

AROUND KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD PAST AND PRESENT



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Cover illustration;
Elizabeth, wife of Fred W. Veale
in the tomato house, Keynsham, 1913

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KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD
PAST & PRESENT

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NOTES FOM THE CHAIRMAN

THE CHANGING FACE OF KEYNSHAM

In 1994 Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society published a book 'The Changing Face of Keynsham'.

This book is now out of print, but the time may now be ripe for a sequel, in view of major changes that have been or are just about to take place concerning the appearance of the town.

Last year I reported on the exhibitions that had taken place to mark the end of chocolate making in Keynsham. Now plans are in progress to redevelop the factory site and its surroundings.

The plans have aroused great interest and not a little controversy, especially in view of the site's history and the significant Roman finds that were unearthed there twenty years ago. There is continuing concern among local archaeologists and historians that the developers may not be paying sufficient attention to the site's archaeological significance.

Another area of interest and concern is the scheme for redeveloping the Town Hall, library and nearby shops. Demolition was scheduled to start in August 2012 and the development is planned to include permanent display cabinets containing information and artefacts relating to the history of Keynsham and Saltford, However the proposed outward appearance of the new buildings does not seem to be to everyone's taste.

During the summer passersby have become aware of excavation trenches that have been dug around the edges of the

site prior to the start of demolition work. Archaeologists have been busy in the trenches and have expressed appreciation of the 'many members' of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society who have stopped to talk to them and supply information and offer old photographs.

Elsewhere there are a number of smaller developments - new dwellings at the junction of Temple Street and Albert Road, incorporating the old school buildings, a similar scheme planned for the main Bath Hill School buildings. There are even signs of building activity on the long-dormant site of the small cottages next to Lichfield Lodge on Bath Hill East.

All the above are adding to 'The Changing Face of Keynsham'. Unfortunately at present Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society does not have a photographic archivist to go out and record these changes.

I therefore take this opportunity to appeal to members who may be 'out and about' with a camera in Keynsham and Saltford. Please photograph the changes - as they happen, They will help build an archive that we can pass on for future generations to see, just as we have been able to appreciate the photographs passed on to us from the past.



Derelict Bath Hill School
(Photo- Don Ogg)

Dennis Hill

MY TIME WITH “DAD’S ARMY”

By Ivor Stabbins

Ivor Stabbins followed his father into No 2 Platoon of the No 2 Company of the Home Guard at the age of 15 (although he should have been 17). At the time, he was an apprentice electrician at Fry’s. He was called up for the R.A.F. when he was 19 and did his basic training in South Wales before returning to be stationed at Colerne. This coincided with the end of hostilities and there his work consisted of reconditioning the engines of surplus Spitfires before they were sold off to various foreign governments.



The author, Ivor Stabbins

Ivor relates.....

No doubt most of you have watched the long running comedy series on television “Dad’s Army” and wondered if it bore any connection with reality. I can assure you that many of the episodes were not so far fetched.

A little history may help. The war against Germany started in 1939 and by May 1940, the Government decided that civilians should be asked to enrol to form a force that could help repel the Germans who were expected to invade the British Isles. Volunteers were asked to join at their local police station and my father joined up almost straight away. The

recruits were not issued with weapons. Some owned a shotgun, but the majority had nothing to use except a pitchfork.

Eventually an armband was issued with the letter L.D.V (Local Defence Volunteers) which many people said stood for "Look, Duck and Vanish!" However, it was about 6 months before full uniforms were received and the L.D.V. became the "Home Guard". About this time, some rifles arrived from the U.S.A. and were distributed amongst the men. So much for the history.

The recruiting age for joining was 17 years old, but as I wanted to take part in the training, a few days after my 15th birthday I told the enrolment officer that I was 17, and was accepted. The training consisted of rifle drill and firing at targets with other weapons which were now in use. We had lectures on one night per week at Keynsham Drill Hall. In addition, every Sunday morning we carried out field exercises and manoeuvres at different places outdoors, sometimes against other platoon as rivals.

Our main night duty was to patrol an area at Burnett. Our unit consisted of a lieutenant, a second lieutenant, 2 sergeants, corporals and other ranks. Our leader was the lieutenant (who I think, in the interests of diplomacy, we will call "Mr Mainwaring").

We did not have a butcher who would supply the transport when required, but our Mr Mainwaring had access to the Director of Keynsham Paper Mill for whom he worked. One of the workers was a lorry driver, a member of our platoon, and the transport consisted of a driver's cab and an open trailer that could carry a large number of men and the supplies required for our platoon.

Not long after I enrolled, a few of us were training in how to use hand grenades, which I expect you know are intended to be thrown into crowds and to explode after about 5 seconds after it leaves the hand of the thrower. Unfortunately, I was not very keen on any sport at school including the game of cricket. One of our sergeants took a few of us to an isolated field, bounded by a loose stone wall. After watching the other fellows throw their grenades it was then my turn. The object was to stand about 10 yards in front of the wall and lob it over the far side where it would explode harmlessly. To prepare it for the explosion, you pulled out the pin as it left your hand. To my horror, my grenade didn't get far enough to clear the wall. The sergeant with me yelled out to lie as flat as possible and his shout was immediately followed by a shower of metal pieces flying over our heads. I was very lucky that it was the sergeant with me, as Mr Mainwaring would surely have said "stupid boy" - which I was.

We also had to take our turn at Burnett for night duty. The site was virtually on the road, which overlooks Saltford and leads to Corston and behind us was the underground ammunitions dump that was part of the reason for our presence. Our patrols consisted of six men working in pairs for 3-hour shifts. When your three hours were up, you returned to a wooden hut that held the off-duty men and where there was always a sergeant or corporal in charge of communications. The hut had no electricity or water, so inevitably paraffin was used for lighting and boiling up water to make a cup of tea - which was very welcome when you came in after a three-hour patrol. The lorry that took us to Burnett also carried two 5-gallon drums, one with the water and the other with the paraffin to enable us to manage through the night. I was on the nine till midnight shift with another colleague and as we finished we returned to our hut. As I entered I was pleased to see the kettle

boiling but as soon as we were handed our teas, my first comment was “it smells of paraffin!”, then the realisation “it is paraffin!” The kettle was still boiling on the stove, so I took it off quickly realising that this was a dangerous vapour that could burst into flames at any moment. Normally the hut had a paraffin smell, but this was all too much and we were very lucky that the whole hut was not set ablaze. I never found who was responsible for mixing up the two liquids, but the drums were very carefully labelled after this.

