Life On The Fifth Continent

Memories Of Romney Marsh

Edited by Rib Davis with Chris Bocutt,
Lorrain Mailer, Natasha Ruskin and Mike Shannon

ROMNEY MARSH
THE FIFTH CONTINENT

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Cover photo: The Dunes and Coast Road, Greatstone
(courtesy of Joe Barnes)

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Interviewees

Stuart Adams, Pat Alston, Albert (Joe) Barnes, Emma Batten, Tracy Brewer, Mick Burns, Judith Clark, Ann Cox, Ellan Crooks, Charlie Davies, Victoria Dawson, Andrew Dennis, Nigel Evenden, Gary Fagg, John Gould, Geraldine Hennessey, Colin Hill, Derek Homewood, Roy Jackson, Michel La Rue, Anne Luckett, Sally Maycock, Bernard Morris, Roger Norman, Margaret Phillips, John Poole, Judith Richardson, Kate Shannon, Mike Shannon, Chris Shore, Carol Simmons, Don Smith, Helen Taylor, Ken Thomas, Colin Walker, Margaret Walker, Brian Washford, Fred White, Denis Wimble, Andy Winter, Clive Wire and Frances Wire.

Interviewers

Chris Bocutt, Rib Davis, Lorrain Mailer, Natasha Ruskin, Mike Shannon, Andrew South and Carol Willes.

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The Fifth Continent Landscape Partnership

The Fifth Continent Landscape Partnership Scheme began in 2017 delivering a variety of projects in Romney Marsh over the course of 5 years, funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund made possible by National Lottery players.

The Scheme has been led by Kent Wildlife Trust on behalf of multiple partner organisations connected with the area who came together to develop ways for people to increase their knowledge of the landscape they live in and the natural, cultural, and archaeological heritage that surrounds them. Through engagement with both landowners and residents, the projects delivered have collectively enabled people to become involved in restoring and rediscovering their local area as well as learning new skills as volunteers.

The New Coastal Communities Oral History was initially a project to gather and share the fascinating memories from people who moved to Romney Marsh because of visiting or holidaying there and to gain greater understanding of why people were attracted to settling on the Marsh. Research carried out at the beginning of the project looked at how the area developed into a popular tourist destination which continues today. Once interviews began with residents, however,

it was soon found that there were many other wonderful memories to be collected from people who had grown up and continued to live in the area as well.

We hope that through this publication you enjoy learning more about the heritage of the area through the personal experiences of people living in Romney Marsh - also known, of course, as 'The Fifth Continent'.

Dawn Apcar

The Fifth Continent Landscape Scheme Partnership Manager

Acknowledgements

Many volunteers have been involved in the oral history project. Working alongside the project leader and editor, they have not only carried out dozens of interviews but have also summarised their contents, edited chapters, tracked down photographs and repeatedly proof-read the text. Without their skills, enthusiasm and commitment these memories would not have been recorded; we very much appreciate all their hard work.

We would also like to thank all those individuals and organisations who have kindly agreed to allow us to make use of their photographs. These photos – many of them taken by family members – really help to bring the text to life.

Most of all, though, we would like to thank members of the community who have freely given their time to be interviewed, sharing a huge variety of their own personal memories with us. Theirs is an extremely valuable contribution to the living history of Romney Marsh.

Introduction

Romney Marsh is a remarkable place. As you descend from Tenterden or Ashford you feel as though you are entering another world, which many have called magical. Hence 'the Fifth Continent.' The land – much of it at sea level or below – has its own particular wide-open character, while the windy coast, sweeping up from Dungeness to Hythe, feels at times desolate, at other times stunningly beautiful. Sometimes it is both.

Many have lived on the Marsh for generations, perhaps farming or fishing, while others first came as visitors and then fell in love with the place, eventually living here. Others came for work, with the power station providing a great deal of employment. And every year the area throngs with holiday-makers, made welcome in caravan parks, hotels and guest houses.

The Marsh has a long and rich history spanning many centuries, but much of that story has been told elsewhere. Here our attention is turned to the memories of people of the Marsh now, so the events recounted are within living memory. With the focus particularly on the coast, we have heard from a wide variety of people about their experiences on the Marsh, from the everyday to the extraordinary.

The text of this book comes from recorded interviews, so it is spoken language. While written language tends to be presented in polished, grammatically correct sentences, spoken language has a rougher edge, a greater spontaneity, and this is its great attraction. However, when transferred to the page it may look a little odd, so the text here has in places been tidied up, still retaining the spirit of spoken language but looking a little more like its written cousin. At the back of the book there is a CD of edited extracts from the interviews, so that you can actually hear the voices of the people of Romney Marsh.

New Romney High Street, c.1950 (courtesy of Joe Barnes)

WHY ROMNEY MARSH?

We could see the potential here in the summer, Dymchurch was thriving in those days. It was massive. And I thought I'd give up this office job I had and take the chance and come to Dymchurch. And from that, we never looked back. We had the shop which is next door to the Ocean Inn public house. We divided it into two shops. The Slopers, the chemists, had one side and we had the other side. The name we decided on was Wellworth Stores. It was a play on Woolworths. We did have a couple of issues with the name, but as it was, it was no problem because Woolworths hadn't registered the name of Wellworths and we used to stock similar things to Woolworths and gave that feeling that Woolworths was in Dymchurch. But a slightly different name.

Colin Walker

Ted Piper, my grandad, and his brother Bill, they've been here ever since anybody can remember. They were Piper Farms and they were also Piper and Marshlands Dairy. Grandad had the dairy at Littlestone and he was down Station Road near the light railway station for years and they used to have the big thick old glass milk bottles and everybody used to go and get their milk from there. And there's a picture come to light recently on the Dymchurch heritage site of Piper Dairies next door to the City of London. So we did have a shop on the High Street as well – it's a 1930s

picture and it's got on it 'Butter, eggs and milk' and it's a fantastic picture. I didn't realise we actually had a shop on the High Street. And the dairy carried on for – oh gosh, I can remember it in the '60s and '70s and it eventually moved to Eastbridge Road, round the back there. We also had beef cattle down 0n Orgarswick Farm down at the back of Dymchurch, and that was basically the family trade all through the War. None of the grandads went to war because they were all food producers, they were all farmers. So they all stayed home and produced food and did the farming and then after the War turned this – what's now E & J Piper Caravan Park – into a big field of caravans. They were like little boxcar caravans originally, tiny little things – you could just about get two people in I think, but they had those for years and years and that's when people started coming down.

Tracy Brewer

Piper's Camp, c.1950 (courtesy of Tracy Brewer)

You said that you've been coming to the Romney / Dungeness area for 62 years. Could you tell me when you first came to the area?

Well that would have been when I was about 10. I might've been a bit younger, but I say 10 with my parents and the dog. And we had 'Verdi Rise', which was a railway carriage again. Many years we had two weeks down there and that was great. And then we went next door the following year to 'Sea Patch', that was another bungalow. And then we went to 'Roslyn', that was another bungalow – there's been quite a few really! But the one I'm in now, I've been going in that one for about probably eight to 10 years I think now. Time goes by. But a long time. They're all on the beach in Dungeness.

It's a place you either like, or you don't. There's no in-between. I mean my ex-husband's auntie came down many years ago on her moped. She said 'I don't know what you see in a place like this.' Well I wasn't very old but I thought, well go home then if you don't like it.

Unfortunately, now things have changed. There's one opposite to where I go and it is just like a square box, which is sad because the character is gone.

To me it's still the same, but course it's different in other ways. I mean, obviously, the scenery's there, the sea's there. And I walk. I do a lot of walking from Dungeness to the Lade, and that's three

miles there and three miles back. I do that two or three times in the week. I'll go on a little train, I enjoy that as well, to New Romney. So you've got to do things down there. Or you can sit outside and enjoy it all. So that's what I love about it. It's a new world. It's a different world. Totally.

Carol Simmons

My parents came down to Camber and I have a recollection of Greatstone. In the summer we'd often go to Folkestone or Hastings, or we'd go to Dymchurch, probably when I was eight or nine.

From the age of 14, I joined a London sea fishing club. And I used to come down in the season that they fished, every Saturday, and pick up a coach, sometimes on my own, sometimes with a friend and the coach will come down and we'd quite often fish at Dungeness or just on the other side of it.

We decided to downsize. We had just two of us and cats in a large house and we decided we wouldn't mind the coast. But it also had to be practical for work for me. And then we found this, and it came with the benefit of having a shop, which was never intended to be used as a shop, that's something my wife set up as a craft room because she likes knitting and it's morphed into opening up a business because people were knocking on the door.

Andy Winter

We were married and living in Nunhead then. My husband was a bit tired of his job or the people he was working for; we were expecting another baby and living in a one-bedroomed flat which we rented and we thought we'd give it a try down here and we had to sort of decide whether to come before the baby was born or wait because places were left empty all through the winter because they were damp and we said, 'We know what the summers are like, we'll see how we get along in the winter and we'll try it for six months.' And we never ever considered going back.

Ann Cox

My father's family came from Lydd, they were a long time in Lydd. Mother's family, Nan and Granddad, came from London, but during the War Granddad was posted to Jesson Airfield (at St Mary's Bay) with the Air Corps down there and he would write letters home to my grandmother saying how lovely it was down here on the Marsh. Nana was up in London with bombs raining down on them, so she decided, 'Oh, why should you be having a nice time down there?' So she upped sticks and she came down and she actually squatted in a house in the top of The Avenue.

Sally Maycock

I'd been coming down fishing with my dad in the early '60s. That was a young boy's delight, you know, to have a father that went fishing.

What were your first impressions of the area?

Wildness, absolute – 'cause there was nothing here. You could only drive here. There was no other way of getting here. I know that the train was there, but you just had the power station and then just open expanse of shingle. And I can always remember my dad saying when I was a kid – he used to look over at these houses over here – and he said, 'We ought to buy one of those,' he said, 'and then your mum could just bring us out sandwiches and a flask every so often, you know.' I was brought up as a male chauvinist, all right, so

Dungeness (courtesy of Lydd Museum)

that was my life. That was the way things were in those days. But it was the wildness of the place. Dungeness is a bit like Marmite. There's no grey areas with it, it's either love or hate. And if you get it into your system, it's very hard to get out.

What were your first impressions of the houses?

Hovels. They were just railway carriages. Some were quite posh and had a lean-to, and they were pretty run-down. These were owned mostly by railway workers from Ashford. They came down here in the 1920s. And your family owned one and you came down here for a week's holiday and during that week holiday, you painted it. So it looked nice for next year.

The whole place has just changed even in the time I've been here. There was a full fishing community here. We would have 15 to 20 working boats out on that beach. And now we've got about three or four. A young family would live in some of these properties. They would have children and the guy would go out and fish. And in those days, the woman kept house and looked after families – they didn't have jobs in those days, women. And that was the way of things when I came down here – not all the houses were populated but a lot of them were. And then we went through a period where a lot of them moved out, they wanted proper houses, they wanted proper jobs, so that all finished. And now it's just being taken over by holiday lets. A different type of people are now in

Dungeness and it has changed quite considerably. A lot of them are rebuilds. They buy these little properties up, knock them down and then put a half-million-pound house on and then just never come in. They just rent it out. So you get different people down here. Changed a lot.

Chris Shore

In 1970 I started working for the GLC and I made friends with one of the Artists in Residence whose job it was to design, sculpturing so on and so forth in various design projects to improve the environment and he came into the office one day and he said, 'I found this wonderful place it's called Dungeness.' So we got into his VW campervan and we came down and took lots of photographs and colour slides of course in those days. And we then spent an evening boring his wife by showing each other's slides. My goodness what an amazing place.

Anyway, Brian my friend ended up buying one of the cottages there. His cottage was next door to Ken and Sylvia Oiller. So I got to know them and when we decided to buy somewhere in the country we discussed it and we went up and looked at the Cotswolds and it was rather expensive. We had friends in East Anglia and we didn't really want to go South West because that would have meant going all the way through London to get there, it was too much trouble.

So we came down here to spend the weekend with Brian talked about our plans and he said, 'Well what about here?' And we said, 'Oh, well.' He said, 'I know there's a house for sale, and it's empty, number 63; it's the one next door...'

Michel La Rue

I came down here in the Air Force when I was about 19. I was a batman. I'd signed on hoping to be a dog handler. A batman – you look after the officers. There were three junior officers out there and you see I was only a Flight Lieutenant and we had an adjutant used to come out from Rye, he was a Wing Commander. I called them in the morning – you're not allowed to touch them you had to sort of tug the pillow. So I used to tug the pillow, wake them up, give them a cup of tea. And then when they got off to do their duties I had to make the beds and clean the room up and make the fires up and all that sort of thing. It was a cushy little job really but not what I wanted.

Colin Hill

I was really excited to discover the Romney Marsh because as a child I'd read books by Monica Edwards, and these were set at Rye Harbour and the Marsh was mentioned. But I actually didn't realise it existed – I assumed it was a fictional place. And I remember being in Sevenoaks and looking at a map and seeing Romney Marsh on

it! And then I realized the places she wrote about actually existed. So I think that was a huge draw to the area, these memories of these books I'd loved as a child.

It took a while really to get to know people. With my son in his pram we'd walk to the post office and Dymchurch. There was a fruit and vegetable shop at the time and a pet shop. So I got to know people there. But other than that, I was quite lonely at first. And, you know, it takes a while to make new friends, doesn't it, when you have a baby?

(Now) I love it. I feel really honoured to be part of the history of the Marsh now. You know, it's just amazing. It's different every day – the tide might be up or down, it might be windy, it might be still... A still day in the winter is fantastic. I love just going out and finding a footpath and going exploring.

Emma Batten

My earliest memory is coming for a family holiday in 1947 when I was two years old. I've seen photographs and whether I could actually remember that I'm not sure. But we came for several years renting bungalows along the coast. And then my parents bought a property at Greatstone and then we spent Christmas, Easter weekends at Greatstone, enjoying the beach, swimming in the sea. Especially at Christmas. That

was a big thing. Christmas day we had to go in. Very cold but fun. Then in 1963 my parents bought another property which was more of a home, and we didn't actually live there, but we spent even more time. And then finally we ended up moving to New Romney in 1968. But when I was here for holidays the area of Greatstone was completely different. The main coast drive was a concrete road, didn't have any footpaths. It was all just sand dunes. So it was very undulating to walk along that road. And entertainment was probably a bit thin, but we played on the beach, had some very funny games like pompom, which is a sort of hide-and-seek. But that's what it was called in those days. And also, there was a boating pool with little paddle boats near where the Varne Boat Club is today. Also on that site was an amusement arcade and you could play bingo there at night. And me and my brothers and sisters and cousins, we used to go because we wanted to win these gonks, which were egg-shaped little toys. They were made of felt and tartan material and had arms and legs. So we went to bingo very regularly to win and we ended up with quite a collection of these gonks.

Now, I would say perhaps you don't get quite so many people staying here because the properties are not there to be rented out. Now, along the coast, there used to be a lot of properties that

were rented out on a regular basis. So new tourism came from that. Nowadays, you do get obviously day visitors and people staying overnight in bed and breakfast and things like that, but there's not much long-term accommodation for holiday-makers apart from caravans, and not everybody wants to be in a caravan.

Frances Wire

I met the wife in Folkestone. We would go dancing quite a lot together. The War ended while we were in Folkestone. We had nowhere to live, actually. We lived with her parents for a while. Then we went and lived with my parents for a while.

Well her mother sent us a letter and said, there's a job going up here at Dymchurch, with accommodation. 'Well,' we said, 'that's just what we want.' So we came up. I got the job, but there was no accommodation. The idea was she wanted to have her daughter back up in Folkestone, that's what it was. And I got this job in Dymchurch and then we got a council house in St Mary's Bay, a nice council house there. The job was a baker's roundsman – I went all round the Marsh selling the bread, going round with the basket, selling the bread. And I saw as much of Romney Marsh as I could like that.

Fred White

Marine Terrace, Dymchurch High Street, c.1950
(courtesy of Joe Barnes)

Your first impressions of Dungeness?

Oh, my God, what is this?! Who lives here? I mean, I came down a couple of occasions just to visit, obviously, because he was living here and I was living up there. And it just seemed a bit strange and a bit weird. And when I told my – I'm still friends with my husband – I said 'I've been down to Dungeness,' he said, 'We took the kids there once. When they were little, we went up the lighthouse.' Well, I certainly didn't. I don't do heights. So he said we'd been. And I couldn't remember at all. So it obviously hadn't made much of an impact initially. But when I first came down I thought, ooh, this is a bit weird, but only a bit weird. It didn't make me go 'Euch.' Or 'Nn.' It just was a bit weird. Now I know: Why do I like living here? I always used to say (I suppose I've stopped saying it), you don't have to keep your grass short and nobody cares

if your car's dirty. If you live in a row of houses where they go, 'Mm, they haven't cleaned the car this week,' you know, it's all that. So you can be who you like down here. There's sort of the feeling of I don't have to answer to anybody (except for himself, of course).

People come because they've read about it. And because of Derek Jarman and now, funnily enough, Coast magazine this month has a great big article about Dungeness and about the lady that owns the Lookout. They come down for curiosity. And generally speaking, it's fine most of the time.

Helen Taylor

My father always wanted to have his own cafe, and this one came up for sale, in Station Road in New Romney. And we came down – it was a journey and a half because my father didn't drive. I think we actually came by train to New Romney station when we came to view it. And it had a huge living accommodation at the top – I think it was about five bedrooms. He liked it, and so we sold property in London and came down here.

