No. 4. These reminiscences are extracts from a longer piece, which includes detailed family background of both her parents. Mavis now lives near Loughborough. Her twin sister, who was single, has died.

He was also senior Billeting Officer, in charge of finding homes for evacuees from Portsmouth. At home in Abbots Worthy he dug out and built air raid shelters, and many meals were eaten there when the air raids were on.

Grammar School

In 1942, during the war, my sister and I started grammar school in Winchester, at the age of nine. We had lessons in the school in the morning, and at the golf hut in nearby Teg Down in the afternoon while Portsmouth Girls Grammar School used the school.

During the war, Daphne and I had two shillings a week pocket money. One shilling and sixpence went on bus fares and sixpence on swimming, but if we saved our bus fares by cycling to school we could spend the money saved on the cinema on Saturday!

Horse Riding

Also during the war, I remember cycling up to Burntwood Stud with Daphne and my father, to have riding lessons on a pony called Hyperion. When we were considered accomplished enough, our parents bought us a New Forest pony called Blake. We also had the use of another pony, Greyboy, whose owner was in the WRNS. We kept our ponies at Harestock Lodge.

Tailpiece

Mrs Gay's parents, the Smiths, owned a smallholding, Homecroft, at Littleton. Mr Gay's sister was married to Arthur Stroud, owner and editor of the *Hampshire Chronicle*, and father of Monica, who inherited the paper and, as Monica Woodhouse, edited it for many years. — *Pamela Johnston*.

Some Local Characters

I haven't mentioned the colourful characters that touched my life at School House Abbots Worthy. Old Mr. Richardson in Mill Lane would always show me where the most succulent watercress was to be found, or the rare plants in the meadow. He entertained Ken and me on the night before our wedding with home made rhubarb wine, saying 'Always row together and never rock the boat!'

Another character was Mrs Brown, who 'did' for us. She had twelve children, all of whom were taught by my parents. They lived in a large council house at Hookpit. Close by lived another character and friend, George Till, who was a retired master chef and staunch Freemason. From him I gained a love of cooking.

Latin Lessons

Another lovely character was the Reverend C. St Maur Williams, Rector of Kings Worthy, who insisted on preparing us for Confirmation before he retired in 1945. He used to give us Latin lessons in his study in the Rectory, Church Lane, where the inscription on the fireplace, carved in oak, read, 'Rector of Kings Worthy, see thy house be worthy of the king of king's presence with thee.' He had a son John about our age who went into the ministry.