The third incident I will tell you about happened on one of the Sunday mornings that were normally used for outside activities. On that occasion, the mission was to capture a rival platoon. Now the distance between us was probably about a mile, but in order to reach them, they knew we would have to cross the River Chew. This was very shallow in one area, so that would be the obvious place to wade across and our rivals would be waiting for us on their side.

However, Mr. Mainwaring was one-step ahead, and decided that we should cross the river where, although quite deep, it was only about 10 feet wide. With his forward planning and connections, he had a wooden bridge made (probably at the Keynsham Paper Mills). It was approximately 14 feet long, but not very wide and our transport brought it down to the riverbank. Somehow, it was manoeuvred into position to span the waters and when our platoon arrived, the temporary bridge was in place, ready to cross. Mr. Mainwaring led his men to the edge of the river and shouted out “Follow me men” and started to storm across the bridge. As he reached the halfway point, he tottered and with flailing arms, he fell into the river with a resounding splash. A bedraggled figure, he was helped out shivering in the frosty morning air and later that day he arrived back rather sheepishly now attired in his civilian clothes.

Well, that is it. I feel that the three examples I mentioned were not unusual, but despite all this our training was helped by all the officers and senior staff who made us into very competent soldiers who would have been able to defend this country while our own troops were fighting overseas.

Just one more shot. When our platoon was finally allocated a Browning automatic rifle, I was put in charge of it instead of the normal rifle, which was far safer for all concerned than my grenade throwing.

So stick to watching “Dad's Army”, it is a bit over the top but excellent entertainment and not so very far removed from our own wartime experiences.



No 2 Platoon, No 2 Company of the Home Guard. Ivor is fourth from the left in the middle row. Any similarity to “Pike” is purely coincidental.

Sadly since this article was written Ivor passed away in January 2012.

WAR TIME MEMORIES OF ROCKHILL

By Dennis Hill

Mr Reginald (Reg) Grantham visited Keynsham on 17 August 2011. As an 18 year old he had been based in Keynsham as an Army driver in 191 Company, RASC during the Second World War. I took Reg to the Rockhill Estate and he was able to identify some of the old buildings and their use during his posting there in 1944-1945.

The living quarters for the RASC personnel were in Nissen huts situated where some of the Rockhill Estate mobile homes now stand. As far as Reg was able to recall there were three or four huts each accommodating up to twenty men. Altogether there were about seventy men based at Rockhill. The main entrance to Rockhill from the Wellsway was as it is today but there was a barrier across the entrance and two sentries were always on duty. The two-storey building that still stands to the right of the entrance and backs on to the edge of the road was the guard room.

To the left just inside the entrance to Rockhill was a wash down area for vehicles and also petrol pumps. A driver returning from deliveries and collections would have to wash down his vehicle and refuel it, before parking at the back of the site to the right beyond the house. During cold weather the vehicle then had to be drained of all water (no anti freeze was available) before being left to stand overnight. Altogether the driver was responsible for a fortnightly maintenance routine involving sixteen checks such as oil levels, tyre pressures etc., at the rate of one, or occasionally two, different checks every day.

Reveille was at 0630hrs, breakfast at 0700hrs and parade at 0800hrs. After this all drivers reported to the transport office for their list of duties which often involved driving to other army

bases, delivering and collecting materials. Their journeys covered a wide area of southern England. The loading and unloading of vehicles was done by personnel based at the collecting and delivery points. The RASC drivers did not have to help. Sometimes the work was even done by prisoners of war. The transport fleet was a mixture of British, Canadian and American vehicles. The British ones included Bedford and Commer 3-ton trucks. The American ones were left-hand drive and had air brakes which were quite fierce. The brakes had to be applied gently otherwise the vehicle stopped abruptly and the driver bumped his nose on the windscreen. No seat belts in those days, of course! Drivers wore denim tunics and trousers while on driving duties, plus beret with RASC cap badge. Conventional battle dress was worn on other occasions.

In the evenings it was possible to visit the NAAFI at the Fear Institute in Keynsham High Street, where dances sometimes took place. There were also occasional visits to the Charlton cinema but these were difficult to afford on pay of three shillings (15p) a day, especially for Reg who sent money home regularly so that he had something to spend when he was granted leave.

When going on evening leave the men had to sign out and then sign in on returning to Rockhill. They had to be back by 2230hrs. Late returns meant being punished, typically one week confined to barracks, with extra duties such as cleaning and helping in the cookhouse. The cookhouse building is still there, and is on the left hand side coming in from Wellsway behind the two-storey red brick building and just in front of the Rockhill Estate. The two storey red brick building housed the ablutions. Rockhill House contained the offices of 191 Company RASC and living quarters for the company's officers, the most senior holding the rank of major.

In March 1945 the drivers were sent to Yorkshire to collect 32 x 10 ton Leyland Hippo trucks which they drove to Dover and there boarded small landing craft to proceed to Calais.



The 10 ton Leyland Hippos

About Reg Grantham

On 16th July 1943, one month after his 17th birthday, he volunteered for the army because 17 & 18 year olds were being conscripted as Bevan Boys to work down coal mines. His basic training started on 16th December 1943 to be followed by driver training at Carlisle. After being posted to Devon he spent the spring of 1944 transporting troops and ammunition to transit camps on the coast in preparation for the D-Day landings. In the autumn he arrived at Rockhill.

During the weeks leading up to Christmas 1944, Reg and his lorry were seconded to the main General Post Office (GPO) sorting office in Bristol to assist in distributing Christmas mail, as the GPO did not have enough men and vehicles to cope with the peak Christmas demand. At this time Reg was driving a left-hand drive American truck. He got into trouble because the truck suffered damage through not being fully drained of water overnight. The 1944/45 winter was exceptionally cold. Reg had to appear before a court of enquiry but was exonerated when similar damage occurred in other vehicles of the same make. It

transpired that the drainage tap was so positioned that when used, and apparently all water had been removed, sufficient remained to freeze and cause damage on an extremely cold night.

After about six months at Rockhill, Reg went overseas with the RASC and served in France, Belgium and Germany. He was trained to drive a wide variety of vehicles and eventually qualified to drive ten-tonners. Unfortunately while overseas he suffered duodenal and stomach ulcers, and after periods in hospital in Brunswick and Hanover was sent back to England on a hospital ship. After a further spell in hospital he was discharged from the army on medical grounds and awarded a war pension.



