

WHG John Stewart 27 September 2016 Recording B Wivenhoe

Fathers job at The Nook

My father was head gardener when Mr Corbin owned The Nook. I think it was about 5 ½ acres round from Belleview Road down to The Brook and all down one side of Park Road which was all orchard. There was a big strawberry ground. There were potato grounds. A walled garden, soft fruit trees everything. So it was quite big. And we used to go up after school when the cherries were ready and the strawberries were ready so we would always have a little feast up there. And they grew medlars as well. My Mum was always partial to medlars but I didn't like the look of them. That was a big garden. They grew a lot of produce there which I think must have gone to London market. Used to have a carrier or a lorry to come and take it away. I don't remember seeing it though. It was lovely. There was 2 cooks and my fathers in the garden and I remember stuff being picked and they used to take it up to the kitchen in the big carrier basket thing. It was a long time ago so I can't remember an awful lot about it. He was on his own just one person in charge of the garden. I don't remember him having anyone to help at any time.

I remember when I had just gone up to Brightlingsea school I was only about 10 or 11 but he shew me how to operate the cultivator, the rotivator, so many a weekend I spent on this cultivator or washing pots and crocks. They had a lovely big potting shed, a big one and big greenhouses cucumbers, melons they had a grape vine up there. The vine was grown outside the greenhouse then they knocked a hole in the greenhouse wall and the grape vine came through into the greenhouse because they like their roots in the shade and their heads in the sunshine. They grew 2 acres of strawberries. They grew just about anything you could want on a small holding. Sold in Wivenhoe... Barton's in Chapel Road opposite Phillip road.

We used to pick blackberries and elderberries too and take them (*to Barton's*) there. We used to collect Corona bottles back there. Take them in the front door, he'd give us threepence each for them. He'd take them out the back and put them in the crates and we ran round the back.... took them out the crates and take them back the next day. He did eventually catch on. He put barbed wire over the wall. Len Barton, he was a Special as well. Specials were like a volunteer Police force, do things that Police haven't got time to do like marshalling. But we never knew where he was, you always used to have to have one eye behind you because he could be round the next corner. I had to own up after all these years. They must have supplied stuff to Barton's I'm sure I've seen him come up with all his wooden trays, pick up lettuces cauliflowers tomatoes cucumbers I mean they grew everything.

My Dad didn't drive any vehicles for him Mr Corbin done all that work himself. Mr Corbin lived there with his family, a boy and a girl. H O Rice lived there and somebody else lived there because they used to hold Fetes and things there to raise money and then after Mr Corbin had it, he moved away and then the Bishops had it and they just let it go to rack and ruin and then it was sold off for Dene Park. Mr Corbin had 2 cooks Mrs Clark and Mrs Mark lived in Paget Road, then he had general home help round the house and me Dad doing the garden. I think that's all they had. I've no idea what Mr Corbin done.

First job

My first job was at Essex Electrical Services at Alresford on the main Road. They were auto electricians ..cars.... and my dad knew Friggy watts who owned it and in them days you didn't have to go and look for a job your Dad got you a job because he knew someone who wanted somebody. So it was

quite easy to get a job. So I started there in 1962. I was living in Anglesea Road then and I stayed there for about 4 years. Then I wanted to do something different so I left. I was in the stores. I issued all the spares for the workshop and I was on the main counter at the front. I answered the phones and made sure everything was there for when they came to pick them up.

If the garages were somewhere like Sudbury you had to get a part, wrap it up, put a ticket on it then leave it on the front. Then when the bus came up you had to leap over the counter, cross the main road, stop the bus and give them the parcel and that would go to Sudbury by bus and the garage would pick it up from Sudbury bus station and that worked quite well. They don't do that sort of thing now. Oh and I served petrol as well. A very varied job.

