

GROWING UP IN THE 1950s

MY CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF HOME AND VILLAGE LIFE IN ABBOTSKERSWELL

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1. Moving In

My family moved to Abbotskerswell in the autumn of 1950, when I had just turned seven years old. This is an account of my growing up in the village over the next decade, from childhood into young adulthood. It is, of course, my personal record of my memories and impressions, and although I believe they are accurate in fact, as far as my knowledge allows, I accept that there may be people who have different recollections of times and events.

The 1950s were a time of change, the country was still recovering from the Second World War, and generally people were not very well off. There was still food rationing on some items, and wages were low. Life was largely governed by need, availability and affordability, but I was a child, so I just accepted life as it was. Although I am writing mainly about Abbotskerswell, I have included some general observations and comments about the times we lived in. After all, we were not isolated, and things taking place in the rest of the country, and even the world, sometimes impacted on our way of life. By the end of the decade the situation for many had improved, and a new world was opening up, especially as far as I was concerned, then being seventeen and about to start work.

My mother, father, two brothers and I moved into 3 Rose Cottages, Abbotskerswell, my father having purchased the block of six cottages for £700! I know he had a mortgage, but nevertheless, I think this purchase was quite an achievement for him. My parents had previously rented a farm, and had had to move out as the lease had expired. I remember the farm sale of livestock, farm machinery and implements, and I think the proceeds of this sale would have part funded the purchase of these cottages. The rents from the other five cottages would have helped to cover the mortgage payments, so the whole enterprise was an investment for the future. However, I remember my Mum and Dad discussing the very low “controlled” rents coming in at the time. Landlords were not permitted to increase rents if tenants had been in residence for a set length of time, or had occupied the property before a certain date – I do not know the exact details, but I know that rents could only be increased on a change of tenancy. The lowest rent my parents received was half-a-crown per week on one cottage, and I think the highest rents, on two of the cottages, were five shillings, or “five bob” in the jargon of the time.

I am sure we moved into Rose Cottages in September*, as I remember the whole family picking apples in the orchard for storage on a bed of straw in our large attic, which ran over only a small part of our cottage but over the whole of No 4. The cider apples did not require such delicate treatment; Dad just shook the trees violently, and the apples fell down. We gathered them up into Hessian sacks, and they were sold to Henley’s Cider Factory near the main road.

*Many agricultural and property leases were drawn up to start and end on quarter days, so it seems to make sense that we probably moved in at Michelmas.

2. Rose Cottages

I believe No. 3 Rose Cottages had been built originally as one large house including what later became No. 6. Certainly, it appeared that Nos. 3 and 6 had been a single dwelling at one time; No 4 may have been an extension built on at a later date. You could see quite clearly where windows and interconnecting doorways had been blocked off, particularly to No. 6. I think they had been built in the eighteenth century, as on the wall above the bedroom fireplace in No 4 the date 1773 had been moulded onto the plasterwork. If No. 4 had indeed been an add-on, then of course this means that Nos. 3 and 6 are even older.

The walls were very thick, as evidenced by the window seats set into the walls under the windows in the main rooms. The exterior walls were cob walls I think, with interior walls made of lathe and plaster (a method where plaster was mixed with horsehair, and matted onto wooden struts); the ground floors were of stone. In the main room of No 3, the fireplace consisted of a large black range set in an inglenook, with a very large chimney – no doubt wide enough to accommodate young chimney sweeps in bygone days. One of the first things my father did was to have this blocked off, and replaced with a tiled Devon grate. There was one other small fireplace in the second small living room, but this room was not used much – it was kept for “best”, and usually used only at Christmas, or if we had visitors. There was no other form of heating, no hot water supply, an outside toilet, and a washhouse in the back yard, which had a built-in copper with a fireplace below, and was shared by the occupants of Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6.

The kitchen had been added on the back of our cottage, just by building across from two outer walls of Nos. 5 and 6, and roofing it over. A window in the staircase/half-landing seems to have been blocked off during this “improvement”, so the staircase then had no natural light. The kitchen had only a white, stone sink with a wooden draining board, and a cold water tap. There was no larder. We had brought with us a Jackson electric cooker, so at least my mother had a piece of ‘modern’ equipment on which to cook – no doubt one of the reasons why my father decided to remove the range from the main living room.

Behind the main cottages there was a cobbled back yard, although this was neglected and most of the cobbles were overgrown. At the far end of the yard there was a block of garden sheds, used by the occupants of Nos. 3 – 6 to store garden tools, coal and logs. In the far left-hand corner of the yard there was a covered lean-to where Mr Skinner, the tenant of No. 5, parked his motorcycle and sidecar.

On the left-hand side of the yard there was the brick built washhouse and a block of four outside toilets, serving Nos. 3 to 6. Nos. 1 and 2 also had outside toilets, but these were at the end of their back gardens.

Beyond the yard, there lay an orchard, at the far end of which, a gate opened into a big vegetable garden. A hedge, with tall elm trees, bordered the right hand side, dividing our property from the Manor grounds. On the lower, or left hand side, a hedge divided us from a field, the school grounds, and then other back gardens. Many of the apples were cider apples, but others were Bramleys, Russets, Tom Putts, Cox's Orange Pippins, and others I cannot remember. There was a natural spring in the garden, which my father enlarged into a small, deep pond; this proved very useful for watering the plants, but a bit of a hazard when Robert, aged about four, walked into it! Fortunately my father was on hand to haul him out, or he may well have drowned. He was a sorry sight, covered in mud and weed. My mother was not pleased – being Sunday morning, she had just dressed him in a clean, blue and white romper suit! Needless to say, my father then fenced off the pond in order to prevent a repeat performance!

On the right-hand side of the back yard there were low walled garden areas, which I always thought were the ruins of three cottages, but this may not have been the case. However, past the first small garden area that went with Mr Coombes' tenancy, there was a path leading around to the back of No. 2, and alongside this was evidence of what appeared to be a ruined dwelling (Ed.this was No7 was was used into the 1930s). The first part was used as garden for the occupants of No. 2, and at the far end there was a ruined chimneybreast*. Underneath this, in what would have been the fireplace, logs were stored. Alongside this was a garden shed and an outside toilet, both of which were built in the ruined walls. My father thought the chimneybreast was unstable, so he later dismantled the top part of it.

The furthestmost garden area on the right hand side of the yard was tilled by Mr Skinner. Recently, a well has been uncovered there. I have thought about this, and can vaguely remember a small area that was covered by one or two very large stone slabs, and have some recollection of being told there was a well underneath**. However, as I never saw it, I think I probably did not believe it, or it was insignificant at the time.

I think a couple, John and Hilda Cobley were living in No 1 when we moved in, in 1950; they later moved to Barnfield Terrace. Several of the tenants moved into Council Houses in the village in the early part of the 1950s. New accommodation was being built with hot water supplies, indoor toilets, and bathrooms. Obviously there was great demand for these homes, especially as Rose Cottages had none of these facilities. Mr and Mrs Chapman then moved in, and they, too, moved on to Barnfield Terrace. Later the cottage was let to a young couple, Ron and Lily Vincent. Mr and Mrs Skinner senior lived in No 2. The Austin family lived in No 4., Herman and Olive Skinner lived in No 5, with their two daughters, Wendy and Marilyn. Both these families moved on to Council properties in the village. Tom Coombes, an old man, lived in No 6.

An elderly lady once told me that John Lee's mother had once lived in No.3. I'm guessing this may have been between about 1910 and 1918, as I believe Mrs Lee died in 1918, but I cannot be sure. There were certainly several changes in the tenancies of the cottages whilst I lived there. My father sold Nos. 3 – 6 in the early 1970s, and Nos. 1 and 2 a bit later.

*Two bread ovens have now been identified, one on either side of the fireplace. I understand this was the site of a bakery.

** It seems likely that the well was the original water supply to the cottages, and was covered/filled in when they were connect to a mains water supply and drainage.

3. Home Life

Home life in the 1950s was very different from that of today. My father was head of the household, as were most men, and he was quite strict, although not unkind. My mother was a bit of a softie, although she, too, could be firm if we misbehaved. When I look back I understand better my father's approach to life, but at the time I used to feel 'hard done by' if I didn't get my own way.

My father was an intelligent man who never had the opportunity to make the most of his abilities. He had little time for 'religion', hated injustice, and always voted Labour. I am in no doubt that his childhood experiences played a huge part in his opinions and outlook. However, I think he was usually fair and rational, and often, having given his opinion we were then left to work things out for ourselves, and make up our own minds. Despite not having a lot of time, he used to play with us, or tease us, and teach us.

My mother, too, spent time with us, and showing us how to make or do new things. She was quite an artist really, although she was never able to take this up as a hobby – for one thing, she never had the time. She used to draw lovely pictures for us when we were small.

We children were expected to do as we were told; arguing, sulking, bad behaviour of any kind, disobedience, bad manners, "cheek" and lies were not tolerated, and we certainly didn't swear, at least not within earshot! I did not appreciate at the time how my parents were always teaching us – new words, new skills etc. – but I clearly remember the encouragement I received from my mother, whose favourite saying was "there's no such word as can't". Another thing she often said to us was 'don't want what you can't have', usually when we did not get what we wanted. In her quiet way she was a very determined woman, who rarely admitted defeat.

We were not allowed to have comics, as my father thought they were rubbish, but we did have books. When I was small I loved reading *The Water Babies*, and *Orlando, the Marmalade Cat*, but I must have been about nine years old before I was able to persuade my father to let me have *Sunny Stories*, which was then delivered each week with the Sunday paper. I was about fourteen or fifteen before I was allowed to read the paper.

Sundays were usually quiet days, often because dad was tired, and liked to read the Sunday paper in peace after lunch. However, sometimes in the summer mum would pack a picnic and he would take us up onto the moors, or occasionally to the beach, where he would paddle with us in the sea. He, like so many men, sometimes wore a knotted handkerchief on his head to protect his bald spot from the sun, and would roll up his trouser legs to paddle with us in the sea! How embarrassing – but the memory makes me smile! Sometimes we went to Paignton Zoo. Graham did not always come with us; he was seven years older than me, so being in his teens he had other things to do! He liked to go out with his mates.

On occasions an elderly lady friend of my parents would visit us on a Sunday afternoon, and stay for tea. We usually had a nice tea on Sundays, as this was the only real teatime of the week. We would have ham or fish paste sandwiches, cake, perhaps jelly and blancmange and, in the winter, would toast bread on a long toasting fork in front of the fire. I used to walk up to meet 'Aunty' at the bus stop on the main road. During the afternoon we might all go for a walk, and after tea my father would drive her home to Kingsteignton, whilst my mother washed up.