Above left – Reg Grantham in 1945. Right - Reg and Dennis Hill at Rockhill 2012

PIPLEY BROOK in the 1920's

As remembered by Jim Allen

The stream that skitters down the southern -most escarpment of the limestone Cotswolds from Lansdown into the lowlands of the River Avon was an idyllic playground in the 1920's. My earliest experience of it was not, however, very happy as my brother Jack and his friend Raymond scurried off to its vicinity leaving me at three, four years their junior, toddling behind. Once into the field of cows they would shout "The cows will eat you." And in tears I'd waddle home to the village shop where we lived and be consoled with a sherbet fountain and earn Jack a reprimand for not looking after me. But after I'd grown into a more companionable age I was able to accompany Jack on his watery adventures. And I grew to have no fear of cows. Indeed, some four years later, I was driving Miss Fry's cows from the Pipleby pastures to be milked at Manor House Farm in Upton Cheyney. Driving? The animals knew the route and dawdled, always calling at the fountain for a drink and seeking any open gate. My prodding with an elder stick never had much effect.

Jack and I never found a real source of the brook. Upstream a confluence of springs met from both sides of the valley to be piped into and contained in an iron tank where the water was forcibly pumped up to Brockham End House at the head of the valley. There was a spasmodic 'thump thump', and as there was no sign of any other power source, Jack concluded it operated hydraulically. There was enough water to escape and gather with other streamlets into a foot wide stream. It eventually escaped the woods and apart from a few soggy parts flowed into open grassland by Congrove Cottage where Jim Jenkins farmed. The landowners, the Parker family, had in the

1900's, created a fruit farm on the southern slopes of the valley to employ miners from the worked-out pits in the Avon minefields. Below the green houses along the edge of the brook the Parkers, too, had created an arboretum to accommodate the exotic trees and shrubs brought back from the various tropical countries in which their missionary forebears had ministered. So a stretch of the stream was preserved from cattle and Wellingtonia trees and bamboo thickets flourished. There was also a wooden chalet around which grew in season daffodils, bluebells, red and white campions and a host of unkempt grasses. The stream, now a yard wide, emerged in a mini waterfall to duck under a wooden elm-plank-bridge at the end of a rough deep cut lane which we believed was a Roman lane which led to a path across the fields to North Stoke.

Here began our true playground. Shallows and waterfalls succeeded each other bordered by fields which gave access to cows to drink and browse under the shade of the hazel nut trees and swish their tails at the flies which proliferated there. In the shallows between the waterfalls we built dams, sailed our wooden sailing boats which inevitably keeled over and trailed their sails in the water and our tin ships and submarines, driven by wind-up mechanisms with keys in the funnels or conning towers. These soon became rusty and calcified like the shrimps which scuttled for shelter in the sandy bottom of the pools. There was always the pleasure of opening the dam and seeing the water gush its way into the cow-trodden levels where marsh marigolds and water mint and inedible watercress grew. Further downstream there was another single plank unfenced bridge which gave more direct access to the path to North Stoke over which the children of that village walked daily to Upton School in term time.

Then the brook, having gathered more tributaries, found its way through a withy-bed and cider apple orchard and then into private gardens to emerge into a culvert which conducted it under the road at Swinford to join the River Avon. Between the two bridges was our playground shared in places by the cows which were admitted by a fencing system to come for a drink. Another pleasure was that because the stream was the county boundary between Gloucestershire and Somerset we could jump from one county to another. From this idyllic scene we would often return to the village shop, our home, wet and muddy to be scolded and threatened with 'No tea', seldom enforced.

The Road to Pibley

The lane began between the Upton Inn and the village school in Upton Cheyney by the Fountain and soon entered a defile whose steep banks bore primroses and violets and the blue flowered alkanet and evil-smelling wild garlic. After a short level it kinked left where a stile led to a path to the lower plank bridge and a direct route to North Stoke. On the left were the slopes of Steep Cleeves dotted with fruit trees, blackberry bushes and rabbit holes. Further east it developed into a deciduous wood of ash and sycamores, plundered in 1926 for its better timbers. The traction engines and the horse-drawn timber wagons kept us from the brook for some weeks. There was also a traction engine called 'Little Jim' whose driver came to the shop from time to time.

The fields to the right were partially cultivated but mostly blackberry clumped and hedged pasture for cows. Past a small triangular copse of decaying pines, the lane levelled, its hedge of blackberry brambles topping a bank that bore wild strawberries and a profusion of wild flowers and grasses. On

the lower side nettles grew among the neatly laid elder bushes.

At a kink in the road a small slope to the left led to the man-made terraces we called The Banks. We thought of them as Roman vineyards as they met the Roman rocky lane down to the brook. The terraces bore regimented lines of cultivated cob nut trees and cultivated daffodils for the flower market.

Then came the gated entrance to Pibley Fruit Farm. In the 1920's the tenant of the fruit farm was Albert Luker who lived next door to us in Upton and, because my father had died when I was one, he became the man in my life, Jack having left for boarding school in 1926. Often he would take me out along the twilight lane to stoke the greenhouse boilers and close the lights on the lean-to frames.

During the Spring-Summer-Autumn evenings we heard nightingales, nightjars, owls, the squeal of rabbits mesmerised by stoats and the winged beats of hunting buzzards. We saw foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels, squirrels and the barn owl that lived further up the valley in the lambing sheds, sitting patiently above the apple store waiting for the mice to emerge. Sometimes we saw a heron fly off from the reservoir set higher up the hillside. The apple store was a semi-successful venture to preserve apples in an arched tunnel dug into the hillside brick lined and fitted with wooden slatted shelves which maintained a temperature of 50° F winter and summer. I was too scared to venture more than a few feet into that seeming dungeon.

Pibley Lane soon became a cart track with water splashes and gates before terminating at Congrove Cottage and its overhanging wood and cedar trees. A perfect end to a valley of infinite interest and beauty.

A Keynsham Man and his Silver Cup

By Elizabeth Cannon

In last year's journal an article described the Veales of Keynsham. Here we continue the story of one of them.

