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John L Carr-  
23 September 2007

[Return to Jean Howard-Please'J

MY MEMORIES  
OF  
ETCHINGHILL  
BY  
MR BAILEY

Written 1991

[Foliated by jlc September 2007]

We bought Alameda at Etchinghill from Mr W Rumbold in October 1944, it was exactly the place we had been looking for, and we couldn't believe our good fortune on our first visit. The twelve acres included two acres of orchard with mostly Bramley apples and damsons, with three or four rows of nut trees right through the field. On the right, at the end of the lane was the stream (Nailboume) running through to Watercress Farm, where there were two fairly large ponds and lots of watercress and about one and a half acres of an old orchard with one or two trees, a few pears and one very large walnut tree.

Back near the house there was a large two-storey bam eighty feet long where Mr Rumbold used to make his breeze blocks and also the old granary built on steadies or mushrooms, which is still there.

The lane ran about two hundred yards down from the back of the house with an avenue of trees on each side from which the Alameda gets its name, meaning 'Shaded Way'. Before Ivy Close was built it was just that - it was perfect and beautiful. No matter what the weather, however cold, or which way the wind blew, it was warm and mild and a perfect bird sanctuary. I have seen three birds' nests close together in one small bush - a blackbird, a wren and a linnet, with parent birds all flying in at the same time to feed their young.

We also had a snipe nesting down the lane and one unforgettable day I saw her flying off with her young one dangling from her feet. She was moving her young to another site about five hundred yards away. I am told that many gamekeepers will not believe this because they have never seen it, but others have seen it and they know it happens.

We also had over one hundred wild ducks at one time and I also counted over forty moorhens one day. I was surprised to see the ducks at times nesting up to about twenty feet high in a tree. I never discovered how the young reached the ground.

When we first went to Alameda the army had been in occupation and there were slit trenches all over the place, also great ruts where Churchill tanks had obviously churned the ground up. Half way down the lane on the left hand side there were two underground shelters, which we were told had been dressing stations.

At the far end, this part had obviously been part of a firing range as the galvanised iron there was riddled with bullet holes. I actually dug out some of the spent bullets one day. After quite some time, gangs of workmen arrived and filled in the trenches and tidied the place up a bit.

Mr George Potts, who lived in one of the Ark Cottages, told me quite a lot about the history of the place. He had lived in the area all his life and as a lad he had gone about with Mr Henry Rigden, shooting and ferreting the rabbits. He told me that before Alameda and Raylands were built there was a pond and a stable on the site, I think also a stockyard and, of course, the granary which is still there.

There was also a small pond and a fairly large bam across the opposite side of the road from us; this bam was burnt down one day by a young lad playing with matches. It was owned by Vincent Bros and was almost full of com at the time. Vera was looking out of the window and she saw the lad run out and disappear and in next to no time, the flames were coming out through the roof. The fire brigade soon arrived but nothing could be done to save it, bam and contents were demolished.

The three old cottages were still there at the time and the heat from the fire was so intense they could have been in great danger had the wind changed, especially the old one at the end which was largely built of wood.

This one was last occupied by the Swaffer family and when the council men came to pull it down, they first took the tiles off the roof and then put ropes around it and pulled. The whole structure came down like a pack of cards, wanton destruction of something in many ways almost priceless. I have been told that years ago there was an outdoor staircase attached to it for the benefit of the monks on their way down from Folkestone to Canterbury, to provide a resting place for them.

I went over there a few days later, there was an archaeologist there sorting it out and I had a chat to him. He was quite upset about it and he explained some of the details about those wooden beams, etc. They were in perfect condition, as good as the day when they were put there and many of them had special markings and numbers and these were as hard as iron. They later took them away, I don't know what they did with them. I also picked up some of the plaster, mud and wattle stuff, it also contained barley chaff and actual barley clevels in perfect condition, as dry and good as when they were first put there. I have blamed myself many times since then for not taking care of it. I took it away and left it in the granary on the bench there and it was probably eaten by mice. If so, they had a meal that was over three hundred years old. But I still blame myself, I should have put it in a glass case, especially the barley.