On other Sunday afternoon, when I a bit older, about 9 or 10 years, I would walk with my friend, Nita Mary, down to Oggwell cross, where her mother was in the isolation hospital. We would pick wild flowers for her on the way. Nita Mary's mum had multiple sclerosis, and was completely bedridden.

Winter Sunday afternoons and evenings, when it was too cold to go out, would be spent around the fire, playing board games or playing with our toys, or perhaps listening to children's programmes on the wireless (we didn't use the term "radio" in those days). My father insisted on listening to the news twice a day – early mornings in the week, and at teatime. The news would include a weather forecast and a farming bulletin, and a shipping forecast. We did not have a television until 1959. Despite our pleas dad said we would not have one until he could afford to buy one – he certainly wasn't going to buy one on "the HP".

After tea my father carried out his Sunday ritual. On the wall in the main room was a large old wall clock. No one, not even my mother, was allowed to touch this clock. Every Sunday, without fail, dad would wind up the clock with a big key. As far as I remember, this old clock never failed to keep time, never wound down, and never failed – it probably wouldn't have dared!

At about half past seven, Robert and I went to bed, although Graham was allowed to stay up later. In the winter we had hot water bottles, as the nights could be cold with no heating in the bedrooms. I can remember waking up some mornings and seeing frost and ice formations on the inside on the bedroom window. If it was very cold, I used to get dressed under the bedclothes!

Father worked hard, as did most people in those days. Wages were low and it was often difficult for families to make the money go round. We had a large vegetable garden, and Dad grew all our vegetables – potatoes, peas, beans, carrots, shallots, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, spring onions, parsnips, and rhubarb. Dad was a good gardener; he always gardened with the phases of the moon, sowing with a new moon, and reaping or harvesting on a waning moon, and it seemed to work for him. He also had other “tricks” like planting carrots alongside onions because carrots were prone to carrot fly, but the flies did not like the smell of onions, so kept away. There were also gooseberry and blackcurrant bushes in the garden, in addition to a plentiful supply of apples from the orchard. It was rare for my mother to have to buy vegetables, except for tomatoes and cucumber, and maybe a sack of potatoes in the winter. My father spent most Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings in the garden, or scything the orchard, trimming hedges, pruning apple trees or sawing and chopping logs.

My father followed Torquay United football team, so during the football season he would sometimes go to a football match if they were playing at home. As this was mostly during the winter months there was not quite as much to do in the garden, so he was more able to afford the time on a Saturday afternoon. Occasionally he would take me with him to the match, and I can remember once we went to Plymouth on the train, when Torquay played against Plymouth Argyle. The train was crowded, and we had to stand in the corridor all the way. We had to walk from the station to Home Park, but en route we stopped for lunch in a small café – a real treat. I can even remember what we ate – liver and onions with boiled potatoes, followed by steamed pudding and custard. Dad finished my pudding, as I could not eat it all!

Dad also kept pigs and poultry – mostly hens, but there were a few ducks and geese. When the pigs were ready, these were sent to Harris's Bacon Factory in Totnes. Baby day-old chicks were purchased from Miller's in Tedburn St Mary, and were sent down on the train from Exeter to Newton Abbot in large cardboard cartons. We would be advised of the time of arrival, so that dad could arrange to collect them promptly from the station. For the first few days they were put under an infrared lamp to keep them warm, and mum would prepare their food – porridge oats and finely chopped hardboiled egg. The ducks and geese were sold at Christmas, but the chicks were kept mainly for their egg production.

My mother also worked very hard, and had regular routines for her many tasks. Although Dad always fed the pigs each day she fed the poultry. Each morning she would scatter poultry pellets, corn, and limestone grit, which Dad used to buy from Stoneycombe Quarry. She would then collect, wash, and pack the eggs into trays ready for collection by the Egg Marketing Board. The sale of pigs, eggs, poultry and a few flowers all supplemented the family income.

Mondays was, as in most households, washday. This would begin with Mum lighting a fire under the copper in the washhouse, and when the water boiled she would stir in washing powder (always Persil) and drop in all the bed linen, towels, and other “whites”. From time to time she would remove the wooden lid, and agitate the wash with a wooden stick. When the items were clean they were hauled out into tin baths, and rinsed several times in cold water. Reckitt's Blue was added to the final rinse, and then the washing was wrung out and put through a big, heavy, wooden-rollered mangle that she turned by hand. She then pegged everything out on the clothesline, which was propped up with a long, forked pole. On wet days everything was pegged on lines inside the washhouse, and the door would be left open so that air could circulate and hopefully dry the washing. Mum would then use the still warm water in the copper to wash the washhouse floor and leave it clean for someone else to use the next day. With hot water available, she also took the opportunity to clean the adjacent toilet.

Whilst the whites were boiling, she would hand wash other items at the kitchen sink. All woollens had to be washed carefully by hand in those days, or they would shrink. Mum used Lux soapflakes for this chore. Dad's overalls, on the other hand, were scrubbed on a ridged washboard, using a strong household soap.

It was not until the late 1950s, or maybe even the early '60s, when mum eventually acquired an electric Burco boiler, which stood in the corner of the kitchen and made washday a bit easier. It was even better when she was able to afford a washing machine, and a spin dryer, but that was much later.

Tuesday was ironing day – piles and piles of ironing – a seemingly never-ending chore. Mum did have an electric iron, but it had to be plugged into the ceiling light socket, as there were no power points. Of all her household tasks I think she disliked ironing the most.

On Wednesdays mum usually went shopping in Newton Abbot. This was market day in the town, and this routine was probably a left over habit from our earlier farming days. She always went to the butchers, Sandford's I think, as we nearly always had pork or lamb chops for tea on Wednesdays. My mother would walk into town, and usually walk home again, unless she had very heavy shopping, in which case she may treat herself to a bus ride. Even so, she would have had to walk down into the village from the main Newton Abbot/Totnes road, as there was no bus service into the village until 1958. We had no refrigerator, so these shopping trips would be repeated on Saturday mornings, for fresh supplies, particularly meat. Robert and I would often go with her, as dad would be working, and she would not leave us at home on our own.

Thursdays and Fridays were mum's cleaning days. All the floors, except the hallway, were covered in linoleum, which she would get on her knees to wash. The sitting room had a large rug. The long hallway was stone floored, with a runner from the front door through to the kitchen. On either side of this runner mum would apply red Cardinal polish to the stone. All the furniture had to be dusted and polished – a task that fell to me when I got older. On these days, mum may make jams and pickles and chutneys as the fruit and vegetables came into season. She was always busy; even my father could not get her to sit down.

In addition to normal housework, bed-making, cooking, cleaning and dusting, mending and darning (using a wooden mushroom) etc., my mother seemed to be responsible for most of the decorating in the home. I don't remember my father doing this, although he did decorate the outside of the cottages. Mum did not really do a lot in the main garden, but she liked flowers, and grew some in the orchard, and in flowerbeds in the back yard. I think she found this relaxing, if she had time to spare.

Probably the most important job for my mother was the cooking. We had a sort of weekly menu of meals, for example on Sundays it was always a roast meal of beef, lamb or pork. If funds were a bit tight, mum would kill a chicken – a luxury for most families, but we were fortunate as we had our own. In the early 1950s many families would have had chicken only at Christmas. Sunday was the only day we ate our main meal at lunchtime; during the week we ate when dad came home from work. Mum cooked the most marvellous roast potatoes, and there would always be plenty of vegetables – all fresh, no one had freezers, although tinned vegetables were always kept in the store cupboard. Robert and I spent many a summer Sunday morning sitting on an old stone in the backyard, shelling peas, or topping and tailing gooseberries and blackcurrants – jobs we hated. If we had roast lamb, I was given another hated chore – making mint sauce. Lunch would often be followed by apple or other fruit tart and cream.

Monday tea would often be cold meat left from the day before, served with bubble and squeak. On Tuesdays we often had lamb stew and dumplings, on Wednesdays it was usually roast chops. On Thursdays we might have liver and onions, and on Fridays perhaps sausages, with baked beans and mashed potatoes. On Saturdays, mum would go shopping again, and she would bring home perhaps smoked haddock, kippers, or fresh herring or mackerel. Nearly every day, our meal was followed by a pudding of some sort; steamed suet pudding with golden syrup, rice pudding, egg custard or fruit tarts. All in all, we ate very well, as both my parents put great emphasis on living well and keeping healthy. I think they knew nothing about nutrition, but knew what was good for us without knowing why. We may have gone without other things, but we never went short of food.

The standard of living was gradually improving year on year during the 1950s, and all in all I remember a happy childhood. As children we had a lot of freedom, and had, within reason, what our parents could afford. They were not particularly demonstrative towards us in their affection but we were loved. Naturally, there were times when we felt a bit deprived, as children do when others have something newer, different or better, but we didn't do too badly.

We always had pets, which my father insisted we looked after and treated well. We had guinea pigs, rabbits and cats, and Graham, my older brother, had a couple of ferrets, with which he went rabbiting. If he was successful we had a rabbit stew, something we all loved. Sadly, this activity came to an end with the introduction of myxomatosis, a viral disease introduced in an effort to

control the rabbit population and the destruction of farmers' crops. No one wanted to risk eating rabbits that may have been infected with this terrible disease. Coming from a farming background my father viewed animals largely as a commercial commodity; however he would not tolerate any ill treatment of animals, and was always concerned for their welfare. I remember his strong opinions on the introduction of myxomatosis, which he thought was a monstrous and cruel practice, and he also firmly believed there were better ways than the proposed methods of dealing with badgers, when new 'evidence' suggested they carried tuberculosis and infected cattle.

4. Christmas

When I was small Christmas always seemed to be a warm, happy time. In the run up to Christmas day, we would make paper chains and lanterns, pick holly sprigs to place above the pictures, and decorate a small Christmas tree. There seemed to be 'secrets', going on. I know now that my mother would spend her evenings, after we had gone to bed, knitting or making presents. She would also bring home shopping bags into which we were instructed not to peep. After Graham joined the army, mum would send him parcels from time to time. At Christmas she would pack up special treats of Christmas cake, mince pies, and chocolate, etc. so that he, too, could enjoy the festivities (although judging by some of the photos he sent home, I think he had a pretty good time!). Although not well off, my parents were thrifty, so we always had a lot of presents for which Mum had saved up, and a special Christmas dinner, usually roast goose, followed by Christmas pudding and clotted cream.

