

Radley History Club

Life in Radley in the 1930s and 1940s

Information extracted from interviews in the Radley Remembered series, mostly carried out in [2003 and 2004?]

Archive number:	A.48
Date of interview:	29 October 2003

Personal details pre 1953

Interviewee (complete separate form for co-interviewee if also resident in Radley pre 1953):	BRIAN TALBOYS
Date of birth:	1930 (in Tilehurst)
Date came to Radley (if different):	May 1934.
Address in 1930s/1940s:	89 Foxborough Road (a bungalow originally called 'The Wish').
Other family information:	Older brother Graham, sister (also living in Radley at time of interview).

Education

Schools/colleges attended:	Radley School until aged 8, then to Council school in Abingdon (now Carswell School) (except for during 1940/41 when went to school near Twickenham). Left school when aged 14.
Other information about education:	Most of the [Radley] children went to Boxhill School, where the pupils thought the Council school was 'a bit snobby'.

Work

Occupation and place of work of father:	
Occupation and place of work of mother:	Cook and housekeeper for Radley College Social.
Occupation and place of work of interviewee in 1930s/40s (if any):	Apprentice motor mechanic for four years at Gowing's Garage in Ock Street in Abingdon (until aged 18). Then two years National Service in REME (in 'A1 recovery' role because of his mechanical skills and experience). Then re-started work (aged 20) at Gowing's and worked there until 1957. Then after working for Jaguar in Oxford returned to Gowing's as workshop manager. Thereafter worked for Esso at Milton Hill as Principal Research Technician, from where retired early. Then set up as car repairer and worked successfully until aged 70 from his house at 33 Selwyn Crescent.
Information about farm work and farms:	There used to be a lot of 'standing grass' meadows (for hay) alongside the river (e.g. Mr Frearson had two very good such meadows between Radley Boat House and Sandford Lock (full of cowslips, moon daisies, ...)). Every September sheep used to arrive at station and be driven to farm at top of Sugworth Lane. Remembers 'Pockets' Greening [farmer] (because he wore a shooting jacket).

Other information about what jobs people were doing:

Travel

Mode of travel to school:

Mode of travel to work (interviewee and parents):

Any comments about the station and use of the train:

'Mr Jones' was the stationmaster ('a character'); used to put his best hat on with gold braid if someone important was arriving at the station; kept Radley Station spotless.
The Bunk to Abingdon used to cost 8d return (cf. 3d on the bus).
A Mr Dandridge was the 'head ganger' on the railway and always wore bowler hat to mark his rank.

Any other comments about travel including, including car use and ownership:

Buildings - location and characteristics

Location of interviewee's home:

Any comments on size, numbers of rooms, sharing, outside loos, source of water, electricity and telephone services etc. of interviewee's home:

Any comments on location and characteristics of other buildings in Radley including dwellings, shops, village hall, barns, laundries etc:

Two fields on part of which Selwyn Crescent was built in 1963 or 1964: one was Mr Badcock's (grazing for cows), other was Mr Long's who had small-holding at bottom of New Road. 'Lovely copse' on left-hand side of Church Road going up towards the church.
Going east from railway bridge on RHS: Shaw's Entrance, Village Hall, then three bungalows (third bungalow was lived in by Allison's, one of whom called Max was ex-Army (Narvik raid) schoolmaster in Oxford, was 'mad as a hatter', and used always to wear his pistol), another of whom called Rupert was manager of Gowing's).
Going east from railway bridge on LHS: bungalow and two houses; a small cottage just before 'Mrs Hadland's cottage' [prob. Old Post Office, #25] caught fire, and bungalow was subsequently built on site.
'Shaw's wood mill' was where mobile home park is now just across railway bridge.

Services and pastimes (excluding education and travel covered above)

Comments about shopping including retail deliveries:

Comments on health and health services:

<p>Comments on play, pastimes and recreational activities - e.g. swimming in river, pub, clubs and societies, football, darts, guides:</p>	<p>Swam in the river at 'Sandford Shallows' ('up towards Sandford Lock'). Played with 'touchy cans' — perforated fruit tins containing smouldering dry dead wood swung around on end of a string. During WW2 (1943) publican was a Mr Edwards.</p>
<p>Comments on religion, church and choir:</p>	<p>Interviewee pumped the organ for choir practice. Rev Pixell (ex London) ran youth club two nights a week and took boys for rowing and cricket.</p>
<p>Miscellaneous</p> <p>Any comments about Radley people not covered elsewhere:</p>	<p>When interviewee was a boy, Radley was 'a very sleepy little village', and 'everybody knew everybody else'. But Radley was 'a beautiful village', and there were 'beautiful meadows' down by the river (for grazing, not for crops). And beautiful wet meadows across the railway line beyond the end of Thrupp Lane. In 1934, Foxborough Road was called Station Road, and the houses all had names not numbers; changed from Station Road to Foxborough Road (because of the presence of lots of foxes' burrows) and houses given numbers just before WW2. In 1930s GWR owned the road from 'Shaw's Entrance' on east side of railway and Spinney's Close on west side; and GWR maintained that bit of road. Going northwards from the Bowyer Arms the road went up a hill removed after WW2 to a big beech tree on a triangle just on the west side of the road bridge over the railway; a commemorative seat (for the Coronation of George VI in 1937) went all round the tree. At the time Radley had reputation of being a place where you could always leave your doors unlocked. 'Mr Sparks' was the village constable, but he was based in Abingdon. Used to be little blacksmith's shop (Mr Hook) near the Bowyer Arms; was also a blacksmith's shop opposite Old Post Office [now #25 LR]. Remembers two houses being built on Foxborough Road 'just after the local laundry' for 'Charlie Taylor's farm workers'. A lot of new people starting coming into Radley in the 1950s. A Geoff Helman [? spelling @51:17] owned local nursery on right-hand side of Church Road opposite Post Office.</p>
<p>Comments about Radley College, its way of operating and relations with the village:</p>	<p>Radley College 'was totally different [from village] in those days'; on Sundays Radley College boys always wore suits; on Saturdays wore sports coats and flannels; always wore red caps while rowing. Mentioned 'The Shrubbery' just opposite the church where the entrance into the swimming pool now is; used to be walled garden there. Many of the Radley College masters were 'real gentlemen'. Radley College had its own sewage farm.</p>
<p>Comments on Coronation and Jubilee events:</p>	<p>Remembers George V's Silver Jubilee. 1953 Coronation: very wet weather.</p>

<p>Any information on impact of WW2 in Radley and about wartime activities:</p>	<p>Remembers evacuees (children aged ~3 – ~11) arriving at Radley Station with nothing but small brown bags and gas masks.</p> <p>During WW2, went to school only in mornings; evacuees went in afternoons. Vividly remembers soldiers coming through Radley Station in Red Cross trains after Dunkirk (green carriages, white roofs, big red crosses on top) to hospitals (some of which were converted colleges) in Oxford.</p> <p>WW2 pulled Upper and Lower Radley together. Remembers 'Wings for Victory' weeks run from music room in East End House [big Victorian 3-storey house, now #75] by Mrs Hutchinson [? or Hutchins, @29:35].</p> <p>Home Guard: two men with rifles manned slit trench and very makeshift tree-trunk movable barrier at kissing gate on to footpath off the road on the left just after Radley College; also 'Upper Thames Patrol' on commandeered motor launches.</p> <p>Was artillery camp at 'top of Sugworth Lane'; camp had a band that was sometimes used for dances in Village Hall.</p> <p>Bombs dropped on Wildmoor Estate 'just up the Wootton Road'; also land mine dropped at Clifton Hampden.</p> <p>A Mr Shirley from New Road (in the Territorials) was POW; Stan Allen (one of three brothers who lived one door away from where interviewee's brother was at time of interview) was killed just towards the end of WW2; brother of Colin Smewin went missing.</p> <p>After evacuees went back, interviewee's mother put up officers from RAF Abingdon; quite a lot of them lasted only a fortnight or so before going out in Whitley bombers and never coming back.</p> <p>Remembers seeing ~1000 bombers from local airfields in the air circling to gradually gain height.</p> <p>Just before D-Day many American soldiers went through Radley Station. A Wellington bomber came down in field nearby.</p> <p>Remembers 'terrible battles' (!) between Americans and British in Abingdon.</p>
<p>Record here any other interesting items not covered above and general observations on life in those days:</p>	<p>Around 1940 [precise date not mentioned] Tuckwell 'had just started pit'.</p> <p>When Radley people came back from WW2, they had begun to realise that there was a world outside Radley, and an infinity of places they could go to. Previously many Radley children had never seen the sea.</p> <p>Greatest change in Radley over the years: the loss of beautiful parts of Radley through gravel extraction.</p>