

Otterton

Just in case you are at a loose end and need something to amuse you — go to Otterton and get a view of roots, but don't feel obliged to.

You would enter the village, which in the time of William the Conqueror was a seaport, over the river Otter. Immediately on the right is the old mill and tea rooms which are in the stables where grandad Clements kept his three horses. Captain, Punch, and Palmer. These were used in single file hitched to a long timber Wagon which carried large felled trees to the saw mills for converting to planks. At the rear of the yard was the slaughter house used then by the village butcher John Andrews, and the field between the stables and the river is called the Duckery where young Porky (Gerald) Andrews kept his pony. I sometimes went round with him delivering meat in his pony and trap, and we would go to gymkhanas where he would enter in events with his pony. We also went catching moles with gins, and the skins we could sell for 1/- (5p) a time after skinning the mole and stretching the skins out to dry.

You can park by the village green and explore the village on foot perhaps. The Green was where in 1941 I entered the boxing ring to be beaten up by Bert Sparks in a contest set up by American soldiers who were camped on Woodbury Common and wanting to befriend the local population by doing things for the kids! I got a bar of chocolate for being brave enough to go for it, having no idea about boxing anyway. Porky was Auntie Tatch's first husband, and they lived in rooms at the back of the Mill House, entered through a door off the Green.

Up the hill by the mill is St Michael's church where I was an alter server. The vicar was Ernest Grimaldi. He had ears like Mr Spock. Many of the familiar names of my time in the village rest in the churchyard. Grimaldi had four sons, all of whom went into the RAF. Two were doctors. Christopher was the scoutmaster but as he was away we had to run the scouts ourselves, except when he was on leave. Mostly it was Pete Elliott and me who organised things, until Pete got called up into the army. Then it was down to me at 15! Nevertheless we still got to go to camp and all the things that needed to be done. Pete and I in turn both got the local Davy Memorial Trophy award for best scout in the district for keeping it going. In the scouts I had more than twelve proficiency badges and now wonder what they all were. I remember — Cyclist, Camper, Cook, Fireman, First Aider, Pioneer — knots, building rope bridge etc, Backwoodsman — making bivouac, sleeping out minus tent, identifying trees etc, Coastwatchman ~ international flag code, rules of the sea etc, Interpreter, Collector (stamps).

Walk up the village and you come to the Kings Arms with Post Office now attached. PC Lemon, the village cop, lived opposite. The pub is much more industrious now than it was because the village has grown. In my day there were only 400 souls lived there. Opposite is what was Andrews Butcher's which was a hairdresser's when we last went there. The village hall was where I was a DJ before the expression was coined, playing records at village dances. Henry Genge the village postmaster, who previously was a butler for Lord Clinton at Bicton House, played the piano and showed dancers how to do the Lancers and other set dances long since forgotten which were great fun.

Kids were encouraged to join in. The scouts used to put on an occasional concert in the hall to raise funds. At the back of the hall was the snooker room with two full-sized tables where we under-aged lads were allowed in to learn the art if it was not busy.

Gerald Andrews, whose father ran the village butchers shop, was my main chum. He had a pony and I often accompanied him taking meat deliveries around in those days of petrol rationing. I went with to gymkhanas around the place, and once tried riding the pony. We also "hunted" for moles using gins to get a shilling for each tail. The skins were dried and used to raise cash too. Porky (Gerald) kept and raised rabbits too as another way of raising funds.

My teenage girl friend was Mollie Otter - how weird is that to be called Otter and live in Otterton! There might have been some historical connection but we didn't discover any. Her dad was in the Navy and was missing, presumed killed in action at sea.

Opposite the hall and the first house past the pub was Vic Vilday's farm and he was also the coalman. Up from there on the same side stands a terrace of five houses, called Sunnyside. We lived in the fourth one. They had three bedrooms and outside bucket loo - which had to be emptied and buried in the garden where I grew some excellent carrots! Water came from a tap outside the back door. At the start in 1940 we had Auntie Betty and her two children and Aunty Gladys with two more, staying with us, all evacuees from Hellfire Corner. Gladys soon got fed up and went back home, and Aunty Betty found rooms elsewhere in the village. They were farm labourers' cottages and eventually we had to get out and so found rooms in the Post Office which was then further up the village. The brook which runs down the side of the street gets quite full in the winter and my mother had an experience one evening when returning in the dark from the sole telephone kiosk at the top of the village. She found the handrail of the bridge and walked the wrong side of it, so got quite a shock and a dowsing!

Houster Farm owned by John Dowell is on the opposite side of the road to Sunnyside, and they had about 30-40 cows which were walked up the village twice a day for milking. Just a bit further up on the left side is Watering Farm owned by Jim and Audrey Dowell with a similar sized herd, but all the farmyards are now occupied trendy mews cottages lived in by 'foreigners'.

Along on the right is the village bakery where I used to work a delivery round on Saturdays and school holidays for 5/- (25p) a day.

On Sundays people would come to the bakery with their Sunday dinner prepared on a baking dish to be put in the oven and baked while they went on to church and collect it ready to serve on the way home.