Whilst Christmas was fun for we children, we never really appreciated what a busy time this was for our mother. In the preceding weeks she would be making puddings, marzipan, a Christmas cake, and jars of pickled onions and of mincemeat. In addition to all this for the last two or three days before Christmas she would be killing, plucking and drawing poultry, dressing them ready for the table, fulfilling Christmas orders. Of course, this was not on the scale she had been used to in earlier years on the farm, but nevertheless it must have been exhausting. On Christmas Eve she would boil an ox tongue. When it was cold, she would skin and roll it, place it in a basin, and pour some of the cooking liquid around it – this would set into a tasty jelly. Then she would place a plate over the whole thing, and weigh it down with a heavy weights or an old flat iron. Home cooked pressed tongue – yummy! We would have this on Boxing Day, together with any leftover goose and stuffing, and boiled potatoes and pickles.

We three children each used to hang one of our mother's lisle stockings on our bed heads, and on Christmas morning when we woke up they would be filled with an apple, an orange or tangerine, a few nuts, some gold wrapped chocolate coins, a few real pennies, and a sugar mouse. There may be coloured pencils, a paint box, crayons or chalks, and a colouring book. There would be socks or gloves or a scarf, and a new board game such as ludo or snakes and ladders. The boys may have clockwork cars, or toy soldiers, and I would have perhaps a little doll or some beads. They were simple things, but gave us much pleasure and enjoyment.

Christmas mornings were always busy for us – dad had the animals and poultry to feed, and would bring in a supply of coal and logs. Mother would be busy cooking dinner; we nearly always had roast goose, with Mum's wonderful homemade sage and onion stuffing and gibley gravy. When I was about nine years old, I would have to help prepare the vegetables, or lay the table. There would always be plenty of vegetables - Brussels's sprouts, roast parsnips and carrots – followed by Christmas pudding and clotted cream. There would be crackers, of course, and silly hats.

Christmas afternoons were spent by the fireside, playing with our new toys, and Dad would show us how to roast chestnuts in the fire. After tea, always Christmas cake and mince pies with more clotted cream, we would play board games or perhaps play snap. At the end of the day, tired but still excited, we filled our hot water bottles and went off to bed.

5. Playing In and Around the Village

My childhood memories seem to be of endless, hot summer days, although I'm sure this was not the case! Nevertheless, children generally had a lot of freedom, and would often play out and about in the lanes and woods for hours. Our parents did not seem to worry too much about us, so long as we were happy, and not getting up to mischief or causing trouble.

On the garden wall of Treeton Cottage, just down the road from us, there grew tufts of pennywort, fleabane, and tiny ivy-leaved toadflax, and over the wall was a large beech tree. Wendy and I used to gather up and eat the fallen beechnuts in the autumn. Fleabane also grew on the rocks opposite the Co-op; we could never walk by on the pavement, we always had to walk up onto the rocks and jump off.

We would walk down Vicarage lane, past Mark Rowe's workshop in the old chapel, past the vicarage and Fairfield, and on down sewerage lane, across the meadows to the stream. Alternatively, we might walk to the very end of Vicarage lane, and then across the fields to the railway line. Sometimes we walked along the line to Langford Bridge, and return along the lane, or walked the other way to Stoneycombe. This track was the busy main Plymouth line and, on reflection, walking along it was a dangerous thing to do; but we were children, and never thought of the danger, just the fun. Halfway down Vicarage lane I remember there was a very old, hollow tree that we used to love to climb. Also in Vicarage lane, just past the back entrance to Manor Farm, where the lane levels out there was a small natural spring by the hedge, where pond weed grew, and clyder ("sticky buttons"), and stitchwort – I loved this, as you could pop the seed pods with a sharp snap. The hedgerows were full of flowers – there were primroses, wild strawberries, red campions, herb Robert, honeysuckle, foxgloves and deadly nightshade.

During the school holidays in the summer my mother would take us to Baker's Park in Newton Abbot, and sometimes Mrs Skinner would bring Wendy and Marilyn as well. We walked up and over Stoneman's Hill, and down the old Totnes Road to the park, and we often took a picnic. In this large park we had the freedom to run and play, whilst the mums sat in the shade under the trees. There were swings, parallel bars, a stirrup maypole, and a roundabout. Beside the main path there was an old water fountain from which we could drink. We would have a lovely time. When we were a bit older, about ten or eleven, Nita Mary and I would walk down to this park, and then on past Bradley Manor, across the meadow and the bridge into Bradley Woods. We would stroll along the riverbank, where the wood anemones grew, and up to the tunnel (then blocked off) and the worshipping pit (overgrown, but full of bluebells and ferns).

In late summer we would take a picnic and sit on the edge of the fields, watching the hay or corn harvests. Mrs Skinner often took us – Wendy, Marilyn, Robert and me on these excursions. The picnics would be very simple – often a cheese spread or jam sandwich, and bottle of homemade lemonade. The cutting would usually start on the perimeter of the field, round and round in ever decreasing circles, until they reached the centre. There would always be rabbits in the fields, and they would retreat into the remaining standing crop, until finally there was nowhere else for them to go, and they would all rush out from the centre. Then the farm dogs would chase and often catch them. Mrs Buckpitt would come along with baskets of refreshments for the men – bread, cheese and pickles, pasties, apples and cold tea or cider.

Cut hay would be left to dry for a few days, then gathered into hay carts and taken to the farm barns – I don't remember many hayricks in the 1950s. On the other hand, corn would be threshed, and the straw tied into sheaves, and stacked into stooks, to dry out before being taken into the barns. Balers also were being brought in as machinery and equipment became more available. I believe combined harvesters (machines which cut and threshed the corn and baled the straw all at the same time) came into use, and farmers could hire these for the harvest if they didn't own one.

Sometimes, we would play in the woods beyond Ladywell, on the way passing by the water meadow that ran from Mrs Bowhay's house down towards the stream. This field was often a bit boggy, but in the spring it would be yellow with flag irises. I remember, too, on the left hand side of Slade lane, which ran past Ladywell and on up towards Stoneyhill, there was an old orchard that would be carpeted with snowdrops in the early spring. We children, both girls and boys spent a lot of our summer days 'exploring', making dens, swinging from trees, catching tadpoles in the old millpond and building dams in the stream where it ran through the woods. Sometimes we would take frog and newt spawn, or tadpoles home in a jam jar, and put them in our garden pond, only to be overrun by frogs and newts a few weeks later.

I remember the beautiful wild orchids that grew in the woodland clearings. I also remember the wild cherry tree, the delicate wild roses, and the masses of bluebells that grew in a small old quarry site, which we called Bluebell Wood, in the field beyond. This was a magic place – fairies lived there!

Sometimes, I would play there on my own. Amongst the bluebells there were old tree stumps, and fallen trees, around which grew lovely, thick, soft green moss, harts tongue ferns, and other ferns, wild garlic and toadstools. In the spring and early summer we would pick wild primroses and violets, and in late summer we picked blackberries, and sometimes found mushrooms in the surrounding fields. In the autumn we picked hazelnuts – I'm surprised we never broke our teeth on them.

The stream ran from the woods, through a tunnel under Ladywell and its garden, and then alongside the lane leading into the lower end of the village. I remember a couple of adventures in this stream, one being when I walked (or rather, stooped) through this tunnel from the well, under the garden and the house, and out the other end, into the woods. I was a bit scared, and influenced by thoughts of 'Ratty' in *The Wind in the Willows*, kept thinking there may be water rats living there.

Village children spent most of their time outdoors if the weather was fine. Some of the boys, including Robert, had a trolley made from wooden planks or with a box-like construction, set upon a frame to which old pram wheels were attached. They were steered by a rope attached to a wooden bar between the front wheels. If you were lucky, your vehicle had a wooden brake lever that could be pulled against a wheel; if not, you just put your foot down on the ground! He and his friend, Tony Tarr, would spend hours playing on their trolleys – they would tow them up to the top of our hill, sit on them and whiz past our cottage at great speed. It used to frighten my mother half to death. On one occasion Robert nearly met his Waterloo when he whizzed off the pavement at the bottom of the hill, directly in front of the post delivery van, which missed him by a whisker!

Robert and Tony were always in mischief, although it couldn't have been too bad, as the helmeted village policeman was always around somewhere. Although we had our own orchard, the boys loved to 'scrump' apples from other people's orchards. They would go up into the woods, creep along the boundary to Court Grange and, if the coast was clear and the gardener was nowhere to be seen, take apples from the trees in the grounds. I do not remember their ever being caught!

Another favourite activity of the village boys (the girls were too chicken) was playing knock-out ginger – knocking on doors and then running under cover to watch the occupants open their doors, only to find no one there. Sometime they tied two adjacent doors together by the handles before knocking – to them this was even more fun, as neither neighbour could open their door. This game was usually a winter evening pastime, as there was less likelihood of being caught if it was dark.

At the top of our hill, just inside the wall of the Manor grounds, there was a big horse chestnut tree, and the branches used to hang out over the wall and the pavement. When it shed its conkers Robert used to collect them, as did other children in and around the village. He would push a skewer through them, and thread through a piece of string. Some boys had secret methods or special treatments, or so they boasted, to harden the conkers. During school play times, the playground would be full of boys, and a few girls, having conker fights, egging each other on, cheering or booing as appropriate, until either a winner was declared, or the conkers fell to pieces.

Further up Stoneman's Hill I remember a place where yellow toadflax and purple loosestrife grew by a field gate, and much further along, on the other side of the hill, there grew bird's foot trefoil, silverweed and scarlet pimpernel. It was here that I first saw a poor rabbit suffering from the effects of myxomatosis, with its milky, protruding eyes, unsteadily falling about all over the lane. What a terrible and sad sight!

Other exciting fights also took place – snowballs! We children loved the snow, even though we froze. If it snowed we always built a snowman, using small pieces of coal for its eyes, and a carrot for its nose, and, of course, we always played snowballs. Most of us would have woollen gloves, (Fair Isle, hand knitted), which were soon soaked through. Our hands would be freezing, but that didn't stop us. If we played snowballs during school playtimes, we used to warm ourselves up by the stove when we returned to the classroom. I remember on one occasion someone lobbed a snowball directly at Miss Blackmore, catching her on the back of the head. I cannot remember who the offender was, but Miss Blackmore was not best pleased.

6. Schooldays – Abbotskerswell Primary School

Moving house meant, for me, changing schools. My brother, Graham, who was seven years older than me, was already attending Newton Abbot Grammar School, so he continued as usual, and my younger brother, Robert, at three-and-a-half, was still too young to go to school. I do not remember

my first day at the village primary school, so I suppose it was not too traumatic! I probably went along with Wendy Skinner, who lived in No 5; certainly, over the next few years as we grew up, we were always playing with each other, and were great friends.

