

## **My life in Hythe by Peter White**

I was born in August 1942 in Tunbridge Wells and up to the age of 8 or 9 years old our family lived in Tyson Road in Folkestone, I think my mother went to Tunbridge Wells to give birth to me because Folkestone was in the front line of WW2 at that time. I have only a scant few memories of life in Folkestone before we moved to the top end of Horn Street, close to the main A20 road into Cheriton before moving to live at No 7 Bartholomew Road in Hythe which at that time was owned by Mackeson's Brewery where my father, Chris, was employed.

Family records show that my father first started work with Mackeson's Brewery at aged 14 in 1935, he was then described as a 'Checker'.

Our family consisted of my father Christopher, born in 1921 at 39 Albert Road Hythe, mother was Mabel (Clark) born in 1919 and I understand they met when they both worked at the Brewery. I had one older brother (Christopher) born in August 1939, sister Sandra born in 1946 and a much younger sister Pauline born in 1956 when we lived at Kingsgate (Isle of Thanet). We lived at Kingsgate for a couple of years during the middle 1950s because my father had become the Mackeson representative in Thanet for the pubs, clubs and US airbase at Manston who sold beers and spirits supplied by Mackeson.

Upon moving to Hythe around 1950 I attended the St Leonard's C of E Primary School in St Leonard's Road which used The Green, opposite the school building, as our playing field and sports field. Our Headmaster at the time was Mr Frederick Skinner. Other teachers I can recall from that time are Miss Miller, Miss Jones, Mr Cockell, Mr Vinson and Mr Brabham.

Miss Miller was my first teacher and at that time our classroom was in another part of the school where we would approach the classroom from Stade Street and we would use a playground at the Stade Street side of the school. I cannot recall any particular lessons from that time.

My next memory of school life is when our classroom was in that part of the school facing St Leonard's Road in the part of the school near to the old Fire Station in Portland Road. Our teacher was Mr Vinson.

Highlight of my school week was during Friday morning assembly when Mr Cockell would announce the school football team for the following day as my name was usually the third one read out. I remember most of the school team which was, Peter Mellors in goal, Tony Griggs right back and me left back. The half backs were Brian (Bussy) Godden, Jimmy Appleton and I think Victor Carey although I may have remembered Victor incorrectly in that position. The forward line was Errol Tunnelly, John Thurston and Tony Buck.....I will come back to that when I remember more names. A couple more names recalled are Alan Page and George Coles.



Bubby Godden and I together won a certificate for winning the Primary Schools three-legged 100 yard race over at Folkestone Sports Ground. It was the only thing I ever won, so thanks to Bubby for helping me with that achievement.

I was in Wilberforce house, the other school houses were Keller, Shaftesbury and Nightingale. Our colour was blue, the other colours were red, yellow and green but I am not sure in what order. When playing school sports games we would wear our house colour sashes from one shoulder down to our waist on the other side.

Every day we would have a small bottle of milk to drink and one of us children would be nominated as "milk monitor" whose job it was would be to bring the crate of milk into the classroom. In winter I recall putting our bottles of milk onto the radiator for 10 minutes in the vain hope of warming it up. In those days if birds had got to the bottles early in the morning to peck at the bottle tops to get to the cream on top I don't recall there ever being a problem with a possible contamination. For a time at school us children would be given a daily dose of what we knew to be "cod liver oil and malt". Cod liver oil was not very nice but the spoonful of thick malt was rather good and took a bit of sucking to get every bit off the spoon. Whether we all had our own spoons or whether we shared I cannot remember. Had we shared spoons I don't think we would have objected too much about sharing because if one of our mates was lucky enough to have an apple one other lucky kid would get to eat the core. Yuk....to think of it now!

Our favourite game on the way to school in the mornings was marbles which we would roll along the gutters at the sides of the road. Us boys would always have our pockets stuffed with marbles of all colours with some of them bigger than others, some with squirly different colours inside the clear glass ones. And of course some marbles would be metal, nowadays I would know them as ball-bearings although they may well have been made as a marble, I am not sure. In the winter we would play conkers by making a hole in the conker to thread a piece of string through it. It was played by two people facing each other taking turns to hit your opponents conker then holding yours still whilst they aimed their conker at yours. The winner was the one with their conker left hanging on the string whilst the losers conker was smashed. About a week before each Christmas my brother Chris and I together with our 2 friends Barry Hadfield and Peter Thomas would go out in the dark early evenings to sing carols at front doors. Of course we would only walk up the front paths if we could see lights on in the house, our favourite carol was "O Come all ye faithful" which we would sing the first, and the third verse that starts "Sing choir of angels sing in exultation" then bang on the door. It was best if there was a bit of a porchway because we couldn't be seen by anybody walking past and we would be in the shelter if it was windy or raining. Park Road and roads leading off up to the seafront were the best with St Leonards Road as well. Sometimes after the count of three we would start laughing so all we could do was leave and go to the next house. Most people would give us a few coppers, thruppence or a tanner, sometimes a bob. Coppers were pennies, tuppence would be two pennies or a couple of coppers. Thruppence or threepenny joey was three pennies, in one bronze coin. A tanner or sixpence was six pennies in one silver coin. A bob was a shilling or twelve pence/pennies in one silver coin. Two bob was two shillings, also known as a florin. Half a crown was two shillings and sixpence. The florin and half a crown were both silver coins the florin slightly smaller than the other one.