What were your first impressions of New Romney?

Oh, wow. Different from living in London, I suppose. Although in London in those days, isn't like London now. I mean, we could still play on the street, there was very little traffic. But it was lovely to be by the sea because our nearest beach there would

have been Southend and my father didn't drive. So it was a very rare occurrence we ever went to the seaside unless my mother's brother took us.

Judith Clark

Mike worked at Betteshanger Colliery, near Deal – we lived in Deal and there was talk of it closing down, although it didn't actually close until 1989 but there was always rumours that it might close down. And he actually bumped into a friend in the High Street in Deal one day and he said he was moving to Dungeness and there were jobs going. So he applied and got the job. We'd just saved up for a deposit for a house in Deal. But key workers were allocated a house in Lydd. So we got a council house in Lydd because we used the deposit to buy a car so that he could get to Dungeness to work because we didn't have a car in those days.

I thought it was a lovely town. And in fact, we used to do all our shopping locally. In a grocery store, greengrocers, butchers, lovely shoe shop in Coronation Square, Lyon's, we used to buy clothes. We really liked Lydd. In fact, one of the only reasons we moved here (New Romney) was because our sons went to the local secondary school here and it was easier for them to walk to school rather than have to go on a bus. And then if they stayed for sport or anything, they could just walk home. That was probably our main reason for moving.

A lot of local people worked at the power station, and I don't think they (local people) resented it. I think if you asked the majority of local people if they wanted the power station, I think they would say yes, because it provides employment and brings money into the area.

But we've been here a long time now, but no, we're still not local. But I've never found it a problem. What I did find when I worked in the library was people would retire from London to Greatstone, say. And then afterward, maybe one of them passed away. And then you're stuck up at Greatstone on your own, and in those days, the bus service wasn't anywhere near as good as it is today. And I think sometimes that was a mistake. But they used to come on holiday here, you see, and then think it was a good place. And it's quite isolated in the winter.

Kate Shannon

'84 I'd been working in the Medway area. I was a baker but at the time the bakery closed, the dockyard closed, the refinery closed – and there was no work. We'd been coming down here for several years on holiday. I got my income tax rebate as I'd been out of work for about three months. I thought, 'We'll have a fortnight down in the caravan park.' I never went back. I looked for work – I got a job down at Romney Sands. Jimmy Coates found out, he said 'I can't have you living

on here and working down there. Can you start?' I started at the deep end, on a Bank Holiday Monday. 36 years, still there.

John Gould

The family lived above a paper shop which belonged to my father, 22 Catford Hill. He bought the paper shop and while my mother was in hospital delivering my sister Sheila she said to my father, 'I'm not coming back to that shop with another child. That'll be the fourth one,' 'cause it was too small. So he promptly walked up Catford Hill and bought number 61, which had seven bedrooms and three reception rooms. And that's where I spent my early years. And in the meantime, as the family was growing, he decided to buy a bungalow at Greatstone on the Coast Drive and that was in 1935. A desolate place, Dungeness was: nothing. There was a few ramshackle bungalows along this plot of ground and it had a garage on it, that was all and it was right on the coast. And he had a bungalow built – breeze block and asbestos ceiling and things like that but it was okay. And we spent all our school holidays down there.

Mick Burns

Well, I had been through the area a few years before, through youth club, and I can remember seeing the power station. But my first impression was actually coming from Ashford (I went on

the train to Ashford and then I was collected) – coming down Hamstreet, and then you got the vista of the Marsh and the power stations in the background. So quite impressive then, because of the size of the view really.

Mike Shannon

It used to be just packed and packed along the seafront, and over the years all the spaces between the houses have now been filled in – there are probably two or three more spaces to fill in from Littlestone right the way through to Dungeness where people have had houses built. And on one occasion, just to give you an instance, I was on duty when I got a call to a coach that had literally been blown off the road down at Lydd-on-Sea. What had happened was, it was very high winds blowing between the bungalows and the houses and the coach went between a couple of houses and got blown off the road by the wind blowing like a tunnel through onto the actual coast road.

Nigel Evenden

Well, I know I came down here with my mother before I was three, which was when the War started, but my earliest memory is after the War because my grandmother had a bungalow built in 1936, which was taken over by the Army in the War, so we didn't come down again until I think

1945-’46 by which time I was nine or 10, but I do remember it very clearly from those days.

And I remember the bungalow, which is seven buildings down from this house, which we still have: my grandmother put down a pound on a piece of shingle in what we think was 1936 because the bungalow was actually finished early 1937 and that pound, she went back to the family and said – she was 54 at the time – ‘I’ve put this pound down on a piece of shingle at Lydd-on-Sea and now you’ve all got to help me have something built.’ And so it’s very much a family building and a family memory and it led to over time – I think we had 17 or 18 properties around here, through the family, and so it’s a very, very important part of my life and my cousins’ because we all used to come down here and spend the summer holidays with our grandmother. She was widowed the last year of the War and this place was very important to her. She only came down between April and October because there was no electricity and no heating apart from an open fire and an old boiler in the kitchen and then she lived in Essex for the winter months.

But yes coming down here – it happened again two nights ago: we went to Paris for the day, 24 hours, and came back – the smell of the sand, that’s my clearest memory of this place. Smelling the sand and the sea, that is my first and clearest

memory. But then I also of course remember, once the bungalow was given back to my grandmother by the Army, they had these chaps in to refurbish it and put it back to what it was. And so, you know, funny memories like that. They showed us how to actually shell a shrimp easily, the two chaps who were doing it.

Pat Alston

I became known to Marlie Farm by agreeing to come to a voluntary agricultural camp, which was started by the coalition wartime government to help the farmers who lost a lot of their staff to the armed services and we were taken on as helpers, really. It was run on a weekly basis and for my second voluntary agricultural camp I chose New Romney as the base. My first one was at Hedge End near Bitterne in Southampton.

The government paid for all of your rail fares from where I lived, Ilford in Essex, to New Romney and we were picked up from New Romney station and taken by truck to Marlie Farm. It was only about eight or nine months after the War and we were billeted in Nissen huts, the old relic of the American gunners that were in place a year or so before my visit, tracking down and shooting at V1s, the Doodlebugs, the pilotless planes.

Roy Jackson

We moved here and my parents retired to Iden and my husband – as he was then – came out of the Army and we were looking to buy property and we came upon Lydd and found a very nice little house down at Copperfields and that's where we moved in. My son's 40 and he was two and a half when we came. Well we absolutely fell in love with it. I think if you've got a dog or a small child, everybody speaks to you and of course we had Julian and we joined the church and then I later came to work at Lydd Primary School and I think if you're involved in these things you're in the community. It was really, really welcoming.

Victoria Dawson

We used to go and play in the fields, we made our own entertainment.

We have the sea, which I love, walking on the beach, being near to the country, I do like walking and trying to find the footpaths. That can be difficult because some are blocked off by the farmers, stiles are broken or some impassable because crops are in the way.

It's not a fast way of life here and being retired it's a different mindset.

Ellan Crooks

(In St Mary's Bay) we started off very happy, obviously, that we'd got a nice new home to start off with. And also very lonely because when I first came, I didn't know anybody, of course. And I did find that the Marsh people in general were very friendly in saying hello, but didn't want to go beyond saying, you know, something over the garden fence sort of thing. So I rather relied on, funnily enough, both of the builders' wives that my husband did work for, I got to know those, and one of them helped me to pass my driving test. And the other one was very good on having someone to chat to occasionally. But obviously in time it changed and I joined things and got to know more people, so that was okay. I joined the WI for a short while but that didn't seem to be quite what I was looking for. So we actually had a few people get together and we did the Young Wives Club, which we ran for a few years and was quite successful.

And then a new neighbour came to live in the house that the builder had. And she was young and she had a couple of children and she wanted to join a flower club that she'd seen and she wanted me to go along with her. She didn't want to go on her own. And the rest is history, as they say. 'Cause I am still doing my flower arranging today and it's taken me to an awful lot of places.

They say you either love it or hate it (the Marsh). And I think I can now put myself in the love it. I did hate it when I first came, I must admit. But it grows on you.

Anne Luckett

HOLIDAYS AND HOLIDAY-MAKERS

The first time I ever came down to the Romney Marsh was back in about 1952, '53. I was a very small child obviously. We came down to Maddieson's Littlestone Holiday Camp, which was a bit like Hi-de-Hi in those days. It's now all caravans – in those days it was all chalets, like it was in the Hi-di-Hi film. We used to come by coach with my mum and dad, and quite often my nan and grandad and an aunt and uncle or two. In fact most of the place was full of people from London I think.

I can remember lying in my bed or cot in the chalet and I could hear the rhythmic sound of the waves crashing onto the shingle beach there, and then the beautiful sound as the water sifted back down into the sea. I can remember that clearly.

John Poole

I'm the seventh one of eight children. My father had his own newsagents; my mother, a housewife, lived at home with eight children. We used to come down here for all our summer holidays. When we broke up from school on a Friday, we'd be down on here on a Saturday and course my father had it built; it was a sort of family holiday home and then we'd go back after six weeks but then it was rented out for most of the winter – a local family lived at the back and the agreement was they moved out for the six weeks school holidays.

Ann Cox

And of course they'd come every summer and we knew them all by name and we watched them grow up. Their children then came with... their children. And with the local people, we had a great relationship with them. You know, we would help them out with putting away goods which they couldn't afford at the time, but they would pay off so much each week. We used to run a Christmas club and that was another thing. These sort of things don't happen today.

Colin Walker

When I was expecting our second child in 1980, we bought a touring caravan. We bought it in February, he was born in the April and when he was six weeks old we made our first trip down to a place called Marlie Farm, which is right next to the Kent Wildlife Centre on Romney Marsh. We used to pack the children, the pram, as they got older their bikes, and we used to head for New Romney, mainly because it was about an hour and 15 minutes from home. It was somewhere we could go Friday night after my husband finished work and then we could come back on Sunday. They used to love the beaches. They were very convenient for the beaches there and it was also a good base.

You got the little train. They loved seeing the train. They loved going on the train. In Dymchurch you had the old-fashioned amusements, which is still almost the same today as they were. We used to

just get in, get there and then do something on the Saturday and beach hop, depending on the weather. And as they got a little bit older, they used to be able to ride round the campsite on their bikes and – 'Off you go!' – quite safe. And it was full of rabbits at the time as well, which I loved. And that's how we first started going down there.

The Putting Green, Dymchurch (site of the present funfair), c.1950
(courtesy of Joe Barnes)

When we first went down there, it (the caravan site) was mainly for tourists and campers. There was one big field with static caravans on it, and they were the elite. You didn't really have anything to do with those people. It was, at the time, the

site with the best facilities in the area. As I said, we went when my son was six weeks old you used to be able to take him over to the laundry room and bath him in the sink. And our daughter as well, as she was about two-and-a-half. So we had to take them over, wrapped in towels and then jump back in the car and drive back to the caravan with them so they could get a bath every night. It was close by to the sea. So again, take them to the sea, get back to the showers. They were the best facilities. They didn't have a shop; in Reception you used to put your icepacks in the coolbox, used to put them in of an evening when you got down there and then swap them over so you'd have say four ice packs, two in one day, two in the next day. There was a van that used to come round and bib his horn and he used to bring round milk, bread, bacon, eggs – the basics for camping. As the site has grown they've added more and more to it.

We were expert at getting an awning up in the rain at breakneck speed. The power, it used to attach to the car in the early days. And then they had power points that you could plug into. And the toilets were ideal, so we never had to worry about taking the chemical ones with us.

Did you get to know local people?

Not in those days. More so now, now that we're back down there, we do. But in those days, no. It was really mainly weekends. You go for the

weekend and you don't always see the same people. So no we didn't. I would say we didn't really get to know the local people.

Now we've got a static caravan. We bought it 10 years ago now. And the grandchildren just like doing the same things as our children did. And we have them for the school holiday.

There are people who don't like to be called residents, but they are residents. The site we're on has gone to 11-and-a-half months of the year. So there's only two weeks that you can't sleep there. You can be there during the day, but you can't sleep there. And when you say to the company about residents, 'Oh no, no, no, they're not residents.' Their children go to school; they go to work. We were there this weekend. Tuesday morning I went to the hairdressers down there, so I got up a bit early. The noise of the cars with their trailers going over the speed bumps – we're only a short way from the road, our caravan – the noise of the trailers and the trucks going out! They're not allowed to park their trucks and their commercial vehicles – they aren't supposed to be near the caravans. So they park them as they come in. And literally as you drive out, there's just vans.

People have different reasons for living on site. I do get a bit cross that they're not paying council tax. They don't pay television licence either because we don't have to pay television licence on our caravan,

that comes in with your ground rent. And I get a bit cross with the water rates. The water rates on the caravan site for us are more expensive than they are here, and we're on a water meter here. So obviously we're careful with what we use, but at the caravan we don't have a washing machine or a dishwasher or a bath, which some of the big caravans do. Some of the lodges have baths and shower or two showers and then have washing machines, dishwashers. So, yeah, people do live down there and that annoys me a little bit. But then some people just like to live there.

Like I say, we kept the caravan because it's memories. It's just different down there, isn't it? It's like people say, when you're on the Marsh you're in a different world, and you are. You are in a different world.

Geraldine Hennessey

Then in the mid-'60s, I was a mod. We've all got a past, okay. I was at the second battle of Margate and the third Battle of Hastings throwing deck chairs around and being chased by the police. But I used to come down here on my scooter. I then used to bring girlfriends down and then I brought my wife down and I brought my kids down and then I moved down.

Chris Shore

St Mary's Bay then was quite a small village. At the time we had what they called a large community centre where children used to come down from London every year. It was like a big holiday camp on the Jefferson Lane fields. And they used to come down every Friday and visit the area for a week. Many of the children used to come out of London having never seen the seaside. And in the summer it came alive. These children used to have sports and have football matches against local schools.

Every Friday there was a changeover day; every Sunday Jefferson Lane, which is like the hub of the bay, where the local pub is, the Boys Brigade bands used to march up and down the lane. You know, it was really, really exciting times.

We had fantastic contact with the caravanners when we were about 14,15. Every Saturday, the coaches used to come into Dymchurch with all the people coming down on holiday. And we used to be there with our old prams that had got the top taken off the pram, we'd made them into fantastic trolleys. We used to then walk them to Pipers fields about a mile away with their cases and we used to be paid to take the people there. In New Romney itself we used to have the mainline station there. And every Saturday morning and Sunday, what I call the toffs used to come into town to play golf, at Littlestone Golf Club. And

we used to take them, take their cases down to the local guesthouses. As we got older, I used to go down and caddy down the golf club. And that was quite funny because as a non-golfer, I quickly realised that if my man won, I got more money so that I was quite adept at treading the opponent's ball down in the long grass and lifting my man's and helping him. And it was quite funny. Now I'm a golfer I dread to think what I did!

Gary Fagg

We moved to Lydd in 1968. But my first memories of the Marsh were when we used to come as children. Every Sunday we used to go out for a picnic. And then afterwards we used to like going round to Greatstone and Littlestone swimming in the sea.

Kate Shannon

Biggest change was '87 of course, the hurricane. We had about 27 vans occupied that night. We lost about 25 caravans. But not one of those vans that was occupied got touched. We had a van occupied – we didn't know at the time 'cause no car beside this van – didn't think anything of it because we checked everybody that we knew was there. Four o'clock that afternoon we got a phone call, 'Is Myrtle all right?' 'Why? I don't know.' 'She's in the van.' We went up – her and her sister'd been in the van. No car and they'd been under the table. Till we

found them. Laugh at it now but it wasn't funny at the time.

When I first come down here there was very few vans with what they call services. You know, you had to go get the water from a standpoint. For your toilet you used a bucket overnight and then took it to a chemical point. You had shower blocks, 10p in the slot to get your hot water. Small clubhouse. Even the toilets – no toilets in the clubhouse. You had to go to one of the toilet blocks to use them. A big van in those days was 29 by 10. Now it is 20 foot wide, 40 foot long, three bedrooms, a bathroom. Some even get a washing machine, dishwasher, central heating, double glazed. A lot different.

We have tents. We've got two yurts. A shepherd's hut. And two vintage caravans.

The number of people used to come on holiday; then come down touring; buy a static caravan; and after a few years, actually buy a house down here. Because they come in the summer they think it's brilliant. They like what they think is the peace and quiet. So they end up moving down here. And then we get a winter and the wind. 'I didn't know it was this windy!'

John Gould

They (tourists) have no idea about boundaries because we don't have any (in Dungeness). So they

are inclined to wander. I mean, we've put a little bit of rope. We're not allowed to put fences up, you see. We put a little bit of rope up and there's a little sign at the end of it you see the back of it and it just says private property do not do whatever, anything, really. They used to just wander off the beach and come down and I'd have people looking through the windows at me, people. 'Ooh, look, people!'

So that was a bit of a problem. But it isn't so much now. But then, you know, people don't understand because there are no fences. They think it's open to the world. And probably the best one was somebody knocked on our door and opened it – the front door – and said, 'Is it all right if I take him round the back for a wee?' 'Do you really think so? Do you really think that's acceptable?' 'Oh,' she said, 'Oh, I thought we could go anywhere!'

Helen Taylor

Well certainly there's the amount of people that we get in Dungeness now – it's a lot of tourists, weekends and through the holidays. And a lot of the homes now, they're all bought up as holiday homes and the likes of my children, where I'd love them to live in this Dungeness area, sadly they've been priced out. So they're untouchable now for the youngsters.