One of the houses up Westfield Lane, on the right, used to be used as an isolation hospital. My dear sister Mary was taken there with scarlet fever in January 1914 and one Sunday afternoon my two brothers and I

walked over from Ladwood to see her. Of course, we couldn't speak to her, we took her some sweets and things which we handed in, we looked up and saw her tear-stained face at the bedroom window and trooped off home with a good large lump in our throat.

Back to Nailbourne. Not long after we moved in the Nailbourne stream nearly dried up. We heard that the reason for this was because they had deepened the well at Blue House Farm Saltwood and that was affecting the streams. I don't know whether this was true or not but I went to see Tom Hogben at Watercress Farm as I got a lot of information from him. He just snorted a bit but said it had all happened before, "Just get a spade and dig down there a bit, don't you know it's a spring, it will soon come bubbling up". So I got a spade and found that he was quite right. I dug out a hole about a foot deep and it filled with water, it bubbled up and every time I dipped the pail in I had a constant supply. But I was glad when it improved somewhat and I decided then to get the ponds cleaned out and catch more water down there, at least that pleased Tom. I got a man in with an excavator and found how badly this needed doing, quite three feet or more of mud in the largest one.

Another surprise, the next morning when I went down there I saw a fairly large eel trying to wriggle through the pipes between the ponds. I went back and said to Vera "We're doing fine, we've got badgers, pheasants, ducks, moorhens and snipes, with all the other birds, including little owls and now we've got eels. We ought to start a fish farm". The little owls were nesting in a hole in the ground down in the old orchard and the badgers were half way //

down the lane. I think they had struck into some of the workings of the underground shelters left by the army which had been very badly filled in, as there was little sign of any fresh earth thrown up by the badgers. The worst thing about them was they killed off the hedgehogs, we often saw the skins around as they eat them all but the prickles.

Tommy Hogben - everyone called him Tommy, he was a real Etchinghill character. He was born in the old Watercress Farm house, lived there all his life and he died there as I believe his father also did. Over many years they milked a few cows on the five acres of pasture, supplying the village and hospital with milk. At one time, he told me his father used to carry pails of milk up to the 'Union', as he described it, on yokes across his shoulders.

Tommy was getting on in life when he moved there and in failing health, but at seventy years of age he could still use a scythe and cut the grass in his corner paddock. I often went to see him and paid him a small sum for this grass, there wasn't much value in it but it pleased him and made him feel that he was still of some use.

This was his trouble, he thought that his life had nearly come to an end and he used to gather some of his tools together and have them around him and pine for the bygone days when he could use them. His one great dread was that he might get taken into St Mary's, which he still looked on as the Union, or Workhouse. He was determined to avoid that at all costs and I am glad to say that he did not have to go there. I went to see him one morning towards the end of his life, I knocked on the door and his dear wife came to let me in. She seemed rather troubled and she said "I think you can go in now, he's in the best room but I don't think he'll mind". I went in and he was half lying back on the sofa with tears running down his cheeks. He looked a bit confused but he needn't have been as I quite understood and sympathised with him. I had seen other old countrymen like this before and I had worked on the farm with some of them since I was a lad. They prized their tools, they treasured even a stake bale which they had cut out themselves and they couldn't bear to part with them, and one thing they all had in common was a great love of horses.

I am sure Tommy did also, even if his first love was for his cows, because he still had his ploughing reins beside him. He had used them to drive his team when he used to work for Messrs Rigden and Grealock in his spare time over the years.

I now had a chat with him and tried to cheer him up but a short while after this I went down and found him in bed. He was nearer the end than I thought, he had his plough reins tied to the foot of his bed and brought back to the head of the old iron bedstead so that he could cling to these to pull himself up into a sitting position, or help turn over with the aid of his dear old wife pushing a bit.