At school I recall sitting next to June Morris in class. Whether I sat next to other boys or girls I cannot recall but I suppose I must have during my time at that school. A boy I came to know at that time and am still friends with to this day ( 2016) was David Tunnage. I remember him particularly because our teacher Mr Vinson would call out, "Tunnage....come to the front and hang your gun and holster up, you can collect it after lessons." I was really envious of Dave's cap gun. I guess nowadays children would say that was 'cool'.

The week leading up to November 5th (Guy Fawkes) was great because we had some pocket money to buy about a dozen fireworks each and a box of matches to light them with. We learnt very quickly how long to let them fizz before throwing them so they would explode in the air. We only bought bangers, maybe some roman candles because they would shoot three or four coloured fizzes out before going out. We might have jumping jacks as well, although perhaps I shouldn't admit to this, we would go over the Reachfields where the army would have a big bonfire and give toffee apples to the kids. There were always crowds of people there watching the bonfire so us kids would be behind the crowd to slip the jumping jacks among the feet of people watching. I am sure we never ever thought it was at all dangerous and just thought of it as good fun to watch people hopping about. It was best not to hang around though just in case.

One winter the canal froze over so hard that many people got onto the ice, near to where the rowing boats are, to slide about although we didn't have skates it was fun to just skid about in our welly boots.



In 1951 we had a school trip to go on a train to London to visit the Festival of Britain. I can only imagine we caught the train at the Hythe Railway Station, which was up Blackhouse Hill. It might have been from Sandling Station. Sadly my only memories of the day are arriving in a smoke filled and very noisy London railway station, eating my sandwiches out of my dad's army satchel and being told, when milling about outside some building, "That is the Dome of Discovery". What we saw inside I have no recollection of. For many years until very recently I could never remember how we got from Victoria or Charing Cross stations to what I thought would have been some distance to Battersea Park. I discovered in 2022 the Festival of Britain was on the South Bank of the Thames so we would have walked from Waterloo Station to the Festival.

At that time the Venetian Fete was held every year and for a few years my father was in charge of organising the Mackeson's Brewery float entry, with help from men from different departments of the brewery that dealt with maintenance. For a week or two before the day of the fete there seemed to be much activity making things in a room at the brewery before taking it to the Twiss Road end of the canal when the floats were lowered into the canal. Things that had been made in the workshop were then put together on a wooden frame on top of the floats. I found it quite exciting to watch the floats coming to life. One year(1951), when I was 9 years old I was dressed up as one of the dwarfs in the exhibit of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, my brother Chris was another dwarf. As we won a cup in the fete I was chosen to accept the cup from the Lady Mayor when the float drew up alongside the area on the canal bank where the Cinque Port mayors were sitting. I was sitting on a little wooden bridge and had a wooden pick-axe over my shoulder and as I was the nearest one to the Lady Mayor it was easy for me just to reach out for the cup. Unfortunately I was unaware the plastic plinth was not fixed to the cup



and I dropped it into the canal so one of the men, it may have been another mayor, had to go on his hands and knees to retrieve the bobbing plastic plinth, luckily it floated. I have a photograph of me accepting the trophy, where in the background it's possible to see a man on his hands and knees.

At next year's Venetian Fete I was Peter Pan standing on an artificial tree trunk on the Mackeson's float. The Brewery entry for that year (1952) the idea was taken from the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens in London. I had to wear a skimpy green tunic and adopt a pose with my left hand in the air and a flute in my right hand. As it was thought to be a little difficult for me to hold that pose whilst balancing on a tree trunk for the



time it took for the float to go from Twiss Bridge up to Ladies Walk Bridge and back a piece of metal conduit with a bicycle saddle attached was fixed in place and adjusted so I could just sit on it without appearing to do so. Much to my 10 year old embarrassment, during the interval between the first and second parades the only way I could climb down from my "perch" was to take off the tunic first and to clamber down wearing only my vest and pants. My sister Sandra was one of the fairies standing in a group around the base of the tree trunk. I think our reward for taking part was to receive a book of Peter Pan.

