

## Memories of life in Wivenhoe during WW2 – Roger Bacon

REF WHG006

*Helen Polom interviewing Roger Bacon in his home at Tiptree 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019*

*Can you begin by telling me when you were born and how you came to be living in Wivenhoe*

Right, I was born in Elmstead Road Colchester where the university is and on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1930 and when I was 4 my father who was a railway policeman was moved from Colchester to Fenchurch Street. He hadn't been there very long before he became very ill and had a tumour on the brain which meant an operation which happened in 1936 in October. He didn't survive very long 2 hours after the operation and it was on the same day that Gershwin had the same operation in America and he also did not last long after the operation. They were pioneering days. That night my aunt and uncle put my brother and myself on the grey green bus to Wivenhoe where we went to my grandparents, my mother's parents 3 Manor Road in Wivenhoe. My grandfather realised that with 5 people in the house it would be rather difficult and so in March 1937 he had a house built in the Avenue... which was an orchard ... and it was semidetached built by Chamberlain who lived in Rectory Hill and Chamberlain kept one and sold it to Mr Waite the coalman and we lived there for many years. My grandparents had had an interesting life before that because when he finished his apprenticeship in 1880 something he walked from Newark to Wivenhoe to find work in Rene Forrest the shipyard. He lodged in the Station Hotel and met my grandmother who lived in West Street so he worked in the shipyard and then it folded up so after that he worked in the sand pit running the steam engine that worked the plant so he was nearly 70 I think when we arrived and we moved to The Avenue. He called it Ropsley and it was after a village in Lincolnshire somewhere near Newark and Mr Waite the Coalman he lived in the next door one.

*How did you know war had started? What are your memories of the start of the war?*

Right then I went to Wivenhoe school and Manor Road, Stanley Road, Manor Road were all unmade roads so we walked to school and on a rainy day we would have rivers and we made a dam and all sorts like that and in winter the ice was on the puddles etc etc and I always remember Mr Sainty's shop which was just round the corner of Manor Road where you could get sweets and he made his own ice-cream and there were quite a number of youngsters altogether there playing football on what was called Spion Kop. In Wivenhoe School there were still in the early days girls who had yet to go to Brightlingsea. So there were secondary girls there for a while and there was a major event before the Second World War, the Coronation, and I can remember that clearly that they had a procession right round Wivenhoe and it was led by Percy Chaney dressed as a pirate and Percy Chaney had a shop on the corner of Queens Road. We had Miss Grasby's car decorated as the old woman who lived in the shoe and we were the children and we towed this car, the juniors, and we were dressed with red berets white shirts and navy blue trousers and we carried a spoon *laughs*

*And what year was that?*

'37 the Coronation so that was the lead up to the war really. And we had a senior girl holding our hands as we went round Wivenhoe, we were only second year juniors in '37, I was 7.

*And this was Phillip Road School you were at?*

So I went to that school and my first teacher was Miss Reason, good name for a teacher, and of course the head mistress was the awesome Miss Smith. I only crossed swords with her the once in the time I was there and that was she called me in, I was captain of the school team football and also captain of the yellow house team. Why is it your team always loses and I said Miss Smith you chose the team. Get out! And she made me stand outside her office for an hour and then said get back to your room. That was the sort of frightening days in a primary school. During the war as I went through the school I was taught by Mr Wiseman and Mr Wiseman in 1940 was called up into the RAF. Later in my life when I started teaching Mr Wiseman became my head master. Our first headmaster at Tiptree, Thurstable, had died after 18 months because he'd had a heart attack and somebody in the staffroom said there's our new head coming down the drive and it was Mr Wiseman and I thought oh no he taught me and he's a geographer and I'm teaching geography but it wasn't bad news it was good news because whatever I did he gave me support. But that is a strange thing that should happen in a primary school. The 11+ continued during the war and when he left Miss Smith took over his class so we were prepared for the 11+. In that class the following pupils all passed the 11+ myself, Peter Knapper, John Dann, Richard Dennier, Alan Green, and Ann Dutton. The boys went to Colchester Grammar School and Ann Dutton went to The Friends School at Bishops Stortford and Claire Slaughter and Dorothy Lee went to The Girls High School. So out of that in our village quite a considerable number of people passing the 11+ and then 2 years later from the same class Tony Durrell, Peter Sainty, Alan Barnes and Alan Harvey went to the Technical College well school it was.