I think just before I left I was told I could be manager but he said, old John Watts said, I don't think you got any confidence so I won't give you that job....but it was ever so busy...no it would have been too much being the manager I think. It was ok working there. So so, but it wasn't really what I wanted to do. I wanted to work in the workshop and I found out...at least it looked like a really good job. I'd already been there 2 years and they said no you're too old to be an apprentice now, you're 18. So I stuck it for another year and then I moved on. I thought I think I'll become a welder, work in the shipyard but I couldn't get in there then so I don't know where I went, Woods I think, fan place, and then I went to North School, passed all my City and Guilds to become a pipe welder but when the course finished I had to have a job where I was welding all the time until the ?? came in October. This was in May which didn't work so I couldn't go pipe welding. I had moved out I was in Alma Street then.

First rented house at Alma Street

I was living at number 1 Alma Street next to Jack Mallets hardware shop. I loved living there... brought back memories when I lived there as a tiny tot. In the summer I could make my breakfast, put it on a tray with my coffee and I would walk down and sit on the old crane on The Quay and have me breakfast there, 7 o'clock in the morning at the weekend. Had loads of parties. Used to make a whole load of homemade wine so when we all piled out the pub they used to come back and try this homemade wine. I remember getting up, going to work, stepping over all these bodies lying on the floor and I'd say don't forget to shut the door when you leave. Everything was always tidied up, breakfast things put away. That was really good. I think all sorts of modern things like washing machines and tumble driers came out then so I had to have them and I was earning good money. People were quite impressed. So if I hadn't got anything to wear and I wanted to go out I could wash it and put it in the tumble drier and it would be ready for me. The village still hadn't altered much and all the pubs at the bottom had their own locals. If you wanted to meet somebody you knew which pub to go to. Then about 10 o'clock they'd all start moving round to a different pub. So they'd all begin at their own local. They'd go Station, Rose and Crown then Black Buoy. That was the three main ones.

Lower Wivenhoe Shops 1960's

The only thing that took a bit of getting used to was Sunday mornings when you were hung over and they would start ringing the bells because it was quite close to the church but all in all it was a nice area because the shops were just round the corner. Fish shop round the corner, butchers at the bottom of the road on Black Buoy Hill. That was a Coop butchers. Before Jack Mallets you had Mrs Chick, old lady and I think they had evacuees in there during the war, then Greens Fish Shop where it still is now, Edwin Greens, and the other side of the road I am sure there was a bakers. I used to buy bread and stuff but I think they also sold milk where Nonsuch House is. Ennews I think. A bit further

round on Anchor Hill a little lean to place that was McKewans another grocer shop and then you had the Deli the other side of the road, then Charlie Taylors bakery what is the Bake House now and if you went round that bit at 7 o'clock in the morning you get bread and rolls that just come out the oven. That was a wood fire as well. That was beautiful beautiful bread.

The other side of the road there was Cyril Browns hairdressers and he'd talk your hair off. He never stopped talking from the minute you got in there and everything was pudden basin style haircut. The other side of the road from him, right next to the church was old man Ketley. He repaired bikes and done car spares and stuff. And then where Valentino's is now was Halcyon Mckay's. They were bakers. Had lovely cakes in there.

They all flourished in the '60's because the supermarkets hadn't been built and everybody well more or less at least half of Wivenhoe worked in the shipyards and the port so there was always people wanting food so there was plenty of food shops and nobody went in to town shopping they always bought local.

There was loads of shops and next door to Halceys was old Mr Smiths that was a confectioner on the corner of ? Lane. He sold sweets and stuff and I can't remember what was next door and next door to that was Masons sold television and things, repaired tellies. And then there was the paper shop. Then a couple of doors up was Ravens the grocers and he still sold stuff in little blue bags. He had sacks of stuff and I was always told, when you go in there boy if you ask for sugar don't let him take it out the sack cos you'll see all them little black bits on top where the mice have been. When you do my shopping he said I don't want you to bring it home and you have to sieve it all out. He just used to weigh it into little blue bags and fold the tops over. Cheese and bacon and ham was still on the old slicer and I remember he had a great big wooden board with cheese on and a cheese wire cutter. The Grosvenor was next door to Ravens. That was still open that was still a pub.