Frederick William Veale was born in 1882 and was the youngest of nine children. As a young man Fred was a market gardener in Keynsham and had a greengrocer's shop on High Street a few doors along from the Lamb and



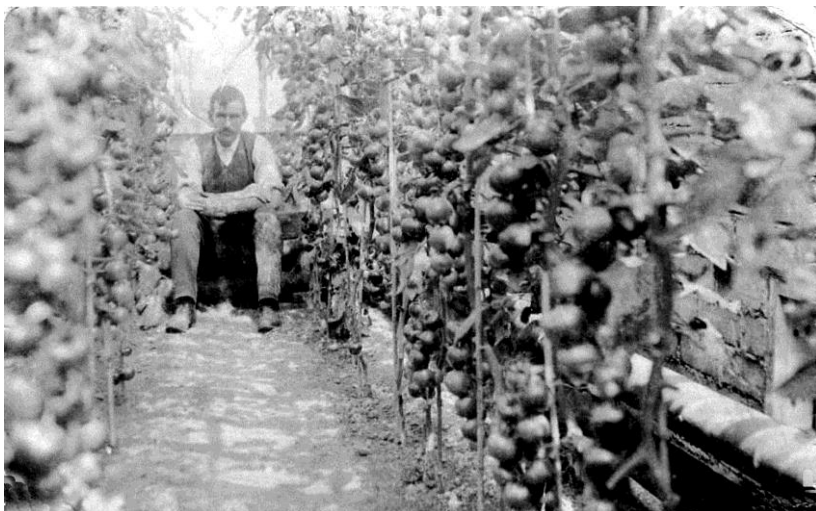
Veale's Greengrocer's Shop



The Resident's Cup

Lark Inn. Fred was a tomato enthusiast and grew large crops in his greenhouses. He evidently experimented with hybrids as there are photographs and descriptions of one particularly successful variety called 'Veale's Leader' which seems to have been a very late fruiter, and heavy cropper. In 1913 he wrote a 32-page booklet called 'Hints for the Culture of Tomatoes' and there are some Trade Journal comments on the

last page. There is a copy of this in Keynsham Library. I think the photo would have been taken round about the time he was winning prizes at the Keynsham Horticultural Association Shows, including The Resident's Challenge Cup. It is not clear from the inscription on the cup what it was awarded for, but the Keynsham and Salford Local History Society has some archives which might give more information. Fred won the cup in 1909, 1910 and 1912, and it may be that three wins meant that you could keep the cup, because it certainly remained in his possession until his death.



Fred W Veale in his tomato house in 1913 with his successful variety called 'Veale's Leader'

Until 1915 Fred lived with his wife and son in Charlton Park in a house called Roseland Cottage but so far as I can discover it no longer exists. He then volunteered for the Army, and was drafted to the Army Service Corps where he became a member of the Remount Division which was responsible for providing and training horses as replacements for those killed or wounded at the Front.

Many of his unit were sent to Guernsey in 1917 after the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry had suffered huge losses in France, and was reinforced with soldiers from mainland regiments. He returned to Keynsham after he was discharged from the Army, but found he could not settle, and returned to Guernsey which he had realised was an excellent place for market gardening. From evidence found in the Guernsey Archives it appears he bought land in the Routes des Coutures,



Roseland Cottage



Fred W Veale Snr., Fred W Veale Jnr. & wife Elizabeth, circa 1915

and set up his business there. (It is worth noting that in Guernsey, even today many roads and houses have French names, and amongst some older islanders a form of French patois is occasionally spoken.) Oddly, I have found no record of his having any particular interest in tomatoes there. He and his wife also opened a guest house near the Doyle Monument at the end of the Jerbourg peninsula and called it Vue des Lies. It seems to have been a flourishing venture as successive postcard views of it in the late 1930s show new extensions having been built.

They stayed on the island for the rest of their lives, even during the German Occupation 1940-1945. At first they continued living at Vue des lies and, if it functioned as a guest house at all, it would have been occupied by German soldiers. Family tradition has it that Officers were billeted there, and that Fred and Elizabeth had to provide services for them.

Two incidents only have come to light so far about those years. First, in July 1940, by direct command of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, a party of British Commandos landed in Guernsey to discover what was going on in the Channel Islands. It was an ill-fated attempt of four vessels sent out only one of which actually landed a party on Guernsey at about 1.00 am, and they happened to go ashore in a bay with a cliff path leading directly up to the lane outside Vue des Lies.

They set up a roadblock in the lane outside the house using stones from Fred's rockery, presumably to delay any pursuers in case their presence was detected. They found out very little, cut a few telephone wires, terrified some local inhabitants by ringing their doorbells and waking them up, and at about 3.00 am began their planned withdrawal. On the way down the cliff path the Commander slipped and discharged his revolver, and



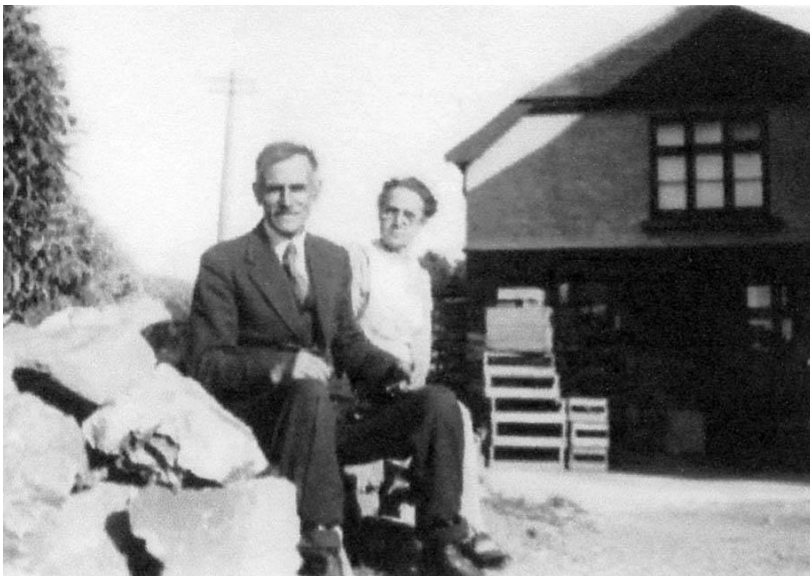
The Road Block

when they reached the beach the tide was such that the landing craft could not come in close enough and they had to pile their ammunition and equipment into a dinghy which then capsized, and the men then had to swim to the landing craft waiting further out. The four men that could not swim had to be left behind and eventually became prisoners of war. Later in the night a German patrol discovered the roadblock and roused Fred Veale, accusing him of an act of sabotage. However, when it was investigated it was realised that no one man could have moved the boulders used, and in addition various possessions were discovered nearby, indicating an English incursion - including a soldier's haversack containing ammunition, washing kit, and even some fresh cakes in a paper bag with a Plymouth baker's name on it!

