

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.57
Date of interview:	18 February 2005.

Personal details pre 1953

Interviewee (complete separate form for co-interviewee if also resident in Radley pre 1953):	DAVID SHAW
Date of birth:	1936. Born in Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford
Date came to Radley (if different):	End December 1936.
Address in 1930s/1940s:	
Other family information:	Mother's parents lived in Rose Hill, Oxford.

Education

Schools/colleges attended:	Abingdon School.
Other information about education:	Three years at Dartington Music School (Devon). Royal Academy of Music.

Work

Occupation and place of work of father:	<p>Started at Salter's sawmill at Folly Bridge, Oxford where interviewee's grandfather was manager. Then several management jobs in factories. Then in 1931 bought land at Radley (£200 for 4 acres) where mobile homes now are, and built house (completed ~1934 or 1935) and sawmill which employed ~15 people from Radley village. But sawmill burnt down. Then put up some large Nissen huts near railway line as second sawmill, which were finally let out and which also burnt down. Then from early 1950s encouraged caravans on land (one of which was lived in by Eric Kitching (Japanese POW) who subsequently ran village shop). Father made wide variety of wooden goods.</p> <p>Mentioned two ponds / gravel pits on his father's land (probably dug out in 19th century) in which were eels.</p> <p>During WW1 father worked as part of research function at Farnham for aeroplanes on developing propellers; worked with Jack Lawson who became Minister of War in Attlee's government.</p> <p>Father was a bit of an actor manqué.</p>
Occupation and place of work of mother:	Shorthand typist and secretary. Worked at Cowley car works. Mother married in 1935. Did the financial bookwork for Mulberry Bush School (Stephen Drysdale + wife) in Badcock's farm house (now flats at 75 Foxborough Road). Mother had three jobs at one time to help pay off father's debts.
Occupation and place of work of interviewee in 1930s/40s (if any):	

Information about farm work and farms:	In 1940s farms tended to have lots of cattle. Mentioned a Mr Blackman at Pumney Farm. Harold Woodley's uncle kept cows on part of father's land.
Other information about what jobs people were doing:	
Travel	
Mode of travel to school:	Often cycled (along with two other 'grammar school boys' (Ian Parsons (settled in Perth, Australia) and Trevor Walker (settled in Kenya)) from Radley).
Mode of travel to work (interviewee and parents):	
Any comments about the station and use of the train:	Father despatched goods made in his sawmill from Radley Station (which had quite large goods yard). Used to be building in south-east corner of T-junction at road over railway bridge for railway gangers, where towards end of WW2 there were Italian POWs making straw baskets. Used to be a train from Oxford in the morning that stopped at Radley and then not again until Paddington (for some VIP?) which then became timetabled for years afterwards.
Any other comments about travel including, including car use and ownership:	
Buildings - location and characteristics	
Location of interviewee's home:	Lower Radley, in house built by parents on land bought by parents.
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:	Caravan / mobile home site began when interviewee's father bought a caravan, rented it out at £1 a week, and found he could make a good profit. Thereafter a motley collection of caravans grew up lived in by a wide range of people. One or two caravans owned by grandfather were left to interviewee who when a student then received income from the caravans. Site was sold to Dickie Deane in the 1960s.
Services and pastimes (excluding education and travel covered above)	
Comments about shopping including retail deliveries:	Mentioned 'Halfway House', shop on Radley Road (Abingdon) in late 1940s now more or less opposite Daisy Bank. Remembered getting 5 or 10 Woodbine on credit from Bayliss's shop.
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>Used to be quite a big bit of field ('The Cornfield') on west side of T-junction at road over railway bridge where village boys played cricket.</p> <p>Mentioned old village hall (where Rev. Pixell ran boys' club) which had stage on which various village 'characters' performed and organised morale-boosting shows during WW2. Interviewee ran 'disco' in early 1950s on Saturday nights in old village hall.</p> <p>In 1940s at least two family holidays were spent in caravan at Pumney near 'Evan's Boathouse' (also called 'The Old Boathouse'), and interviewee used to swim across to little island with bridge to left river bank and cottages nearby where it had once been possible to have tea.</p> <p>Also now and then camped with mother at Black Bridge — called 'black' not because of its colour but because men died building it.</p> <p>Used to be the odd scrap outside the pub; then not everyone thought the pub was entirely respectable.</p>
<p>Comments on religion, church and choir:</p>	<p>Rev. Brutton was a very popular priest of the village; very charismatic; got to know everybody; he attracted so many people to church that balcony had to be built. Interviewee was his organist in 1950s.</p>
<p>Miscellaneous</p>	
<p>Any comments about Radley people not covered elsewhere:</p>	<p>Mentioned as living on caravan / mobile home site: Charlie and Jean Steptoe; George Helman [? Hellman] (whose father kept (plant) nursery); Porin Singh [? spelling; @ 10:55]) (Punjabi, door-to-door salesman); Jordan family, who lavishly celebrated the end of WW2.</p> <p>Mentioned Mr Tombs, one-time Mayor of Abingdon and who had grocery store, who had big house set well back west of T-junction at road over railway bridge.</p> <p>Mentioned Max Allison (cricket).</p> <p>Mentioned mother's brief conversation with Lord Harcourt near Harcourt House Boathouse.</p> <p>Lower Radley village was originally a Saxon circle.</p> <p>Post Office ('Florrie Hadland's old cottage') used to be present-day 25 Lower Radley.</p> <p>In 1930s/1940s, Post Office [prob. by then in Church Road] run by a Mr and Mrs Broad; Mr Broad did the newspaper rounds; 'the other shop' run by Bayliss family probably didn't do newspapers.</p>
<p>Comments about Radley College, its way of operating and relations with the village:</p>	<p>Radley Church provided useful link between Radley College and Radley village. During WW2 villagers attended, and performed in, concerts in Radley C.</p> <p>At that time Head of Music at Radley C was a Mr Dussek; he wrote music for out-of-doors performance of Aristophanes' 'The Frogs'.</p> <p>Villagers also attended Christmas Pantomimes in Radley C.</p> <p>Radley village played their cricket at Radley C.</p> <p>Interviewee earned the odd shilling by carrying bags between Radley C. and station.</p>
<p>Comments on Coronation and Jubilee events:</p>	<p>In 1935 interviewee's grandparents planted horse chestnut tree to celebrate George V's Silver Jubilee.</p>

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

During WW2 mother worked for CRO (Civil Repairs Organisation), a civilian organisation to see to repairs of military aircraft (one of which crash-landed in village) and hosted by the Nuffield organisation housed in Merton College. One day, during Battle of Britain, although Germans were seen off, very few serviceable fighters remained.

From 1945 until well into 1950s VE Day was celebrated on land on other side of road from caravan / mobile home site (where 3 Lower Radley now is); lots of trestle tables with lots of food; if rain, in village hall on other side of road. Remembered counting well over 100 bombers flying east over Radley.

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

Radley village was mostly 'Labour' in those days — in contrast to Radley College and 'Squire' Dockar-Drysdale in his Wolseley car.