Not really characters apart from Mr Barr, oh and of course Holy Jo on the corner of Alma Street. It was supposed to be a shop, used to be Fluxes old shop. Because he was an Evangelist he used to spend a couple of hours in his shop and then he'd shut up and then he'd get his big banner out and he'd march up and down the road and when we was there, kids, we used to go in there with a bamboo stick and try and hold the bell up and open the door when he tried to come out and then go in there and help ourselves to whatever was on the counter. I look back now and I think ohhh. He must have had weeks when everything was stolen. Nobody went in there in the end. It was all Bless You Bless you and he'd give you text to read and then he died and the place closed down. It used to be another pub. The old Live and Let Live on the corner of Alma Street and Brook Street. Shops stopped there. Terry Endean had the Coop butchers and Holy Jo had the sweet shop there was nothing after that. Till you went right round near the fire station then you had the Brewery Tavern. That was it I don't remember any other shops.

Work in the 70's

I had a job with Whymark, structural steel, engineers and welders. I went all over the country it was a great job. You'd work away for a week just come home at weekends or you could stay on site for the weekend and you could earn time and a half, you could earn really good money. Trouble is working away, it's not very glamorous because all the money you earn there is nothing to do in the evening so you go and get something to eat and you go in the pub and spend all your money. I grew up and thought blow this I'm not spending all my money in the pub so I used to save as much as I could.

What about friends? I think they worked in Colchester mainly or surrounding area. Most of them were plant fitters and motor mechanics, some of them worked in the shipyard.

People in the shipyard were welders boilermakers fitters platers and joiners. They had some really good joiners, carpenters. It was all quality work they turned out. That was up to about the 70s. There was also another yard on the port side, Wivenhoe shipyard, a few worked there until that closed down. There was just a few worked on the farms but most worked in Colchester at places like Paxmans, Woods and the Lathe Company, big employers. A lot of Wivenhoe people actually worked there. It was only a handful fishing. There really wasn't much of a fishing trade. I think it was about 3 boats out at the time and now we haven't got any apart from Rodney Bowes. About 60's/70's and then the 80's the Port came to Wivenhoe and that took all local labour. They employed a lot of local people. That's how the shops survived I suppose. I don't think many people had freezers, people shopped from day to day. The lady of the house would shop every day. So they always got fresh food.

Pubs

Working class people. Like The Station was the best of the village pubs. That was a lovely pub. I mean you got the odd person who worked in London who would pop in as they got off the train but maybe one or two but nowadays you get quite a few in there. First when I went there, there was Ron Chaney and then Colin Andrews and Fay. They kept it for quite a long time then the Czech fella, he kept it for quite a long time. We used to have a nice big roaring log fire in there. I remember coming back one night with Dave Alison and he said, "Shall we go for a pint" and I had me waders on and guns with me and he said "That'll be all right", and we just stood the guns up in the corner took our welly boots off and sat on the bar with just our socks on and nobody said a word. I mean if you took a gun in there you'd get arrested but in them days it were different. A bit more easy going I think. When you walked in the door you were greeted by this great big wall of smoke because everybody smoked then. The walls were brown or green and the ceiling was orangey yellow, nicotine. It was an old fashioned pub.

It was just when pubs were going over to fizzy keg beer and juke boxes and things like that were there, not at the Station I don't think but The Falcon was open and that was a good local pub. It was run by Stefan Motyka. He was Polish. I remember at Christmas time you always got a special treat. He used to bring out a bottle of Polish spirit and I always remember this stuff, you only got a little tiny glass on Christmas Day and as you drank it, it made your lips go numb. It would evaporate before you could drink it but you always had to drink it straight down. That was evil stuff and that came off the Polish timber boats. They all got done for smuggling, Stefan at The Falcon, bottles of Polish spirit and Cyril Brown he got done because he had a couple of ? of cigarettes because they had come off of the boats. In fact the Black gang, the customs gang, had a purge one week. One night this Polish boat had come up and one of the crew got off, I remember this as clear as day, he was walking up out of the shipyard to the Port as it was then and these customs blokes jumped over Mrs Marvin's wall to arrest him so he turned round picked up a lump of wood and hit them across the head with it and he landed a couple of these custom blokes. Anyway he got arrested and they found all these cigarettes and booze on him. Anyway eventually he told them where it was going and I think the Captain had to pay his fine whatever it was. They didn't arrest him before they let the ship leave port.