*So do you think it was a good little school?*

It must have been yes

*What went on in terms of preparations at the school for the war?*

The main thing to do with the school was the fact that we had air raid shelters built in the playground so we lost some of our playground and we'd lost our teacher Mr Wiseman and the windows of the school classrooms were plastered over with sticky tape so that they didn't fall in if there was an air raid. In 1940 there were quite a number of air raids. We did spend a fair amount of time in air raid shelters mainly doing Chinese whispers.

*How did that work?*

Quite often the air raid had finished before we got all the way round

*So where was the siren... there must have been a noise to tell you?*

The air raid siren in the village

*Any idea where it was?*

Somewhere near the council offices at Little Wick. I wouldn't be sure of that. And the following year the following youngsters passed the 11+ and that was my brother John, Johnny Braithwaite, Frank Pike, John Headsorn and Valerie Peck went to the Girls High School. So these are all local people and local names. I thought that might be of interest. Then we were surrounded by war so we're going to school in Colchester and we had to get the bus at half past eight, after 8 o'clock, and come home on

the 4.30 bus because all the other buses were for workers only. If we missed the bus we had to walk but it did have one benefit you could never be put into detention and another important factor was that we had school dinners which helped with food rationing because they didn't take anything off the ration book so we had a good meal every day.

*Did you pay for that?*

No I don't think so but we wouldn't anyway because my mother was a widow and interestingly as far as that's concerned she had a widows pension of 10 shillings a week 7/ 6 for me and nothing for my brother. They talk about benefits to day erm so the war had a big effect on a boy growing up. You shouldn't glorify war but with all this around... the shipyards opened up. In the first part it built wooden submarines and as a boy I couldn't understand how you could have a wooden submarine and of course what they were doing was they were making decoys which were put out the front in Harwich harbour and the Germans bombed them but the real submarines were in the harbour so that made sense then erm the orchard that had an AK AK gun at the back of us in the first part of the war during the night and then it would disappear and come back the next night

*That was on The Avenue behind you? So that's near where the telephone exchange is now?*

In my day there was a lane going into Ernest Road called Smiths. The orchard started opposite that and continued up to our house and at the back of that was an orchard that went right back to Wivenhoe woods and that was there in 1939. It was there in '37 so eventually the other side of my mother's house I bought when I married and I named it Orchard End because it was the end of the orchard in 2 ways. Once that was built that opened it up and that became the council estate.

*You were saying about the AK AK gun behind the house and other things would you just like to tell us a little bit more about that?*

Well you know as a boy these soldiers there with this gun and the thought that they might be shooting down planes you know was quite interesting as a boy and then other things happened Wivenhoe Park was taken over by the Government War Department and the first people there were the Free Czech army and they were there for some time they were the first people. The second contingent were the Black Watch Regiment and they were followed by the Tank Regiment and then finally by the SAS. The interesting ones were the tanks because they came down to Cedi Pecks garage to fill up with petrol and there were marks on the kerbs for many years after the war where there tracks caught the kerbs and then finally when the SAS were there they came down and filled up with petrol and then disappeared for a fortnight. They were heavily armed they'd got machine guns they'd got hand grenades and goodness knows what and they were manned by 4 people

*And did you see them...*

Oh yes and you'd think ahh they're going away and when they went they dropped in behind the German lines and they blasted their way through so a fortnight later they reappeared with swastikas from their aerials and bras and things.

*And you saw that on The Avenue did you?*

Yes yes you can imagine as a lad growing up with all that going on. The ship yard continued....

*(few seconds interruption 17.08)*

My grandfather was taken back into the shipyard and he was in his 70's by then and I used to have to go down at night 7 o'clock and meet him at the railway bridge and carry his case home in the black out because my grandmother was frightened he would walk into a lamppost or something... so again I'm in the war. Then Vospers were bombed out of Portsmouth and came and built er rebuilt the shipyard really. Husks built yachts before the war... and build motor torpedo boats so we had that going on and then occasionally I think on 2 occasions we had Dutch sailors come into the village to take over mine sweepers too and that was all connected with Rowhedge shipyard. Men came across the ferry to various jobs. Then before D Day they built parts. They built caissons for the Mulberry Harbour down on the marshes and there another fascination with war.