Shortly after this she woke up one morning and found him dead in the bed beside her. Two very independent spirits, I quite believe both of them would rather have had it that way. They had lived together and had a great love of their little farm and at least they owned it. It meant as much to them as a vast estate and, I could add, far less troublesome.

This came home to me one day when two old men from St Mary's came down outside Alameda and were admiring the garden. They asked me whether they could go down the lane to see the stream as they had

heard about it. Of course I gave them permission and when they came back one of them said something to the effect that he thought I must be the luckiest man alive. "I would rather have this place that you have than all the money in the world", he said. I could have said "Brother them's my sentiments", instead I told them to come whenever they wanted to. Alas they didn't come many times. I saw the most chatty one one day and I asked him where his friend was. With tears in his eyes he said "He's left me, he's gone to glory".

Many years ago, almost eighty years in fact, a man named Steven Webb came to work for us at Ladwood. He was an elderly man then, and he and his family had lived in Etchinghill in one of the Rigden's cottages. He would have known the Hogben family and probably worked with them. He was a similar type of man, honest and hard working, a strong supporter of the Swingfield Chapel, in fact his daughter taught in the Sunday School there for many years. He was the type of man that you could believe what he told you. I wasn't very old at the time but I used to be interested in hearing of their exploits, the acreages cut by scythe in a day, strong men, twelve abreast amongst the peas or the wheat and they always claimed to have made a better, cleaner job of it than the modern methods. In many ways this was true, a field would be left quite clean, especially after the gleaners had gone in following up and picking up every handful of wheat or whatever, whereas today, many farms are a blackened eyesore and a disgrace to the countryside, without mentioning the burnt hedges and traffic hazards. Those good honest old folk would have been appalled at such carnage.

Of course, the hay was also cut with scythe or sickle and they took such pride in their work, if they built a stack that wasn't perfectly straight with an even roof, and this was sometimes very difficult in a strong wind, they could hardly sleep at night.

A G Street, the farmer and author, tells the story in one of his books about a day in the harvest field when they were carrying and stacking wheat in a strong wind. They got the stack finished during the evening, the roof was rather one sided but it was satisfactory to them so he and his father went off home to supper and bed. The next morning when they went back to the field the stack had a perfectly straight roof and they learned that after they had left the previous evening, the wind dropped off and the stacker actually paid the other two men a few coppers out of his low wages to pitch it back onto the wagons and up again for him to rebuild it satisfactorily. I like that story and I think that I also have worked with men who would have done that, probably Tommy Hogben and Steve Webb.

I mentioned before that these countrymen were all very fond of horses, this may be a bit of a digression but I feel it worth recording. One of our waggoners at Ladwood, old Jim Matcham, couldn't read or write but he had a watch and he could tell the time. Our system on the farm in those days was to work a one yoke, i.e. from 6 am to 2 pm, not very clever I used to think at times because it was sometimes too dark to see to hold a Kent plough and on a frosty morning I have known the billets frozen to the ground and a job to kick them out, but that was the way of it. Old Matcham, although unable to read or write, knew all about farm work and he could teach me many things about horses and his watch came out at take-out time, 2 pm. We had one old mare at that time named Flower, she was a bay and a beauty. Old Matcham could get her to turn left or right on command, "Hoot Flower" and she veered right. "Way comeere way", and she would come back left into line.

Personally I didn't follow him in that, I always relied on the reins, but we all loved Flower. Every time we went to the stable on a dark morning, groping along the wall to find the door, as soon as the door rattled, one would get a whinny of welcome from her. It was not altogether a whinny but more of a chuckle and it sounded like sheer pleasure. My own brother Walter also had a wonderful way with horses and ponies, he could break them in and get them to obey his command. If he had a pair on the point of jibbing under a heavy load, he would call out "Come on, why not?" and they would always oblige with greater effort. It was like asking them a question. Why not? He was the only one I ever heard treat them like that but he got his response and it was better than a whip. At times I used to think that he was too fearless and reckless. He was thrown off in the middle of the road and concussed, the filly galloped away for some distance then she trotted back and stood over him until help arrived, who wouldn't love a horse after that.