So the raid was not a success, and was not welcomed by the islanders as it made relations with the Occupying Force more difficult than they were. The second incident is revealed in a

document now in the Guernsey Archives which records that F. Veale had been evicted from Vue des Lies, and was then living at "Mornington" on Foulon Road.

It is not clear whether these two incidents confirm family traditions, but neither do they completely invalidate them. One wonders how, if German personnel had been sleeping at Vue des Lies, the barrier could have been built without disturbing them! However, the story is widely published, and photographic evidence exists, so either there were no Germans billeted there at the time, or they were on night duty elsewhere (or they were very sound sleepers!). And if Fred and his wife were living some two miles from Vue des Lies it seems unlikely that they were responsible for providing services. However, under the Occupation almost anything was possible, however inconvenient for the islanders.



Fred & Elizabeth Veale, Guernsey

In later years Fred's main speciality was rhubarb, and he was said to have been the only commercial grower in Guernsey. He was a familiar figure on the roads of Guernsey in the 1960s and 1970s, riding his moped and taking his produce to the Market Halls to be sold. He continued riding his moped to a very advanced age, by which time he was causing anxiety to his family, and to the authorities! Where was the silver cup for all this time? It has to be conjecture rather than firm knowledge, but it would probably have been proudly displayed in the home in Roseland Cottage up



Fred on his beloved moped

to the time they left Keynsham, and then wherever they were living in Guernsey until the time of the Occupation. Again it may be conjectured that it was then hidden away from possible confiscation by the Germans. Maybe after the Liberation of Guernsey in May 1945 it was restored to a place of honour. It was clearly always valued by Fred, as he bequeathed it to Fred Jnr's wife in his will.

Fred died in 1979. His son (also Fred) had married a Guernsey woman and they also stayed there all their lives, except for the Occupation years. When their house had to be cleared for sale after their deaths in 1999 the cup came to light

and it seemed good to their surviving son John that a use should be found for it if possible.



Fred and Elizabeth Veale in later life probably at their home in Guernsey

So it was that in March 2009 the cup was renamed The Fred Veale Memorial Cup, and was returned to Keynsham and given to the Keynsham and Saltford Gardeners Association to be competed for once again - just one hundred years after Fred first won it. It was decided to present it to members who had not previously won a cup and in 2009 it was awarded to Mr Fred Single and in 2010 to Mrs Wendy King.

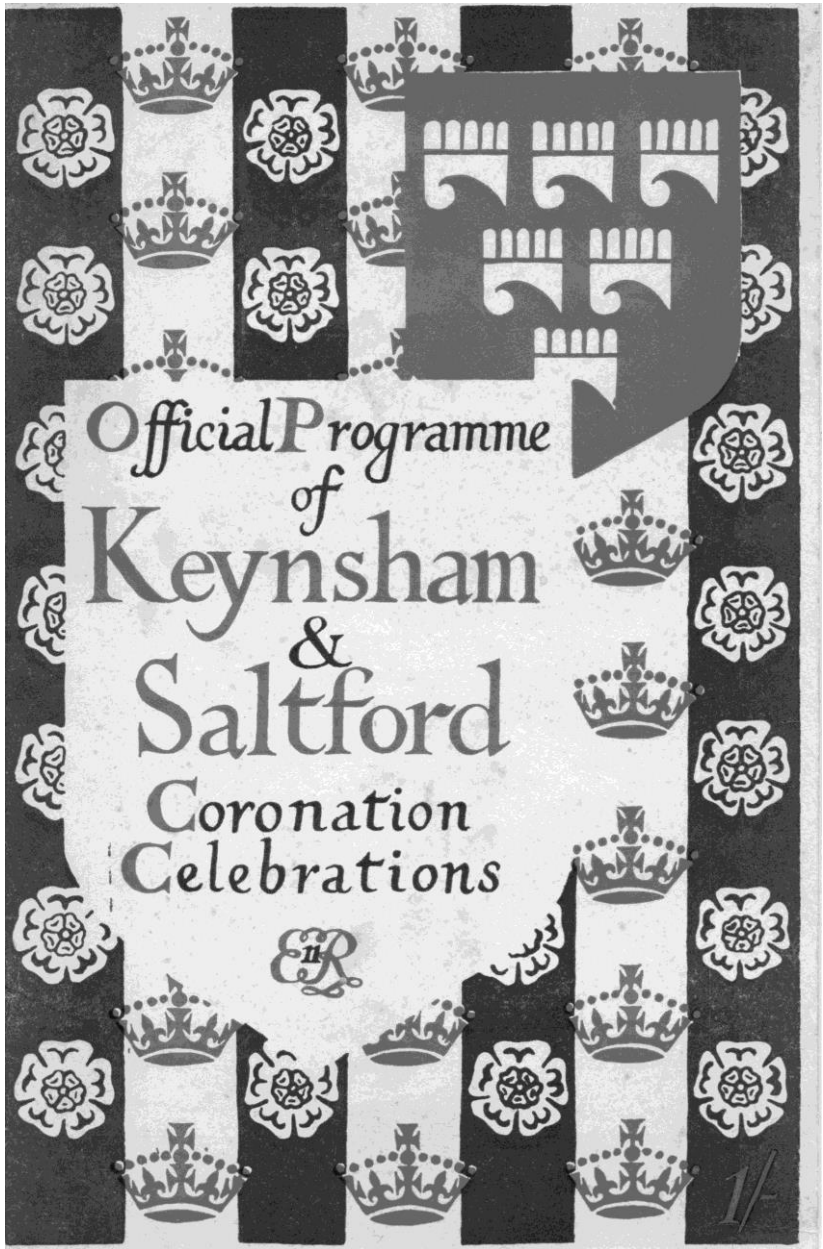
KEYNSHAM'S CORONATION CELEBRATIONS 1953.

By Brian Vowles

We celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II recently and as I thumbed through the copy of the official Coronation Programme for Keynsham and Saltford held by the society I noticed some of the small but significant changes that have taken place in our life styles and the district in the sixty years since 1952.

For example the cover, designed by an early member of the society Mary Fairclough, is skillfully hand lettered. No computer set 48 point Times New Roman font was available for her! Similarly the Chairman of the Executive committee Colonel S.H.G. Dainton O.B.E. J.P. probably would have avoided using the phrase "a gay and cheerful coronation" in his introductory remarks.