We children all walked to school, mostly in groups, occasionally accompanied by someone's mother, but usually on our own. I did not have far to go, but children living at Stoneyhill had quite a long walk. They would often take a short cut across the fields, to join Slade lane halfway down, beyond Ladywell – a nice route in the summer, but not so if it was pouring with rain. However, I believe they had great fun playing snowballs if it snowed, and recall them being chastised for being late for school on one occasion.

I started in the infants' class, under Miss Menhennet. She was 'very old', and very strict. I remember some of us being rapped over the knuckles with the edge of her ruler for some misdemeanour – perhaps for talking, or not knowing our tables! – but I don't remember ever falling foul of her myself. Although the school had a prescribed school uniform, I think this may not applied to the infants.

School started at 9 o'clock, when one of the teachers blew a whistle – the signal to line up in an orderly fashion in the playground, and to stop talking. Then, at a further blow of a whistle, we would go inside, hang up our hats and coats in the cloakroom which lay to the left of the school entrance porch, and assemble in the main classroom for morning prayers. Prayers were followed by a hymn, which we would sing whilst accompanied by the headmistress's, Miss Blackmore's playing the piano. Infants then moved to their classroom, where Miss Menhennet would call out our names and mark off the attendance register. This was important because I seem to remember attendance inspectors visiting and checking the register, and woe betide families who failed to send their children to school without very good reason. On Monday mornings she also collected our Dinner Money – 2shillings per week, I think, but later increased to 2shillings 4d. This now seems ridiculous, but at that time, this was quite a lot, especially if there were several children in the family. I remember some grumbles at the increase.

Each morning, in class the first thing we did was to say our 'times tables' in unison; then real lessons would begin. Every day seemed to start with arithmetic, mostly counting, adding and subtracting. Sums would be chalked on the blackboard, and we raised our hands if we knew the answers. This lesson was then followed by reading and writing. We repeated the alphabet, learned the sounds of letters and spelling of new words, and simple reading - sometimes we had to read aloud. We were also taught how to write, using lined paper, and copying from the blackboard.

Halfway through the mornings, at about 11 o'clock, perhaps between these two lessons, we had a break for a bottle of milk. Each child was given a 1/3rd pint bottle of milk. The milk was delivered each morning in crates, which were left at the school entrance. Our ginger cat, called Nelson because he was blind in one eye, discovered the milk supply, and used to break open the cardboard milk tops, dip his paws into the cream and lick them clean! Clever cat! The damage was blamed initially on birds until someone caught him red-handed, or rather, white pawed. After this the crates of milk were always brought inside when school opened each morning.

The afternoons brought a more relaxed routine in the infants' class. We used to have a scripture class, with bible stories. We also had PT (physical training) in the playground, and painting and drawing.

When Miss Menhennet retired, the infants had a new teacher, Mrs Hayward, who was a bit more lenient than her predecessor. She never taught me, but she did teach my younger brother, Robert.

When I was about eight years old, I was moved into the "big class", and was taught by Miss Blackmore, the Headmistress. She was a tall, attractive and quite smart lady, and a very good teacher. Here, we children now sat at double desks, instead of the tables and chairs in the infants' room. These desks were each made for two children to sit side by side. They had a bench seat, and two sloping, lidded desk compartments, with two inkwells and a groove along the top for holding pens and pencils. Our workbooks were kept in our desks, along with rulers, rubbers, setsquares, and all the other paraphernalia children collect. I felt quite grown up to have a desk! The desks were set in rows, with the older children sitting towards the back, and the younger ones at the front of the class. The children were divided into teams, yellow, red, green and blue, and were given team bands, which we wore during PT and games. I was in the yellow team. There was a large, coke/coal-fired

boiler in this classroom, which heated large pipes (and perhaps radiators, although I do not remember them), which ran along the skirting boards of both classrooms.

Morning routines were much the same, but we now did multiplication and long division, read “real” books, and learned poetry. We had history and geography lessons, and sometimes listened to BBC school broadcasts on the wireless. We had regular spelling and arithmetic tests, in addition to end-of-term exams. We still had our mid-morning milk breaks, and I recall one time when the milk supply was unavailable, although I do not know why. During this period - I cannot remember how long it lasted - we were given packets of milk tablets instead. These were thin, flat and somewhat chalky in texture, and came in several flavours, such as blackcurrant, strawberry and toffee.

Afternoon lessons also became more interesting; we drew and painted, did sewing and embroidery (girls only, I think) and cane work, making trays and baskets. We had drama lessons, and enacted little plays – I remember once being cast as Queen Victoria - not as glamorous as you may think, as I then thought Queen Victoria was rather ugly! Sometimes, in the spring and summer months, we would be taken on nature walks, along Vicarage lane. We would collect wild flowers and bugs, and take them back to school for identification and display on the specimen table in discarded fish paste pots. I knew the names of all the wild flowers, but I didn’t much like the bugs – I still don’t!

Some afternoons during the spring and summer were spent gardening in the school garden at the back of the school, behind the toilets. We each had little plots, and planted seeds there. I grew larkspur (delphiniums) and stocks – most of the girls liked to grow flowers; the boys, I think, were fonder of growing vegetables. Other afternoons were spent playing games, or doing PT in the school playground. We also practised country dancing, in readiness for a display at the village fete. We danced to records that Miss Blackmore played on an old gramophone – and learned the routines of Flowers of Edinburgh, Haste to the Wedding, and Durham Reel, to name but a few.

When I was at the primary school only part of the playground was surfaced; the remainder was just bare earth, with the roots of the trees in the hedge sticking up, waiting for us to trip over them, which I did more than once! I also remember our playing cricket on the village cricket ground. We would walk through the village in a crocodile to the cricket pitch at the far end of the village. This was a real treat – even the girls were allowed to play!

A new subject on the school curriculum was hygiene. Most children did not have very good teeth, and as we were now at an age when we were losing our milk teeth, many of us looked a bit gummy. (I remember many grown-ups having false teeth, including my own parents; my dad used to tease us by wiggling his. He used to say teeth were “trouble when they came, trouble when you had them, and trouble when they went!”) I think few of us owned a toothbrush, so we were taught that we could rub our teeth with salt to keep them clean. I clearly remember the school dentist’s visits, and being rather roughly poked and prodded. There were also regular visits and inspections by school doctors and nurses; I think half the children lost their tonsils on recommendation and referral by the school doctor!

My mother would not accept such advice, and took Robert and me to our own doctor, Dr Everard, in Newton Abbot. After inspection he said, “certainly not, if you weren’t meant to have tonsils they wouldn’t be there – there’s room for a horse and cart to go down!” I felt an outsider at school afterwards, firstly because my mother had sought a second opinion, and secondly because I seemed to be one of only a few who kept their tonsils intact. I was always termed “delicate”, having been born prematurely, and had my fair share of childhood illnesses, including whooping cough, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and chicken pox. In later years I questioned my mother’s wisdom as I had bouts of severe tonsillitis every winter until I was seventeen years old.

No account of schooldays would be complete without a mention of school dinners. At Abbotskerswell a kitchen had been built onto the far side of the school building, and dinners were prepared and cooked there daily. A hatch, from which the meals were served, opened onto the main classroom. I seem to recall that lunch breaks were from 12.30pm until 2 o’clock, and after eating our lunch we went out to play until it was time to return to lessons. There was a “dinner lady”, Mrs Hawkins, in attendance during the lunch break, probably to keep an eye on us whilst the teachers had their lunch break

The meals were not particularly exciting, being quite bland, and meals such as stew and cottage pie and corned beef were the usual type of main course, followed by tapioca pudding (which I hated),

apple pie and custard, stewed fruit, jam roly-poly or semolina with a dollop of jam. The food was warming in the winter months, and welcomed by most of the children - it may have been the only hot meal of their day. However, I remember one occasion, when perhaps the cooks were trying to make life a bit more interesting, dinner was accompanied by cheesy mashed potato. We had never had this before. It was essentially quite tasty, but unfortunately, in catering for a large number of children, the cooks had either not grated the cheese finely enough, or the potatoes were not hot enough to melt it. The result was lumpy mash containing globules of stringy cheese, and it did not look very appetising. One little girl, Frances Cummings, couldn't face it, but was instructed to eat it up - after all, no one wasted food in those days. Poor Frances tried again, and failed to swallow. After a second reprimand, she made a further attempt and then got her own back by promptly being sick over everything.

There are a few occasions in my early childhood that stand out in my mind, and I remember them vividly. One of these is the announcement of the death of the king, George VI, on 6th February 1952. I was eight years old. I remember being overcome by a feeling of great sadness and loss, and even today when I think of this event I still have those same feelings. A few months later, in May or June, the new Queen Elizabeth came to open the annual agricultural show at Stover. Local schools and organisations were allocated spaces on Courtenay Park, opposite Newton Abbot railway station, to await her arrival by train. Abbotskerswell schoolchildren were given a space, and the teachers asked us to ensure we wore our school uniforms. We all were very excited, and Mrs Skinner set about making Wendy and me new blue and white check dresses for the occasion. We were very proud; our new dresses had two rows of little frills running down the bodice - we felt very pretty! When the Queen arrived, she inspected a parade of Junior Leaders - young army recruits - from Denbury Camp. I was quite short and was very disappointed that I could see only the top of her head.

In June of the following year there were two more events that called for special celebrations; Edmund Hillary conquered Mount Everest, and the Queen was crowned. I remember being very excited. We listened to special broadcasts on the radio, and I seem to remember a school group going to the cinema later to watch these events.

On another occasion, I remember a group of blind children visiting the school. At that time, Court Grange was a Sunshine Home for the Blind, and was home to many young children. During the visit I clearly recall how I felt when I watched a small girl called Bridie feeling and smoothing a piece of fur - her little face was full of wonder. It made me appreciate what the world must have been like for her, not only away from home and family if she had them, but to have never been able to see an animal. Her sense of touch was everything to her, and I have never forgotten her.

I also remember being invited to tea with Miss Blackmore. She lived in the School House, just a few yards along from the school. The Needs family were moving into a new home in Stoneyhill, but I think there was a delay between their moving from their old home into their new one. Mrs Needs was a teacher, so maybe Miss Blackmore already knew her; anyway, in the period between moves the family, Mr and Mrs Needs and their two daughters, Susan and Pauline, stayed with Miss Blackmore for a short while. One day, as I was leaving school, Miss Blackmore asked me if I would like to have tea with them all, and to meet the girls. Well, what an honour! I remember feeling a bit apprehensive and nervous, and knew I had to be on my best behaviour, but I had a nice time. We had crumpets, which we toasted on the living room coal fire.