But for the Marsh I mean I think we're just the

same as anywhere really, it just gets busier, the towns keep expanding – I think we'd all like to keep as it was, but thankfully there's still quite a bit of farming goes on which is good. Again I think what's lost you know – when we was kids growing up in Lydd, we would set out across the Marsh of a weekend or an evening and cross the fields and nobody would mind, you know, it's just part of growing up and part of living on the Marsh, you know, the local farmer would see these kids, would sort of say hello, and I think now if you was to walk across the field you'd probably be pulled over for it.

And it's just managing the sheer amount of people down here now. I think that's going to be the problem. It's a victim of its own success. You know, it's changed the people that we're getting down here now. I think when Derek Jarman moved down that was a big turning point. We've still got a community here, it's a different community than what we had. Once upon a time you'd walk up the road and say good morning to everybody – everybody knew you, you knew them. But now it's a bit different. I can walk into the boathouse here of a morning and probably not say good morning to half the people I meet. Some of them just want to come and when they're here – it's like anywhere I suppose – once they're here they want to change things: the foghorn's too loud or the lights are too bright on the power station or the lifeboat

tractor's making too much noise three o'clock in the morning. It's just the way of life now I suppose.

Stuart Adams

I've got people who come down to the caravan site now who are in their 80s who say, 'Oh I used to come down when I was six months old' and all that sort of thing. So it's been a very long time. It started off with little box cars and then they had chalets for a while. It was all under Bill Piper and Ted Piper, the two, my grandad and his brother. Bill died in the '70s, and then the caravan park was split between his side of the family and our side of the family, so it's basically split right down the middle, everything, the farmland the caravan park, everything.

I remember as a very tiny girl when Grandad was still here, on a Saturday he used to go around to Mr Underwood's caravan, because Mr. Underwood used to do home brew, and they'd sit on the wheel of that – it one of the old-fashioned boxcar caravans – and they'd sit on the wheel hub drinking pints every Saturday afternoon. And we'd have to sort of lead Grandad back to the office and Dad would have to drive him home.

Caravanning was like glorified camping. It was lovely because you could play like you did in tents and things but you had a toilet so you didn't have to go out in the cold to go to the toilet. It was

lovely. So that, you know, it kind of gave you the fun of everything but without all the hardship – 'glamping' in a way it was, it was lovely.

Caravaning near Pope's Hotel in 1958 or '59, with Mick Burns' first car, a Singer Le Mans 1935/37 (courtesy of Mick Burns)

We had two shower and toilet blocks. So if somebody didn't have a toilet in their caravan – which towards the '60s, there were still a few about that didn't – there was a shower and toilet block together at one end of the site and one at the other end. And people could go in there and use those, they were open all the time. Which is, okay, a bit cold when you showered in there in the winter, coming into late season, that was a bit chilly. But we'd close at the end of October anyway, so there wasn't the total winter coldness.

It was a fun place to grow up because you met lots of people. And you regularly got the same people come back year after year. So you'd have your friends that used to come back and you'd also get a change of people because if somebody gave up their van for whatever reason you'd get new people on. So there was always that beginning of the season where everybody was finding their level, you know – who's new? Who fits in the gang?

May Underwood was the most amazing person. May was born in Poplar and she first came here when she was six months old. She was 94 when she died. And she always said the only places she'd ever been were Poplar and Piper's. Her caravan was on the kids' play park. So, towards the end, she had a big, really nice, warm, cosy caravan, and all the way through from when we were kids everybody went to the play park to play and as soon as you wanted a biscuit you went to May's. Everybody piled in May's – the biscuit tin'll come out – she'd have lemonade, milk and biscuits. And you had to behave yourself or you didn't get a biscuit, and you went to wash your hands. And she had no teeth – no, two teeth, one big one at the front one at the bottom – and she said, 'Come on, come on, wash yer hands, yer not getting a biscuit till you've washed yer hands!' And you'd get your biscuit and your lemonade or your milk, whatever, and then out you'd go and play again if she saw

anybody bullying or pushing or doing something they shouldn't she'd shout out the window, 'Oy, don't you do that!' She was such a character. And if anybody fell over, she'd go out and pick them up and take them in the van and wash their knees down and put a plaster on and yes, all she ever said was, 'I've never been anywhere, only been Poplar and Piper's.' And one of her daughters, Barbara, she grew up on the site and she works for us now. And she has done for years.

When I first started working here, the beginning of 2000, up till then everybody Friday night or Friday lunchtime, if they worked in London, soon as they finished – straight down the caravan park, and they'd come down for the weekend and go back by Sunday night or early Monday morning. So they'd have the weekend and just drive backwards and forwards from London. They'd have the caravan all set up – they'd have clothes in the caravan so they didn't have to pack anything. They'd literally just jump in the car and come, with all the kids. People don't do that anymore, whether it's the cost of the fuel or not having time off of work or whatever, they stopped doing that. Now it's a lot more they just come for some holidays, or if they get a week off work or things like that. But we've still got loads of people with vans, even people sort of New Romney way. We're only in Dymchurch. We've got about five people in New Romney

who've got caravans who use it as an escape, or for the family when they come down from up north or wherever. So they're much more sort of bolt-holes now or places for family to come and stay rather than people themselves staying there all season. Because early, late '70s onwards, soon as we were open, we had people move in. And that was it. They gave up their house or wherever they rented in the winter. And then as soon as we opened they'd move in with us until the day we shut and then they'd go rent somewhere for the winter. And come back again. We still get a few that do it now, but not as many as we used to.

We don't actually have a Wi-Fi connection, we haven't got a cabling for Wi-Fi here. It used to be they'd bring a dongle that they used to put in but nowadays most people seem to just be able to pick it up off the general net. So now we get a lot of people come down and just, you know, chill out and work out here. You see them sitting outside the caravan with the laptop.

It's like any office, it's like any workplace, you get people that don't get on, you get kids that don't get on, and we have a few issues. You know, we've had to get perhaps two sets of kids in and say, 'Right, you don't like each other, that's obvious. So keep apart, you know. Either that, or you're both going to be off site.' Because we can't have it, we're a fun family holiday home site, we want everybody

to come and enjoy themselves. That's the whole point of it.

It used to be, in the old days, there wasn't telephones – we had a phone box on site and that was it. So when you came down a lot of people came just to get away – we used to get a lot of stock workers and things like that because it was a complete shut off. There were no phones, there was nothing, you could just come and completely relax. Nowadays with Wi-Fi and things like that – again, it's a lot of business owners, you know, just want to get away for the weekend, come and chill, and a lot of people who came here as kids. To be honest, I never ever have to advertise to sell a caravan, because it's, 'Nan had a caravan here' or 'Mum had a caravan here' or 'Grandad had a caravan.' And it's all sort of like descendants of them.

Oh gosh, the best day – I can remember in 1977, which must have been Jubilee, we had the biggest party. They put up an awning over about four caravans and the gap in one caravan was the bar and then there was the food and that was like a huge street party. That was brilliant. And I remember that because my friends and I went round, and we were raising all the glasses, you know, minesweeping around the tables, and we all got drunk dancing to ABBA, Dancing Queen. But every year we do a charity day, normally August Bank Holiday or sometimes we do it in May Bank

Holiday, depends on the weather. But we've got what we call a NAAFI wagon, an old-fashioned war NAAFI wagon. And that was re-kitted out and done properly. And Barbara and I did our food certificate tests and all the rest of it. And we do days where Barb goes in the NAAFI wagon – in the morning she'll do egg and bacon rolls, sausage rolls, that kind of thing. Lunchtime she does waffles and pancakes and bigger bacon dishes and stuff. And then in the afternoon we have afternoon tea and it's cream teas and strawberries and all that sort of thing. We started it for two reasons; one to raise money for charity; and we've got a lot of old ladies on their own. You know, they've come down with their husbands over the years, and either their husbands have died or they're on their own, but they still come down because it reminds them of happy times. It's a safe place. They've got friends down here. There's a group of my Thursday girls, I call them, they go up, there's four of them, and they meet up every Thursday, they walk up to the village and they sit on the sea wall and have fish and chips and put the whole world to rights sitting on this wall and then they walk back. And then they'll take it in turns to cook – one'll cook Monday night for the four of them, one'll cook Tuesday. They go around to each other's caravans and it just gives them a social thing and someone to talk to. So we said at the beginning of the season, if we can, we get the NAAFI wagon

out, and we put tables and chairs out and people can come and sit up by the office and talk to us, we go out and talk to them or Barb's in the wagon and all that sort of thing. And it just gives them a point of contact and just re-establishes everybody at the beginning of the season. And then normally August time we do like a charity day.

Piper's Caravan Park Morris
(courtesy of Tracy Brewer)

The big hurricane we had in the '80s, that was interesting. Because at that time, there was no law saying you've got to chain your caravans down or anything like that. Or you had to have one chain – I think that's all it was. But the hurricane, actually, it was pretty efficient at relocating caravans! I was living at St Mary's Bay and Dad rang up and said, 'Are you all right?' And I said yes. He said, 'Can you come and help me?' 'Yeah,' I said 'Yes, if

you come and get me,' because he had the only four-wheel drive vehicle. And we came up here and two caravans were in the field next door. One had been picked up deposited on the toilet block, which was quite handy. And another one had been picked up, rumped into another caravan. So that was really quite scary, especially as the one in the toilet block, the guy got out the caravan, he heard the wind and he thought, 'Oh I need the loo,' got up, went out to the loo, came back and his caravan was upside down on next door's caravan! So he had a very close escape. So we sat down after that and said, 'Right what are we going to do?' And Dad said, 'From now on,' he said, 'everything is chained at four corners.' He said, 'That's part of it. Everything now we will chain at four, because even if it's windy all it's going to do is take the roof off. It's not going to lift the whole van up. We're not having this again.'

Tracy Brewer

BEACHES AND WEATHER

In 1940 there were just the three bungalows. I was disappointed that we had the middle one so we couldn't buy an extra plot. So between us there was another bungalow and a plot of land and then nothing until you got to our house. Now there are seven bungalows but when I come off the beach, I look at the road and I always remember it as it was with so very few houses. The freedom was amazing – we were always on the beach, there were remarkably interesting things being washed up and we had no fear.

In 1948 a mine was washed up on the beach and the Navy came down to defuse it. They took the insides out and set fire to it. We were never bored.

Nobody ever thought people would build down here (at Lydd on Sea). The plots came up I think for £25 then £100 (shortly after the Second World War). But it just never seemed... it seemed stupid the idea of buying because who's going to live down here? Only somebody like my grandmother!

But of course, it couldn't be more different.

We are so lucky because we still have the view in front of us but of course the beach, which grows so much every year, I was working it out, it's probably 70 more yards to walk across the beach now than it was just after the War and so much of the sand is covered up. Certainly we used to have really nice

sand for playing cricket and rounders and things, but if you're lucky you get a strip now. That's a pity.

And of course shrimping was a very essential part of our lives and still is, we have got all the nets. It's over a mile out at low tide, a long way back carrying a bucket on the way back, full of water and shrimps.

Lydd on Sea played such an important part of our lives even after working all over the world.

I was 28 and didn't know if I was going to get married or not and that's another reason this place is important, you can just go and sit on the beach here, it's so empty and relaxing, I suppose it's called mindfulness now. I can remember having lots of thoughts with myself over the years.

This place has always been our base, when we were home on leave we came back here, this is where the children grew up and now the grandchildren. They are all coming down next week, it's so much more than a holiday place.

Pat Alston

All of the houses from here, on the land side of Dungeness Estate Road, are in a line. By tradition, a fisherman built his house opposite his boat. The shape of the road, built up in 1838 follows the high-water mark. The road which was built up in 1937 follows the high watermark of 1901 exactly.

The next generation built their houses in front of the last one because the sea had receded so much.

Ken Thomas

Littlestone beach now, the Environment Agency have put shingle up against the sea wall, but in those days you walked down the steps to a sandy beach and it was really nice. Well swimming in the sea – we loved it! I still like swimming in the sea. Whenever I can.

I would guess I was about 11 – 10, 11, 12 maybe. My sister was four years younger. Bucket and spade, that sort of thing. Well we'd probably set off in the morning and go to the airport first and then go round the coast, and he (father) loved going to Ferryfield to watch the planes. Actually I think in those days – in fact even when we first moved here – the coast road wasn't really made up like it is now. It was quite bumpy, shall we say!

Things like changing into swimming costumes, how did you manage that?

I suppose we sat under a towel! I think when you're kids you don't mind so much do you.

Well we don't live very far from the sea and when the children were little we used to go up there nearly every day. I use to swim most days in the sea. We had a couple of canoes and the boys used to go canoeing up here and they'd canoe out to Mulberry Harbour or we'd take the canoes to the lake at Dungeness – I don't think you're allowed in it now – or go to Jury's Gap, which is just before Camber Sands, and go canoeing.

Kate Shannon

When the tide went right out it was the Mulberry Harbour off the coast here and you could walk out; well you couldn't actually walk out to it but you could walk a long way out to it, but there was a big mudflat that went across and I can remember going out with some friends once and we'd gone through this mud which was about a foot or so deep, went out as far as we could and then it was getting a bit deep, so we thought better turn round and walk back in because the tide's coming in. Of course when we got to the mud, I couldn't swim and it meant that if we got into the mud the sea would have been over our heads which frightened us, but fortunately some young lads had seen and they came out and carried us back across the mudflats to get into the safety of the beach again but no we used to spend all our time down there on the beach.

Sally Maycock

A lot of people used to go shrimping with a six-foot-wide net on the end of a long pole and frame that they pushed along at low tide. Other than that we spent most of the time on the beach, we were never bored, time seemed to fly by.

It was just an idyllic place with all the different smells. I love to go down there and do the same things now in balmy weather but now it's not a good beach to go on because of the shingle. It is still fairly clean but it was a beautiful sandy beach.

Mick Burns

Sometimes the mums would take us up into the beach in groups. And the mums sat on the sea wall by the Ocean Inn and the people who had the pub then when I was about four or five, they had an Alsatian dog. All us kids would be down on the beach playing in the little shallow pools of water. And Mum said this Alsatian just used to circle us the whole time we were down there. And if anybody went to go out too far, close to the sea, this dog would bring you back into the circle. So you couldn't go anywhere. And the mums just used to sit on the sea wall, laughing, they didn't have to do anything, because the dog kept us all in one place. And she said that went on for about three or four summers – every time we went down, this dog would circle everybody and just keep everybody in the same place.

Tracy Brewer

I know about longshore drift because of my experience in the Coastguard and understanding tide patterns. There is a constant battle to reduce the shingle moving from west to east around the point. The tide basically moves shingle seven hours up the coast (east) and five hours down the coast (west), so there is a two hour shift twice a day. Then there are the south westerly storms. It is a constant battle to stop the sea from breaching the shingle bank. It has to be done all the time. There are several schemes in place to reinforce the coast on the west side of Dungeness.

Chris Shore

The beach at night is alive with mice. When you have got your lamps – like your head lamps and things – you hear them and if you're quick enough and turn your head you see the mice moving. And also foxes. I had a nice bass stolen by a fox. It came in quickly, grabbed it, and ran off with it.

Andy Winter

I'm lucky enough to live just across the road from the beach at Dymchurch. It's pretty awful in the summer when the village is absolutely packed with visitors. I know the local economy needs visitors although it is sad when they drive for two or three hours and then cannot find anywhere to park except on the verges and pavements. But these people are all gone by five o'clock and you can then walk across the road to the beach which is empty and it's lovely. I love to walk on the beach on my own.

Emma Batten

I've worked all around the world and seen all kinds of beaches but there is nothing like Dymchurch beach – it has always been amazing and special. There are no stones, just sand. It is just a wide expanse of sand, you can have thousands of people there and you will always find room. If the tide is coming in then that was a different matter, it can get a little squashed!

Most of the time there would be kids running

everywhere, sitting in shallow pools of warm water, trying to catch shrimps with their buckets.

We used to take the horse into the sea to swim, that was great fun. We would go up to the slipway and gallop at full tilt down and across the sand and straight into the sea, the horses loved it. They would swim with us on their backs. If you had an injured horse with sore feet or something like that it was good for them just to walk in the sea.

My grandad had point-to-point horses, and they did all their training on the beach. If there was a real big spring tide and you went down the slipway and turned right you could gallop all the way to Dungeness. You had to watch for the tide turning because it comes in very quick at St Mary's Bay but you could gallop to Dungeness in a couple of hours.

Tracy Brewer

When we started fishing off the beach there was a company up in the Orkneys that were building fishing boats and they were 12 or 14 foot long. They were beautifully built boats, sea boats, they were lovely. But they were £90 delivered to your nearest railway station, and you had to take them from there. They were mahogany on larch I think, larch or ash. And the modern variant is the Orkney 'long liners', Orkney 'strike liners' that you can see on the coast that were made out of fibreglass that were

cast on these hulls. I had one. But they were lovely beach boats.

Boats are designed for the area that they work in. There used to be a boat builder at Rye, Philips's: if you ordered the boat from him, he would want to know what length you wanted it and what beach you were going to work off of. And that was it. He would then build you a fishing boat. The Dungeness boats were different to the Hythe boats and they were different to the Hastings boats.

Charlie Davies

We had the hurricane in 1987 and that was fantastic; I have never seen winds like it. It started about one or two o'clock in the morning. By about four o'clock we had to put struts between the railway carriage and the patio door because the walls were bending in.

