

Chapter 1/ My father Leslie used to tell me many tales, possibly more than the average, as we worked as well as lived together.

He used to tell me about his visits to his Uncle Tom and Aunt where he and others of his family spent busy days helping to cut the reeds and clear the mill stream. They first put a net across the stream to catch the fish, then they roped together a sharp blade with one person on each bank sawing the reeds above the mill race. Many fish were disturbed and caught. My father's Auntie then fried the fish for tea. Occasionally a large pike was caught and the children brought it back for mother to dress and leave in salt water for 12 - 24 hours ready to bake in the oven.

My father's brother Tom used to go with his father on Wednesday afternoons shooting rabbits, pigeons etc. Before my grandmother was married a regular yearly visitor was a Mr Nixon who used to spend 2 or 3 weeks staying at the Hare and Hounds, Wardington and when the Suttons retired, he stayed with my father's family at the Bakehouse. He worked in South Africa, forming and financing gold and diamond mines. He didn't appear to have any near relatives and never got married. He used to go with Tom shooting and was very impressed with Tom's shooting ability and said that he would find him a good job in South Africa and would take him on a safari, but Grandmother said that she wouldn't let him go. Mr Nixon died approx. 1918 my Grandmother received a letter from his solicitor, saying that he had left her a large amount of money, so she approached Mr Bull of Hanwell whose tenant they were and offered to buy the Bakehouse and 2 cottages above which he agreed to do in 1919.

In 1915, father's brother Tom volunteered to join the army and was posted eventually to Greece Salonika where he was killed in 1917 by a sniper whilst delivering dispatches. My father was doing very well at school and the government said that if a need was approved, a child of 12 years old could take an exam and if he achieved a certain level could leave school, which my father did. He helped his father with his sister Phyllis in the bakery, baking the bread.

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Bread was baked early in the morning then delivering to neighbouring villages by Horse and Cart after the bread was baked, my father had to feed the horse and he and Phyllis or his father went off on their rounds Williamscoote Mollington, Warmington, Hanwell, Horley, Edgehills, Shotteswell. There were two bakeries in Shotteswell, Mr Shepherd at the Flying Horse and ourselves. We delivered around Shotteswell Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and Mr Shepherd on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. (Mr Warren later took over from Mr Shepherd.)

Albert left school 1918 at 13 years old and was apprenticed to a watchmaker in Banbury. After he had been there for two years he said that he didn't like it and could he come in the business so he came back and eventually worked with my father as a partner in the business.

Grandfather was in bad health and died in 1928 My father got married in 1930 I was born in 1934, my Grandmother had a bungalow built on the old bowling green between the Bakehouse and the Cottages. Albert went and lived with his mother until she died in 1936 aged 70. He had housekeepers but they didn't stop long, eventually Albert went to stay with his sister Phyllis. He and my father had numerous rows in 1946 after one particular disagreement he went to live in North Devon and the Somerset area. Two years later he returned and asked Father if he could work again with him. Father

agreed, but said not as a partner. In 1937 my brother Michael was born so my mother was pleased when two girls asked if they could take me for a walk we went into a field where there was a stream running into a horse trough which I fell into. The girls, afraid of what my mother might say decided to wash my clothes thinking that mother wouldn't know. It was a good job that it was a sunny day when I stood naked waiting for my clothes to dry. When I was five years old, I attended the village school. My first day at school, I remember Sam Shepherd who lived at the Old Red Lion Pub and who called for me (he was 12 months older than me) when the whistle was blown we all trooped into school. I was seated in a big room while the register was read when the name was read out, we said 'Yes Miss.'

After Miss James sat at the piano and we had to sing a hymn. 'Fight The Good Fight' was a favourite, the louder the better. Then I was shown into the Infants room where Miss Maybury, a large lady made a fuss of me as it was my first day. Once a week, the Vicar or sometimes my father called to sign the register (in their capacity as Governors.) The Vicar used to take a Scripture lesson. Another visitor to the school was Mr Vale the education inspector. He called two or three times a year and was treated with great respect by Mrs James and Miss Maybury and we children were told that we must be on our best behaviour when he called.

### Chapter 3 /

As the 1939 war had started we were issued with gas masks which we had to carry to and from school. We also had Air Raid Practice which was to get out of our desks, put our gas masks on, and lay on the floor under them when the bell rang. What protection that afforded ? Very little I think!

If you had your oil lamps or candles on in the evenings you had to make sure your windows were blacked out, either by shutters or extra black curtains.