Time at Whitehead Engineering, contraband at Wivenhoe port.

I worked briefly at Whitehead engineering which was in the Port itself. It was completely separate from them. Came from Harlow I think. They did marine outboard engines and they used to do all sorts of bits and bobs for them. I think there was a foreman there he got this thing going with the boats because we were in the same part of the yard. All the crews came off and he had a locker full of stuff and then this bloke come and we thought he wanted something made and he came over and said, "Hmm it's a good little factory here", and he said, "Perks, you know, can you get anything done cheap?" "Not really" he said, "but I can do a nice line in spirits, cigarettes." "Really" And he got his wallet out and he shew it to him. I remember seeing his face drop. It was the old Customs and Excise. "I'd like to look at your locker." Cor when he opened it, well I didn't realise he had got so much stuff in there. Well it was all contraband cigarettes, booze and loads of work shirts, boots, trousers, off the Polish boats. I think he was from Brightlingsea. He had contacts. You always knew somebody who knew where to get the stuff from. That's how it worked.

Everybody was smoking these fags in the pub and you knew they hadn't paid duty on them cause they'd got all this foreign writing on them and whenever you went round someone's house they had crates of beer with foreign sounding names on them. So you knew it had all come off of boats. Just the Polish boats. We did have a Russian one up here and that was another strange set up. Huge boat. Could only get up when there was high Spring tides. It had a Hammer and Sickle on the front. And the boys started to unload it and one of them down in the hold was taking these strops off some wood and he looked up and there was a bloke on the bridge with a machine gun. So they all went out on strike and said we are not unloading the ship while he's there. Anyway turns out this bloke with a machine gun was there to stop the crew jumping ship. There was one young fellow jumped ship there and I don't know what happened to him but he never went back on the boat. So that was the last time we had any boats in the yard that were Russian. They wouldn't unload them. That was the one and only ship that were Russian that was up here.

I used to repair the holds. They dropped the grab in the holds when they had soya meal or coal. Mainly soya meal. After the timber yards closed it was mainly cargo boats came up and they used to bring up loads and loads of soya meal. I dunno where it went. Sometimes the grabber would hit the hold bottom and would spilt it and when these boats..., ships.... whatever you want to call them, when they went back empty they had to pump salt water into the tanks underneath the deck.... underneath the hold for ballast...so it would hang a bit easier. I used to go down and weld them up so they could get away. Very often the old engineer would say, "Lovely, well done" in broken English. "Have beer", and he'd give you half a crate of beer.

I was down there one day and I'd just finished welding and it was about 6 o'clock cause I had to work with the tides so it weren't from 8 o'clock to 5 o'clock, If there was a boat that needed repairing you had to sit there and wait for it to be finished unloading and you could be there anytime up to 8... 9 o'clock at night. And there was a Danish ship I can't think of the name of it now, big iron ship. So I was sitting on top the hold looking down seeing how fay they'd got and the old engineer on the boat came up and said, "You repair big hole" and I said "It's not a big hole it's a split." He said "You come and have something to eat" and they had this funny black bread. I said "I'll have a beer instead." Any way they had some ordinary bread and I had a quite a nice... salads and meat and... but they were all munching away on this black bread. It was like that you know crisp bread... it was jet black. You know something that Danish people eat. But they were lovely people. They were in such a hurry they started to pull the hatch covers off. I said "No no, I haven't finished yet." Anyway they said "We'll put the last one on. You come out up through the stairs" and I always remember I was trying to