But to get back to Etchinghill and its inhabitants. Miss Shillingford lived at The Nook when we went there and I had a very amusing introduction to her, or rather it was amusing to me but not to her. It was on Polling Day for the Council elections which were held at the School at Lyminge. I took Mrs Hogben from Watercress Farm over to vote. I parked the car outside the School and we went in. I had already cast my vote and as there was quite a queue in there I left Mrs Hogben and went back to the car to wait for her. As I reached the car, I saw this very irate lady sitting in the front seat glaring at me and she said in a rather loud voice "I am not getting out of this car until I have had an apology from you". I couldn't understand this as I

did not think I had parked on her plot. So I went around and sat beside her to have a good look at her. She was unknown to me at the time so I said "Who are you Madam and what's the trouble?" She said "You have disfigured my front gate with that awful notice and without my permission". This still drew a blank until I saw her looking round at the back window of the car, I had a sticker there from the Acrise Young Farmers advertising one of their events. Quite unknown to me, one of them had attached a large notice of the same to Miss Shillingford's front gate. I was just trying to convince the lady that I was not guilty when Mrs Hogben came back. Miss Shillingford, I now realised this was her in person, said "Oh, there's Mrs Hogben". Mrs Hogben looking none too pleased said "Yes, and you've got my seat". So the good lady nimbly hopped out of the car and she was the one who had to apologise to Mrs Hogben. It must have been one of the wicked moments of my life to see the funny side of it and I didn't even offer the lady a lift or inquire if she had any transport back to Etchinghill. But it was my impression that these two ladies did not have much regard for each other. I may have been wrong but that is how it appeared at the time. I agree that it was certainly wrong for the YFC to put that notice there without permission.

In 1944 Raylands was used as a fish shop run by Mr and Mrs Nisbit. I must admit that we were pleased when it closed as such people used to buy their fish and chips, sit out on the wall eating them and throw the paper down and leave an unsightly mess spoiling the village or hamlet, as it was called in those days.

Old Mrs Matthews had the tea shop at Tudor Cottage and Miss Palmer lived at Rock Cottage. This wonderful lady was a great personality and a pleasure to know, her wonderful smile was worth a million. She was getting on in years but full of life and energy and she had a beautiful garden full of flowers on the border all around her corner. She even used to do interior decorating for people and everyone said she did it perfectly, a real expert. She even offered to do ours up the narrow stairs. She said it was too difficult for me and she thought I was too busy on the farm but, of course, I wouldn't hear of it and she was very disappointed. She took a liking to me for some reason and she gave me a beautiful model of her handiwork, two horses pulling a loaded timber tug, perfectly made in every detail including chains and harness. I kept it for many years and when we moved I gave it to my nephew, as he took a fancy to it. I still have photographs of it in my album.

It would have been about 1959 that I set about trying to improve the orchard. Tommy Hogben had told me that it was planted about seventy-five years before that and it used to be called Swaffers Orchard, although he never knew why. I got Mr Kingsley Dykes from Ottinge to send his men over with the spraying equipment for two or three years, they sprayed the trees and I spent many days pruning and cutting them back as they had been neglected for years. But the price of apples was not good enough to justify the expense of the spraying. Best Bramley apples 6/- a bushel delivered to Cheriton and damsons 10/- per bushel. By about 1976 I got most of the trees cut down, in fact, several had blown down and the nuts were almost past bearing. So it was a sad goodbye to our fruit growing. When we left Alameda in March 1987 there was only about one apple tree left and two nut trees. Dick Read at the Nursery had been glad of the apple wood for his glass house furnace as it makes ideal firing.