My Father had plumbed a bath upstairs and to have a bath we had to put 2 large boilers (large oval pots) of hot water in the Baker's oven then carried by bucket into the bath upstairs. Thanks to Father's plumbing, the dirty water went down the drain, my brother Michael and myself being bathed on Saturdays. Our toilet was down the bottom of the garden - tough luck if its snowing or raining. When it was dark, we could watch the searchlights - there was a gun position plus searchlights based on Southam Rd (yes I sat there) with a large building which was called the Dummy Aluminium. Alcan itself was nearer to Banbury. We used to keep chickens and pigs. We had to surrender our bacon and egg ration. Then we were allocated a ration of chicken and pig meal.

We also supplied the local villages with their ration of poultry and pigmeal along with bread deliveries. We used to kill one pig 10 or 11 score (200lb+) usually in January. Mr Shepherd killed his in December and used to bring us a joint of pork. We in turn returned a joint in January. Mr W (Bill) Sharman butchered our pig for us. He latterly used a Stun gun before bleeding the pig. We then covered the pig with straw and set light to it after which Bill scraped and scrubbed the carcass. The Flitches and Hams were put in salting leads and covered with salt. The Hams also had saltpepper added as well. Part of the Flitches were jointed to be used as pork. The leaf and scrap pieces of fat were rendered down to make lard. Other trimmings were made into pies. Heart and liver, kidneys were used and given to your friends who in some cases would in return give you part of their pig.

The Chitlings were given to an old lady who lived in Snuff Lane. So there was very little left for the cat or dog. The hens laid a lot of eggs

during Spring, Summer, and Autumn, but winter time very few eggs were laid. So during the period of rationing my father used to buy a tin of water glass and mixed with 2 gallons of water preserving the eggs for winter use in 'cakes eat.'

My Father had bought a Ford 8 car in 1936 and he and Uncle Albert (Bert) bought a Austin 7 Van in 1938. However in 1940, the petrol ration became so little that father bought a pony and cart from Mr Elkington Warmington for 30 pounds and so saved some petrol. However, on appeal, my Father managed to gain an increase in his ration, so after 9 months decided to sell his pony & cart for 65 pounds (good profit, increased demand.) We used to save our private ration of petrol to enable us to visit my Grandad and Grandmother Boddington at Newnham once a month. They had a small holding there. We got stopped once or twice by the homeguard checking where we were going to and from. We used to go to Banbury on Wednesdays to collect the Blocks of Yeast and bank any cheques. My mother took Michael and myself to fetch the groceries from Perk's in the market place. The girls there would greet us, and remind mother if she had overlooked any item. Then, after we would call on Mr Truss the Fishmonger and buy some fish. We always had a joint or sometimes a chicken on Sunday. Monday was wash day - cold meat and pickles, or lettuce in Summer. Tuesday ironing - minced joint up or shepherd pie etc. Wednesday Fish or bacon. Mr Mumford, the butcher called on Wednesday with sausages etc.

My Father and Albert (Uncle Bert) used to always have a piece of bacon to cut at for breakfast, with pickles and bread at 5:30am. We children had our breakfast at 7:30am - cereals, bread and marmalade - before school at 9am. On Sundays, we all had bacon and eggs together. At 10:30am the locals used to bring their Sunday dinners to be cooked, carrying a milk can with batter (Yorkshire pudding) to be added 1/2 hour before meat was cooked. We insisted that the last dinner must be collected by 12:30pm, so anybody calling late disturbed our meal with strong comments from my Mother to Father. During the war we had many evacuees. A housing officer was appointed to billet children with locals. Any spare houses in the village were allocated to families resulting in a 50% increase in numbers at school. We also had Italian and German prisoners working on the farms. After the capitulation of Italy, the Italians were allowed out on trust, staying at the farms during the week. Two of our local girls were very friendly with them, one of the girls becoming pregnant.

My father offered a girl named Elsie Gardner a job as a delivery girl to help with the extra work .

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I used to help Dad in the Bakehouse, also Michael helped as well. Every Saturday morning, my Uncle and Elsie used to go off on the round leaving Dad and me to mould up and bake the 2nd and 3rd batches of bread. I also used to play cricket or other games Saturday afternoons.