Then in the early part of the war a Junkers 88 bomber crashed on Vine Farm land and my brother went up, I never went, but my brother went and picked up Perspex which they made with crosses and rings etc etc which was a boy thing to do but later in the war in the last part of the war when the Americans were doing a thousand bomber raids they were escorted by Thunderbolt fighters from Langham or Boxted I think they now call it and I was on top of my grandmothers chicken shed 1919 creosoting it and I saw this Thunderbolt coming in and he was trailing smoke and I thought to myself you'll be all right you haven't got far to go and I'd only just thought that and suddenly he just dropped like a stone and he crashed on the corner of the allotments and the cricket pitch. I was the first one there. His name was Captain Simpson because I picked up his identity card. Policeman came...

What are you doing?

I came to be of any help and I have got his identification card.

I'll have that now clear off...

but I was the first one there. It was just a mass of debris and err I can see that now. And an interesting thing about the cricket pitch was Mr W G Loveless who was Manager... Director of the sandpit put his sheep on it in the war so it wouldn't get ploughed up

*You were talking about the crash and I presume the pilot died?*

Yes yes it brings home to you the horrors of war and you know it was quite emotional I was quite affected by it. Those thousand bomber raids they had those fighters with fuel tanks and when they were empty they used to drop them and we picked them up and made canoes out of them.

*So when you say they were dropped was it over the marshes?*

Yes mostly down on the marshes and one day we were over on Sunnymead farm and it was a disused sandpit and there was stream running through and we had fun there and ponds and so on. We were building rafts with these emergency tanks. German fighter came over and he must have thought we were something to do with the war because we heard the bullets go whistling through the trees and he was being chased by a Spitfire.

*So he was strafing the... so how did you feel at that point?*

I don't know I can't recollect how I felt. Felt we were part of the war I suppose... very much in it and you stand back and you think oh dear me but the interesting thing was ...my mother and my grandparents never worried about us boys going out you know.... now you wouldn't let them out of your sight but we just you to get on our bikes and go and we'd go for the day

Then while we were at school, grammar school, we had a lot of holidays, 8 weeks in the summer. Now there was a slogan "Lend a hand on the land" and I went and worked at the Wivenhoe Sand and Gravel in the holidays and I think I actually, I think I said last night, I did every job on the farm with horses and the only job I never did was milk cows because we never had any. We had bullocks which were fattened up. So on that farm it was arable, 4 horses in pairs and if I worked with the horse it would be Prince or Regent, Suffolk horses, and I ploughed with a horse. Opened up to put potatoes in. German prisoners and Italian prisoners came to plant the potatoes and of course they came to pick 'em up in harvest time and then I had a tumbrial

*a cart?*

Yes a single cart with a single horse. I was in charge of the horse. I was only 14 but then people left school at 14 and 15 didn't they and I had a German prisoner working with me. He was very strong. The German prisoners, well the Italian prisoners then loaded them into sacks on to the tumbrial, took them to the end of the field where the farm workers they made a uhm....a stack of potatoes it was covered in thatch. And they were riddled out later. There were orders...no fraternization. We weren't allowed to speak but how can you work with a German prisoner... he's got one end I've got the other loading up without speaking? And he came from the Rhineland his father was a farmer and after the war he was going back to Germany and be with his father. The Italians loved being there. They were out of the war. They were happy they were "manjana" but the Germans were upset, disappointed, sullen, but the interesting thing... they only came with an escort of 2 soldiers and there was no attempt to escape.

*Did you know any of their names?*

No No No The Germans were from Berechurch and the Italians were from Weeley woods. There was an Italian camp there. We didn't know who we were going to get but the War Agricultural Committee just sent whoever was available.

Other things I did on the farm you know combine harvesters... what was cut into sheaves and you worked in pairs.. you took 4 sheaves each and made a trave... it's sometimes called a stook but in North Essex it was a trave and then of course they were left to dry out for a couple of weeks and then we had to take them down to the farm so we could load up the carts. Again I was in charge of a lead horse... 2 horses to the cart... wagon... and then we got down to the farm and built a stack and when it got up to a certain height they had to throw it off the cart on to the stack and they made a hole in the stack called a bully hole and I became a bully boy because I was quite a big lad and then I passed it up to the stack and then Easter time may be in the holiday we'd be threshing and then I'd have a job on the chaff box... the dirtiest filthiest job on the farm and I used to go home looking black.

*So how did that work. What did you do?*

I had to... when the threshing machine had got the wheat... went out one end into sacks and at the other end the chaff came out into a sack which was then fed to horses and to cattle during the winter and there was a chaff room and there was all this dust no health and safety there.