Forgive me if I use my imagination for a moment. I can remember what it was like on our own farm at Ladwood over eighty years ago. The amount of horses, carts and wagons, the rattle of chain traces, the whistling of the plough boys, they always whistled as they went about their work. The harvest field, the old reaping machine, cutting and throwing out the wads loose, we didn't have a self binder until about 1910. The men yes, and women, following along putting two wads together to make a sheaf, young lads yes, and girls, making bonds for them. I used to do this before I left school at fourteen. No string was used for wheat and oats, the bonds were made as we went along. The sheaves were then put into stocks, although we always called them shocks, and woebetide anyone who didn't make his row perfectly straight.

Back to Etchinghill. Spicers Farm and Ridgehill with all their amount of cottages and work people, all that would have been intensified and it is no wonder those great barns were needed. The plod of horses, the rattle of chains, the last wagon load coming down the hill just before dark and many people going home to bed well-satisfied with another day's work well done, Steve Webb and Tommy Hogben among them.

Back to 1944. When we arrived at Etchinghill, Sid and Nell Williams lived at Little Orchard Garage with their daughter Iris. They were grand people and a pleasure to know. Sid had the petrol pumps and sold petrol, but otherwise he did no garage work or anything to do with cars. He had a couple of grand, shorthorn cows and reared calves, he also kept a lot of bees and he was an expert with them, quite a professional.

He used to go around the district giving people advice and help, anyone who saw a swarm of bees sent for Sid. Nell ran the cafe there. She had been a cook and she had a great reputation for her scones and tea cakes.

They also kept poultry and reared chickens. I got to know them very well as they called on me at one time to come and build their stack when

they were haying and it went on from there. Nell and Vera were great friends also. But alas Sid died suddenly in May 1959 at the age of 60. He had been unwell for a few days with heart trouble and Nell was worried about him and she asked me one day if I would come along and keep him company whilst she went to Lyminge on the bus. I went along there, he was out in the shed and I think he said there was no need for me to stay as he was alright, but I stayed on until Nell came back and, in the meantime, he served a few customers with petrol. The very next day Nell was out there with him and they had just served a customer. As Sid put his arm up to wave him goodbye, he collapsed and died. He was a big man and a big hearted man and the whole village was shocked. Someone came and told us and Vera and I went along there. He still laid in the shed. Dr Buchanan had arrived then and two porters from St Mary's with their ambulance trolley to take him along to the mortuary. We stayed with Nell to try and comfort her as best we could. It wasn't long before she had to sell out and leave the place and we missed them very much indeed.

St Mary's. I feel that I could write pages about St Mary's, always called the Workhouse or the Union in past days. 'Over the Wall' was how many of the old folk expressed it. Once you went over the wall you never came back. Old Steve Hubbard who lived at Winterdown Farm almost eighty years ago, had been taken there at one time for some reason. At least he came back to tell the tale. His one great dread was that he would have to go there again in his old age. He said "They put you in the scardin tub and if you don't soon get better they give you a brown draught to finish you off". I have heard more than one of the old folk say that and I think they really believed it. Of course the wall used to be much higher than it is now, and that made the place look more forbidding I suppose. The wall was higher and the letter box was in it, about two thirds of the way up towards the entrance from our Alameda. The main road was narrower than it is now and much more dangerous because there was no pavement. Vera was coming home down there one day when a car collided with the wall just behind her, a few more yards and she would have been crushed against the wall. People going to post letters were always at risk.

My first visit to St Mary's was in about 1924. An uncle of mine was taken there. He was a bachelor living on his own and was taken there ill with no one to look after him. It was just at the time I had my first motor bike and I rode over there one Sunday afternoon to see him. At that time there was a hut just a little way in from the entrance with someone always there to check visitors, this hut was still there in about 1946. Mr Swain who lived at Raylands then, used to go up there then on night duty. I don't know why it was there or when it was taken away but I remember it being there. Also, not far in from the entrance on the right hand side before you got up to the main building, there was a brick building or ward for men with a row of beds. That is where I found my uncle, he was pleased to see me and he seemed fairly well, but he didn't live many days after that.