#### Chapter 4/

In 1946, the evacuees returned to the cities, my uncle Bert said that he wanted a change and went to live on the coast of south and north Devon In 1949 Elsie said that she was getting married and

would like to leave when Dad found someone else to help. Uncle Bert asked Dad if he could return, Dad agreed to him returning. I left school and helped my Dad in the bakery lighting the living room fire and preparing the breakfast. After breakfast we scaled off the buns, and rolls, followed by the bread dough. My uncle started at 7am, we made dough cakes and fruit cakes while he and one of us drew the bread out of the oven then we loaded the van and the estate car then started our bread rounds. My uncle stayed with us 3Yrs then went to work in Banbury. Michael left school and joined us as I had a 12mth deferment for my national service. The previous year I had caused Dad a few worries that parents have with teenage sons driving the Ford van to fast round a corner between Mollington and Warmington the same corner that my uncle Bert had smashed into a fallen tree I tipped right over onto the roof and Mr Checkley came rushing over to see if I was alright which I was apart from a scratch down one leg. My father eventually came and took me to Mrs Hughes at Warmington who gave me a cup of tea. He then went back to collect the bread that was saleable. The eggs had smashed causing a few problems Then we resumed the round next day. We bought a new van. a few weeks later I was delivering round Hanwell and backing with the drivers door open hitting a bank rising up and then down catching the bottom of the door resulting in a buckled door. This time my Dad was very angry. We had a new oven Xmas 1952 the engineers installed the new oven over Xmas and Mr Cherry agreed to take the old oven out, However my father was worried about the amount of steam coming, from the oven he rang the engineers they said it was the drying out process. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> February I went to see my Uncle Bert upon returning my father was very concerned I went upstairs, about 1 hour later my mother told us to get up as father had gone up to Mr Spencer to ring for the fire brigade and by the time I had dressed the room was filled with smoke. The firemen soon arrived and we managed to bring a few things out by the time the firemen arrived the fire was in the roof. Michael and I stayed with Mr Spencer my Dad Mum and Alan stayed with my aunt Mrs Harris. The next day we had to take the dough out and tip into the garden where it look like a stranded whale (8ft x 6ft.) There were clouds of starlings settled on it, eating the whole lot within a week. We resumed baking about 10 days later, buying the bread meantime from Mr England and Mr Warren (our competitors) for about a week. I was called up for my National Service on May 5th 1953.

When I joined the army, I was told to report to Aldershot at The Army Catering Corps. We spent the first day collecting our uniforms, (I needed size 13 boots) and having further medical checks. We were woken next morning about 6:15am with a corporal banging our beds telling us to 'get a bloody move on to parade' outside in 1/2 hour to be marched to the canteen for breakfast and told the schedule for the day. I had resolved that I would volunteer for nothing, keeping at the back out of sight, and hopefully harms way. I also had two purses which proved good advice to any young person going out in the world so that you don't display your wealth every time you bought a beer - 'or the beers.' We were a very mixed bunch. There were some tough guys from Glasgow who knew more about the world entering the Army than I knew when I left. Also there was a poor lad, his name Longchalk from Suffolk who was a farmer's son. He was picked on quite a lot. When we went for our technical training he was in the same group as me and one day I told them to leave him alone so they came over to me and said 'what was I going to do about it' did I want a fight. I realized that in no way could I back down, so I sparred backwards and forwards for ages. When eventually we had both had enough, with only our ego's spurring us on, so I told him I couldn't care a damn who thought who had won after which I didn't personally have any more trouble with them. In fact, I think they treated me with more respect. Alas, a later date, poor Longchalk had some brasso poured in his ear which caused terrific pain and he had to go to hospital. The idiot who did it (not the one I had fought with) was put in custody and I never saw either again.

There were some nice lads and I was never short of a friend to go out with. We had the first 6 week drilling and learning to shoot and crawling on our stomach in the mud under barbed wire. We had to shine our boots to a very high standard, blanco our kit and shine our brasses. If we made a mistake in our drilling, we would be told to run around the Parade ground with a rifle held by two hands fully stretched above our head - easy the first five minutes but after that time you begin to sag.

I had a sergeant Sharpe come and see me one evening and asked me if I could lend him £2-00. As he was the one in charge of the practice drilling, I gave him the money. Two weeks later, he hadn't paid me back and I learnt he had approached other boys, so I wrote him a letter (as I had finished my basic training by then.) And he came a couple of days later and offered me 10/- (50p) I realized that I had been conned. However, better to lose £1-50 than to get caught for £50-00.

My pay the first 6 weeks was 25/- (£1-25) rising to 30/- when I started technical training. I had a fortnight's leave. I qualified as a B3 hospital cook and was posted to West Germany, to Munster. After 6 months, I took my B2 H-C exam at Duisburg, wages increasing to £3-50 per week. Upon completion of my National Service, I returned to help my father in the bakery.

Public extracts from John Prickett's memoirs. Brief information regarding life in the Old Bakery from 1930 to 1955ish.

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