*I wonder if you can remember how much you were paid for doing that?*

Not a lot... I've got a feeling it was something like 30 shillings a week but we got extra rations during the war... extra sugar, butter, meat. I think all farm workers got extra rations during the war. Only during that period though not all through out.

*Did you take lunch with you?*

Yes. Nicely cut sandwiches and I felt totally embarrassed... my mum cut these nicely cut sandwiches and the farm workers had a crust of bread, a knife, a piece of cheese and an onion... that was there 10s's. At lunch time more often than not I cycled home but 10s quite embarrassing my nicely cut sandwiches. And they also had Corona bottles with cold tea

*And you had?*

Corona.

Farming was on all sorts of land. The orchard was grubbed up with a steamroller which had like a chain on the back and all the apple trees were uprooted and burnt and then Wivenhoe Sand and Gravel farm farmed that because WG Loveless was Chair of the War Agricultural Committee and Spion Kop which was our playground was all ploughed up and Claud Watcham had that. Interesting happening at Sunny Mead farm. In the early part of the war they grew sunflowers and we used to go and cut sunflower heads. We had a sack tied around our neck and a knife and we cut the head off and put it in the sack and then when we got to the end of a row... put it on a cart and the seeds were taken away to be made into margarine. So that was an interesting crop. The other thing was the sheep were hurdled... they were put into hurdles and they were moved along each day and they were called The Golden Hoof because they were eating and also fertilizing the land.

*Can you tell me where the orchards were?*

On the Avenue... yes... apples were grubbed up. Wheat potatoes arable crops. The sheep were on the cricket pitch and also on the land which wasn't being excavated for tarmac and so on. They also had pigs. They had Tottenham Pudding. This was waste food that was coming out of London and you get a lorry load of this and you fed it to the pigs and it was called Tottenham Pudding... now the pigs were very careful what they ate so the troughs when they finished had spoons and saucers and goodness knows what... it was another interesting feature.

*Where were the pigs I know some people had their own pigs...*

Tony Forsgate's father had pigs. The pigs were on farms... there were farm buildings on the far side of the sand pit. I think they've gone now and there were also some buildings on The Glebe field next to the Rectory and they may well have gone now. They were the opposite end of Chamberlains Lake and they had pigs there and that meant work.

*Did you work with the pigs?*

Yes and I remember one day one sheep lost its legs as it were and I had to go with the farm foreman and put it on a hurdle like a stretcher and carry it to be on its own. The other thing they had there were geese and the geese were on the lakes of the sandpit and there were also poultry. They were all to be fed and I remember that and then I always remember in the early part of the war, we always worked as a group, the grammar school boys, and we used to go out at night in the harvest...

we weren't working ourselves... we would go to fields where they were cutting wheat barley whatever and catch rabbits as they ran out of the corn. I remember one year I got 14... I got 14 notches on the stick and then I used to sell them. They went for about 2 and 6 pence. It was meat in the war.

*So did you sell them to people you knew?*

Local people... yes... neighbours well I didn't charge. Would you like a rabbit well here's half a crown and my mother during the war collected national savings for Wivenhoe raising money for a Spitfire. The Spitfire fund.

*Do you know any more about the Spitfire fund?*

There was a board up with totals going up as you went past in the High Street near the Council Offices which showed how far we'd got for the target and there other things that they did to raise money. Another thing that we did was in our holidays when we weren't working on farms or whatever we collected blackberries and one of the best places was the Broomie you know towards the university and I can remember one day we had a tin bath you know one of the those big tin baths... we filled that with blackberries. This was the grammar school boys and we took it to Mrs Springett across the ferry in Rowhedge and she passed it on the WI over there and they made it into jam. Wivenhoe were doing something else. Mrs Springett gave us sixpence or something... a whatever. It wasn't megabucks but as far as we were concerned it was a war effort.

*Was there a feeling that people wanted to do something?*

Oh yes a tremendous effort. Now that reminds me another thing we did. Tony Forsgate's father and Peter Knapper's father lived next door to one another... were part of the committee of raising money for the troops when they came back. It was called The Welcome Home Fund and it was in what was called The Forrester's hall where there was a dance on a Saturday night and there'd be an army band... dance band or on some occasions an American dance band you know Glenn Miller style from Boxford or Wormingford... they were the nearest bases and we on a Saturday afternoon would be getting chairs out and sprinkling the floor with Boracic crystals to make it slippery for dancing and they would have a spotlight at night on a crystal ball for the last dance you know.

