

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.56
Date of interview:	2 April 2004.

Personal details pre 1953

Interviewee (complete separate form for co-interviewee if also resident in Radley pre 1953):	MICK PORTSMOUTH (Michael John Portsmouth)
Date of birth:	1933, in Abingdon.
Date came to Radley (if different):	
Address in 1930s/1940s:	At first, one of the bungalows in New Road; then bungalow in Foxborough Road.
Other family information:	Grandfather came to Radley in 1912, to work for Taylors Farm at Peachcroft — 'right in the wilderness, in those days'; called up 1914 or 1915, drafted to Salonika, wounded, hospitalised to Liverpool, but threw message to his wife out of train passing through Radley on his way to Liverpool, and wife successfully received it; left Taylors ~1935 to go to work for John Greening at Church Farm; lived in cottage (now demolished) just opposite the beagles formerly in Church Road. Interviewee's mother died young, only 44, heart trouble. Interviewee got married in 1962. Interviewee has son and daughter, and three grandchildren.

Education

Schools/colleges attended:	Radley School (5–10), then 'a Catholic school along the Oxford Road' (until 14) where there were only three classes and the three teachers were nuns from the Convent itself, then 'the Council School' until aged 15.
Other information about education:	Miss Middleton taught the infants at Radley School for many years (saw several head teachers come and go); had the patience of a saint. Four generations of Portsmouths have attended Radley School. Mention made of carpentry (for boys) and cookery (for girls) at a building still present in Conduit Road.

Work

Occupation and place of work of father:	Father worked at Morris's, then (during WW2) at Pressed Steel.
Occupation and place of work of mother:	

Occupation and place of work of interviewee in 1930s/40s (if any):	Interviewee's first job: 4 years at Fred Wheeler's market garden at Wick Hall. Some time later [not specified], worked at Morland's; Morland's 'were a good firm'. Then at MG for 17½ years. Then work for 'the Council' for ~3 years. Then worked for National Carriers under contract to British Rail. Around 1958–1960, when MG was on short time, worked part-time (with three other MG workers) for Mr Deane (a 'very nice' man) at Home Farm pulling sugar-beet in field at top of Pebble Hill. Later on, interviewee's wife worked at Radley College, then at 'C Packs' [? @27:25] in Barton Lane.
Information about farm work and farms:	
Other information about what jobs people were doing:	Most local employment was either farming, Radley College, MG, Pressed Steel, or Pavlova.
Travel	
Mode of travel to school:	
Mode of travel to work (interviewee and parents):	
Any comments about the station and use of the train:	During WW2, railway line between Radley and Hinksey Yard was quadrupled to take slow goods trains; went back to double track when electric signalling was installed.
Any other comments about travel including, including car use and ownership:	
Buildings - location and characteristics	
Location of interviewee's home:	69 Foxborough Road, Radley.
Any comments on size, numbers of rooms, sharing, outside loos, source of water, electricity and telephone services etc. of interviewee's home:	Initially, in Foxborough Road bungalows, there was only (Abingdon) town gas; no electricity, no water. Had well and cess-pit in long garden, although well and cess-pit probably too close together for modern tastes. If cess-pit became full, a trench had to be dug. Water had to be pumped by hand from well into tank in roof. Electricity came ~1938, mains water came 1939. But water was all from wells in Lower Radley (buckets, no pumps).
Any comments on location and characteristics of other buildings in Radley including dwellings, shops, village hall, barns, laundries etc:	Where Catherine Close now is, used to be 'The Cornfield'; and where Spinneys Close and the allotments now are, used to be 'The Ballast Hole' where bulrushes grew. The railway bridge was 'much steeper' than it is now. In those days, from Foxborough Road, you could see the flagpole on Nuneham House.
Services and pastimes (excluding education and travel covered above)	

<p>Comments about shopping including retail deliveries:</p>	<p>Remembers Jack Blackman, milkman from Purney, delivering by horse and cart. Remembers Stan Badcock of Nuneham View (now #75 Foxborough Road) delivering milk from his dairy (a shed at the top of his garden) by bicycle twice a day. Remembers Bonner, Abingdon-to-Oxford carrier. Remembers Sacker [? @ 36:19] who had shop in East St. Helen's Street selling paraffin, soap, etc. from back of an old black van with wooden spoke wheels. Oxonian Baker also delivered. Remembers Helman who had nursery where Spinney's Close now is; he grew 'beautiful tasting tomatoes'. Remembers Shaw's sawmills in Lower Radley; Shaw (husband of Sue Shaw) was 'a bit eccentric'; he employed three or four people.</p>
<p>Comments on health and health services:</p>	
<p>Comments on play, pastimes and recreational activities - e.g. swimming in river, pub, clubs and societies, football, darts, guides:</p>	<p>The Radley Feast (in September) used to be held where New Road now is; and used to flood there (opposite the Bowyer Arms). Youngsters used to wander everywhere, 'miles', and all day; parents never wondered where they were going. Remembers a large snowball being thrown down the chimney of a ganger's hut near the railway bridge used by Italian gangers and the predictable Italian reaction. Mr Silvester ran the Bowyer Arms for a time. Other publicans: Edwards, and Walt Long.</p>
<p>Comments on religion, church and choir:</p>	
<p>Miscellaneous</p>	
<p>Any comments about Radley people not covered elsewhere:</p>	<p>Interviewee's mates during WW2 included Derek Cook. Remembers Spinney Comley ('the roadman'), and Joe Woodley. Mentions May Turner, the 'parcel person' on Church Road for the Oxford Bus Company; Oxford Bus Company used to do a parcel service; bus conductor used to put off or take on parcels at bus stops — including Jack Blackman's milk churns for Kennington.</p>
<p>Comments about Radley College, its way of operating and relations with the village:</p>	
<p>Comments on Coronation and Jubilee events:</p>	

Any information on impact of WW2 in Radley and about wartime activities:

A Mr Lockett from Lower Radley and used to do acrobatics over Radley in his Spitfire or Hurricane sometimes on Sunday afternoons.
When evacuees arrived in Radley, they were taken to the old village hall, and 'you could pick whom you wanted'. Interviewee's family had two boys, and then, when bombing became worse, the boys' mother and sister also came; when, later, bombing became less, evacuees returned to London.
Remembers 'swarms' of German planes flying over Radley to bomb Coventry, and returning over Radley. Remembers going to Coventry and seeing flattened rubble all up main road with only a few terraced houses still standing; remembers seeing just the spire of Coventry Cathedral standing.
During WW2, cars were put on blocks and wheels taken off; no petrol; marbles used to be played in middle of Foxborough Road; only traffic was buses and the occasional doctor's car.

Record here any other interesting items not covered above and general observations on life in those days:

In those days, 'everybody knew everybody'.
One of the support staff at Radley College who had acquired a pilot's licence once gave interviewee's wife a trip in an aeroplane (from Kidlington) over Radley.