We often have storms and it's great to go out onto the beach and watch the sea. It's a tough environment but we don't get many frosts, the sea is warmer here and the temperature only gets down to 38F.

Snow comes from the east all the way from Russia, goes through Holland, France and then Dungeness, it sort of picks us out. It does not last long because most of this is covered in salt from the sea spray. When we do get snow the sun is very low and

it picks out all the curves of the land and bits sticking out of the snow. It just transforms the landscape, it's magical, absolutely beautiful.

Chris Shore

I've seen the sea come over the beach bank. I took the dog for a walk to meet my wife off the last bus. I walked onto the greens, it was pitch black and found myself knee deep in water. The next day you could see the greens were flooded. Another occasion, after a lot of rain, the greens and a caravan park were flooded because we are below sea level.

John Gould

Greatstone Sand Dunes, 1948, Mick Burns with mother and sisters (courtesy of Mick Burns)

When it's really windy and blowing off the land the sand really stings your legs. We used to go and get muddy on purpose (on Greatstone beach) and I believe now you know you do get mud holes - I don't know what we called them then - they always appeared, a couple of strips of mud you had to go through. They said it was very good for your skin. We did sometimes cover ourselves in mud and then come up and roll in the sand, then wait for the tide to come up before you went and washed it all off.

Ann Cox

The weather here is often quite windy but actually we have a lot of dry weather. Often when you come onto the Marsh from Ashford where it's raining, when you get to Hamstreet there is a line across the road and we have not had any rain. Mostly the weather is very good here.

Kate Shannon

Well, it is quite windy. My house does face directly on to the beach and I used to have wooden double-glazed windows and on a windy day you would have sand on the inside window sill. When I had the carpets changed in the house there was sand underneath them, but I'm used to it and just accept it as it is.

Emma Batten

The wind blows here all the time; there are very few occasions when it isn't blowing. You sort of get used to it and it's a good job I don't have a hairstyle as I just have to shake it in the mornings. It's great for the washing as I don't have to iron – it blows everything flat.

Helen Taylor

THE SEA AND FISHING

I was mainly a sea fisherman – I got very much into sea fishing basically when I was at primary school. Mother was a member of the WI and there was another lady there, Mrs Ramsden – her husband was a teacher at Southlands and ran the Southlands Sea Angling Club, so I actually went with the Southlands Sea Angling Club before I went to Southlands.

They organised fishing competitions. Every school holiday you would fish – mainly at Dungeness. It was run by two teachers, Stan Ramsden and Don Capon. And I suppose there must have been 10 or 12 guaranteed every time that there was a competition organised, and Stan used to pick us up with his car – he had a trailer behind and all our fishing tackle and rods went in the trailer – and we'd go off to Dungeness, or Dad would take us down there. And we would fish possibly four or five hours and then it was the weigh-in at the end, and all the weights were taken and the specimen fish – it was all well organised. And then every year at presentation time at the school, you would get dished out with the prizes – the biggest catch, the biggest fish, the smallest fish, longest fish or whatever, but every year we would go to one competition. We would go to Deal and fish off Deal Pier.

I can always remember when Mum and Dad bought me my first fishing rod – I don't know how much it cost. It had an old Bakelite reel on it and when you cast with this thing if you were unlucky your thumb used to get caught on the handle and this spool was spinning round and beat your thumb to death. It had cotton line – that's how old it was. But you used to be able to go on Littlestone beach, you could go to the bottom of The Avenue (Littlestone Road) in front of the hotels and the big houses down there – at high tide in the winter you would only have to cast out 70 yards and you could catch cod.

We used to go long-lining in the winter. We'd put these sand lines out. There'd be four of five of us'd put out these different lines all over the beach. And you could go there and come back with four or five cod, Dover soles, dogfish, plaice. We used to go purse seine netting – we used to call it draw-netting – off the beach; you'd got a big long net and you'd walk into the water and make it into a U-shape and then you would walk along at low tide up to your chest in water, and you could feel the fish going into the net – you'd feel this bomp, bomp, bomp as they went in, and after a while you'd think, 'We can't pull this any longer,' so you'd then turn and walk into the shore and pull this net ashore and empty it out. Sometimes you could come back with five or six stone of fish. Those were

the days before freezers, so you had to get rid of it. So we would go and see the local fish and chip people – 'Do you want any fresh fish?' You'd go round people's doors, knocking on the door – 'Do you want any fresh Dover soles?' And you'd sell it, you know – pocket money.

Charlie Davies

The brig Big Louis being towed off the beach by life-boat Alice Upjohn (courtesy of RNLI Dungeness)

Dad (Stan Ramsden) liked fishing very much and I think that was mainly in the winter weekends, 'cause we didn't go away much at all and he used to run the fishing competitions for the school at Southlands but one day I was down there (at Dungeness) and the mackerel were in, and this mackerel actually jumped right out of the water onto the beach and I was able to run down and pick it up with my hands – I don't think I've moved so fast ever since!

He also did laylines, right where you'd meet the coast at the top of The Avenue (Littlestone Road). He used to bait it up at low tide, let the tide come in and go out then he'd come and inspect if he'd caught anything.

But the best way of catching fish – and what I really enjoyed – was when he went what I think they call 'drawing', when two men have a net between them and they drag it along the seabed on their shoulders; they go about chest deep at low tide and they drag it along and when they feel it was heavy enough they'd bring it out and I'd have a cart and I'd been going along the beach and the fish they'd caught were all put in the cart. And we usually ate – well we did eat – them if they were big enough, and they usually were then.

(We caught) cod, dabs, plaice, pouting, whiting and obviously the mackerel when they were in. Mackerel were easy to catch at Dungeness and we used coloured feathers.

Fishing was a big part of our life. We had a boat and went out in that. I do remember Dad saying that when I was married he knew I would always obey because he said 'Look out!' and I thought he said 'Get out!' so I jumped out of the boat and was up to my chest in water. He managed to drag me back in, I was only seven at the time.

Ellan Crooks

I don't worry about the sea – I'm going to go sometime and if that's by a tsunami that's fine. We have never been flooded and the sea has only come over the bank once in the hurricane of 1987.

I am frightened of the sea. I do swim but that is very deep out there (in Dungeness) and it goes straight down – we don't have this gentle bit of sand. It frightens me and I don't like getting too close to the edge. That's one of my nightmares, we all have them don't we?

Helen Taylor

I really, really love walking along by the sea and it does take me back to my younger days when we spent so much time on the beach.

Frances Wire

Always holiday at Dungeness and we liked the same bungalow so that's why I go every year. The seafront gives you space, it's peaceful, calming.

Carol Simmons

The barriers to the sea have been increased. At Dymchurch – proper name Dymchurch Under the Wall – the wall was breached by the Martello Tower close to the New Beach holiday camp. The water just rushed straight through into the Sands Estate. I had to stay on duty to control the traffic while repairs were carried out.

In 1987 the shingle wall breached at Dungeness and came to about half a mile of Lydd, around the back of the caravans on the Dengemarsh road. The sea covered the bottom of the pylons but now the sea has retreated, and the land is back to sheep grazing.

Nigel Evenden

At the age of 14 I joined a London sea fishing club and used to come down on a coach every Saturday, sometimes with a friend, and fish at Dungeness or by Hythe Ranges. (I caught) loads of bass and once a 29-pound cod at Dungeness along with lots of whiting. Sometimes I would fish overnight on my own or with my nephew. One night on my own I caught 49 Dover sole. This was at Galloways beach, Camber side of Dungeness. It took three trips just to carry the fish back to the car. I had already headed and gutted them on the beach. It was late in August. It was a really hot night. It was a spring tide. There was no wind, which is unusual on the beach. And the sea was like a millpond. I lost quite a few came off the hooks as I was

catching three at a time. They were up to three-and-a-half pounds, which is quite big for a Dover sole. Brilliant!

Andy Winter

I've been coming down to Dungeness, fishing with my dad since the early '60s. You just wrapped yourself up in oilskins and you had a Tilley lamp and a couple of flasks of coffee, and that was it. The pub opposite was just a drinking house. There was no food. In fact, I think you was lucky if you could get a packet of crisps in there, but it was just a drinking house. A lot of pubs were in those days. Yeah, it had two bars and it was just covered in nicotine inside and nothing on the floors and pretty grim.

There was nothing here – you could only drive. We stayed on the beach – there was nowhere to stay. (We used to stay for) eight to 12 hours I suppose. It depended how long the coffee lasted and how long the sandwiches lasted before we all got cold and fed up and wanted to go home. We would fish wherever we could get in. You don't realise how this place has changed – if you came down at Christmas you could walk a mile or mile and a half before you found a gap. All you could see was Tilley lamps all the way along the beach – it looked like a promenade.

Chris Shore

In the winter period, we used to go with our dad and dig up lugworm on the beach, and we used to put out laylines with hooks at low tide and fill them up, so a line of hooks, about 30 hooks, with lugworm on, and the tide came in and then when the next tide went out, we'd go down there and find cod and huss and eels and all sorts of things that we used to catch. That was part of the life as well. They were beautiful. Dover sole, plaice.

Gary Fagg

We were so broke to start with we used to put a layline out. You peg a line out at low water with hooks on it – you know, strings and then hooks – and then go and check it again and let the tide come over and then check it again at low water and see if you caught any fish. And usually you had. You couldn't do it in the summer months for obvious reasons but in the winter months we used to put them out. Lovely fresh fish for just a bit of effort really.

Ann Cox

I met my girlfriend in '65 in London and for my 18th birthday six months later she said. 'What do you want to do?' and I said, 'Let's go down to Warehorne, fishing.' She had never been before, so we went down.

We caught a load of eels, then we caught the train home. We had this load of eels wrapped up in

newspaper and we got on the train at Hamstreet and again at Ashford. There were people all dressed up, out for the night to go to the cinema and theatre, and there was us with this smelly bag of eels and everyone looking at us.

John Poole

By then we had a handheld radio – we didn't used to have anything like that, mobile phone was a great big thing you used to carry, weighed a ton. But later on – he'd still got a wooden boat, he hadn't gone to fibreglass – he called up one day on one of the channels I had and he said, 'I don't want you to panic but I think we're sinking.' And what do you do? You panic. So I got in the car, got the children in the car, came up and got his dad and we went up to the boat 'cause he was trying to get in before he sunk. And it was terrifying, I can only say it was terrifying. And he did get in – he sunk as he hit the beach, his dad had got the winch all ready to winch him up so it was fine.

His dad was called Foggy Harry because he liked foggy weather but William never got a name like that, he was just called Willie. But yeah he would always go out in rough weather, because we were hard up, we needed the money, 'cause that's what it was all about in those days. There wasn't quotas. If the herring came – quite funny really – you wouldn't put the light on in the morning in case one of the other herring boats, people

Colin Haines with fish he landed
(courtesy of RNLI Dungeness)

who lived near you (saw the light). So you'd creep around, you wouldn't put the light on and then you'd get up to the boat and you'd try to get the boat off without making a sound, with no lights. All you would hear is the putt-putt-putt-putt of the engine, as they went out and they shoot their nets. And then sometimes you would look and somebody was in front of you! You'd get a few but you wouldn't get as many. So yeah, it was a bit cut-throat then.

But was it a friendly place to live?

Oh yeah, it was a community. Whereas nowadays people don't know their neighbours, we do because it still is that sort of community – I live near the Pilot, so it still is a community there but up here on the beach it's not so much, they have them as holiday houses so they don't know the people here very much.

Judith Richardson

Most of the fishermen migrated from over in the ranges, west side of the point, Dengemarsh, Galloways and Jury's Gap. I think they came here in the 1880s when the railway came because they could get the fish away to market. It would have been swimming fish mainly, herring, mackerel. It was the herring fleet because that was the mainstay but that has changed over the years.

Best catch?

Well fishing for sole, caught a ton in one session. It doesn't happen too much now. The EU and Dutch have decimated the stocks by 'pulse beaming' which electrocutes the fish. Originally it was illegal until the EU saw how efficient it was!

You could go weeks and weeks under pressure to catch a few fish when the weather was too bad but you did go when you shouldn't. Bad winters, ashore for six weeks. Now we have better boats,

mainly catamaran, and technology, sat nav etc. Now you can go anywhere whereas before you had to learn all the landmarks and exactly where you were, now it's easier. I was the last one of my peers to learn. We had DECCA Radar, big lumps of kit, now you can do it on your phone.

Ken Thomas

THE LIFEBOAT

We are lucky to have crew members who are or were fisherman and come from fishing families. Our crew now come from all walks of life, still from the surrounding area, they have to live within a three-mile radius. There has never been a time when we could not launch. The boat needs a crew of six, but we can go with five, we need a tractor driver because the boat is launched off a carriage.

Myself, (coxswain), and Trevor, the mechanic are full-time now, both started off as volunteers, both fishermen.

Dungeness lifeboat The Morell, c.2014
(courtesy of RNLI Dungeness)

The lifeboat, The Mable, was further along the coast, a mile towards the point, and was launched via a slipway. Ben Tart was the coxswain at the time. The launch was down the slip and then you had to put the skids to run her into the sea. We moved up here in 1977, because the beach on the east side of the point grows out. When it was on the slip, every 10 or 12 years they had to pick the whole station up and move it out towards the sea. So, we moved here and put the boat on a carriage. The first boat we had here was an eight-knot Rother Class boat, then we went to a Mersey Class which was a 16-knot boat made of Kevlar. Now we have the Shannon Class which is a jet boat. We have gone from props to jets which some people said would never work because of pumping beach through your jets but we have had it here five years with no trouble at all. This is a 25-knot boat, so in my career we have gone from eight to 25 knots. We used to stand anywhere and when the swell would come we would get wet whereas now you just get in, there are nice comfy seats, all computerised, computer screens in front of us. Where we used to have to keep our wet weather gear on, this one we tend to take it off again when we are on board.

The launch kit with the Rother and Mersey needed 12 people to help recover the boat on to the carriages; with the Shannon Class we only need three.

Most of our jobs are what we call AA jobs – we have a lot of pleasure craft that often breakdown and need a tow. Our nearest harbour is Dover so with the old boats it took hours to get back but with this one we fly back.

Stuart Adams

Because my husband, William, was a fisherman at Dungeness, we lived at Taylor Road which was okay for being a crew member. We had two children then so it wasn't quite so easy but I would bundle them into the car in the middle of the night if I had to. No seat belt laws then!

My job then was to telephone. We'd get a phone call – 'cause we all had phones by then – we had a phone call to say there was a lifeboat – and the maroon would have gone off but we wouldn't have heard that, and then we got up and I had a list of six people to phone so I would phone those and just say, 'Lifeboat.'

So you weren't part of the launch crew?

Not here. I was one of the last of the lady launchers up on the other one, but I was relatively new up there before they finished. That role entailed going up in the car and making sure the children were sat in the boathouse and didn't come out, and putting the woods down, big woods, so then the lifeboat could go down the slipway – the old slipway – over the woods and into the sea,

if there was enough water. And many a time it came off the woods and they had to winch it back up, turn it round and do it again. It wouldn't go anywhere – it was just stuck there on the beach! You'd got to make sure the woods were in the right place – they'd be standing there pushing them this way, that way. Whatever weathers.

There was a meeting as the crew selected coxswain. William was not in the frame but the person we thought was going to be appointed did not want to do it so the crew asked William and he got voted in unanimously. It was quite a job as it was not a full-time position and he still had to go off fishing.

The RNLI sent him on courses for the new boat and the tractor and trailer. They were also building the new lifeboat station here. Ursula Upjohn gave the RNLI money for a new boat, the Alice Upjohn, in memory of her mother. So, we had a new station, a tractor and trailer and a new Mersey Class lifeboat and we just had to get on with it!

Every year Miss Upjohn sent me a cheque to organise a Christmas party for the children, there were quite a few then. The mothers would do the food and I would find an entertainer. All the children would get a nice present.

I made the tea in the crew room, I was always in there. I joined the fundraising committee because it was part of the station. I was involved

in whatever was going on, washing up, cleaning floors after do's. That's what I did.

Lady launchers at Dungeness, c.1960
(courtesy of RNLI Dungeness)

I got an award after 50 years, Excellence in Volunteering. I didn't need an award, I just enjoyed being part of the team. I have been Press Officer since 2006 and when I got to 70 I thought I would have to retire, as everyone else has to, so the coxswain and mechanic have been scanning the

rule book and couldn't find anything about retiring the Press Officer!

Judith Richardson

There were three major fishing families, the Oillers, the Tarts and the Richardsons. There's actually an exhibit in the Chatham Dockyard Museum – a lifeboat exhibit with Dorothy Tart memoirs and a reprint from the Sunday Times in which she said, 'My mother was a Tart but she married an Oiller, so I was an Oiller but I married a Tart.' Which is one of those local quotes, but then Sylvia was one of the last of the lady launchers; the local men crewed the lifeboat, but the women actually pushed it down the bank into the sea and then hauled it up again when it was time to recover it.

Michel La Rue

Launch of Dungeness lifeboat Mable E Holland, c.1966
(courtesy of RNLI Dungeness)

The area we cover is known as the M25 of the Channel; it's one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. We go to all types of incidents – it can be collisions, sick passengers or crew, kite-surfers, wind-surfers, breakdowns right in the shipping lanes so they have to be pulled out of the way quickly, missing people and boats.

John Poole

Best part was bringing families ashore who had been involved in an incident, and seeing them safe is very satisfying. Rescuing injured people, we had a man whose hand had been caught in a winch bringing him back and transferring him to an ambulance is very satisfying.