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I'd walk home on my own in the black out at midnight and my mother didn't bat a hair. No I bet she wouldn't do that now.

*It was the times wasn't it?*

You could do it... yes people looked after one another and that was another thing that we did I was still at school and all these things going on.

The other thing of interest we see the Tesco and the Waitrose delivering.... most of the groceries in those days were delivered. I as I went off to school would drop off my grandmother's grocery book with her order on a Thursday and it would be delivered on Friday or Saturday by handcart. Because of what we were doing... what my parents and grandparents were doing... we weren't able to take any evacuees and I didn't have any contact with them. We went to school in the morning... well I can't remember and they went to school in the afternoon something like that but it didn't last very long... 6 months probably and then they went back but I never had a contact with any evacuees.

They kept very much to themselves or with the families that they were staying with and they never entered into anything we were doing as lads. Like playing football or anything like that which we did of course playing on the playing field football and we also played on Spion Kop until it was ploughed up. Spion Kop was our ground and the playing field was for the downstreeters. Cause if you lived above the Park Hotel you were an upstreeter and if you were below the Park Hotel you were down streeters and all our games were upstreeters versus the down... crazy. *Laughs* and as the war went on and we became older we joined the army cadets and also the older people joined the Home Guard and the only connection there was was that the Home Guard had a secret hideout in Wivenhoe woods but we all knew where it was.

*So can you tell me a little bit about the Army Cadets*

So we actually then became soldiers... I became a lance corporal, Tony Forsgate was a corporal and we had army cadets at school and we had a parade every Friday afternoon which meant you were off lessons. There were a lot of people joined the army cadets and we were trained by soldiers. Our PE teacher was an ex-army, PE Collier, and he died during the war and I was part of the guard of honour over at his funeral and we fired a volley of shots to salute our ex PE teacher. We went on courses with soldiers. I learnt to fire a Bren gun and I also fired a 303 Enfield rifle and you felt it at your shoulder.

*So where were the courses?*

Barracks Colchester... and the Grammar school was just down the road you see so they'd come in on a Friday afternoon and take over. It has some advantages... but I thought and I still think that had the Germans come and invaded we would have been part of a guerrilla movement because we could fire rifles and I could fire a Bren gun. If that happened. I have no evidence that that would have happened but it seems pretty obvious to me. I mean I would have been 14 ... 15 shortly going into National Service at 18 so that was that

*You were saying about the Home Guard*

Yes so they were Dads Army they really were.

*Why do you describe them as a Dads Army?*

Because they were all pensioners because they hadn't been called up... so they were doing war work may be in the ship yard and then they became either the Home Guard or Air Raid Warden or something of that nature... I can't think what else they did... and of course in the early part of the Home Guard they had a pitch fork instead of a rifle because there weren't enough to go round and they did patrols on bicycles and Wivenhoe was completely surrounded by barbed wire right across the cricket pitch right across the end of Ernest Road then into The Avenue then down into Wivenhoe woods and there was something like I think 2 rolls of barbed wire and then another roll on top so about that high and it went right round the boundary of the cricket pitch.

*Why was that there?*

Fortress Wivenhoe. It was Fortress Wivenhoe and if the Germans came they were waiting for them you see



*Was it the Home Guard that did this?*

They were in charge of that yes

And their headquarters was a house near Spring Lane. Coming back down the Avenue there were 2 bungalows then a house and that house was the headquarters of the Home Guard.

*Was that going up towards the cross?*

No that was coming down on the right hand side and opposite was a big grass verge with an old steam roller which they were going to roll across The Avenue to blockade Fortress Wivenhoe. I'm trying to think where these bungalows are... well one of them was the old medical centre which is now in the school... then there's another bungalow and then there's a house. And then there was another house and that was the Home Guard headquarters. Nobody's told you that ah well.

Well coming back to school and what we could do... we had... erm... we did PE in the playground with rush mats so we could lay on our mats and do exercise but we played games on the playing field. The boys played football and the girls played rounders.