It was also about that time in 1924 that one of our horsemen, J Hammond, took his daughter into St Mary's to have her child, so I suppose they had a maternity wing there. I remember that we let him have our pony and cart to fetch the girl home with her baby.

During the 1950's was about the time I remember most of the old men, or tramps, turning out each morning from the main entrance. Quite a number on some days, some would go off Folkestone way, others would take the Elham Valley. I think they headed for the Bridge Union, as it was known, often one or two of them would call in to us and Raylands begging

for tea or something to eat or they had a billycan asking for some tea so they could make a fire somewhere and have a boil up. I didn't feel too sympathetic towards some of them. I remember a day at Ladwood years ago when we were busy haying. We were short handed and two old chaps came along asking for a job. It was almost dinner time and we had the wagons ready for one o'clock. Mother gave them a dinner and when we came out from having ours they had vanished. But Vera was otherwise minded. Her heart always went out to anyone in need. I remember an old drover who came around to our back door at Ladwood years ago asking for food. Vera had him in the kitchen and gave him some food and drink and then, as it was raining a bit, she gave him one of my old macs. Of course, he was back again within a short while asking for more. I don't know what the system was at St Mary's, I can't think that they had beds for all these old men, or rather men, some of them didn't look very old. I don't know how they slept them, we were told they took them in if they were penniless, but not otherwise. They gave them breakfast in the morning and sent them on their way.

When Mr Rumbold erected his bam, which we now possessed, he used quite a lot of second hand material and one of the doors had obviously come from St Mary's Hospital. The notice on the door was Old Womens

Lobbies, and when I saw that I just saw red. Whoever put that on there or gave the order for it ought to be ashamed of themselves. Many of those old ladies would have done a life's hard work and brought up their children and then fallen on hard times with no State help and they deserved something better than that. I only hope their treatment in there was better than those words seemed to imply. I thought of old Mrs Marsh from Selsted, she walked the two miles down to Ladwood twice a week in all weathers to do our washing and cleaning and help mother with the baking in the big oven, for many years. She was also a midwife and was always at hand if anyone had any trouble. She had brought up her family, her son was in the Navy in the First World War and she was taken into St Mary's when almost blind at the age of 90. If the wording on that door had been Ladies Department, it wouldn't have been too good for her. The bam got a bit shaky and we pulled it down about 1975 and it gave me some pleasure to smash up that door and bum it. For many years Vera and I attended the Sunday morning services at the Hospital Chapel. It gave us the opportunity to see things at first hand. We used to help the porters pushing the patients to and fro and we got to know many of them. Sister Thomas was one of those in charge in those days and from some of the wards she used to send them out to the service as she said it did them good whether they thought so or not. We have known upwards of twenty on some occasions and it was quite a business taking them back. At one period, the R.C.'s had their service following ours so we would push one patient out and then bring another one back and it was a great help to the porters.

It left me with one or two amusing and also affectionate memories of the place. One old man, who no doubt wanted his dinner, would shout out if the sermon was too long "Last Hymn" and the Padre would say "Yes, alright Charlie, won't be long now, have patience". The other old men would nod in agreement, although I don't know whose side they were on.

Another sweet memory is of old Mrs Snow, well over 90 years of age, singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers' at the top of her voice and it was still a good voice, "Marching as to War", she really looked as if she meant it.

Yes indeed, a great change for the better at St Mary's, everyone receiving the utmost care and attention, usually no complaints and nothing but praise for the place. The old lobbies door forgotten and the hospital part was brought up to a very high standard. I like to think of one old man in particular, Jack Vaughn, I had known him for many years, he used to work at the Village Farm at Acrise. They called him Stumpy as he had a wooden leg. He had laid about rough in a shed for some time and at last, in failing health, he was taken into St Mary's Hospital, which he had been dreading. Talk about over the wall, I visited him and he couldn't believe his good fortune, he had never had such good food and attention, I think he wished that he had gone there much sooner. One interesting thing about him is worth recording. He was a boy in Folkestone years ago when the Stage Coach used to run from Folkestone to Canterbury drawn, of course, by four horses and for Wingate Hill and White Horse Hill, they needed an additional horse. It was his job to ride on this fifth horse as far as the White Horse, Hawkinge and then take it back to Folkestone.