A further event which affected me deeply, took place when I was a little older - 11. One cold February morning in 1955, my brother, Graham, and I set out from home, he to report to Topsham Barracks to commence his National Service, whilst I had to go into Newton Abbot to take my 11-plus exams. In my mind's eye I can still see my mother, standing on the front doorstep in the falling snow, looking a bit tearful, and waving as we walked up the hill to catch the bus. This day was to change our lives. Graham joined the Devonshire Regiment, and I passed my exams.

I left the village school in the summer of 1955 - the end of an era - after passing my 11-plus exams, and started at the Grammar School in Newton Abbot in September. Four of us left the Primary School that year - Ronnie Hawkins, Alan Redwood, Jean Pugh and myself. I was very proud to be going to the Grammar school, although I did not relish the fact that I would be going there without my friends. However, we all travelled together on the same bus to Newton Abbot each day, as the

boys went to the Highweek Secondary Modern School for Boys, and Jean went on to the Highweek Secondary Modern School for Girls.

7. Schooldays – Newton Abbot Grammar School

Village life continued in much the same way, slowly changing with the times, but school was now quite different, and much more intense. My mother had worked hard to pay for my school uniform and sportswear, together with a hockey stick, and my older brother, Graham, who was in the army by then, bought me a lovely new fountain pen. All the new children, including me, turned up on the first day wearing mackintoshes or jackets that were far too big for them – purchased with the expectation that they would grow in to them. I never grew into mine; it was still big for me at sixteen!

As at primary school we had morning assembly and prayers before lessons. My friend, Nita Mary, being a year older than me, was already at the grammar school. Although assembly and prayers were non-denominational she, being a Roman Catholic, was excused this session. I was introduced to a lot more subjects, such as Latin and French and music, and arithmetic suddenly became mathematics, encompassing algebra, geometry, calculus, and additional mathematics. English lessons put emphasis of grammar, and I was introduced to the classics, and other great literature, to Shakespeare, and great poets and playwrights. I had always loved reading, and still do, so this suited me fine. History and geography were far more wide reaching, and ultimately very interesting. I was also introduced to the sciences – biology, physics and chemistry, all of which I enjoyed.

One thing we did not have was sex education – sex was never talked about, and children were not quite so worldly in the '50s as they are now. Biology lessons were strictly confined to plants and animals, with 'no birds and bees'. Science lessons were a balance of theory, and practical experiments, so I suppose whilst the theory element might have been O.K., I'm not sure practical lessons would have met with much approval! Generally speaking, families were larger than they are today. Five or six children* were not uncommon, so perhaps no one spoke about sex, but obviously actions spoke louder than words! There was a bigger outcry at the publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* than there seemed to be about the treatment and segregation of black Americans in the U.S.A., which my father deplored. One girl in my school year was caught reading this 'disgusting' book, and not only was the book confiscated, but she was threatened with expulsion.

Our teachers were very strict. By the end of the 50s we thought we were quite grown up. Nita Mary and I had been taking ballroom dancing lessons, and we were into the new music and dance, with singers like Marty Wilde and Tommy Steele, and Bill Haley and the Comets. Nita Mary had a record player, and used to buy records. I remember on one occasion she took her record player to school, and we were caught listening to records in the girls' cloakroom during a rainy lunchtime break. What a terrible crime! Poor Nita Mary was put in detention, and the rest of us were severely reprimanded. The headmistress singled me out for a particular dressing down as I 'ought to know better'. Being in the main stream, I should have been 'setting an example' to the others. I was made to feel so ashamed. I was such a shy girl, and I took this all very much to heart. Now, I just feel indignant that a child could be made to feel so badly about listening to a few love songs.

Despite having no sex education, we were taught the difference between boys and girls, acquiring this knowledge in our schooling on etiquette, manners and social graces! Boys wore caps, which were to be touched or doffed to their superiors. This practice was dying out, although older gentlemen were still doing this to me well into the sixties, if not early seventies – 'gentlemen' being the key word here. The boys were taught how to become gentlemen: remove their hats indoors, stand up when ladies entered the room, and never to sit down again before the ladies were seated, unless invited to do so. Gentlemen walked on the outside of the pavement when escorting a lady, stepped ahead to open doors for her, walked behind her when going upstairs, and in front when going down. A gentleman would light a lady's cigarette, and pay for her meals, and offer to carry her bags; and a gentleman never swore, especially in front of a lady. No wonder the boys found the girls intimidating. The girls had things a bit easier – they should remember to thank people, and to do so graciously. Ladies always wore hats to church. Ladies were never 'forward', but always modest. Little did they then know that the mini skirt was about to be introduced, and modesty as they

understood it was about to fly out of the window! Even for 1958/9 this all seems very stiff and starchy, and although I always appreciate good manners I am glad some of this has fallen out of practice.

For the first time, I had music lessons. Although I love all types of music I regret being unable to play any musical instrument, and I certainly cannot sing! Similarly, with art – I loved this, but although I can appreciate and enjoy its many forms, I am not much good at anything myself. During the first two years the girls sewed, and learned cookery, whilst the boys learned woodwork, or carpentry. In the third year we were allowed to opt out of these classes, and to concentrate on the subjects we wished to study for O and A levels. I enjoyed school, and loved learning, perhaps with the exception of Latin! The downside of all this was, of course, that I had one-and-a-half hours (three subjects) of homework after school every evening, and two hours (four subjects) at weekends.

School life was different in other ways too. For example, although the classes were mixed, at break time, the boys were segregated from the girls – we had separate playgrounds and playing fields. There was a good emphasis on sport, although I only really liked gymnastics, athletics and hockey. Strangely, when we were in about our fourth year, we had ballroom dancing lessons, but I did not think much of them. I had been dancing, even obsessed with it, since I was about ten years old. I was already quite a competent ballroom and Latin American dancer, so thought these lessons were of a very poor standard! However, I suppose it was thought that dancing was a desirable social asset among other social graces and etiquette we were to acquire. When I think about these school dances, which took place in the gym., I think how gauche and naïve we were, especially the boys. They would probably have preferred to be playing football. With the gravelly record player, all the lights blazing, and under the watchful eyes of the teachers, most of us were too embarrassed even to hold each other, leave alone perform ‘some stupid dance’! How the memory makes me smile.

Despite the homework I was still expected to help out at home as before, and I think my father in particular did not have much patience with me if I protested that I had to do my homework. He would often grumble that I “had my nose stuck in book again”.

I left school in 1960, with eight O levels to my credit and started work almost immediately. I should have liked to go on to some further education, but firstly I think my parents could not afford to keep me, and secondly, my father, although forward thinking in many ways, did not think this was necessary for a girl. His aspirations for me were that I should work in an office, and learn shorthand and typing. I did not want either of these things – I wanted to be a dancer. However, by way of compensation, he bought me an Irish setter puppy, which grew up to be as mad as a hatter, but I loved him to bits.

* I think there was probably little or no effective birth control – I don’t actually know, of course, as I was still a child. I didn’t know where babies came from, leave alone how to stop them!

8. Hobbies and Interests, Toys and Games

In the 1950s children’s toys were really quite simple. Although clockwork toys and talking dolls were available they were sometimes expensive. Dinky toys and Hornby train sets were much sought after by the boys. Many children were able to make their own amusements, for example, using discarded bottles as skittles, and making catapults and bows and arrows with sticks cut from the hedges and old pieces of string. Most boys had a penknife or pocketknife that came in useful for things like this. We played hopscotch, chalking squares on the pavement; we had yoyos, and hoops, and the boys had footballs. We played ping-pong, and five stones. Some children flew kites – lucky them! I always wanted a kite, but never had one, although Graham once made one for Robert. Girls had skipping ropes, or they would juggle with rubber balls. Wendy and I used to play for hours on the railings that ran in front of the cottages, until, at the age of about ten, we decided it was not ‘ladylike’ to show our knickers!

We played Cowboys and Indians with toy guns and bows and arrows, and played Doctors and Nurses with toy stethoscopes, and coloured water for medicines. We played Shops, using discarded ration books, and unused coupons. We even played Schools, with a blackboard and chalk. We had plasticine, which started off in a variety of colours, but became a sludgy brown/grey colour after much use and mixing up. Boys had tin soldiers, train sets, toy cars, meccano sets and popguns; girls had dolls. There were puppets, xylophones, drums and whistles.

Girls played Cats Cradle with a piece of wool; they also knitted, sewed or embroidered, as all little girls were taught these crafts. My mother banged nails into old cotton reels, and Wendy and I spent many hours making yards of French knitting from oddments of wool. My mother also showed us how to make golliwogs from any left over wool – we loved these, partly because they were easy to make. Sometimes, we picked flowers, removed the petals and soaked them in water to make perfume – it didn't smell very nice!

We would often play board games, or cards, (Snap was a favourite), and all children had crayons, paints, and colouring books. Small children had soft toys, often hand knitted and stuffed; they had kaleidoscopes, and building blocks with letters or numbers painted on them. Robert had an abacus and a fort, both made for him by a family friend. Graham had a bagatelle board, and a steam engine that was fuelled by methylated spirit.

Boys were keen on collecting things, from birds' eggs to cigarette cards, and postage stamps. Graham had a large collection of birds' eggs, although he had collected them before we moved to Abbotskerswell. (This practice later became illegal.) He also had a stamp album, with a collection of stamps from all over the world. Girls would collect things too, but these were more likely to be Robinson's Gollies from marmalade jars, or badges etc. Wendy and I became 'Ovaltines' – we joined a promotional children's club run by the Ovaltine manufacturers – and used to sing their special song 'We are the Ovaltines', until we drove everyone mad and were told to be quiet.

When I was about eight or nine years old, I was given a rug making kit for Christmas. Mrs Skinner had shown Wendy and me how to make rag rugs, from a sackcloth backing and pieces of fabric cut into strips, but this kit was far superior in my eyes. It certainly kept me busy and quiet for weeks until, at last, I produced a warm, sunrise patterned hearthrug. I felt very proud of myself.

Some children had scooters or bicycles, which were often hand-me-downs from their fathers or older siblings. Lucky children might get a new bike for Christmas or a birthday, but I think this was more common towards the end of the decade. I never had a bicycle; perhaps this is just as well, as several attempts by Wendy to teach me to ride hers ended in disaster. It soon became obvious that I had no aptitude for cycling, for I always fell off.