weld this split and every time I got to the end of this split cause there was so much heat that turned the water to steam and it kept blowing the end of this weld off. I thought I'll sit and wait for it to go and I heard the engine start and I thought, oh my God, and I ran up trying to get all me gear off and he said, "That had you worried. You thought you were gonna end up in Denmark." But they'd just run the donkey engine to get some power on the boats for lights and whatever. That was quite frightening I had visions of getting out of the hatch and being half way across the North Sea. It was a good time. I loved working on boats. So I was working at the same place but instead of going round doing site work I had a spell there 6 months in the workshop. That's when we first started repairing the boats that came in, pipe work and stuff like that. It wasn't the best job I ever had. I got made redundant after 25 years. 25 years I worked there. Any way it was a time when a lot of people were getting laid off.

Other jobs before Retirement

End of the 90s may be and I saw this job advertised in the paper. It said engineer wanted Ministry of Defence. I thought it would be out of my league but there was nothing else about and I weren't going to go on the dole so I thought I'd apply for it. It was the cushiest job I've ever had. It was in Colchester. All you had to do was go round all these army places, go in the married quarters to the playpark areas. There is a lot of vandalism so because of insurance they had to check all of them. So you just repaired what you could and if not tell them and they got it done. Colchester barracks, Karma barracks near Cambridge, Watcham airbase across to Woodbridge and back to Colchester. Some days I'd be home at one o'clock finished or I'd take my dinner with me and go and park up on the beach for the rest of the afternoon. Sunbathing. I never saw anybody. I used to just take my time sheets and worksheets, put them through the door. There was never anybody there.

I used to stop at all these little stalls in the countryside. I had a list of what people wanted, I got me own brand new van. It was lovely. I think it only ran for 3 years then it was included in someone else's job. I was really upset.

So then I went on Royal mail and I stayed there until I retired. I was sent to Colchester and all over Essex. I never had a round in one place. They said, go to Mersea, go to Tiptree, Castle Hedingham, Halsted. I went everywhere. I didn't know the rounds. Just used to turn up. They'd give you a bag with all the mail in. Give you a map. Say that's where you start and that's where you finish. Off you go. Someone had marked it out. It was all in numerical order. You couldn't go wrong. I had an 8 hour contract. That's all I had, 8 hours a week. I said I can't live on that but they said, you'll be alright. It turned out I got paid normal rate for 8 hours, that was Saturday, then from Monday to Friday I was on time and a half. Like 40 hours at time and a half. I was rolling money. That kept me really fit. I was earning more than postmen that had been there 20 years. Then I retired and thought what'll I do so I bought a boat.

People and Pubs

Alma Street was a bit of a special place. I grew up there and Saturday morning was when you earned your pocket money. A lot of people lived in the street...like Ernie Turner who done the primitive paintings I used to do his shopping for him on a Saturday. Give me a shopping basket and a list... off you go. So you'd just do all the local shops... get his bread, milk, meat, all his provisions. Things like that and he used to give you a tanner, sixpence, for doing it and I never asked him for a painting. They were on old scraps of board that he'd borrowed or begged from the shipyard. I think his paints were old shipyard paint and now they're worth a fortune. I can't believe it and I've gone a bit off tack but we used to drink in the Black Buoy on Friday night and Dennis and Dickie Chopping used to

come in there with Francis Bacon and when he was sober he was a really nice bloke. I mean he was a grotesque looking man but when he was sober he was all right to talk to. He wanted to know mainly what went on in the village when we was younger and things like that. He were interested. And I thought why I didn't ask him for a sketch I would have been a millionaire now. We used to drink with them on a Friday night... really good laugh. Dennis Wirth Miller and Dickie Chopin would come bursting in at the door and say, "We've had a good night at Montecarlo the drinks are on us" and he'd get this great big wood announcer and of course we boys we loved it. Just drink your heart away until you fell over and you hadn't got to pay for it. It happened quite regularly. I don't know if they did go to Montecarlo but they used to come back with lots and lots of money. Black Buoy on a Saturday night at that time had a jazz club in the back room where there is a restaurant now. People would come in there like Ernie Woods. He used to eat daffodil bulbs and razor blades and things like that. He used to live in Station Road. He was quite a clever man. He was brilliant sheet metal worker.