Vera was a constant visitor at the Hospital and for many years she went up almost every Tuesday evening to help Rev Lucket and later Rev Vaughn, with the services at 6.30 pm. She gave out the books and helped with the singing, many of the old folk loved her and looked forward to her coming. This was only discontinued when for some reason, the management switched their evening meal to 6.30 pm and that brought the services to an end. Of course she continued to visit them as some of them seemed to have few friends.

Bill Booth was another quite notorious Etchinghill character. I had known him since about 1924 when he was always at the sheep sales and markets. He had a great reputation as a shepherd and for his training of collies. He lived at Court Lodge Farm as Shepherd for Mr W R Aggis for over thirty-five years. We let our summer grazing to Mr Aggis for a year or two about 1970. Bill came there attending to the sheep, he could still shear a sheep at the age of 70 and he had a collie which would round up the sheep and hold them in a corner of the field whilst Bill sheared one or two without the use of hurdles or pen.

He told me that he lived in Etchinghill when he was a lad and he went to Lyminge School. His father was a shepherd to Mr Rigden and I think they lived in the old house now called Spicers Farm. He also told me that Sun Lodge had been so called when it was renamed, the little field there running down to the stream was known as Saw Lodge before the bungalow was built by Mr Rumbold. There used to be sawing works there and the area between Sun Lodge and Watercress Farm, where the other four bungalows are now, was a small orchard. We had the grass from this and Mr Grealock for a year or two after we arrived.



Etchinghill was also well-known for its cricket club and at one time, Taffy Betts was the Captain. The cricket ground was, at one time, along at Little Orchard. I think about 1929 I played against them there when I played for Acrise.

Alf Matthews was another well-known character in the village. He owned the Nursery which was a well-established business when we arrived there. He had been in charge of his section of the Observation Post known as Spitfire Cottage at the top of Nash Hill at Lyminge. Of course, this was during the War and a few years previous to our coming but they had some very exciting times and we used to hear of them from various people. I thought one episode in particular was worth recording.

The Etchinghill contingent consisted of Alf Matthews, Sid Williams and Mr Woods, I forget his Christian (sic) name, but he was one of the older members and he lived in a bungalow on the right of Teddars Leas Road. I had known him since the early 1920's, he was the Pru agent in those days and he used to call on us at Ladwood. His son Eddie was also a member, he had a small farm at Rhodes Minnis. No doubt they did a great job up there plotting the course of the incoming enemy aircraft and that would have been in addition to all of their other work, and they were all busy people. One morning, just as they were coming off duty, the usual dog fights were going on above and a Messerschmitt was shot down and crashed in the area. Of course, this was only one of many but the pilot baled out and landed smack down in Eddie Wood's stack yard, just as he arrived home for breakfast. It was Eddie himself who told me about it, the German pilot had a revolver in his hand and Eddie said he was a bit uncertain what to do but his father walked straight up to him and said "Give that to me, you won't require it any more" and the pilot handed it over. They took charge of him until the army arrived to take him away. The interesting sequel to this is the fact that the German pilot, twenty years later, wrote to them from Canada where he was then living, saying that he was coming back to Kent to see the place where he was shot down and he would like to see the man who took his revolver from him. Mr Woods was then eighty-five years of age, but I have never had it actually confirmed that he came.

I have forgotten to mention Connie Betts. She was the only woman amongst them and she still lives in her bungalow in Westfield Lane at Etchinghill in December 1991.