Chris Shore

Formally I started in 1974 when I left the Navy. I joined the crew then, but I'd helped out all the time I was on leave, and this was before the days of pagers, and communications systems we've now got for calling the crews out has come on in leaps and bounds. Those days it was the two maroons from the lifeboat station – the good old 'bang bang' or a telephone call.

The area of operation then – that's when I was at sea – was Dymchurch, St Mary's Bay, Littlestone, Greatstone, that sort of area. In those days (I never came across it) they used to carry on board an empty tobacco tin with pennies in (that was before decimalisation kicked in); the Coastguard would

give them roughly the area where the casualty was and if they couldn't find the casualty they used to come ashore and go to a phone box and phone the Coastguard and try and get a bit more information! It was a bit like Fred Karno's Army to be quite honest but then the RNLI invested in radios for the boats which made life a lot lot better. The boat was there '66, so it would have been '66 to '68, somewhere around there, before they then came up with these – they were like a cylindrical orange unit that was just bungie-corded to the front of the boat, with an aerial on the front, and that was the radio. It had a range of about six miles I suppose but you could talk to the Coastguard and get raw information, which made life a lot easier.

I was sent out on a job one day – supposed to be a windsurfer in the water at the back of the Mulberry Harbour and when I got out there it was three big fishing floats, a black one and two white ones which looked like a guy on a surfboard.

The ones that took the mickey the most, back at the station, I think it was about three or four weeks later – the same three that made all the comments – got a shout: Dymchurch, child on a yellow Lilo being blown out to sea. (Westerly wind, they get blown out towards the French coast.) They went hurtling off down to Dymchurch and they came back with an eight-foot inflated Fyffe's banana!

Charlie Davies

LAND AND LANDSCAPE

Besides the main ditches, which are quite deep and often full of water, you've got lots of small ones and they often run through people's gardens, and Warren Road at the bottom of the gardens. Unfortunately, new people come to the area, don't read their paperwork, have no idea what they are and think, 'Well, I don't want that, so I'll fill it in.' And a hairdresser friend of mine, she went home to find her back garden flooded. Well, being a local, she knew exactly what it was – somebody had blocked the dyke in some way. So off she went knocking on doors and found, yes, a new person who moved in about a year earlier had filled it in, had no idea that it was there as a drainage ditch. And course if you get a lot of rain, you soon know. It's a good drainage area – I mean, lots of stone and sand – so it should go through, but when it comes down in a hurry, you need somewhere for it to channel itself. And that was what they were for. Some people just think they're a very good compost place. And others put small pipes in, as has happened up the road here. And in actual fact, it wasn't his ditch to fill in.

There's different sorts of cess pits; ones that are contained and have to be emptied and others that are soak-away type. But they started bringing in the ones that didn't soak away – because obviously it's not very healthy when you get lots

of them. Unfortunately, a lot of them thought it was a jolly good idea to make a hole in them so that it would keep down the amount of emptyings they'd have to do. And I always maintain, and still do today, that when we've had a lot of rain, a lot of people would go down with tummy bugs. And I still maintain that it was because the ground was so full of sewage that had not been emptied. It's better today, of course, because we've now got mains drainage in most places, but there are still those that didn't want to connect to it, which is not a good idea. All over the Marsh actually. New Romney didn't get main drainage until 20-odd years ago. They had to fight.

Anne Luckett

I had an ambition because my grandfather worked there (Church Farm) for a long, long time, the old chap was a thatcher, and when they built all the corn stacks they used to thatch all the stacks; they used to thatch them with straw and everything to keep the weather out. Well he was an expert thatcher on there and he worked there for a good many years. And then my brother went there, he worked there, and I just had a burning ambition to work on the farm, and that's what I eventually did in the end.

I left Southlands at 15, and before I was 15 I was working at Church Farm because as kids you was always there in the fields, you worked the

harvest time, you worked lambing time, and you was known as the old boy. And every farm had an old boy and you was the old boy, that's how you started – I was driving tractors when I was eight or nine. That's how you started in them days. They was all good days – I can't remember any bad days. The only bad days I can remember was

Church Farm, New Romney, at that time next to the Church, c.1946 (courtesy of Bernie Morris)

in April and we was lambing I think really, it was always raining, blowing, sleeting, and you was walking round – headwind and rain – trying to drive lambs out of fields... but no really bad days. A

lot of them were rough but you just did it.

Before I left school, Mr Prior, he ran the farm, and I was cleaning out some chicken sheds and he come to me – with his trilby hat and his old pipe on – and he said to me, 'Have you got a job, boy, when you leave school?' And I said, 'No Mr Prior, I haven't.' And he said, 'Well you'd better start here when you leave school then hadn't yer.' And that's how I started and I thought I was in clover then because I was earning £5 a week, and I thought I was well away then! And I worked there for quite a few years, till I was 21, 22 I suppose.

Bernard Morris

Thatched haystacks on the Marsh, c.1934
(courtesy of Bernie Morris)

When we moved from Warren Road, my family had the shoe shop in The Avenue, Davies' shoe shop. So Dad worked up there. My grandfather started the business in 1933. So when my grandfather passed away, he left my father some land at the back of the shop and Dad built a bungalow there. And so in 1959, 1960, we moved into the bungalow. There was us, there was Joe Barnes up towards the light railway track and a Mrs Ellis that lived down there. And we were in the middle of nowhere, basically. Our playground, our romping area became the meadow opposite, which went right over to the sewage works over to the caravan site – massive great fields. So we spent hours out in that field. There were dykes, we used to go eeling, catch eels out there, we'd exercise the dogs out there.

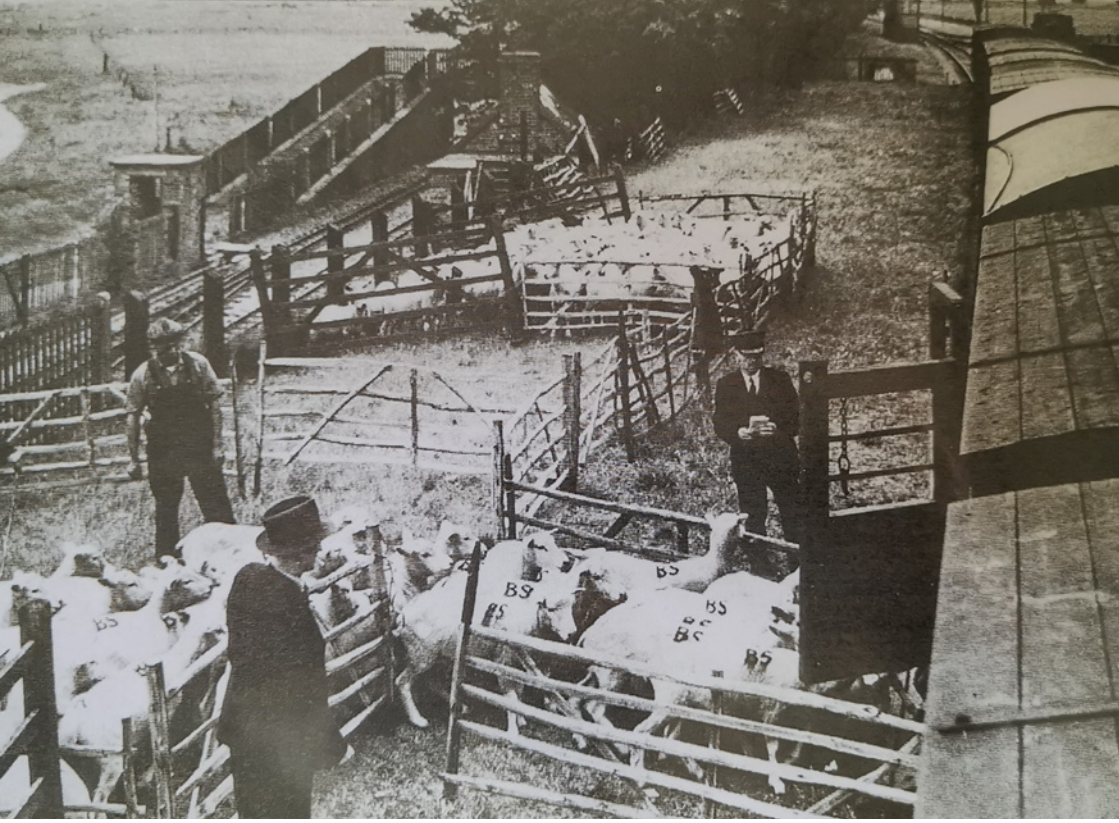
The dykes on the Marsh at one time were full of eels. They weren't big. We didn't eat them. Basically we just used to go and catch them and release them, put them back in the dykes. But most of the dykes, you'd just take a light rod, small hook, worms or maggots, and that was it. With eels, if you looked at the dykes, if you saw a swirl like a mud swirl come up on the water that would be an eel, he'd be moving through the dyke.

The elvers (baby eels) used to congregate; they used to swim up the outfall pipe that runs across the golf course, which is just to the north of the water tower on the seafront – that's the outlet for

it. And if you followed that ditch all the way up there's a weir on a bridge and you could see the eels there, they would congregate. And the elvers used to literally climb up the weed round the weir and get inland, and get into that sewer system.

My father got to know the local shepherd who lived down the road down in Queens Road, worked for G.T. Paine. So from about the age of 12, I spent a lot of my weekends that I wasn't fishing, out with the shepherd. We'd see Ned come out with the dogs of a morning. The fields that we worked were over near the airport. So we'd walk across the field, cross the railway tracks and then out towards the airport where his looker's hut was.

So I spent, I suppose, a good three years, off and on, school holidays – I used to help him out lambing time, so I'd go lambing with him. And you learnt a lot from the old boy. What I would say was he was an old country farmer. You knew he would show you different things. We'd know where to go to get mushrooms. Where to get the best blackberries and things like this. He knew a lot of the old country ways. Lambing time, you always get losses in a lambing field. The Marsh is well known for lambing in fields and not in sheds. The worst weather you can get is a day like today – wind and rain. The young lambs could put up with wind, they could put up with rain, they couldn't put up with two of them. If it blew and it was wet you



Sheep shearing by petrol engine, 1958
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

would lose stock. But we used to put the wattle pens out that were covered in reeds, which would then give them protection, so the newborns would go in there. Bales of straw you'd put out in the fields and they'd huddle up underneath those. So, you know, you'd get a deceased lamb – he would show you how to skin it and put it on a sock lamb. That's a lamb that the ewe has died so you've got lambs that are orphans, basically. So if a mother had had twins and one of them had died, you'd skin the dead lamb. Make a coat for the orphaned lamb, put it on there and put it with the sheep. And

A Lamb, with a looker's hut, c.1960
(courtesy of Bernie Morris)

after about a week, she would accept that lamb. So you then take the skin off and it was hers. You know, that was the sort of thing that you learnt how to do with Ned. He was a great guy.

For about two years they ran a lot of Hereford cattle and running with the cattle was a bull. He was enormous. He was a big Hereford bull. You couldn't drive him. He had to walk behind you. So when you move the stock, there's the cows and the calves, three or four of us, the dogs moving the cattle out the field, and behind you was the bull. But behind the bull was one of the dogs. And Ned always used to say, 'If the dog starts barking, watch out for the bull!'

Charlie Davies

I'm a part-time warden. I'm paid the minimum wages and I'm employed to walk the beaches and keep them clean. During the course of the year I pick up 400 sacks of rubbish – litter – and that comprises all sorts of things from fishing nets to buoys.

People come down and picnic on the beach and just walk away and leave food cooking on them. We've picked up sofas, duvets, mattresses on the beach. Tents used as toilets for a fortnight have been just left behind. And as you probably saw as you came in, there's a whole pile of plastic out there that I keep for myself to put on that tree just to show people just how much plastic there is swilling around in the ocean. And that's only the little bit that comes up on Dungeness – my bit is from the power station down to the Pilot pub, which is about a mile and a half of beach.

(As a photographer) I try and capture the essence of this place. The boats, the skies and the environment. Because where people come to the gallery, they want to see how you interpret what you're seeing. And that's what I try to convey. Most of my stuff is black and white. I don't see Dungeness in colour at all. It's not a colourful place. It is harsh. It is brutal. It is tough. It is crude. And it is not a nice place to be. It's lovely, don't get me wrong, but it's not a kind place. So I very rarely photograph in colour. It's always black and

white with these huge night skies and this feeling of being blown to death all the time. It's an open environment and it is tough.

We have sea kale out here, which is used quite a lot in London restaurants, very posh. We used to get the Chinese come down here and virtually strip the whole beach.

That's all been banged on the head. Sea kale, it's like a big cauliflower, huge, great cauliflower plant, that produces these huge, great white heads like the inside of a cauliflower. But just flowers. And what happens is they get pollinated and they produce a seed which is about the size of your little fingernail, on like a branch. And what happens is in the autumn, these dry and then they snap and then they roll like tumbleweeds. You know, in the Westerns where you see the tumbleweed? And the seeds roll along the beach and get deposited on the shingle. That's how the sea kale pollinates. And it's frowned upon to take these away – that's why we're not allowed to have fences, because it interrupts the flow of plants across the beach.

I just think it's a wonderful environment. I never stop looking at it, never stop being amazed at the colours. We've got the gorse out at the moment. And then in the summer, we have Viper's-bugloss. We have vetches. We have all sorts. My favourite is a little plant – you have to get down on your hands

and knees to find it. Everything here gets blown to pieces, you can appreciate. And it produces a little flower, like a scabious, and it's on a stem. And I've never seen a stem so long. It's like a little piece of fishing line. And it's this perfect little purple flower on the end of this stem that must be nine, 10, 12 inches long. And you think, how does that survive down here? I go looking for it.

People have asked me what is my favourite season and my favourite season is the next one.

Chris Shore

Things have improved, I think. And I think if you look out on the Marsh now, quite a lot of the dykes have been dredged and cleaned. Which is good. I mean, it doesn't stop flooding because you can never stop flooding because you can design systems for so much water but then you get a monsoon or something like that and it's just going to over-run. But luckily, I think the Marsh has been very, very fortunate that we haven't had major flooding.

We had a Kent County Council councillor from Thanet stand up and say that we shouldn't defend the Marsh, we should let the sea take the Marsh back and we shouldn't defend the Marsh. And him saying that had a knock-on effect because it meant quite a lot of the people on the Marsh couldn't get flood or property insurance because

of it. And Michael Howard was our MP at the time. And I went to him and I said, 'We can't let this go, Michael, we've got to do something.' And he said, 'Well, what do you think?' I said, 'Well, let's try and get hold of the powers that be, the Environment Agency and people like that, and get them down here and get them to commit to defend this area or not.' And because at the time he was the leader of the Conservative Party, he was quite powerful. He did that. And we got the Environment Agency to come down and they said they would defend the Marsh to 2050 at the earliest.

Clive Wire

Land drainage – this is before it was mechanised, they used to do these land drains. We used to get 25 shillings for 22 feet (a chain). Me and my working man used to do about three and half chains a day. We'd always try to get over the three chain and then Saturday we only worked half a day. We were getting about £24 a week, which is equivalent to about three weeks money because farm wages in those days were £7, two shillings for a 47-hour week. And so we were on good money.

You had a gouge, about 29 inches longs and about four or five inches wide, and rounded. And you took small bites – if you took too big a bite you'd bend the tool and mess it up and you were stuck. You'd take about four inches at a time and then go to the edge and then you just flip it over and lay it on the side of the trench. I always done the top work, and

my partner and workmate, he done the bottom because it was easier for him. I would scoop out the crumb and we'd go down probably to about five or six feet when we came away from the ditch. The crumb is the soil that's left when you dig out your scoopful. So you were digging a trench. I went in at the top and then my workmate would go in once I got away from the ditch bank – he went in and brought the water with him.

Colin Hill

Illegal coursing happens. If you walk around the Marsh now you'll see all sorts of obstacles parked in gateways to try to stop people from going out with their greyhounds and chasing hares. Many years ago you had John Jones Coursing Club, which was a legal club. And people used to belong to that and they were allowed to go round the Marsh, coursing legally with the permission of the landowner. But now the government, in its wisdom, has banned coursing now what it's done is driven it underground. Now people think they've got a right to come into the country, countryside virtually all around – they don't respect seasons because they come at any time. When the coursing club was there, they only ran it from October around to February and then that was it. And then just March, April time is the breeding season for the hares, so they were left alone. But the coursing people now, don't adhere to that.

Denis Wimble

When I was a young boy, three of us we used to go out rabbiting. We used to have a couple of ferrets. But that wasn't sport – that was something to eat.

(We used to watch hare coursing) on the Marsh, right in the middle of the Marsh. When I was on the baker's round I used to see them out there, and used to stop for a while and watch them hare coursing.

Fred White

You see because I'm a painter. I suppose I look at it in colour and texture, and I do like the space in between and the fact we don't have fences. So there's good, clear views, no matter where you go, whatever you look at. And then of course, in the spring we're going to be getting the lovely flowers. Poppies, bugloss. So there are certain times of year where it's absolutely beautiful – very barren most of the time, but absolutely beautiful coming up soon.

We have a lot of birds, but not garden birds. Very specific to here. And also because we're right on the flight path we get a few odd visitors that pop in, have a quick breather and then off they go again. And a lot of twitchers come down, specifically when they hear, obviously on their bird line.

There used to be a huge amount of rabbits, absolutely massive amount of rabbits. And we've

had them breeding in the garden, so little tiny baby ones, you know, so cotton buds almost popping about. But those seem to have been wiped out. A lot of them have gone now.