It would appear that all the children born before 2nd June 1953 and under 16 were to receive a souvenir mug. Those not at school in either Keynsham or Saltford and applying for theirs at the Church Rooms in Station Road (demolished in preparation for the by-pass), had to produce their ration books. These were, of course, still being used at that time to get not only their allocation of meat but also their sweets. A number of competitions were organized for the children. Group 'A' was a hand writing test, a difficult task for some of today's young people now more used to twiddling their thumbs on their mobile phone. Those 'Under 9' were to copy out the first verse of the National Anthem and both those 'Under 12' and 'Under 15' had to pen an extract from the dedication speech given by the Queen at Capetown on the occasion of her 21st birthday.



Group 'B' was a coronation picture or poster composition; on any subject for the 'Under 8's' but a poster advertising the Coronation Week was required from the 'Under 12's' and 'Under 15's'. Group 'C' was an art competition open to the same three age categories on any subject whilst Group 'D' was a handicraft competition that included the lost arts of weaving, basketry, metal work and wood work (strictly no turnery!). Lastly, Group 'E' was a competition for needlework or knitting (no machine work allowed) – all skills that were commonly practised in the pre-television age. The handsome prizes to be awarded to the winners were 4s. (20p in today's money) for those of groups A, B & C and 5s (25p) for groups D&E.

The events of the week were to begin on Saturday 30th May with a fancy dress parade that would start from the gates of the now redundant Fry's factory, head past the church into the High Street before turning up Charlton Road. A right turn would be made down into St. Ladoc's Road before returning back up Bristol Hill, the High Street once more and on into the Park. This was to be followed by a dance to be held in the Women's Institute Hut that used to stand at the driveway down to the colour mills (to the right of the present Memorial Gates on Bath Hill).

On Sunday 31st May all the Keynsham churches were to hold special services and there was to be a dedication of the Keynsham Memorial by the vicar of Keynsham the Rev. A. Trevor Wright. An innovation was to be the floodlighting of the parish church (until 11.30pm only).

Monday 1st June was to witness a Grand Treasure Hunt organised by the Young Conservatives starting from the lawn of Abbotsford House (demolished during the construction of the by-pass) and a special mass at St. Dunstan's.

Coronation Day 2nd June was to commence with communion at the parish church and mass at St. Dunstan's before the main event, the afternoon street parties, took place. I remember coming last in my race during the Temple Street one as my mother had insisted on my wearing my best shiny black leather lace-ups whilst the other competitors wore their daps.

At 7pm there was to be a Grand Coronation Celebration on the Crown Field to be followed by bonfires lit by the Keynsham, Saltford and Stanton Drew Scouts on Stantonbury Hill at Marksbury. Meanwhile the patients at Keynsham Hospital (now rebuilt as the Keynsham Health Centre) were to receive a festive tea and a coronation rosette and handkerchief. The Grand Celebrations were to be opened by Col. Dainton and followed by, amongst other events, a crazy football match between the rugby and hockey clubs, musical chairs on bicycles, Old Tyme and Square dancing and a demonstration of Indian club swinging with coloured lights.

The evening would be brought to a conclusion with community singing led by the combined choirs. At midnight there would be a mass singing of the National Anthem before a floodlit portrait of the Queen. Although admission would be free, a charge of 1s (5p) would be made for the car park.

During the rest of the week teas were to be arranged for 76 Saltford residents aged over 65 by the Evergreen Club at the Church School and the Keynsham Over Sixties Cheerful Club for old folks were to hold theirs at the J.N. Fear Institute.

On Friday June 5th a Coronation Gala Dance was organised by the Young Wives Fellowship again in the Women's Institute Hut and a Coronation Whist Drive was to be held at the British Legion Hall.

On Saturday 6th June it was Saltford's turn to enjoy their Fancy Dress Parade and the week was to conclude on Sunday with mass at St Dunstan's and at 3pm a Coronation Service at St Mary's, the Saltford Parish Church.

The organising committee included many of the independent tradesmen who conducted their own businesses in the town but have since been replaced with chain stores. Harvey the newsagent, Hickling the ironmonger, Grimes the grocer and Jarrett the baker were represented and prominent local figures such as the Rev. A. McPhee and Mr. Osgathorpe and Miss Parsons the heads of the two schools; Mr. Tom Tookey the scoutmaster, Mr. Viv Bateman and Mr. George Ashton, who had been Clerk to Keynsham Urban District Council and after whom the road at the rear of the High Street is named, were also involved. So was Mr. H. Gill whose West End Radio Shop was selling numerous new black and white television appliances that were to enable Keynshamites to watch the actual crowning ceremony live for the first time.

Other independent traders (mainly based on the High Street) who advertised in the programme but whose businesses have since disappeared were Sherer's the butcher, Daniel Gilbert's the shoe shop, Geoff Willoughby's the stationer and Percy Baker's the men's outfitter. Mr. Church's tobacconist shop 'Nicotine' would now carry a health warning and no longer does Fry's "makers of good chocolate since 1728" play a major part in the life of the town.

The Coronation left its legacy in other ways of course. The Keynsham Memorial was a further development of the Park with the planting of trees and a children's playground whilst at Saltford the river bank at the Shallows was cleared, new trees planted and a coronation seat provided for the weary. Some of

the roads on the newly constructed Park Road estate were given names relating to the event; Coronation Avenue, Princess Close, Edinburgh Road and Balmoral Road are just a few of the permanent reminders of that grand occasion.

Although the individual celebratory events of 1953 may have differed somewhat from those of 2012, in essence the enthusiastic spirit of those days was more than adequately revived this June.



The mug and spoon presented to the author on Coronation Day, 2nd June 1953

Robert Cantle – A Mystery

By Gill Roberts

In his book ‘Writing up your Family History - A do-it-yourself Guide’, John Titford says: *“Now is your chance to breathe new life back into your ancestors, to give their lives, however humble, a further touch of dignity and meaning.”* Very humble lives were led by the scores of Cantle family members in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in Keynsham. The following story sets out to give a touch of dignity and meaning to just a few of them.

Prologue

The war memorials in Keynsham list 63 names of those men from the ‘village’ who died in the First World War. I had always known that **C.H. Baker** and **E.S. Baker** were my great uncles - brothers of my paternal grandmother Florence Cantle (nee Baker) and Keynsham tradesmen, Reg and Percy Baker. However, despite my family history research and that of my late father, Ivor Cantle, the name **R. Cantle** aroused no more than mild curiosity. This situation was to change in 2008.