*Was this in Wivenhoe?*

When I was at Wivenhoe School... also on occasions we used what was a parish hall by the railway opposite the school lane

*Chapel?*

That's right at one stage it was St Johns Ambulance Hall when I was at school it was just a hall and we sometimes did PE and games in there. We also had an orchard next to the school I don't know whether it's still there and I can remember doing plays. Treasure Island... we did Treasure Island in the orchard

*That's Phillip Road?*

Yes there was the school and a shop on the corner and then there was this space the orchard belonging to the school. It was used for the school for outdoor activities when I was there... in the early part... after I went to the grammar school I don't know. We did Treasure Island and we also did a grand party for Tom Wiseman when he was called up... a farewell party in the orchard after school one day.

*So who was he?*

He was the man who eventually became my headmaster. He was my form teacher. In the playground we had slides in the winter and after school we had sledging on Brook Hill and Bobbits Hole and games in the playground were marbles and cards... cigarette cards. Nearsies. Nearest the wall... flicked the cards and the one that got them nearest the wall picked them up and the girls had skipping. Skipping to tunes.

And I think I've covered pretty much what I can remember.

*Perhaps I can ask you about your home and how rationing affected you at home*

It didn't affect us at all. We kept chickens. We had a ration of corn. We couldn't buy eggs and we kept rabbits and we could go to Mr Mortlocks mill in Rectory Road to get bran so we kept rabbits for meat. Belgian hare or Blue Beveren... they were for meat and my brother was to collect dandelions and stuff like that. I looked after the chickens and I had to cycle to Great Bromley to Granger Brown to get day old chicks and then we fattened cockerels up for Christmas because a chicken at Christmas was sheer luxury and beef was cheap. When I was 7 the family said I became a man. I did all these jobs... I did all the gardening. I used to take out... my mother was a court dressmaker and so she did dressmaking during the war as well and I used to take a parcel out. She'd make a dress for somebody and I er... you're a good lad here's sixpence.

*So you were the delivery person?*

I was the one who did everything yea

*Getting back to food... What about vegetables?*

We grew our own and then during harvest time because it was quite a wasteful system of harvesting we used to go gleaning and pick up a sack of wheat maybe and that would last through the winter. And the other thing we used to glean were potatoes and a couple of bags of those and that's for winter and we used to go down the river and get seagulls eggs and they made beautiful cakes and sad to say we also took moorhens eggs and because they were right in the middle of the pond you had a spoon on a stick and you could get the eggs and they also made beautiful cakes

*I was wondering about fuel as well and rationing of fuel how that effected your family?*

No because when they pulled the Orchard out they left all the roots and so on so we gathered them. My grandfather always had a log of wood in his case coming up from the shipyard I had to carry up and my mother, because my father was a railway policeman, she had an allowance of sleepers... old sleepers and so about half a ton of sleepers... so guess who had the job of cutting them up? So we lived pretty well and I'm not sure but I think fish wasn't rationed and I'm sure fish and chip chop was still going.

*Sounds as though you did pretty well compared to some people?*

Yes we lived off the land shall we say and the other thing was when the orchard was there over the fence and the apples were put in the loft for the winter

*You were talking earlier about evidence of war was there any other evidence of enemy aircraft?*

No... mostly we used to cycle to Woringford or Langham and watch the planes come in. When I was at school, grammar school, we had shelters at Creffield Road at the grammar school and one day the alarm went late and that was the day Germans dropped bombs on Chappel Road in Colchester. They went late and my class was running across 'the close' that was the main play ground to the shelters and shrapnel was falling around us and for years I had a piece of shrapnel... that landed 2 feet away from me and somebody might say pity you didn't keep it.

*Nothing like that in Wivenhoe no evidence of shrapnel?*

No but an interesting evening... a German bomber... they came mostly at night after 1941 and they straddled the railway line and 2 bombs dropped on the playing field and of course we were over there to see it the next day and 2 of them didn't go off and they had the army and they straddled the railway from the bottom of the playing field over to the marshes about 5 bombs.

*Someone else said over near Broomgrove there'd been evidence of bombs*

Oh yea our army were practising with tanks in fact we had a frightening day... we used to play over there and blackberry over there and one day we were playing a game and for some reason Graham Denham was tied up as part of the game and then we couldn't remember where he was and the tanks started rumbling down from the university... that was frightening moment and they did carry out manoeuvres there but I don't remember any shells or anything like that

*So they were coming from Wivenhoe Park the tanks... right close to Wivenhoe?*

Oh yes right down to Spring Lane and we heard them rumbling down and you were on your bike...

*Thank you very much*