A new trend of going to the pictures on a Saturday morning started up for children in the mid-1950s and although Robert went along with Tony Tarr sometimes, if mum could afford it, I think I went only once, The Odeon cinema in Newton Abbot began showing children's films on Saturday mornings, and I know this was quite popular at the time.

9. Other Village Activities, Social Life and Entertainment

In the 1950s, most people did not have their own transport, and had little money to spare for entertainment so much of their leisure time was spent at home, or within the village. The village had a very good cricket team, so many of the men were involved with this. Even if they did not play, there were plenty who helped out, preparing the pitch, scoring, etc., and women helped by preparing the teas. The team had a good following, and there were always a lot of many youngsters and children watching the matches. I think the small children just went along to enjoy the teas and the sunshine, and the older girls went along to get to know the lads! Michael Buckpitt, Tony Bowhay, and most of the Pugh lads played at one time, along with others too many to mention.

There was a Men's and Youth Club above the Church House, where many of the male population would spend their evenings, playing darts and snooker. There was no admission for females, but girls would hang around outside. However, this practice came to an end when there were complaints from some of the ladies of the parish, who thought girls would be better off staying at home and doing embroidery! There were no organisations for young women, so of course they were bored. However, I do remember teenage girls and boys gathering around Cross Tree, by the public notice board and Mark Rowe's builder's yard, teasing, flirting and smoking. A lot of people smoked in those days and, often, older men smoked pipes, cupping their hands around the bowls and lighting the tobacco with Swan Vestas. I think it was only later that safety matches were available, or people had pocket lighters. Neither of my parents smoked, but I do not remember their forbidding us to do so. I do recall, however, their advising Graham, when he was about to join the army, that smoking was a waste of money but that, nevertheless, he should make his own decisions. Of course, smoking was

all part of young soldiers' lives then, as was the beer. I know Graham did smoke when he was in the army, but I think this was more to be in tune with the other lads than for any enjoyment.

Older men, or those not interested in the Club activities, could go to one of the two village pubs, the Tradesman's Arms, or the Butcher's Arms, and I think they must have had a good trade. I believe not many women frequented the pubs, and certainly not without their husbands. When we first moved to the village I think the landlord of the Tradesman's was Harold Hancock, and "Bungy" Eyles had the Butcher's Arms.

I remember another community activity, although I don't know how often it took place, and that is the Beating of the Bounds. Both adults and children took part, and walked the boundaries of the parish. This is a very old tradition, and took place in most parishes – it was like marking one's territory. I rarely hear about people doing this nowadays, although it was carried out not long ago where I live now. I don't know how many people attended.

There were other social activities, mainly for adults, which took place on a fairly regular basis. There was a flourishing Women's Institute, and members seemed to be always making cakes or jam. My mother never joined, but Mrs Skinner was a member, as were many women in the village, and I think friendships and social life grew from this organisation. There were whist drives in the Church House, mostly during the winter months, I think. I know Mrs Skinner used to go to these, but my own parents never went, not because they disapproved, but because they were fairly private people.

There were occasional dances in the Church House too, and a lot of the young men and women went to these, although, of course, I was too young to do so. Before he went into the army Graham liked to go to these, and he would also attend if he came home on leave. Sadly, I remember one occasion that upset him dreadfully. He had been friendly with John Seymour, a little younger than him, as they both had small motorcycles, but John had been killed in an accident earlier in the year. Graham was more than a little fond of John's sister, Hester. At the village dance, just before Christmas I think, Hester suddenly collapsed and died. Graham was in a state of great distress. Poor Mrs Seymour had lost both her husband and her son earlier that year, and had now lost her younger daughter.

I do not remember any village activities that were exclusively for children. Some children belonged to the Boy Scouts, Cubs, Girl Guides or Brownies, but I think they went to Ipplepen for these groups. There may have been facilities in the village later on; I am not sure. The children were once organised into putting on a concert evening at Court Grange. I remember Mrs Cowell being in charge of dress and make-up, and I wore my ballet tutu for a duet, a piece called "Me and my Shadow" with another girl. Mrs Cowell delegated some make up duties to other ladies, who made a bit of a mess with the eye shadows – Mrs Cowell had to clean it off, declaring we looked as if we had black eyes!

There was one annual event, however, which certainly involved the children, and that was the village carnival. There were weeks of preparation in the run up to the carnival day, on a Saturday during the school summer holidays. A Carnival Queen would be chosen, together with her attendants, and mums would get busy making their dresses and bouquets. On the big day everyone would get together to decorate the floats, praying it would not rain because a lot of decorative flowers and streamers were made from crepe paper. My father was working as a lorry driver, and he obtained his employer's permission to use the lorry as a carnival float. Some floats were trailers, with hay bales for seating, and pulled along by farmers' tractors – I think Michael Buckpitt supplied one of these. After the floats were dressed we would put on our fancy dress outfits and begin the procession. There would be a prize for the best float, and for the best fancy dress costume. Over the next few weeks the carnival queen's float would be taken to other local carnivals in the hope of winning prizes for best carnival queen, or best display. It was great fun.

I also remember another, one-off event organised for the village children to commemorate the Queen's coronation in June 1953. I think all the primary school children were given a special tea, and a commemorative mug.

We did not mark Hallowe'en, as far as I remember, but Bonfire Nights were great fun filled evenings, although not so much communal events, as they took place on a more individual basis. We had a large orchard, and my father was able to build up quite a large pile of hedge trimmings during the spring and summer months. This would have dried out quite nicely by 5th November, so gave us a blazing fire. In the run up to the event Robert and Tony Tarr would be busy making a Guy Fawkes,

stuffing it with straw, and dressing it in any discarded clothes they could beg. Then they would put it on their trolley and tow it around the village, trying to raise funds for fireworks, although Dad did not really approve of this. We children would beg mangolds from Michael Buckpitt to carve into lanterns, and Dad would stick half a candle in each one. Mum would scrub potatoes to cook in the fire, Mrs Skinner used to make lovely toffee and she and mum made toffee apples.

The Skinners and the Austins, and a few other children would gather in our back yard, and the dads would set off the fireworks. We all had sparklers, and the boys, of course, liked the bangers and the rip raps. We had rockets, Catherine wheels, and Roman candles, too. When we ran out of fireworks we would traipse into the orchard, light the bonfire and warm up whilst the potatoes cooked. Bonfire nights were always cold, and sometimes wet, but we didn't mind - we had fun, and would go off to bed tired, but happy.

10. The Church and Church Related Activities

Abbotskerswell has a small but lovely church, with, unusually, a painted screen and I think one of the oldest lych gates in the country. Our vicar was the Reverend Ainscough, and Mrs Fey, who ran the post office, played the church organ.

My parents were not churchgoers, but they never discouraged us children from attending if we wanted to do so. As a small child, I felt church was a bit intimidating – something for grown-ups. However, Robert and I did attend Sunday School in the Church House on Sunday afternoons. I think Mrs Arnold was one of the teachers there. At Christmas time there was a Sunday School Christmas Party, and all the children received a prize or small gift, together with an orange.

I did go along to church on a few occasions, probably as an extension to Sunday School or Primary School arrangements. I particularly liked Harvest Festival, when children took flowers and garden produce along with which to decorate the church. These were displayed alongside plaited loaves of bread, and sheaves of corn, and we sang special harvest hymns. My friends Nita Mary and Ann Cooper were both Roman Catholic, so on Sunday mornings they walked to St Augustine's Priory for their church service. This nunnery was a closed order at the time, so it was a place of mystery to me. I may have seen a nun occasionally, but this was rare.

There was always a summer fete on the Vicarage lawn, and some of the schoolchildren gave a display of country-dancing that we had practised at school. The boys wore short summer trousers, and the girls wore flowery cotton frocks. We all wore white socks. Music was played on the gramophone as at school. There were cake stalls, bring and buy stalls, craft stalls and hoopla, and we all had a lovely time. I'm sure the sun always shone – it always seemed to be warm, and I cannot remember it raining, although I am sure must have done on some occasions.

Another event I liked was carol singing. We all dressed as warmly as we could, because it always seemed to be freezing. We wore woolly hats, scarves and gloves, and our breath would be misty in the winter air. We carried candles or lanterns and our carol sheets, and went around the village from street to street, stamping our feet to keep warm, and singing a variety of Christmas carols to raise funds for the church. Some people would give us mince pies, but I do not remember any of the mulled wine you read about in story books – maybe this was for the grownups! Anyway, we enjoyed the pies.

There was an active Mothers' Union in the village, and although my mother was not a member of this group, I believe many women in the village were. This provided friendship and social support to both women and children in the 1950s. In addition to regular meetings, I think sometimes there were organised trips or 'outings'. I remember my mother, Robert and I going on a summer coach trip to Ladram Bay with Mrs Skinner, Marilyn and Wendy, and I think this was a Mothers' Union trip.

11. Food and Drink

I have already mentioned the simple meals we ate as children, and I think these were typical of the meals in most homes at that time. There had been severe food rationing during the war years, but most rationing had ceased by the early 1950s. I believe bread, sugar and sweets were among the last items to be removed from rationing.

Most people had a cooked Sunday lunch - nearly always a roast of some kind, with fresh, often home grown vegetables, and many families would have 'leftovers' such as cold meat and bubble

and squeak on a Monday. However, I feel sure it must have been difficult for some housewives to manage, as wages were low, and some families were quite large. Toad in the hole, and other meals with a savoury pudding or with a pastry topping which made meals more filling were common, as were sausages, hog's pudding, bacon and faggots. Offal was relatively cheap, so liver, steak and kidney, and stuffed hearts were often on the menu. Corned beef, Spam or luncheon meat, cold tongue and Bath chaps (ham – boiled and crumbed pigs' cheeks) were popular and cheap, and nice with salad in the summertime. Potatoes were mostly boiled, as people did not have a lot of butter or margarine to make mashed potato. On the other hand, jacket potatoes always required a knob of butter, didn't they? Poultry was a real treat, and something that most people could afford only at Christmas. During the week most families would have their main meal in the evening when the men came home from work. Many children had a cooked school dinner, so may not have eaten another cooked meal. They might have a light snack like cheese, eggs or beans on toast for tea.

Although a fishmonger called in the village once a week, I do not remember our having a lot of fish, other than smoked haddock or kippers occasionally and, sometimes, fresh herrings or mackerel. Fish was, of course, nutritious, but not so filling, and the object of a meal seemed to be to fill you up, and prevent hunger. We did have fish sometimes when we were 'off colour'; it was a light meal, and easy to digest. I do recall having tinned salmon at teatime on a Sunday, but I never tasted fresh salmon or prawns until about 1962/3.