When taking the 11 plus exam to go to secondary school I do remember thinking that I wanted to go to Brockhill at Saltwood rather than to the Harvey Grammar School, I guess I thought my school mates would be going to Brockhill so that's why I preferred going there rather than the HGS, rather than any thoughts as to what would be best for my education. As it turned out, whether by design or because we were all thick, all my mates, and my brother Chris before me, ended up going to Brockhill.

School life, as I recall, at Brockhill was great. I was in a class with my mates, my brother Chris was there so life carried on as before. By now as well as Chris and I being friends with Barry Hadfield and Peter Thomas friendships were being developed more with others in my class so gradually I became more friendly with Dave Tunnage, Frank Murphy, Kenny Broad and Barry Hawkins. Others in my class at that time were Kenny Harris, Robin Thornby, Keith Marfleet, Bussy Godden, Dave Relf, John Gillett and Mike Bennett.

Teachers at school at that time were Mr (Jack) Setterfield Headmaster, Mr (Herr) Stainer, Mr (Taffy) Lewis, Mr (Bill) Young, Mr (Polly) Pearson, Mr (Molly) Martin, Mr (Omo) Smythe...Omo on account of his brilliant white track suit, Mr (King Rat) Goodhew our woodwork teacher who we never managed to get passed the exercise of "How to plane a piece of wood," much to our amusement when we saw Kenny Broad surrounded (it seemed) ankle deep in wood shavings because he never was able to get the "face side" and "face edge" accurately planed to the extent his 4"x2" piece of wood was reduced to the size of an ice-cream wafer. I think Ken became a bricklayer before becoming a prison officer, perhaps it was for the best he never ended up as a carpenter.

In 1957 aged 15 I left school without having sat any exams, nor having any ambitions with regard what future work prospects were in store for me.

Thinking about it now I guess my options were the brewery in Red Lion Square or one of the building firms in the town. During the next 3 or 4 years I worked for Mackesons Brewery, Sharp's Builders and D&G Mills building company.

I met my wife (Sue Woods) at the Youth Club, which was held in the Church House next door to what was the British Legion Club now called something else.

I ended up owning a garage near Tunbridge Wells for 30 years before retiring and one of my customers lived in a large house which he told me used to be a nursing home during WW2. It was the same address where I was born in 1942.

## And a ghost story

I do not believe in ghosts, poltergeists or fairies. So who came up the stairs and along the landing in the dead of night to push open our bedroom door has been a mystery to me for over 50 years.

Half-way up the first, and steepest, part of Tanners Hill stands a house overlooking the end of the High Street. In 1966 when I lived there with my wife Sue and baby daughter Nicola it was called Craig-y-Don.

Craig-y-Don had clearly enjoyed better days in previous years for there was a servant's bell box fitted to the wall in one of the unused downstairs rooms probably used as the maid's parlour. From memory there were about eight different rooms connected by push buttons to this bell box and I could imagine the maid being summoned to come at once to attend the needs of the grand person who once lived there. In our time the only rooms used were the kitchen, half of the large sitting room divided into two, one of the bathrooms, and one bedroom at the end of the long landing at the top of the stairs. The impressive staircase had a landing halfway up with a sharp about turn up to the first floor. This small landing had a window allowing a view up Lower Tanners Hill to the North Road turning. The upstairs landing at the top of the stairs led straight to the door of the one bedroom we used with the door hinged to the right so the door would open against our bed just inside the door.

During the early hours of one morning our daughter, of just a few months, woke noisily for her regular feed. Sue had only been back into bed with the baby for a few minutes when a noise was heard that sounded like somebody walking slowly up the stairs. We looked at each other because by now I was wide awake listening to the footsteps coming up the stairs one by one. They appeared to pause at the landing halfway up the stairs before continuing the rest of the way to the top. I sat up in bed and whispered to Sue, "Can you hear that?"

"Shush!" Sue, ever so silently, whispered back.

The footsteps continued to our closed bedroom door.

The bedroom door slowly began to open and at that point despite my fears I had to confront whoever was there before they entered the bedroom to find all three of us still in bed. I leaped out of bed throwing open the door to discover..... nobody there!

The street lamp at the top of Tanners Hill threw sufficient light on the landing to show all the other upstairs doors were closed and there was simply nobody there.

I searched the rest of the house to find both the front and back doors locked and with no sign of any windows had been opened in any of the downstairs rooms, some of which we had not been in for ages.

Nothing like that ever happened again in the next 18 months we lived there, although I did speak to somebody else in more recent years who told me strange things happened in that house.