Helen Taylor

We used to go across the fields with our nets and we were looking for tadpoles, and we were looking for sticklebacks and we were looking for newts. And I remember when my children were young I took them across the fields, but by then – because of the mass use of pesticides and the over-farming – all the ditches had overgrown, the weeds were there, and there was no sticklebacks, there was no newts or anything, so that was part of my history had gone, and I was very sad about that.

Gary Fagg

We'd cycle up to Dungeness. Often I'd cycle from Catford down to Greatstone and it was a brilliant ride in those days. The roads were so different. Once you dropped down onto the Marsh from Tenterden – that's the way I used to go – you're in a different world. It's such a magical place and it always has been. And there's one or two pubs there which are quite good! There was a pub at Snargate, and the old boy who ran it, may have been an old farmer or not, but it was by hurricane lamps when we went there. Opposite the church.

And you'd get a few locals in there, and you'd sit on a beer crate – no seats. I can remember sitting on a beer crate having a brown ale.

Mick Burns

I like bird watching, go down the Dungeness bird reserve. This side of the Dungeness road, I really like that because there's only two hides there. One's an enclosed one and one is an open screen. And I always walk up there for half an hour or whatever – fantastic. The marsh harrier never disappoints me. He always comes along when I'm walking along there. So I do like bird watching.

Other wildlife, I've interacted with badgers, which I don't like. So I'm not a badger hugger. One walks along the front of our wall almost every night toward a track. But they shouldn't be in the urban setting. They need to be in the countryside. And if you don't cull them, then they'll keep coming. I've had to have all my fencing replaced because of badgers.

Mike Shannon

Probably the wettest incident I ever got involved in was actually rescuing a swan from a dyke and the swan decided to take me into the dyke with it as well, unfortunately. And I got rather wet.

Wildlife hasn't changed a lot, and one of the things I have learnt down here is that if you see a lot of,

unfortunately, dead badgers or foxes or rabbits anywhere, then you can probably be sure there are a lot of them about, but if you don't see them about – and I've not seen a hare for a long time – it will probably indicate that there's not very many of them about. But generally, there's not been an increase or decrease, no.

One thing in the farmers' fields I've noticed is that sheep have now reduced over the years, decreased considerably. But a lot of arable work is now done. And speaking to some of the farmers, especially one from Snargate, he tells me that he can grow potatoes in the Lydd area and New Romney better and earlier than he can out at Snargate where he lives. There's a difference of about a fortnight in the actual growth cycle. So he can get early crop potatoes in the Lydd area and then later on have his second crop out at Snargate where he lives. If you look at a map, you will see that Lydd is actually sticking out into the English Channel and quite often our weather is more aligned to that of northern France than to the English weather systems.

Nigel Evenden

If you go over to the ponds – I don't do it now, I used to years ago – well, you got bullrushes and there's a lot of wildlife. Well it's a nature reserve. I mean, that must be fantastic, all the different types of birds that come over here winter time and

then go off and come back again, which is lovely to see because where I am, you've just basically got seagulls! Don't see many other birds – you do see sparrows.

Carol Simmons

I remember going up Barrack Hill with a friend of mine. We must have been 13 or 14, I suppose. At the back of the Small Arms School there was sort of an open area, neglected really I suppose, and it had an old tree growing in it, with an obvious hole sort of halfway up. And the friend of mine said, 'Well, I'm going to climb up there to see whether there's an owl that might be nesting in there.' So he climbed this tree. And as he stuck his hand in, the tawny owl flew out, almost knocking him backwards and down onto the floor. Luckily, he hung on and he was okay. We weren't birding exactly, we were egg collecting, which was the rage for youngsters then, trying to get as good a collection as we could. But you didn't or you shouldn't take more than one egg from a nest. And I do remember we had Sea Cubs and I used to go to that once a week and one of the older boys there had actually taken the whole clutch of a song thrush's nest. And this elder boy had heard about it. I think maybe the lad was boasting. He knocked the daylights out of him. He said you don't do that. So there was certain rules, even though we were doing what we'd consider

nowadays to be quite wrong.

I suppose I was vaguely interested in birds. Otherwise you wouldn't do it because you had to know what the species was when you were taking the egg, so you could label it. Then you'd blow them. You prick a little hole at either end, one a bit larger than the other. And then you blow through the smaller hole, just hold the egg as gently as you can, but still fairly firm and blow hard and the yolk will come out. Quite often the pressure of your fingers would burst it before you got to that stage. But that was all part of the learning process.

I actually had the collection for many years, gathered from various places, not just locally. And an acquaintance of mine who I used to write to – he'd got a very good collection – he was fined for holding this collection of eggs. Because, you know, the law changed over the years, it became rather more severe about taking – only a few birds could legally be taken. And he told me - he said 'You'd be so shocked,' he said, 'No, it's not as if I'd collected them recently. This was years and years ago. I just liked them and kept them.' And I thought, 'Well, maybe I should move mine on,' and I contacted Dungeness Bird Observatory and they said, 'Yes, yes, bring it along and it'll be fine.'

And in 1949 I'd decided I would stop collecting eggs at all, and that I would become a bird watcher instead. The thing that worried me was

if I had an egg, I knew I'd seen the bird or its nest. In a notebook, I could write anything in that and couldn't really prove whether I'd seen what I'd written down, and that worried me for a long time. But eventually I got over it and no, I just keep notes as normal now.

You find some of the waders, the shorebirds as Americans call them, they're going to turn up, some in the winter, birds like turnstone, there's always more of them about in the wintertime. And another bird, I suppose, like sanderling or knot, or some of the godwits occasionally, dunlin, they pass through. So they're going to spend a certain amount of time during both spring and autumn migration and dunlin probably in the winter as well. But you're not going to see very many that you never know. And obviously, because we've got the Channel next door, then there are birds that migrate through the Channel to get to northern areas where they're going to breed and of course return in the autumn. So you might get large flocks of common scoter, which is a duck, you know, several hundreds, or brent geese. They go through and you can get maybe a thousand in a day that would go through if you stay there long enough. A place like Dungeness is ideal because they've got a hide there, you can sit in.

It's magic. The light is brilliant on the Marsh. And it is such a wonderful place to be in. I enjoy maybe

not climbing mountains, but climbing uphill. I do that in the Preseli mountains in Pembrokeshire. And that's wonderful. But there's something really special about the Marsh. And I think so much so that, even if I was given the offer without any worry about expense to move somewhere else in the country or in Kent even, I don't think I'd do it.

Roger Norman

Where the house is, where Manana is, is right in the corner of a big field. It's a huge area. We had the ponies. And again, all the local girls had their ponies and used to keep them at what is now Copperfield Stables, which is down Eastbridge Road. And we'd go there and at weekends we'd do pony riding lessons. Yvonne Downey used to run it. And we'd keep our ponies up there. They'd use our ponies for pony riding lessons and then we'd get riding lessons in the evening and we'd go galloping off round the fields and Dad'd leave straw bales out that we could make jumps with and things like that. So we literally did that. And then we'd take packed lunches and go up to the wildlife park at Port Lympne and ride all along the canal bank and have our sandwiches. By the time you've cantered along a few grass verges, the sandwiches are all squashed. You'd take an apple for the horse and the horse ends up eating all your sandwiches as well.

Oh, we were so lucky. So lucky. Down the beach we'd take the horses. We used to ride to Dymchurch Primary on the horses. Yvonne used to have all the horses at the stables. We'd go in the mornings, get on the horses, ride to school. She had a big old cart horse called Liza and there'd be about 10 of us, eight to 10 of us, all on ponies. We go up Dymchurch way, gallop along the beach, then come up the slipway opposite the school, Sycamore Gardens. There used to be a slipway bit up there. Come up there, ride down through Sycamore Gardens, into the school playgrounds, jump off the ponies, throw the lead reins over to Yvonne and she'd go riding off up the road because there was a field which is opposite where Youngs used to be, a big field there. And she'd turned the horses out there for the day and then she'd go and catch them all up in the afternoon, come back to school. We'd jump on the horses and then go belting on the beach. To Dungeness or however far the tide was, all in our school stuff, satchels banging!

There was a little pony called Puzzle, a little Shetland pony who nobody ever rode, he just used to go free, and he used to charge along behind everybody else, you know, he'd be miles behind but he'd still follow everybody else. And then he'd stop and turn round and wait till we came back and pick us up on the way back, and we used to ride back to

the stables and that was it. Then we got home. It was amazing.

Tracy Brewer

I was out at Old Romney the other week. I looked out across the Marsh and saw the sheep and the blue sky and the low trees and things like that. And I thought you could not want for anything better. This is an absolutely fantastic place to live. And also, if you walk along the sea, you get the same calming sort of feeling. You just watch the sea, and there's hardly any people, and you think – that's really lovely.

Frances Wire

FARMING

When I came down here it was absolute magic. It was all post-and-rail fencing, oak post-and-rail, all grass, and a very small amount of broken ground. It was mostly sheep. In 1957 – about that time – the Lincolnshire farmers realised what good potential it had for growing stuff and so we had quite a few Lincolnshire farmers moved down here to take advantage of it. But of course they farmed as they would in Lincolnshire. They filled the ditches in, grub the trees out, grub the hedgerows out, make three or four small fields into one big field. It was more economical for them. But of course you lose all your wildlife, don't you.

They said piece work – I thought, 'Sounds good to me, because the harder you work the more you get.' So that's what we done: land draining, and picking up potatoes, picking flowers. Daffodils you could pick: three and three (three shillings and three pence) a thousand you used to get, that's 17 pence.

Colin Hill

We've gone from the horse right up to the two-, three-, four-, five-hundred-pound tractors now. Fields have got bigger. Machinery has got bigger. And less and less people. We've done away with people and put extra horsepower in really. I think we could do with more people on the land.

Horse drawn threshing on the Marsh
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

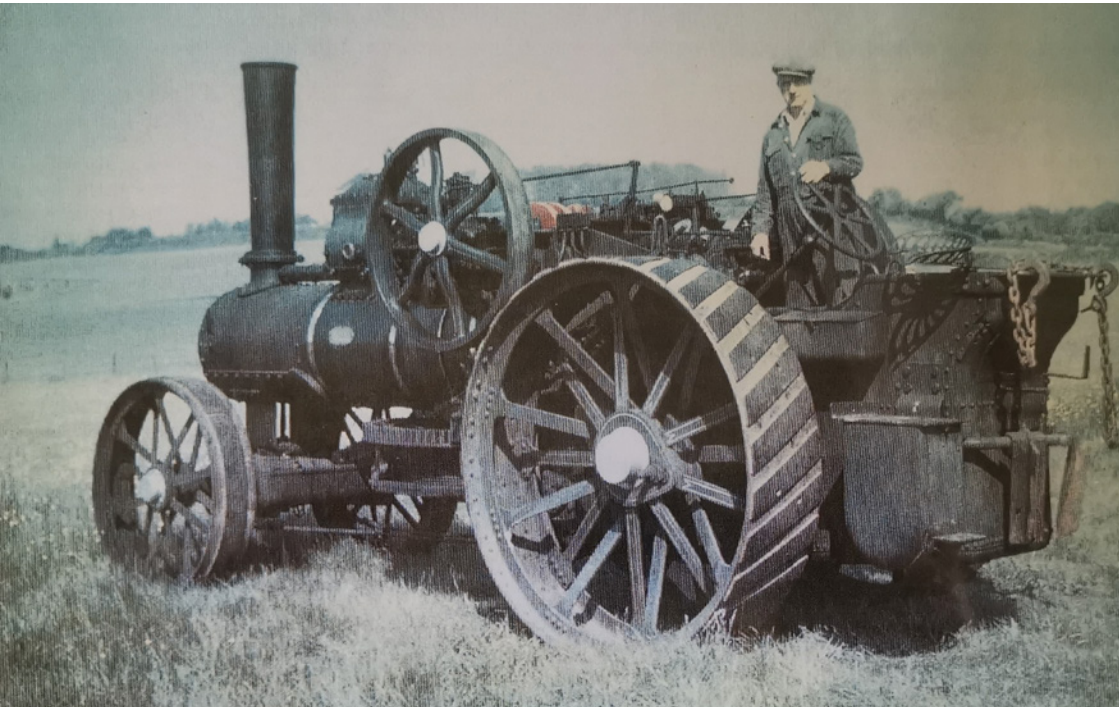
A lot of farms on the Marsh had mixed farming, i.e. a mixture of arable and livestock. Now deep down I do believe that's the most logical way to farm anyway, in my mind, but now we've got big tractors, big flayers, big combines. They do more in a day now than what we used to do in a whole season. Call it progress if you like but it is trying to produce food, cheap food, for the nation.

We bought our first combine in 1970-'71, I remember it cost us – brand new – about two and a half thousand. We had it for 14 years and we sold it for two.

Denis Wimble

I put a tractor in the ditch upside down, a brand-spanking-new tractor. I was ditching, cleaning out the ditches, and I got in a corner and it grabbed a root or something – the ditcher did – and it lifted the front of the tractor up and when it come down

it come down sidewards and we went upside down in the ditch. Brand new tractor it was. It had the cab on it so I was lucky. It started up soon as we got it back up again. It just bent the cab at a slight angle, that was about all – I was very lucky. Ooh it was scary! All I could remember was, as it says on the dashboard, 'Hold on to the steering wheel if the tractor overturns.' And that's what I did. The worst bit was when they put me back in it to pull it back over to pull it out. Somebody had to keep the steering wheel straight, so the wheels



Local farmer Ted Higgins on his traction engine
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

were straight. That was more frightening than the tipping over bit. The farmer'd said, 'If you put that tractor in the ditch ...' I said, 'You won't see me for dust.' He said, 'You'd better start running.' Course he was only just joking. He was more worried about me than anything.

Brian Washford

(My earliest memory) was probably the mosquitos. They were an absolute menace. It was then that we had to put mosquito nets over our bed at night. That would be in 1935. I think if the frogs hadn't come, thanks to Mr AP Smith – if he hadn't brought those frogs back from Hungary, put 'em in his pond, goodness knows what living on the Marsh would have been like. And these frogs spread like – you know – but it took a little time but once they come to your area they'd be about every eight, ten feet along the banks – everywhere you walked there'd be a frog jump in. And apparently they'd eat darn near anything, these things. They certainly ate the mosquitos' larvae. And we could then do away with the nets just after the end of the War. AP Smith was our MP, and he'd been on holiday in Hungary and heard these frogs call. He put them in his pond and they just spread everywhere.

Derek Homewood

When I came down here first they were all Romney Marsh farmers. Then the Romney Marsh farmers

sold out and farmers from Lincolnshire came down. And as soon as they came down here they wanted it the same as it was in Lincolnshire. They cut all the hedges down: like one big open – spoilt it really. But we got used to it. The potato company used to have about 10 to 15 women working around there pre-packing potatoes. Then they had the lorry drivers. Great deliveries in all different places. If I had a big round, I used to have a mate with me, and we used to do it (driving) between us. When I started working at the potato company it was 100wt sacks – hessian sacks. Then it changed from there to half 100wt, 55s instead of a 110. We didn't like that because it was more journeys. We used to practice carrying two of these half-hundred weight bags on our shoulder and go in all the fruit shops and fish shops in the area.

Fred White

Every morning we started off by having our breakfast to be ready for working at eight o'clock. By then, three or four farmers' trucks had arrived and the leader of each truck – and the farmer of course – would say, 'I want four for potato picking,' or 'three for weeding,' that kind of thing. Potato picking was a laborious job in those days and it was the first time I had ever come across 'land girls', the Women's Land Army. Do you know, I was 20, 21 at the time and considered myself fit, but I could never cover my patch of potato picking as quickly as these land girls. I learnt a lesson

from that for future use. We'd get back on these farmers' lorries again about five in the evening for us to have a wash and brush up and to have our evening meal. From about seven o'clock you could go out and provided you were back by 11 – so that you were fit enough for work the next morning – they were happy.

Moving the hay, Dering Farm, Lydd, c.1936
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

Barely a fortnight ago I saw a field nearly opposite Marlie, used for potato picking. They had two tractors going together, side by side. One was

furrowing to get the potatoes loose. And the other one passed all the potatoes and the earth to the second lorry which filtered out the dry earth to the potatoes. The two tractors were doing the work of what we did in the field 60 or 70 years before.

Roy Jackson

I had a wonderful childhood. I just wish my kids could have had the same. It was absolutely idyllic because there was no pressure then. You went to school. There was no exams pressure.

We had dogs, pheasants, ponies. We were basically free-range because we were working on the farm. If I wanted to see Dad, I had to go and find him in the fields. They combined themselves. They did the baling. We had potatoes, so there was potato picking.

Christmas mornings were amazing. You had one little stocking at the end of your bed, and then you had to feed all the cattle. Nothing got done until you had done the cattle.

We had one beef cow that I wouldn't let Dad sell because you could ride him. Curly he was called because he had a curly bit on the top of his forelock. I could only have been about four, and I could sit on him and my legs were like out in splits because he was so wide. But I loved this cow and wouldn't let Dad sell him.

I used to regularly skive school and go to market

on a Tuesday with Dad when he loaded them all in the lorry. Then we'd have egg and chips for breakfast. And then watch them being sold. And one day, I very nearly bought a prize bull because he was lovely. I kept putting my hand up. And Dad suddenly realised and he said, 'No! Put your hand down, put your hand down!'