On the same side further up is the old Post Office and village store where we lived and Aunty Tatch worked the post office counter and balanced the books at the end of each day. Every week we would all get involved in marking off ration books and bundling up the 'points' used for canned food, or work in the shop measuring up butter into 2oz portions, or sugar etc into portion sizes for sale in the shop according to the rations in force. One benefit of living in the shop is that we could have ice cream (not available anywhere during the war years). Henry had some powder left from before the war and occasionally gave us a treat. In the store room in the yard of the shop was a

quarter size billiard table which all the boys in the village were allowed to use, or to play cards in there, or in the evenings we would all go into the house to play Solo or other card games. This was mainly because **Henry's nephew Harry Manns from Southampton lived with him too**. At weekends the village boys would walk along the meadows or out to Ladram Bay and up Peak Hill. I remember once we walked 14 miles up to Woodbury Common and along to Halfway House and back home. We had a football team to play other village teams in one of the farmers fields. Some of us would get up at 6am and go to pick mushrooms in the fields to sell fresh to greengrocers for 1/6 a lb. (7 ½ p)

All the village crowd had nicknames - Sniffer (**Cicily**) Till, Pinky Elliott, Porky (**Gerald**) Andrews, Mousey Vinnicombe etc - it was thought I should also have a nickname, so Chris Grimaldi dubbed me 'Oscar' — after his one time pet chameleon!

Often we'd walk to Ladram Bay for a swim. Chris Grimaldi taught me to swim there by throwing me in because I was too scared to go in the water! Sometimes we'd take out a rowing boat and fish for mackerel with spinners. I learnt to get my Coastwatchman badge in the scouts from the coastguards at Ladram, in days before there were caravans or car parks and shops there.

Another time we went to Monks Wall (near Ladram Bay) and asked the lady owner if we could play tennis in her court which seemed under-used and she was quite happy to have us use it.

Long summer holidays were originally intended to let children help in the harvest. In Otterton we always went into the fields with knob-headed sticks to assist the farmers and have fun. The reaper/binder would start around the outside of the field and go round in circles until it got to the centre. All the wildlife (rabbits etc would go into the middle of into the dwindling island of corn until they realised the trap and eventually made a run for it, whereupon we would run after it with the sticks to clobber it, sometimes successfully!

While waiting for this we would help stook up the sheaves to dry in stooks of 6-8 carrying a pair, one under each arm, to the nearest stook. The straw would soon create sore fore-arms if' you had no sleeves.

Later the thresher would be taken to the fields and to separate the straw from the corn, but nowadays all this fun is spoilt by the combine harvesters.

Stantaway Farm owned by Sid and Ray Williams is opposite the post office. Imagine how many incontinent cows were going up and down the street twice a day! Just a short way up from the Post Office is Cross Tree which had a garage on the left (now houses I think) where Uncle Roy worked. On the opposite corner, the forge which was part of the garage, used for welding farm machinery and shoeing horses, was being knocked into accommodation by a chap we spoke to last time there. The buses come up and turn round at Cross Tree and many times the school bus woke me as it came up, but I was always on it when it left for Exmouth ten minutes later! Sometimes I would bike to school (about seven miles) and meet up with chums who lived about half-way. For some time our school at Exmouth Grammar was shared with a London school called Beaufoy College, who had been evacuated to Exmouth, so we only went all day on Monday and Wednesday, and half-days the rest of the week.

Redfors Please owned Cross Tree Farm opposite the blacksmiths. There was also a carpenter/joiner, two cobblers (one of whom was also the postman), and two greengrocers in the village.

As you leave the village you will cross over the railway bridge and perhaps see the old East Budleigh station which is now a house. I never knew why the station is called East Budleigh when it is nearer Otterton! First left is Frogmore Road which was signposted to East Budleigh and the first house on the right is where grandad Clements lived on the corner of Beech Tree Lane. It is much more grand now than it was in those days when water came from a pump in the garden, and it was two semi-detached cottages. It has suffered gentrification in a big way. Grandad kept pigs, chicken, ducks, rabbits and two ferrets which we used when catching rabbits in the fields around. Living there was much like in the Darling Buds of May! Every morning we would walk across three fields with billy cans to fetch fresh milk from Bicton Farm, and on special occasions, Devonshire clotted cream too.

When we first evacuated we lived for a time with Great Aunt Emily, at 7 Middle Street East Budleigh, and I went to the village school almost next door where we were taught woodwork and I did my first halved joint! My first girl friend Joan Letten was a bit older than me and lived next door. Her mum got killed by a bomb which landed outside Woolworths in Exmouth when she was shopping.

Go up the village and turn left at the Walter Raleigh pub, there is a car park on the right. Climb the steps into the churchyard and you will find Albert James Clements nearby, just along on the left! I was in the choir in Budleigh church when we lived there.

I believe my father started working for Lord Clinton at Bicton Gardens, as an apprentice gardener. He did his 'journeyman' time at Tredegar House in Wales but then seemed to throw it all away to join the Royal Marines. Perhaps he was influenced by his uncle Birch who was a marine. However, had he not joined up he would not have gone to Deal and met my mother!

I think in a way the war was lucky for me because I would not otherwise have had the benefit of growing up in the village communities, even though we would have spent some summer holidays at Frogmore.

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