We were lucky - that is, if mum had time and if she had the money – we usually had a pudding after our main meal. However, this would be a simple dish, made with basic ingredients such as milk and eggs. There may be rice pudding sprinkled with nutmeg, bread and butter pudding to use up stale bread, apple crumble or pie using fruit from the orchard, or an egg custard. In the winter we loved steamed suet pudding with golden syrup; and of course, there was often jelly and blancmange. Busy mums also made use of tinned fruit and condensed milk.

Eggs seemed to be widely available, although they too had been rationed. Perhaps we were fortunate, because we kept hens. In any event, I think many women made sponge cakes and fairy cakes, although fruitcakes we usually made only at Christmas as dried fruit and nuts were expensive. Mrs Skinner used to make iced fairy cakes, and lemon meringue pie; my mother made sponges filled with coffee flavoured butter cream. The flavouring was from a bottle of Camp coffee – coffee and chicory, I think – which is the only coffee I remember. Usually we drank tea, or milk flavoured with cocoa, Ovaltine or Horlicks, but we rarely drank coffee. After sugar rationing ceased, sometimes mum would make coconut ice, toffee, or chocolate cornflake balls as a special treat.

I can remember other 'brands' of foodstuffs common in my early childhood. There was Daddies sauce, H.P. sauce and O.K. sauce, none of which I think you see today, although Heinz and Branston are still household names. I also remember tinned Fray Bentos corned beef, imported from Argentina, and Eiffel Tower lemonade crystals, which were probably sugar and lemon flavoured citric acid crystals, to be dissolved in water to make lemonade.

Although children were happy with lemonade, adults often liked something a bit stronger. Being in a cider making area, of course cider was popular, as was beer, and the village pubs seemed to do a good trade. My parents rarely drank, not because they were against it, but because they could not afford to. I remember their buying alcohol only at Christmas time, when dad would buy a bottle of whisky for himself, and a bottle of port and maybe Babycham, for my mother - no alcohol for we three children, of course. No ordinary families drank wine in those days.

Interestingly, I cannot remember a single overweight child. We all had enough to eat, so I think we were never went hungry, but there was no junk food and we were all active, playing out and about in the fresh air and walking everywhere – that was the way of life.

12. Fashions

As I have mentioned before, there were many changes during the 1950s, and one of these was in fashions and trends. During the war years clothes were rationed, and although people had clothing coupons they often did not have the money to buy new clothes. I am not sure exactly when clothes rationing ceased, but gradually over the decade clothes became more plentiful and perhaps more affordable. Many children wore clothes handed down from older siblings who had grown out of them. New clothes, if you were lucky enough to have them, were often bought in a larger size than

was needed, to allow for you to “grow into them”. Contrasting bands of fabric from another discarded garment would often be sewn onto the hem of girls’ dresses, to lengthen them, and make them last another year. Sometimes a new contrasting collar would be added too, in an attempt to disguise the alteration.

In the early 1950s boys wore short trousers, and generally only graduated to long trousers when they went to senior school. Jackets often had patched elbows to make them last a bit longer after the elbows had worn through. They wore long socks to keep their legs warm, so it is not surprising that I remember so many boys with scraped knees, as knees had no protection. They also often wore hand-knitted Fair Isle jumpers or pullovers. Most boys had a cap, but didn’t always wear it. Hairstyles were usually short and flat, with a side parting.

Girls wore winter skirts or pinafore dresses with hand-knitted jumpers, or twin sets, and had hand-knitted Fair Isle berets. In the summertime, they would be wearing homemade cotton frocks and hand-knitted cardigans. They often wore their hair in plaits or bunches, tied with a ribbon bow, clipped to one side with a hair slide, or held back from the face with an Alice band.

Shoes were always a problem for families where money was short. Children seemed to grow out of them quickly, or perhaps because we walked everywhere, the just wore out. Whichever, many children, myself included, wore shoes from which the toecap had been cut away. These were OK during the summer, and left money to spare to buy winter shoes later on.

Adult fashions, I think, were a bit drab, especially men’s. Generally, men wore flannel or corduroy trousers with wide legs, and turn-ups, and a jacket or jumper, over perhaps a checked twill shirt. Shirts often came with two collars, as collars wore out or were soiled more quickly than the main body of the shirt. These were attached with studs, so they could be removed and laundered separately, even if the shirt did not need washing. Footwear was a pair of brown or black lace-up shoes, although hobnailed boots and even gaiters were still worn for work by some, depending on their occupation. Many men wore a cap, or trilby hat. They would generally have a best suit, perhaps tweed or pin-striped. Men, especially older men, wore long-johns, or combinations, for warmth in the winter. Hair was usually a “short back and sides”, with a side parting.

Women were a bit more colourful, but almost always protected their clothes with an apron at home during the day. Undergarments, slips and knickers were not very exciting; women wore corsets, and knitted vests. Ugh! I remember Mrs Thompson, who lived in Jasmine Cottage – she was a corsetiere, and some ladies went to her to be measured and fitted for bras and corsets. I think she may have been an agent for Spirella. Most women wore skirts and jumpers in the winter, and a short-sleeved floral cotton dress during the summer. Coats were fitted, and women always wore a hat if they went out. Their shoes were not very glamorous, usually flat or low heeled and laced. Their hair would often be coiled, worn in a bun or ‘roll’, held in place with a hair net or combs, Marcel waved or set on metal curlers. They wore little make-up - perhaps lipstick and a touch of face powder (which looked like chalk) if they were going out. There was one exception – Mrs Cowell. She was pretty, and always looked very glamorous. She always wore lipstick AND eye shadow!

By the late 50s, how things had changed! Rationing had long gone, wages were improving, and many items had become more plentiful and available. Young men had suits, and were beginning to buy casual clothes too. Their trousers had narrower legs. Their hairstyles were changing – they grew their hair a bit longer and styled it into a ‘DA’ at the back, and a quiff at the front, held in place or smoothed down with Brylcreem. They no longer wore hats as their fathers had done.

Women’s fashions had also changed. As fabric became more widely available, although many were still making their own clothes, the slim fashions were being left behind. Dresses now had fuller skirts, puff sleeves and fitted waists, often belted, or tied with a bow. Full petticoats, made of paper nylon, were stiffened with sugar syrup to add fullness to the wider skirts. Shoes were much daintier, with the new fashion Louis heels. Hair was now being subjected to the permanent wave, and the home perm was popular, but perhaps not always successful! The French pleat and chignons were becoming popular. Although older women still wore hats, these were being replaced with headscarves to protect the hair, a trend being set by the Queen. Many of the younger girls replaced old-fashioned plaits with a more up-to-date ponytail. Women began to wear more make – mascara, and eye shadow – and beauty creams, such as Ponds cold cream, Nivea and Astral, and Cusson’s toilet soap were popular.

13. Finance

Although it was never discussed with us children, I know my parents were careful with money, but they were never in debt. They would budget and save and spend as wisely as they could. My father had a bank account, but my mother did not, although she did have some post office savings bonds (I think these were called war bonds). My father gave her a weekly housekeeping allowance, and this she supplemented this by selling a few flowers when in season. In addition, I believe she kept the rents from the other cottages. When Robert started school, in 1952/3 mum, like other women in the village, took some cleaning jobs, (for, among others, the Somers Cocks in Vicarage Lane at one time), and I know one of the reasons she did this was to pay for my uniform when I went to the grammar school.

Mum had a money tin, which she kept in a drawer at the bottom of her wardrobe. In this tin she apportioned money for the rates, insurances, household repairs, electricity and other regular bills, and saved a little for clothes and shoes, and for Christmas. In this way, she was always able to pay the bills. I believe my father took responsibility for paying the mortgage, but I suspect the properties were in his sole name.

In the early 50s there was little money to spare for sweets and treats, but we did have a few pennies to spend. We could buy 1d bars of chocolate from Mrs Fey at the post office, or 2ozs of sweets, which she would wrap in a cone-shaped screw of paper. I think sweets were rationed until 1953, so you could not buy many anyway, and then only if you had enough coupons. If there was no money or coupons for sweets, mum sometimes gave us a jelly cube, or a few sultanas.

Graham, being that much older than Robert and me, had a paper round until he left school, and this earned him his own pocket money, although I don't think it was very much. He used to cycle to school in Newton Abbot, and he collected the papers after school each day, and delivered them throughout the village.

As the decade wore on we had more, of course. We may be treated to ice cream on a Sunday when the ice cream van came around, or a bottle of fizzy drink when the Corona lorry called – I remember the flavours of dandelion and burdock, cherryade and ice cream soda, which we children thought were great just because they were a change from lemonade.

Throughout the 1950s, particularly in first part of the decade, people used various money saving ideas in order to make ends meet. Not only did they make or alter their own clothes, but their household linens were also adapted to last longer. Socks were darned, shirt collars were turned, buttons were moved and worn bed sheets were turned 'side-to-middle'. The women made jams and chutneys, sometimes using blackberries, rose hips and crab apples from the hedgerows. Shoes were mended, with new soles and sometimes, extra metal 'taps' nailed on to prolong the wear. My father had an iron foot, with a base and three different sized feet for this purpose. Later, Phillips stick-on soles became available, which made repairs a bit easier. We children were often told not to scuff our shoes – boys, especially, like to kick footballs, don't they? I can remember their big football boots, with high sides to protect their ankles; my brothers used to rub them with Dubbin to keep them waterproof, and Robert had Graham's hand-me-downs.

I can remember only one holiday, in 1958, I think, when we went to London to stay for a week with my Great Aunt Martha. She was widow and lived in Charlton. My father drove us; this was quite a long journey at the time, but what a thrill it was to be going on holiday! Robert and I were so excited. Graham did not come with us; he was either still in the army (although I think he left sometime in 1958), or he was working.

We visited Madame Tussaud's, the Tower of London, saw Buckingham Palace and went to see a show, Salad Days, at the Vaudeville Theatre. My Father gave us extra pocket money. In true girl fashion, I blew a large part of mine on a red jacket, and then didn't have much left to spend for the rest of the week. Robert, on the other hand, was much more prudent, and made his money last.

14. Facilities and Services

The Co-operative stores at Cross Tree in the centre of the village was the only grocers, and was managed by Mr Osbourne. Not only did he stock a range of groceries, but you could also order coal there. I can remember his recording purchases in a notebook, because many would pick up items

throughout the week, and settle their account on payday. The Co-op later moved out, and Mr and Mrs Holmes took over the shop as independent grocers.