Another war time episode that is worth recording, and I can vouch for the truth of it because it was told to us by our friend, Mrs Weedon, Florrie as she was known by many of her friends. She was the widow of the late Pastor Weedon and they had lived in Elham and Rhodes Minnis for a number of years. During the War she was living in Etchinghill and there are three bungalows in the Old Westfield Lane, on the right hand side, well up towards the top, but of course the TV mast was not there then.

Florrie lived in the middle of the three, I forget the name of it, the top one is WestHo. There was a battery of guns stationed on Tolsford Hill above them, placed to shoot down the Doodlebugs or Flying Bombs. On this occasion they found their target and the crippled Doodlebug crashed, just missing the bungalows, but it landed in a hollow in the field just at the back of them. It was very close and the two top bungalows took the full force of it. The whole roof of No 2 was lifted out of position and I should think it was very similar to an earthquake. Florrie said everything movable was left on the floor. Some of the young soldiers from the battery came running down there expecting to find casualties, but fortunately no one was injured, apart from shock. The soldiers stayed with her for some time and made her a cup of tea in her own kitchen and tidied the place up a bit. We had to smile when she said "I was mostly concerned that they should see me like that, my hair in such a state and my face all black with soot from the chimney". Good old British spirit, it makes one realise what the Nazis were up against when they took on the Brits. I think that Flying Bomb was probably the one that damaged quite a number of houses in the village, including Alameda because the ceilings there had been cracked rather badly.

In conclusion, I feel that I must write some more about the Nailboume. Soon after we arrived in 1945/6, it practically dried up and it gave me a chance to get down in there and investigate, and have a good look at it. On three sides it was bricked up for about three feet or more, so that it could contain up to three feet of water before it started forming a running stream. From the top of the brickwork there were various rocks set into the bank, which was another ten feet or more up to the roadway above. Later on, when it started again, this lovely, pure water came bubbling up as clear as crystal and I think by November, when the rains came, it was quite a torrent. It flowed through into the Ridge Hill side of the hedge where it formed quite a small lake. In fact, the people who owned the place then kept a number of Chinese geese on it.

Then it went under a small culvert where it could be regulated and flowed back on to our land and on through to Watercress Farm and under the main road. Opposite Sun Lodge, where the public footpath crosses it, there was quite a flow at times and there were two large stepping stones for the use of people

crossing. Although for very many years we saw no one use this footpath, Tommy Hogben told me this had been the case for the last twenty years. He said that the only people he had known to use it were two old men who used to walk over from Postling to the New Inn Etchinghill on a Summer evening for a drink.

Some time before we left in 1987 it was being used again by the rambblers.

Back to our end again. We heard that Mr Rumbold once lost a heifer which fell into it down the bank and on to her back. When we arrived there was only a very flimsy hedge surround and I soon pulled this out and put up a good strong spike fence and I also planted a quick hedge along the top because this bordered the yard. We then got Messrs C & F Rumbold to build us a decent cowshed which came at the end of the nut trees. Whilst the stream was almost dry, I spent a bit of time down there as I really wanted to improve the place. I planted daffodil and snowdrop bulbs and in between some of the rocks, I had various rock plants. This was rather dangerous work as one false slip would have landed me in the water. I also planted a weeping willow tree, there were already a number of old willows further down and one beautiful specimen, which, when the Spring came and it bloomed, looking down on it was like a mass of pearls before they actually formed into the yellow palm. When the spring water rose once again and some of those Chinese geese found their way down into it, it was a sight worth seeing.

Unfortunately the rock plants didn't do too well as the whole place was too shady and very little sun filtered through. The daffodils and snowdrops thrived and some were still there when we came away, also red campions, milkmaids and kingcups.

Bob Linch, who farmed at Peene Farm Newington and used to live at Rock Cottage Etchinghill, told me that years ago some of the local farmers used to come with their water barrels in a dry Summer to the Nailbourne for their water. This seems to prove that there used to be a greater flow at one time and from my own observations, I can well believe it.

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**Original text was returned to Ms Jean Howard in October 2007**