We used to progress from the Black Buoy to the Station and then from The Station we went to The Greyhound. It was a lovely pub that. Harry and Grace Maudsley kept it and we always used to go in there on a Saturday dinner time about 12 o'clock and they had a terrific darts team. They were all local men, a really nice bunch. Anyway one morning we were in there and Grace she said, "Edward have you been messing about?" and he said "No Grace" and she said "Well where's the life boat?" He said "I've put it in the sink see if it will float with all the money in it." "Right" she said "You're barred." He used to get barred every Saturday then he'd be back again Sunday. Sunday dinner time we went in there for a normal drink and he came in there with the biggest bunch of daffodils you've ever seen huge they were very impressive and he said "Grace I'm so sorry I've brought you these flowers." "Oo" she said "I'll go and get a vase." She said "I can't bar you." "I should think not" he said "I went to a lot of trouble getting these daffodils." "Do you know what" she said "I've got some exactly like that at the back" and that's where Ted had got them from because he'd nipped round the back because that's where the toilets were. So the next Saturday he was barred again for pinching all the flowers. It was a good pub. They was nearly all shipyard workers in there.

Everybody new everybody. You had no secrets in Wivenhoe in them days. There weren't that many pubs around then. People say oh there were 21 pubs but there was only about a dozen open at any one time or less than that. We never went any further than the Park Hotel. That was good. They used to have rock bands on a Saturday night. People would be spilling out all into the High Street. That was good old Mac McKay and his son was a draughtsman at Cooks. Even the publicans had sons that worked in the shipyard. Everyone had someone who worked at the shipyard. A son a brother an auntie or uncle anybody.

So you start at the Black Buoy, had one in the Rose and Crown then you walk down to The Station have a couple in there and if you could manage it you'd walk up to The Greyhound probably have one in there and then sometimes after that they'd walk up to The Park Hotel. Oh and The Grosvenor was open on the corner of Station Road but we never went in there. It was more like a transport café. It was all bright and white. It was horrible. That's why we liked the Station. It was all brown and yellow. You could go in there with your working clothes on. Nobody said anything. I mean you still got a few now, Black Buoy, Station, Rose and Crown, Greyhound. You haven't got The Park Hotel but the Grosvenor closed years and years ago.

Brewery Tavern was still open. Thursday night's we used to go there because that was when the firemen were supposed to have their drill practice. They had more drill practice in the pub than they did across the road. That was nice little pub on them nights but it was like Thursday was a great night

everybody went on a Thursday night and the rest of the week there'd be nobody in there. But the main ones were busy all the time. They had their own group of locals. After they'd been in their own pub for couple or three hours they got restless and they'd all sort of move round in this circle. So there were lots of people but you'd already seem them in all the other pubs beforehand. It was the same people, except the staunch locals who stick in their own pub whatever.

The Falcon was a Saturday night pub and they'd have some old governor on the piano on the stage and when Stefan moved down he had the juke box fitted just inside the door and you'd say, "Can I have a burger Stef" and he'll say, "I'll go and cook you one" and he'd disappear out the back and we would lift the corner of the juke box up and drop it on the floor and get three plays for nothing and he'd come back with your burger and say, "I know what you lot been up to . I haven't heard that Juke box go off, I haven't heard anybody put any money in." There was only 3 or 4 pubs I ever went in the rest were always a bit quiet and then we discovered night clubs and then Friday nights and Saturday nights we were always in Colchester. So the poor old pubs got left for just during the week or we used to go to the university. They used to have rock bands up there. Woods on a Sunday night that was good. They were all bands. In the Woods main sports hall at Braiswick.

I was in my 20's I suppose. The pubs changed. There were less people you know. People got married they stopped going in the pub. You start to lose all the locals that you knew. Then you hadn't been in the pub for a few years, you went in and you didn't know anybody. That's the way village life goes. If you leave a gap, go back and it's all changed.