Shopping was so different from today. I cannot remember any supermarkets – there were just plain grocers' shops such as the Co-op, Home and Colonial Stores, International Stores and Lipton's. Shops had a counter, with shelves behind on which were stored a range of tinned and bottles goods. Sugar was sold in blue bags. Bacon was sliced on a bacon slicer. Large slabs of butter (from New Zealand), margarine and lard were displayed under glass, and were cut and weighed to order. Dried fruit was displayed in hessian bags, their tops rolled back to show off the produce. Toffee and cooking chocolate came on large shallow trays, and pieces were knocked off with a small hammer, as required. Biscuits too were displayed in open topped tins, and broken biscuits were sold at a reduced price. Slade's, an independent grocer in Newton Abbot, had a cashier sitting in a sort of high box at the rear of the shop, and the shop assistants would place your bill and money in a canister and sent it up to her on a wire. Your change and receipt would come flying back! Harvey's, a draper's in Highweek Street had a similar arrangement.

Mrs Fey, who ran the post office at Cross Tree, also sold a limited range of goods. We children used to buy sweets there; although in the early 50s they were still on ration. We would buy dolly mixtures, and lollipops, and humbugs and liquorice strips, and sticks of barley sugar and liquorice comfits.

Few people had a telephone, but there was a public kiosk outside the post office, and you could always send telegrams from the post office if there was an urgent matter. It was not unusual to see a telegraph boy, on his small motorcycle, delivering messages.

There was a range of deliverymen servicing the village. The milkman delivered milk every morning, and there were weekly visits by a fishmonger and a butcher. You could order your shopping from International Stores in Newton Abbot, and they would deliver it – a great help if you had no transport. There were also weekly visits from a fish and chip van from Kingskwerswell, the Wall's ice cream van on Sundays, and the Corona lorry delivery fizzy drinks in glass bottles with a metal-levered rubber seal. Most homes had open fires, so there were coal and log deliveries.

There were occasional visits from hawkers; I particularly recall the gipsy women selling wooden clothes pegs, and French onion sellers with their strings of big golden onions tied onto their bicycles. Although we grew our own, my mother always bought onions from the onion men – she had a soft heart.

There was no bank, no hairdresser, no barber in the village, but there were two pubs – The Tradesman's Arms, and the Butcher's Arms. I suppose it was a matter of priorities: people could afford to save very little, they could cut their own hair, but they couldn't make their own beer!

15. Transport

In the early 50s not many people owned a car; many people went to work on a bicycle, or caught the bus from the main road, or walked. Motorcycles with sidecars were fairly common, especially for families with small children. Young men, once they started work, often saved up for a motorcycle – (Graham had a BSA Bantam) – but it was not until the latter part of the decade that they could afford cars. Petrol had been rationed during the war, and had not been readily available for private use, so even if you owned a car it would not have been much use if you had no fuel. I do not know when petrol rationing ceased, but I expect it was expensive, because although Dad had a car he still walked or rode his bike to work. My mother did not drive, so she still used the bus service or walked into Newton Abbot to shop. Even if they could drive I don't know how women managed, as in those days many cars were started by pulling out the choke to regulate to fuel flow, and inserting and turning a handle, which appeared to me to be quite hard work. I believe new cars may have had electric starters by this time but I do not think I knew anyone who had a new car in the early 1950s.

Of course young men wanted their independence, so they were eager to learn to drive and to have their own transport. On the other hand, although the girls may have had similar aspirations, their chances of buying a car were even less than the lads, because even when they were working they earned far less wages. There was a further problem, for whilst it was OK for young men to ride a motorcycle, this was almost unheard of for young women even if they could afford one – very unladylike! It was, of course, quite acceptable for women to ride pillion, in our fluffy dresses and a

headscarf – helmets were not yet compulsory. By the late 50s, however, things were changing and when I started work in 1960, at the age of seventeen, my father taught me to drive. As if it wasn't enough to learn how to steer and change gear with the gear stick positioned on the steering column, you had to do hand signals by waving your arm out of the open window! However, I never had a car of my own until about 1970, so I still used the bus.

There was always a bus service from the main Newton Abbot/Totnes road, although I seem to remember the last bus left from Newton Abbot at about 9pm during the week, with a late bus at about 10pm on Saturdays. There was no bus service into the village until 1958, but even then I think this was only about three times a day, and the last bus in was about 6pm to bring villagers home from work. There may have been a later service, perhaps on Wednesdays and at the weekends, but I am not sure.

I remember Matchless Norton and Royal Enfield motorcycles were very desirable. I also remember Lancia, Wolesley and Standard cars, among others, and shooting brakes too, all of which I think are now out of production.

16. Health Care and Welfare

The National Health Service was introduced in 1948, so was still in its infancy in 1950. Like many small villages, Abbotskerswell had no doctor. Although my family remained with our Newton Abbot doctor, I think most people in the village seemed to be registered with Dr Lyons at Ipplepen, or Dr McVicker in Kingskerswell. However, although it may have been difficult for some to visit the doctor's surgery, particularly if they were unwell and had to make the journey by bus, in those days doctors made house calls, especially for children and the elderly. The district nurse and the midwife also made home visits. The nearest dentists were in Newton Abbot.

I think the school milk ration may have been introduced around this time in order to supplement children's diets. Free supplies of concentrated orange juice were available to pregnant women – this could be obtained from Mrs Billett who, I suppose, was a sort of agent or nurse for the NHS.

Free glasses were available – most had wire or plastic frames, and not very flattering. Children's frames were horrible, round frames in blue or pink, making children look like little owls. A common practice for so-called 'lazy eye' was for a child to wear an eye patch over the good eye, which was supposed to make the lazy eye work harder. You never see this nowadays.

I suppose we were fortunate to be living opposite Dr Unwin who, although he was not our family doctor, was very good to us, He patched/stitched Robert up on more than one occasion! He was often called out at night – we would hear his car leave. However, his popularity was somewhat diminished when, on one such occasion, he accidentally ran over and killed our cat, Spratto, who jumped off the bank into his car headlights.

Of course, everyone still used the many old fashioned remedies for common illnesses and complaints. I believe most of them worked, unless the problem was serious, or maybe the disorder just ran its course, and the patient would recover naturally. Who knows? In any event, some of the remedies now seem very strange or amusing – I have listed some just out of interest.

I do not really remember much about the availability of welfare benefits in the 1950s. I know the unemployed could draw the 'dole', and old people could draw a pension, but apart from that I cannot recall anything else, although in certain circumstances, there may have been other help available.

I do remember, however, that it was not uncommon in those days to see tramps wandering the roads, and sleeping rough in the lanes and in barns. Sometimes they would call at our house, and my mother would give them a cup of tea, and something to eat if she had it. I think she felt sorry for them. Tramps were thought of as dishonest, and I suppose they were, if stealing meant survival. I think the alternative would have been the workhouse - although I don't know when these were closed down. I do remember my father telling me about them, and there was a workhouse in East Street in Newton Abbot. If what he told me was true who could blame these poor men for preferring to live rough. How difficult it must have been outside in all weathers, cold, lonely and friendless. I suppose they were the equivalent of today's 'homeless', and had fallen upon hard times. I am guessing that some of these men had lost families, or had been injured during the Second World War; whatever the reason, they were always bedraggled, and often dirty and unshaven.

17. Common Childhood Illnesses

As a young child, before moving to Abbotskerswell, I had suffered diphtheria, whooping cough and scarlet fever, all of which were considered very serious illnesses. All three of us children had been ill with chicken pox too, and I can still remember the taste of the medicine prescribed by Dr Everard.

By 1950 I think many of the more serious childhood illnesses had been almost eradicated, or could at least be treated and cured. Much of this success was due to the introduction of the NHS. I knew a couple of children in the village who were crippled as a result of poliomyelitis, but I don't remember any current cases. Tuberculosis was less common than it had been too, although my sister-in-law was hospitalised in the isolation hospital at Hawkmoor with this awful disease in about 1959/60.

The NHS introduced a programme of vaccination/immunisation for children, to prevent polio, TB and smallpox, and this scheme proved hugely successful. Most children had measles, mumps or chicken pox at one time or another. Colds and flu were also common, as was tonsillitis. Germs spread easily among children, especially in classrooms, so it was almost taken for granted that if one child caught something then nearly all the others would follow suit. Bronchitis was also quite common among both children and adults; this was probably not helped by the fact that we did not know or appreciate the effects of cigarette smoke, and a lot of people smoked. My parents were non-smokers, but can still remember some of cigarette brands smoked by the village lads; Silk Cut, Players and Woodbines seemed to be popular. Asbestos was commonly used in the building trade, and dust and fume inhalation in the workplace was just a way of life; no one realised the long-term lung damage they could cause; there were no Health and Safety inspectors then. Occasionally, someone would be ill with glandular fever, or even rheumatic fever, and although both these illnesses were quite serious, they were rare.

Improving diets were playing a part, too, in the prevention of childhood sickness. More nutritious foods were becoming available; there were new treatments and medicines, and health care was more readily available. Education also played a large part as people began to take more care of themselves.

18. Pills and Potions

When I think of the old fashioned remedies that were used in the 1950s, I cannot believe how many I can remember. I suppose that many were handed down by families from generation to generation, and were commonly used because until 1948 people had to pay for a doctor's treatment or visit. Here is a list of some of them, but I am sure there were many more. If none of these were suitable, there was always aspirin and sticking plasters for everything else!

- Bicarbonate of soda solution – indigestion, eyewash
- Bitter alum – for mouth ulcers
- Blackcurrant cordial – colds, coughs and sore throats
- Boiled onions - colds
- Bread and Milk – for when you were feeling 'under the weather'
- Calamine lotion – rashes, sunburn
- Cod liver oil and malt – “makes you grow big and strong”
- Dock leaves – nettle stings
- Egg beaten into hot milk – a pick me up (especially with whisky or brandy added)
- Epsom salts – stomach upsets
- Friars Balsam – colds, congestion
- Grasshopper ointment – a green ointment for chilblains
- Honey and lemon juice in hot water - sore throats, coughs
- Kaolin poultice – infected cuts and grazes
- Milk of magnesia – indigestion
- Oil of Cloves – for toothache
- Sloan's linament – for aching muscles and joints
- Surgical spirit – blisters
- Syrup of figs – “keeps you regular” was the given reason for this!
- Vaseline – chapped hands or lips
- Vick ointment – a rub for chesty coughs

Vinegar – wasp stings
Zinc ointment – cuts and grazes