An Unexpected Discovery

On a gloomy December Sunday that year, I was walking around Keynsham Cemetery with my sister Rosemary, pointing out to her various Cantle graves. We passed the familiar military headstone commemorating ‘R. Cantle’ and saw, to our surprise, that someone had recently placed in front of it an arrangement of artificial flowers. As far as we were aware, R. Cantle had no known descendents. Moving on a few yards we came to the grave of Ernest Cantle (1889-1942), whom we knew was the only son of our great, great grandfather John Cantle (1824-1911) and his second wife Mary (née Cook) (1846-1923).

Identical artificial flowers were on this grave also! What was the connection between the occupants of the two graves? Just who was R. Cante? How did he die in the First World War and how did he come to be buried in Keynsham Cemetery? What was this young soldier's story?

The Story Unfolds

I could hardly wait for the Town Council office to open next morning. The Burial Book there revealed that in Plot 93A is buried Robert Cante who died on 9th August 1917, aged 19, described as 'the adopted son of Mrs. M. Cante of 63 Temple Street, Keynsham.' Just behind, in an unmarked grave, lie John and

Mary Cante (née Cook), along with Ann Cook who died on 16 September 1899 aged 34. Plot 209A contains the remains of Ernest Cante, his wife Elsie and daughter Gladys Beatrice. An added note opposite this entry stated that a further plot had been bought for their other daughter Madge Dearman (née Cante) (1910-2007) by Madge's daughter, Pauline Parker of Hampshire. I wrote straight away to Pauline. She replied by return and within weeks she and her sister Jane Burgess from Suffolk came to visit me. They had brought the flowers, on a previous visit to tend their family's graves. They recounted a good deal about their parents and grandparents. It was to the latter, Ernest and



The grave of R. Cante with the flowers

Elsie Cante, living in St Keyna Road, that Pauline had been evacuated from Biggin Hill at the outbreak of World War II. Earlier, after Army service in India in World War I, Ernest had returned to his fishmonger's business in Keynsham. It came as a surprise to the sisters that, before marrying their great grandmother Mary Cook, their great grandfather, John Cante, had had 8 children by his first wife. One of these children was my great grandmother Louisa. Pauline and Jane mentioned Robert Cante in passing, referring to him as 'Uncle Bob'. They had an idea as to how he had died and, when I obtained his death certificate, this was confirmed. However they seemed uncertain as to exactly how he was related to them.

An Intriguing Puzzle

So I was still left with the question 'Who was Robert Cante?' Now I wondered: why and when did Mary Cante adopt him (informally as formal adoptions were not introduced until 1929) and how, if at all, were they related? Perhaps the puzzle would be solved in discovering more about Mary (Cook) Cante's life?

Mary Cook's Story

Mary, daughter of William and Ann Cook, was baptised on Christmas Day 1846 in the Parish of Over Wallop, near Stockbridge in Hampshire. Five years later the Cook family comprises William (30) a labourer, his (second?) wife Harriett (28), four year old Mary and three other children. By 1861 William (now a carter) and Harriett are living with 5 children and 2 lodgers at Jack's Bush, Nether Wallop. Mary and her older brother have already left home - Mary to act as housekeeper for her widowed grandfather in the neighbouring village of East Tytherley. By the age of twenty-four Mary has made her way to Bath. She is employed as a domestic servant at 4 Cavendish Crescent, Walcot, by Mary A. Stuckey, a 53 year

old widow, whose means are derived from 'Land and Interest'. Back home in Nether Wallop that same year, William and Harriet Cook have not only a daughter Elizabeth and son Silas living at home, but also a 6 year old grand-daughter named Anne. Speculation that Anne (named after her grandmother?) could be the daughter of Mary Cook is confirmed by obtaining her birth certificate - the entry column for father's name is blank. Ann (no 'e') came into the world at Nether Wallop on 8th February 1865.

Mary seems to have found a good employer in Mary Stuckey and was loyal to her because, by the time she is 34 in 1881, she is still with her and has been promoted to Cook. She has also become a mother for the second time. Her son, whom she named William Percy (presumably after her father), was born on 4th December 1877 in Over Wallop. No father is named on his birth certificate. At the age of three 'Percy' was still living in the village, but as a boarder with Fred and Fanny Turton and their five children.

Mary's Marriage

At some point Mary Cook met railway platelayer John Cantle of Temple Street, Keynsham. This could have been through John's daughter-in-law, Harriet from East Coker, who had also been in service in Walcot, Bath. John (born in 1824) and his first wife Leah (née Tipney) had married in July 1849, just 6 weeks after Leah's mother had died of cholera during the outbreak in Keynsham. Of John and Leah's eight children, my great grandmother Louisa was the third.

Seven months after Leah's death in 1887, John married Mary Cook in Twerton, Bath. He was 63, she was 41. Sixteen months later their only child, Ernest James, was born. By the time of the 1891 census the family had grown to include William

Cook, aged 14 and employed as a post errand boy. He was described as a nephew but was in fact Mary's son. However, within ten years William, once again known as Percy, had returned to board with the Turton family in Over Wallop. He was employed as a 'cattle yardsman'.

In September 1899, Mary's daughter 'Annie Cook' died at the age of 34. Like Mary she had been in service, first in Pulteney Street, Bath and later as a cook in a London mansion at 6 Charles Street, Mayfair. Annie died in Keynsham of 'cerebral congestion' with her mother present, although her death certificate describes Mary as her aunt.

The Missing Link?

Had Annie Cook left a 2 year old son when she died? Was *he* the boy named Robert who was brought up by Mary Cantle? Was she actually his grandmother?

The earliest reference to Robert Cantle is his admission to Bath Hill School on 1st February 1905. The School Entry Book states that his 'adopted mother, Mrs. M Cantle of Temple Street' gave his birth date as 29th September 1897. However, he is not listed anywhere in the 1901 census under the name of Robert Cantle or Robert Cook (or any variation of those names). Ernest Cantle completed the 1911 census return on behalf of his father John (86) and mother Mary (64). The other family members were his wife Elsie, baby daughter Madge and 13 year old schoolboy Robert, Mary's adopted son. A second daughter, Gladys Beatrice (Babs) was born to Ernest and Elsie in November 1912.

A Shocking Event

Before the end of the decade, the peace of Keynsham had been shattered by the First World War and the Cantle family had

been struck by two tragedies.

Possibly because of poor health or some other disability, when Robert Cantle enlisted for military service on 8th August 1917, he joined the 4th Territorial Force (Reserve) Battalion of the Duke of Edinburgh's Wiltshire Regiment, based at Sutton Veny in the Wylve Valley. Because of its close proximity to Warminster and Salisbury Plain the area was chosen for assembling and training troops. At one point there were 55,000 men camped at Codford, Longbridge Deverill and Sutton Veny.