Dad always had a thing about everybody had to earn their own money. He wanted everybody to learn the value of having a wage and doing work. From Dymchurch, everybody used to work at the farm. All the women from the village used to come and do the potato picking. When you were old enough we would have what was called a camp, which was like a stretch of how far you'd get to pick your potatoes. They'd do a long row and it's divided into camps. The really quick pickers would get a big long camp. The slower ones would get a smaller one. And the kids would get a little one that two or three of us would do. Paid per bag – it was good money. In the '70s you got good money for picking potatoes. The boys drove the tractors, the girls did the spud-picking. For potato picking, you had a blue van: in the back was straw bales, and everybody – all the old girls – used to get in. First thing in the morning, drop at the field and then in the afternoon pick them up and take them home.

Everybody had their place. It was quite a hierarchy. Those that got dropped off first sat at the front and the rest around the back until it got to your place to be dropped off. Fridays were the exciting days because Friday was payday. Dad said he wanted everybody, the kids, to learn about getting a wage packet. As you got in the van you were handed a wage packet. Some of the women – they'd pick hundreds of bags a day. They were just so quick. In the summer you'd be picked up normally at eight and work through to probably three – lunchbreak in the middle. Sitting in the middle of a field, when everything stopped for lunch, and it was so peaceful. All you could hear was the birds and foxes run across the field and badgers, hares.

Tracy Brewer

SOCIAL LIFE

There was a culture. When I lived in the estate, all the old men – the men who lived in the estate and the families – they'd always have their Sunday best on at 12 o'clock walking up – they'd all be dolled up in their best suits – going up to either The Ship or The Cinque Ports which was known at the Sink Hole in them days, or the New Inn, and that was the tradition, all the men walking up there to the pub, come back at half past two and have their dinner and then sleep for the rest of the day. But the pubs were more lively. All the pubs did a roaring trade because you had everybody, you had the power station workers, you had contractors and everything, so there was a lot in the area.

I remember one night when old Pete Webb tried to get a donkey up the steps of The Plough pub and got his head stuck in the door and old Gwen was playing on the piano, fag hanging out the side of her mouth. There used to be a donkey opposite The Plough and it always had its head over the fence and old Pete Webb got it by the scruff of the neck and he was dragging it up the steps to The Plough door. Poor old donkey. And there was old Gwen with her old fag, bashing away on the old ivories she was.

Bernard Morris

My pub was The Rising Sun, that was my local – me, Barry Cloak and a few of my other mates, Alan Middleton, our little group. That's where we would start whenever we went round Lydd, or sometimes we'd go round the coast. Then sometimes we'd come back to The Rising Sun and Martin Whipp – he was an ex-boxer – was running it (he and his wife but Martin was nearly always behind the bar) and sometimes we'd fancy a late one and me and Barry and Alan used to wind up Martin – everybody knew that The Rising Sun was haunted so we all used to start telling ghost stories and we'd say, 'It's getting to him!' (Martin, as big as he is) and then he'd go way past closing time. 'Do you want another one lads?' – so he'd get us to stay later because Barbie she'd gone off to London which is where her parents were, so he'd be there on his own and he didn't like being in a haunted house on his own.

I was in 1st Lydd Scouts, which is down the lane now, but it wasn't there it was down by the old Gas Works House (down Station Road), then that hut got burnt down and we lost all our kit.

Friday night was main Scout night. And you had things you had to do to get your badges. There was a badge for just about everything. I even did one for a story of Lydd church, and when I started that I did bell ringing in Lydd. I was only a young man then. I was 15 when I started, because I remember my mates used to say to me, 'Come on,

you're not going bell ringing are you?' 'Yeah, it's alright, Monday night we all go bell ringing – when bell ringing's finished we go down The George and have a beer.'

(The scout leader) was Wilfred Wag. He was a local surveyor. He used to live just down by Hardy Hall. We used to go to his house on a weekend and cut the logs, do kindling, and then when we'd finished we'd all take turns to take it round to all the old folks in Lydd. Used to do Bob-a-Job – I believe they're not allowed to do that now – health and safety – well that was a big thing in our day, that's how you got funds to come in for your troops, to go towards buying a canoe or buying some more tents or anything.

Don Smith

Morris Dancers in New Romney
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

The atmosphere at the Country Fayre was just amazing. It was a real community effort and because some of the acts couldn't actually do their complete performances because the grass was wet, we had Police Cadets and RAF Air Training Cadets, they joined in and they did a dance display in the arena, and people loved it. But that, I think, was because we didn't have the tourists here this year, and people actually said after the event, 'What a lovely atmosphere –there wasn't the people but it was a fantastic event.' And we will remember the 25th Country Fayre because it's the only time it's ever rained all day.

By working with the town council, I found I was making contact with so many different people and even today I still know them, and I don't feel like I'm a "grockle" which is what you're called if you haven't actually been born and bred here; I feel that I am part of this town and people – I think they do understand that really.

Frances Wire

Do you still feel that there is that sense of community (on Dungeness)?

No. No. No it's gone. Changed. There are 99 properties on the Dungeness Estate and only 20 of them are lived in full time. We don't meet in the pubs on Friday night. We keep ourselves to ourselves. We do have a community association

but it's very low key.

Chris Shore

People always say, 'There must be a community spirit' and I always say, 'No.' If you come to live here (Dungeness) it's because you like solitude. That's what I feel. You don't want to be having a Tupperware party in the evenings and going for girly drinks over the pub. It's more about the isolation and the fact that you can be who you like, and that's what I like about it.

Helen Taylor

There was a guy that used to do pony rides down the beach and his name was Tom Quick. Quite a character, very likeable. We used to have Romney Revels – it's all finished now – and I went on this pony ride, because I loved it. And being the sort of person he was, he now wanted to sell my father a pony that he had, for me. And the pony was called Dolly, and she was pregnant. And he said, 'Don't forget you'll have the fowl as well.' But you just don't buy a horse when you know nothing – absolutely nothing about horses. Even at 11, even I could see the dangers of that!

But I sort of went with him for riding; we used to go down the beach and give people rides but there used to be a rival faction here also doing the same thing, a lady called Joan Grey and I was kidnapped I think by that group not to go with Tom

Quick anymore, to go with her lot, which I did and of course you work for nothing, because you were taught – well I say you were taught how to ride, she gave you the basics and let you get on with it I suppose. It was a case of you either stay on or you fall off!

(New Romney was) very small really, insular, in some respects, because everybody's related to everybody else. A bit like Dungeness really, the few families. You had to behave yourself because everybody knew who your parents were and if you misbehaved it would soon get back to them.

I can remember one day my cousin came to stay, and we all decided to go midnight swimming so we all decided to creep out and meet up. My dad is deaf, and to this day, I shall never know how he knew. But we're in the sea, we're not skinny dipping or anything, just splashing about and all of a sudden this vision appears and one of them shouts out, 'Hey Jude, it's your dad!' Oh, and by then he'd woken the whole house up and my uncle (my dad had gone walking down there) Eric had followed in the car, so we were bundled in this car to – still wet – to go home. We were in terrible trouble.

I can remember one night (at the café), my dad – we'd just cleared up and he was washing the floors and a whole load of fairground workers turned up because the fair had come to New Romney and they were all hungry and we'd just closed, so he said, 'Okay,' because he was quite amenable like

that, so we re-opened the place and cooked – it must have been egg and chips. Anyway, I must have been helping with serving – I would probably have been about 13 – but they remembered me and when I went to the fair I got all my rides for free.

Judith Clark

Most of the community thing was based in the pub. I was younger and a bit different to them; they were an older generation but it wasn't like they'd shun you, not at all, because they'd known me since I was a baby. Everybody knew each other really well. Now it's completely changed; they're either second homes or new people have moved in which is a different community, but then I get on quite well with most of them; they're really nice people and they bring new skills.

But I do have early memories of the old Pilot as a very small child, we used to go there. Then it got knocked down and rebuilt. The Pilot was Christmas Day and The Britannia was Boxing Day or the other way round, but it was by tradition that everyone went to that one and then everyone went to the other. Everybody was together.

Ken Thomas

There was also a bit of socialising, particularly in the Dormy House, as I got older. All my boyfriends were vetted there by the family, and my aunt was

very sociable, who lived in Romney Bay House. Christmas was always down here, and the Dormy where we'd always go and socialise. Again it was mainly family but I remember local people coming in, and my father when they retired down here and there was quite a lot of pub crawling in those days, so that was social life. I miss that (the Dormy) – it had an interesting mix of people because people coming to play golf would stay there. It was always very lively, that bar, and comfortable. There's nowhere like that now.

Pat Alston

Now previously, over the road was woods. There was just trees and waste land, and the road was completely unmade when we first moved in, so I used to organise with an old lady down the road, to make the road up. I used to send her round to collect money from all the people, then we'd buy a lorry load of ballast and we'd have a weekend doing it, which is all social and she used to walk along with cups of tea or sherry for us all. When the waste land was over here the Fire Brigade used to have a bonfire for bonfire night so they'd run power from my garage across, and we'd have a barbeque and firework display and we'd bring the fire engine down, and then one bonfire night we got called out to our own bonfire, so it was a bit embarrassing.

Mike Shannon

Coronation Party, New Romney 1953
(courtesy of Bernie Morris)

When we finished working in the shop – we both loved history, we're both very passionate about history – we decided, because the shop goes back to about 1733 I think – we thought we would look back into the history of all the owners of the shop. So we compiled all that and after we'd finished we kept getting people come saying, 'Oh we've got this and we've got that' so then we decided we'd call a meeting in the village hall to see if anybody would be interested in forming a history group and we just hired the small room, and Colin put

out chairs, about fifty and I said, 'Oh you're being a bit optimistic' and it turned out that there weren't enough chairs there – they were all sitting on tables and standing round as well, so it was from then, which I think was October 2010, that we all decided to form a heritage group and it's been going strong ever since.

Margaret Walker

Down at the Brownie hut, down Mitchem Road, every year they used to do a firework display and there'd be a bonfire and to get in you had to take a firework and everybody used to go walking up the road with their firework, you'd never get away with it nowadays; that was your entry fee. And they used to do hot dogs and when we were very young, we'd go up to the British Legion and they did a lantern parade and everybody had those candle things on sticks with a cover on them and we used to parade from the Legion down to the Brownie hut for the firework display. They did a Guy Fawkes competition; it used to be in the Ocean car park, and you'd make your Guy and push it up the road and everybody would decide whose the best were and they'd go on the bonfire. That was the ultimate thing if your Guy was on the bonfire. I won one year and got a little medal and a sweet.

The Day of Syn – that morphed as it went on, because when we were very young we weren't really involved in it. We used to watch; they

used to do mock fights outside the pub and the people who had the stables used to dress up and gallop along the beach on the horses and that was amazing. As we got older, what we did in The Day of Syn differed because they used to have a big fete on the recreation ground with stalls and re-enactments going on with canons going off. Syn week was a big thing. They used to have competitions in the village. They'd put something different in the shop window that shouldn't be there, so like in the ladies underwear, the corset shop that was on the corner, there'd be a lump of coal in the window and each window had a number and you had a sheet of paper and you had to go round the village and look in every window and try and find the thing that shouldn't be there, and whoever got the most right at the end got prizes. That went on for years, because when we were kids I can remember we got so excited when all the windows got their numbers up because it meant they were ready. I can't remember what the prizes were, but everybody wanted to win it. And so many people used to put 'dead wasp' because obviously the wasps used to get in and die and they'd say, 'Ah, that shouldn't be there' and everybody got 'dead wasp in the window.'

Then as we got older withThe Day of Syn, once we hit our teens, we actually rode in it. We dressed up as the scarecrow and the night riders; we used to

go on pub raids and we'd gallop along the beach early in the morning, up the slipway, through the village; go and raid The City of London, The Ship, out to The Shepherd and Crook at Burmarsh, back down the farm track which was great, because we were all dressed in these flowing capes and we'd flat out gallop across the fields, it was brilliant. And then we'd come back the other way and do The Star and back into the village and finish at The Ocean. Yvonne Downey and Ron used to be the scarecrow, they'd take it in turns. One used to ride in the car and make sure that we were alright and the other one used to ride the horses, dressed as a scarecrow and we'd go to the pub and then us younger kids who weren't allowed in would stand outside and hold the horses and the adults would go in and do a mock raid, you know, 'Give us your money!' And we'd go from pub, to pub, to pub, to pub doing these raids all dressed up and they used to take pictures and film us and on the actual Day of Syn we used to ride to church and everybody dressed as villagers and all us kids were dressed in mob caps and we had to ride side-saddle and we had the proper dresses on and everybody rode to church. And the vicar used to dress up in old-fashioned gear and we'd have an old-fashioned church service and there'd be people dressed as red coats and people dressed as smugglers.

Tracy Brewer

Annual Event of the New Romney Goal Running Club
(courtesy of Bernie Morris)

HOUSING AND FAMILY LIFE

I went to see a local councillor after I got de-mobbed and I said, 'What's the chances of getting a council house Mr Apse?' – Fred Apse – and he said, 'You're an ex-serviceman, you've got priority,' which is how it was in those days. And he said, 'There's a chap in West Place, called Archie Little' – I knew Archie because he worked up at the RAF camp, in the NAAFI – and he said, 'You go and see Archie; he's going to Australia.' So I came and saw Archie and Archie said, 'Yes, I've got some bits and pieces.' In those days everyone was a bit tight for cash, and they were ordinary cotton curtains and linoleum on the floor, and he had a few garden tools, but he said, 'You can have the lot for a fiver.' So I did; a fiver seems nothing today but that was nearly a week's wages in those days. We've been here ever since. We're quite happy here. We've raised four children here.

Colin Hill

Certainly there were not so many houses then in 1946. I'd walked from Dungeness and back (to Marlie Farm); there were so many gaps in the houses you'd go a quarter of a mile, half a mile even, without seeing another bungalow. They were all pre-war buildings then and every gap now – there's not even a plot for one more house.

Roy Jackson

Came to the Marsh in 1968. The CEGB (Central Electricity Generating Board) at that time had built the power stations. They provided funds for council housing for key workers, so as a craftsman or plant operator you got a council house. So we moved into a fairly new council house in Lydd. The house was in a terrace, three bedrooms.

My grandmother brought me up and when I told her I was moving she said, 'But I'll never see you again!' because of her perception of where the Marsh was.

Mike Shannon

I've always lived in the Romney Marsh. My father was a local. He lived in Brabourne area, near Sellindge and came down in the War years; he lodged with a local farmer in Dymchurch. My mum was born and raised in Bermondsey and was evacuated in the War years and came down to New Church on Romney Marsh. At the end of the War she worked in the local bakery.

I was one of four boys. We lived in a three-bedroom council house in St Mary's Bay, and one of my holiday jobs was over on the School Journey field. I was a 15- or 16-year-old. And I met a young lad from London who was in Barnardo's and we got to become good friends – Eric – and when he got to 16 he wrote to my mum and dad and asked whether he could come as a lodger in our family.

At that time, children of 15 and 16 went to halfway houses to learn to live in a community. Mum and Dad phoned him up and said, 'Look, we don't want a lodger in the family, but if you're prepared to come and take the discipline and the love of a family you can come and live with us.' And he grew up with us and integrated in our family. Eventually he met and married the girl who was brought up two doors away from us and has been more like a sister all my life –married her and he adored my mother and father. So then we had five boys in the family. And then some years later I had a brother, Ricky, who's five years younger than me and he had a friend at school who was also in a children's home down at Littlestone, and at 15 or 16 he came into the family; so there were six boys and we all grew up together as brothers.

Gary Fagg

This (house) was brought down here in the 1920s. The man that put it together was Horace Sinclair and he came from the Caithness region of Scotland and that's why this house is called Caithness. It was a pretty basic house at the time. I added extensions on. This has got 16 rooms in it, but very tiny rooms. We have a room with a bed in it and when you want to get dressed you have to go into another room. It's like being onboard ship but they are low, they're squat, there's no draughts and they're easy to heat and maintain.

During the War these were all requisitioned to house the troops in case of invasion. It was three carriages originally; two third class carriages and a horse box, in a very strange configuration.

Chris Shore

Quite a lot of these little buildings (on Dungeness) have been left as they were. So you've got some originals, which are very nice – the older fishing families used to live in – but then we've now got the new state-of-the art ones, which people come to see because they've read about them. They're always in some magazine, where one's been renovated.

What are your feelings in general about the changes that have taken place?

It bothers Chris more than it bothers me, because he's been here longer and I think he feels he's got more of a claim to the place, because I'm a relative newcomer. I think providing they're in keeping, that's just fine, but (the old buildings are) not protected; they're not preserved or anything. It's just you feel somehow the integrity of the place will go if we're not careful. It needs to stay wild and slightly mad and open and dishevelled; don't want neat and tidy. So I think that's what worries me.

Helen Taylor

My parents rented; it was called Chancery then, it's by Sycamore Close, near the church. It was a big summer house, very large, meant for a family. It was a scary house to me, because there were only three of us living in it out of season. I must have been about four-and-a-half or five.

It was a strange existence living at the guesthouse because the season was only three or four months. Everything for the family revolved around the kitchen. It was a very big kitchen. It had an Aga and we had a six-by-four table which Mum used to work on, and we used to live in there. Couldn't do it these days but the dog used to live under the table – Health and Safety! But we never poisoned anybody.

At 10 we moved to Littlestone to a big house called Sandbanks, down by the golf course. (Again we used) it as a guesthouse. During the season Mum and Dad moved into what we termed the potting shed and I slept in one of the three summer houses at the bottom of the garden; so I did have a rather strange upbringing.