The interior of one of the huts at Sutton Veny described by a World War One soldier as “this godforsaken place” (printed with the kind permission of the Dewey Museum, Warminster)

Only 24 hours later at No. 6 camp, and after ‘having his eyes seen to’, Robert joined his squad on the parade ground for the first time. After just 20 minutes, at 3.10pm, there was a crash and a sudden flash of lightning. It seemed to stagger everybody. Company Sergeant Major Henry James Bennett was brought to his knees and when he recovered he saw three men, two of whom were struggling on the ground. He immediately

rushed over and did what he could to organise respiration parties. The medical officer, Major Stocker, tried artificial respiration for about ten minutes. It was found that Robert Cantle had been killed, but the other two men recovered. Mary Cantle, as next of kin, was notified immediately by wire and informed that an inquest would be held two days later at the Military Hospital, Sutton Veny.

The Warminster & Westbury Journal & Wilts County Advertiser of Friday 17th August 1917 reported the inquest in great detail. The Coroner heard from witnesses that, although a storm had been brewing, there had been no lightning before the fatal flash. No-one in the squad was carrying a rifle or a bayonet. He remarked that it 'was curious that the squad struck was the one not carrying arms'. The deceased's cap was handed over to a witness with the crown ripped off and the wire rim expanded. The cap was not burnt. The Medical Officer had examined the body and found burns on the right side of the head and neck, the front of the chest and abdomen, extending down the inner side of the left leg and thigh to the foot. He believed death to have been instantaneous and caused by the effects of the lightning strike. Private Cantle had been identified by letters found in his pocket.

A Compounded Grief

The shock and horror felt by Robert Cantle's adoptive mother can only be guessed at, but within two years she was to experience further suffering. Her son Ernest returned safely from his service with the Somerset Light Infantry in India and resumed working with his wife in their High Street fishmongers business. A few months later, on 20th May 1919, presumably while playing at the bottom of the steep hill beyond the garden of the family's cottage in Temple Street, his younger daughter, Gladys (Babs), drowned in the River Chew. She was 6 years

old. Her grandmother Mary Cante died four years later (twelve years after her husband John) and was buried in Keynsham Cemetery with him and her daughter Annie, just feet away from her adopted son Robert.

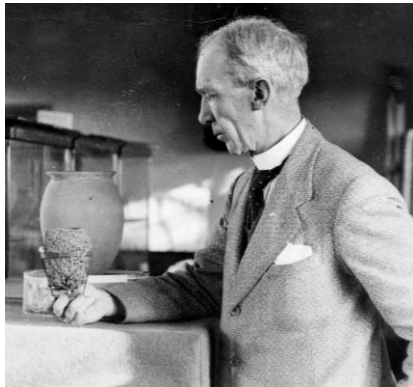
An Eerie Coincidence

It was a short while after becoming interested in Robert Cante's story that I collected from Mrs. Sheila McGrath a box of photographs. These had belonged to the late Miss Joyce Knight of Abbey Park, Keynsham, and were considered to be of interest to our Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society. Many of the photos had been taken by Miss Knight's uncle. He was the architect Ernest Hilton, who had designed and supervised the construction of Fry's factory at Somerdale in the early 1920s. His family had moved from Cheshire to Keynsham, where Ernest and his wife set up home in Stockwood Vale. After

scanning some of the photographs I was surprised to find a handwritten letter lying at the bottom of the box. It was



Gladys Beatrice Cante (Babs)



Ernest Hilton

incomplete - just one sheet of notepaper. From the content I concluded that it had been written by Ernest Hilton's wife to her brother, probably in August 1922:

Keynsham, Thursday

My dear Henry,

Ernest asked me to send you the enclosed £5-0-0 (Five). He has just left for Lynmouth & was very tired last night or he would have written to you himself. He was working late at the office - then doing all he could here. He thinks of coming back next Thursday & will do what he can for the ----? He has made a grand workshop just near the house. I am glad Puppy is improving & do hope he will not have any relapse to prevent his coming here soon. It is extremely quiet here at times - last week was a holiday with most of the people. I suppose it is a kind of Wakes week, when they hold all the shows around the district. The first part of the week all the shops closed & no one was working about here. It was so intensely still - not even a bird chirping at times nor a leaf moving. If Puppy will bring his bark with him, he will be heard for miles all round the hills. It has been very wet at times - but not floods like some parts of the country & it so quickly dries up.

There have been one or two distant peals of thunder but the man who brings me fish says the storms are never bad here. He has lived here all his life. His brother 19 was killed by lightning on his first parade on Salisbury plain at the beginning of the war. He didn't see him as he was at the war himself, but he was told he looked like a piece of burnt wood. He was brought here to be buried.

I am sending another newspaper. It gives a little idea of the grandeur of Bath. Ernest says this is only a small portion of it. I see from the railway guide 1911 Census there were 38,000 pop so it is much bigger than I thought. Milk is still only 4d a quart - I wish I could take more while it is so cheap but we can only

manage 1 quart a day. Tell Puppy he can have a pudding every day for his lunch. I'll have one ready when he comes. Ernest says on that night train Puppy could ride on the seat with a clean sack under him. He saw a lady getting into the train at Bristol last week with a dog on leash, no muzzle, it just went into the carriage with her. There is a

When I read the words ***“the man who brings me fish.....”*** My legs felt like jelly: I instinctively knew that this was about Ernest Cantle and ‘his brother’ Robert Cantle. It was an amazing coincidence that this very relevant fragment should have survived and come into *my* hands after so many years. It was incredible that, by chance, *I* happened to be the member of the Local History Society who collected the box of photos and that *I* had a connection with the people and the event mentioned in the letter.

On Reflection

So just what had I actually learned about Robert Cantle?

In reality, tantalisingly little, apart from the very detailed report of his sad death after one day in the Army. His relationship to his adopted mother remains the subject of conjecture. Despite having his (supposed) date of birth from his school entry record, I have so far been unable to trace his birth under the names Robert Cantle or Robert Cook.

To return to John Titford’s book: *“The fact is that family history is all about the lives and relationships of real people - and real people, in the last analysis, are not subject to being packaged and ‘databased’ in a way that might suit our yearning for tidiness. We’ll have to learn to live with uncertainties, loose ends, unanswered questions - all very frustrating but the rules of the game I’m afraid”*