Andrew Dennis

I was born in a little bungalow called Glencairn in a little small lane off Church Lane (New Romney), just past the doctor's surgery. There was my elder brother, Howard, and my younger sister, Rosemary, and then I came along and it was only a little two-

bedroom bungalow and course all the troops were coming back, and there was no housing built since 1939.

Then the council put up some prefabs. They were a put up during the course of a day type of thing, bolted together jobs. And there was prefabs in Warren Road, St Nicholas Road and Blenheim Road, the end of Langport Road where the insurance company is now and right to the further end where the little railway is.

The late '50s there were things happening. I remember as you approached into New Romney. It was a bottle-neck either end. A lorry and a bus couldn't pass. So a lot of the old buildings were knocked down, demolished to widen the road. Then everything mushroomed in New Romney. Broadlands Avenue was built for the commissioning engineers for McAlpines or TNPG, The Nuclear Power Group. There were loads of places put up in Romney, there was prefabricated houses in Church Lane, all to put the engineers in.

Bernard Morris

My grandfather trained as a shoe repairer. He used to come down to Greatstone on holidays. He'd bought a plot of land off Main Road in Greatstone and had a shed on it and they used to come down and erect these old bell tents.

He sold the two businesses in London, moved down in 1933 and opened the shoe shop in The Avenue, in Littlestone Road. If you look at what is now Littlestone Stores, you will notice that the house to the left is joined to that shop. That was where my dad was brought up. And my father went into the business when he left school, trained by my grandfather; my brother went into the business and was trained by my father.

The Burns' bungalow, Greatstone, early 1950s
(courtesy of Mick Burns)

My mum was born in Camberwell in 1925. Before the War they had a house in Merritt Road in Greatstone called Grenville. That was their holiday home. When they finally moved down after the Second World War, my mum worked behind the bar in the Jolly Fisherman and that's where she met Dad. They sold Grenville and bought Venti and they ran it as a guesthouse. We kept chickens, and Dad would dispatch one every so often and that was Sunday lunch. When we moved over to the bungalow Dad bred rabbits for the table, New Zealand Whites. We weren't allowed to make pets of them, except for the two does that we bred from and the buck, Benji. If Dad came home from work on a Friday night, and came in the back gate and turned right and walked into the rabbits, we knew what we'd got for Sunday lunch. Everything would come out of the garden; Dad was a very keen vegetable gardener. Where my brother's bungalow stands today was his vegetable plot and that was 140 foot long and 40 foot wide and he used to dig it by hand. Out there all the time just digging away, puffing on his pipe.

We had basic, wholesome food. It was casseroles, stews, roasts, pies, cakes, apple pies. Used to put eggs into Isinglass; I don't know what it is really, but Nan used to put eggs into that and keep them in a crock, because there were no fridges – that would preserve the eggs.

Charlie Davies

The house is predominantly a timber framed medieval house, from around about 1450. There's a little bit that's possibly older that may have been part of the old Priory that is probably an outhouse on the market place that they had, round about the 1300s.

Around about 1810 they've extended the frontage out on the lower level, put a new Georgian front on. The next additions were probably around about 1920 when it acquired a new kitchen on the back.

There's a Victorian strangely built shed that's sitting there and then a 1920s barn that I think was a bonded warehouse because we understand this is where Unwins the wine merchants started their business. They probably expanded and bought some other packages of land so we ended up with a drive, and what was originally part of the house next door was a bakehouse, and that looks to be a Georgian building. So we've acquired a house that's got lots of history; it creaks and it moves.

Andy Winter

After I left school I lodged with several local families. I lodged with an old girl, Rene Fair, and then Dot Richardson. Eventually I bought one of the cottages on the beach, and that's where I met my wife. We got married and stayed there for a while but it had a – well it wasn't an outside toilet, it was in a lean-to. Had no bathroom, needed

a new roof. We wanted to start a family, so we decided to sell and moved down to Leonard Road, Greatstone.

Stuart Adams

(Dungeness) was a big playground for kids, we had loads of space. That's my earliest memories – of being free as a child.

We lived over in what's known as the Redoubt, the RNSSS cottages, which stands for Royal Naval Shore Signal Station. That's what they were originally, but after the War they were still navy based. My father was in the Navy during the War and that gave you priority for the housing. That's where they lived till he died in 1974.

Most of the fishermen in Dungeness have grandmothers (who were) coastguards' daughters. They were the new genes to put into the pool. My grandfather married a coastguard's daughter. Everybody knew each other, didn't question it, but if you do family trees everybody was related. My grandfather's generation were all first cousins to each other and they basically stem from the Tart family, which is quite famous as fishermen. My great-grandmother, she was the eldest Tart girl in that family, but the family had about six children, three being men and three being women, and they all inter-married in the local community. So sometimes a Tart became an Oiller, then an Oiller

became a Tart. They were all one community if you work it out. Being so isolated, it made it just one big family in a way I suppose; although they didn't see each other as family. They could have a row; I suppose like all families could.

Ken Thomas

In New Romney: I was living there when I was up at the potato company because I used to start in the mornings at all times – sometimes you had to be up the market at six o'clock in the morning. I remember going up there one morning – I was starting from here four o'clock. I used to walk and I was walking along the road and I could hear this thud, thud, rerr, rerr, thud, thud, rerr, rerr, and I could see this thing coming towards me – huge – and it was the circus moving into New Romney and this was one of the elephants. Huge great thing he was and his old feet were plodding down and he was grunting away at the same time. I wondered what the hell it was! That day the elephant came in early morning before the traffic got about, and when I came home my son and daughter met me and they said, 'Dad! Dad! The circus is down the road!' I said, 'Do you want to go then?' and they said, 'Yeah!' And so did I, I wanted to go! And then we all went to the circus.

Fred White

In the late summers when Dad used to be combining, we'd go out and Mum used to have this red and white check cloth, we had this for years! She'd take four straw bales, put them together, put the red and white check cloth over it, and out would come – Dad used to like marmalade sandwiches and celery, and jam tarts and Battenburg cake. And we'd sit in the middle of the field – Mum, Dad, my brother and I – and the dog would be running around, it was so peaceful, listening to the birds. Because the combine had been noisy and suddenly stopped and everything went quiet, all the animals used to come out. You'd sit there for about an hour, just eating, because Dad had to keep going until it got dark. He was on an open combine then and he used to have a handkerchief around his mouth, a bit like a bandit, and when he took it off the top half of his face was all black and the bottom half would be white and we used to sit and eat our tea out in the middle of the fields on this checked cloth, then go home and do our homework, do the horses and it was amazing. We were very lucky.

Tracy Brewer

Margaret Philips and her brother in Poplar Lane, Lydd
(courtesy of Margaret Philips)

Class of 1960, the Old School, New Romney
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

EDUCATION

I went to the old Romney primary school in Church Lane – I started Easter 1954. I had a great time there. I really enjoyed school.

There were twins who were a bit older than me, in the same class, and they either called for me or I called for them and we used to walk on our own to school the three of us, and sometimes we went up the road and into North Street – and I can remember we used to zigzag in between the chains where the Broadacre is, there's still a few of those chains there now – but on the other side there were woods where the new houses have been developed. Sometimes we went right along North Street and other times we went along the High Street but we always crossed the High Street at the zebra crossing which was right outside where the charity shop is now. There was always a policeman there and he knew us all.

My daughter always says, 'Didn't anyone ever collect you from school?' I said, 'No, I just made my own way home, with the twins.' I was never collected at all. My mother was a volunteer at the welfare centre, so I had to walk home to my grandma's in Sussex Road, and you did it without thinking – everybody knew you, you know, and so you didn't feel ever in danger.

Ellan Crooks

I can remember starting at the old school in New Romney. I did my time at that school and then went to Southlands Secondary Modern, which was where the Sainsbury's site is now... until the age of 15-and-a-half when I left school... I was going to stay on into the sixth form, fifth form, whatever it was then, and then go to the local college and I thought 'No, damn it,' I always wanted to go to sea so I did.

I actually went with the Southlands Sea Angling Club before I went to Southlands. They organised fishing competitions, every school holiday you would fish, mainly Dungeness. It was run by two teachers, Stan Ramsden and Don Capon. They were both great. The teachers at Southlands in those days – they were practical – Stan was the woodwork master, Don did French, but they were the two that ran the Sea Angling Club.

Charlie Davies

New Romney Primary School... I can remember the teachers; the first one was Miss Wilson; Miss Duley, Miss Plant, Mrs Foreman, Mr Kingsley, Mr Guppy, and Mr Cunningham. I didn't pass the 11-plus but I ended up at Southlands and I really quite enjoyed my time there. It was difficult for a start I suppose, first two years, but third and fourth year I think the art master knocked me into shape a bit, because I was probably easily led then and sort of kept me out of trouble, which I'm eternally grateful for.

The art master was Mr Ingleton. I stayed in for the

fifth year and did GCE O-levels, of which I obtained four, basically because Mr Elender knew my two elder brothers were back on the farm, and he advised me to stay on and get some qualifications because if the farming job didn't work out, at least I'd got something else to fall back on.

Denis Wimble

I can remember going to primary school and running home on the first day because I went in the morning and I was quite happy and the teacher said, 'You've all been so good that in the afternoon, we are going across the playground' into an area where there was grass, and she would read us the story of Hansel and Gretel, and I thought, 'Oh no!' because I was terrified of the story of Hansel and Gretel and if ever I was naughty that was what Mum used to threaten me with. She would say, 'If you're naughty, I'll read you Hansel and Gretel' and I thought, 'I haven't been naughty, I've been good all day, all morning I've not done anything!' So I got hold of my coat and I left the school, walked out, walked back, crossed the High Street and went into my Nan and Granddad's and I said, 'I'm not going back there anymore!' I said, 'I've not been naughty and they're going to read Hansel and Gretel!' So they had to go back into the school and say 'Please don't threaten to read this book because Sally will just keep running away.'

Sally Maycock

My children all went to the infant school, which was a fairly new building then, and then they moved on to the junior school on the Fairfield Road site. They had a good education from there. New Romney school was well up in the stakes of schools and then they moved on to what was then Southlands School and all three of them went to university, which I feel is really credit to them and the teachers who were there then, because it wasn't easy in those days to take your exams and get good results and be capable of getting to university. I know there are people there now at the Academy who do well, but I feel it's perhaps failing some children because they go off to Folkestone schools, and they don't get involved then with the community. Once you start going out of the area to go to school I think you lose something because Southlands used to do big carol concerts in the church – you had to get there early to get a seat and they were fantastic. But that doesn't happen any more which is a real shame.

Frances Wire

I didn't like Lydd school. (One teacher) was a right bitch! She had one of these step-up desks and I can see her now – she had carrot coloured hair. She had a ruler and she used to sit there like this and she caught you talking to someone and she'd come along and rattle your knuckles.

Mr Marchant: we called him Merk. And after the War my brother and I used to collect, in Poplar Lane, grasshoppers or caterpillars, things like that, and we'd put them in a matchbox, sit in school and let them go and old Merk would be at his desk, at the board and there they'd be.

Margaret Phillips

I was a school Governor for getting on for 17 years at Southlands, which is now the Academy, but Southlands school's been knocked down now. I was Chairman of Governors for about 10 of those years.

It is a big job and it was bigger because we made it grant maintained. The budget there at that time was £6 million. The school had been so neglected. It had not been painted for 17years, and they tidied it up – they stopped a lot of the graffiti by getting rid of it straight away but they also put litter bins everywhere, and guess what – students put the stuff in the litter bins. And they created really nice areas of the school, social areas. We had our own maintenance people, a gardener, and they created raised gardens and seating areas and plants in all the rooms – so it really changed the character of the school. Well, the students were more caring because the environment they were in wasn't tatty, and we employed our own catering people with a proper catering manager and they'd fantastic eating areas; it was lovely. Did the exam results go up? Probably not as much as we'd have liked them

to but I just think of all the people that I know that went to the school in my time who have absolutely fantastic jobs.

Mike Shannon

Sports Day 1950, Southlands, New Romney
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

I think my earliest memory was going to the old school in New Romney, the primary school. It was very much a village school. Very small. Obviously being a small school and a small town, everybody knew everybody so it was quite good. I remember helping the caretaker, Mr Marchant, with the milk

at play times.

(At Southlands) the old science block that was always good fun, doing the science with the bunsen burners and experiments. One of my favourites was Mr Bennett, rural science, where we learnt a lot about the Marsh and we got to dissect rabbits and skin rabbits and dissect owl pellets and get some field trips out into the fields to actually experience all that. There was one farm we visited, looking for owl pellets in the barn. And then another day Mr Bennett would turn up with a handful of rabbits that we had to skin and prepare. I think probably for his dinner! And then another day we went out to collect some sunflower seeds and then we'd go back and make pictures out of the seeds and different bits and pieces that we'd picked up. They were smaller classes back then. We did a lot more hands-on stuff – woodwork, metal work, rural science – but obviously as the school expanded the classes got bigger.

Stuart Adams

Dymchurch Primary, oh it was an amazing place. It was the only school in the area at the time. It had a little above-ground swimming pool, so once a week every class had a chance to learn to swim. And you learnt to swim your width there and you got this piece of white material, like a stripe, that Mum then had to sew on your swimming costume. And when you'd done your first length you got

one; when you'd done your second length you got two and when you'd done your third you got three and then that was it. Then you were a fully fledged swimmer then. I think, because we were so close to the sea, they wanted everybody to be able to swim. And it was freezing cold. Oh it was cold! There was no such thing as heating.

And you'd go in and the hall overlooked this play area. It had gym bars at the side and your ropes that were all tied up to the top, because they would regularly fall down, because it also doubled as a dinner hall. So you'd be sitting there having your dinner and suddenly one of the gym ropes would come flying down and smack the table. And that was like 'Ooh, duck the rope!'

Once we left Dymchurch a lot of us went to Brampton Down in Folkestone and it was a boarding school, but we were day pupils. It's what I call an old-fashioned school – typical private school, but it had famous peoples' daughters there as boarders. We went to school with two of the Sultan of Brunei's daughters, famous politicians at the time – their daughters were there. We used to have prize-giving at the Folkestone Town Hall and you'd have to wear white gloves and your hat and march down to the Town Hall. It was very prim and proper and they were leaning towards being upper class – and then we all arrived! We were always

getting into trouble, because the school was on Dixwell Road in Folkestone and on the right hand side you had Dixwell House which is where the main school was, and the left hand side there was like a little side branch, like a whole complex, and you had to cross the road to get to the big school and you weren't allowed to cross the road on your own; you had to wait for a member of staff and their idea of discipline was talking to the front hall clock, this great big grandfather clock. We had two headteachers, Miss Sinclair and Miss Chapman – two lovely old ladies who were very strict – and if you got caught doing anything wrong you had to go and talk to the clock and you were given passages of Shakespeare to learn so I practically learnt Macbeth while I was at Brampton! I got to know that clock very well because I couldn't be bothered waiting for teachers and I just used to zip across the road and somebody'd see me from a window...

Then after that closed down, we all got moved to St Mary's Convent. Which again was a big shock to their system because we were the first non-Catholics to go to St Mary's Convent, which was just further over. And that was run by nuns, so you can imagine you've got all us kids grew up on the farm... We worked and we knew about wage packets and how to budget money and all this sort of thing – and we go to this Catholic school, where

they're all prissy and they've never done anything in their lives you know and it was like 'Ooh, this is a bit of a clash!' There was one male teacher, bless him, Mr Johnson, who taught English. By the time we'd reached the fifth year poor Mr Johnson was the butt of everybody's jokes because he was the only man on the premises and we took great delight one day in pinning somebody's bra to the blackboard rubber, so when he picked it up this bra hung up; well you can imagine. He got very embarrassed and ran out the room. We were all shrieking with laughter and we had one very irate nun coming in and telling us all off, for playing pranks on the poor gentleman teacher. It wasn't me but I did have a hand in it.

Tracy Brewer

When we were in London I took my 11-plus, which I failed and I went to Southlands, but it was only the one building that's there now. The big school hadn't been built. I think there was only 400 pupils there and it was a Secondary Modern. I loved it there because there was no pressure, and then I went to Folkestone Technical High School, which again does not exist anymore, which I think is a great pity because it covered all aspects of education and preparation for what you wanted to specialise in. You went at 13, and at 14 you had to decide whether you wanted to go on the technical side, the commercial side.

It was a very good school. I mean today a lot of the girls, they'd think it funny, because you had to wear a uniform. You always had to wear a hat; you had to wear white gloves in the summer; brown gloves in the winter and you'd get a detention if you didn't have any of these items. It was very strict. On the Bastille Day we had the whole assembly in French. I now know "La Marseillaise" off by heart, the Lord's Prayer in French... I had no idea what the connection was to France. They used to have all the messages in the assembly in French and I was none the wiser at the end of all this at all, what I had to be doing!

The Christmas party they used to have at the Leas Cliff Hall and it was always fancy dress, which was fine. But you're talking about some girls now, where they're 17-and-a-half, coming up to 18 and boys aren't allowed. You thought it would be nice to have the Harvey Grammar School boys included in this but oh no we were kept as virginal as possible!

My lasting memory also of that school, is I think it's at an age when there was a lot of women that went into teaching because there were no other opportunities available. A wasted generation of very intelligent women. One was our Maths teacher. She was absolutely wasted as a teacher because she didn't know how to teach, but she would have been excellent in some field. What

stays in my mind – I think it must have been algebra – she put this thing on the board and said, 'Right. You all understand?' And I had no idea, and for the first time in my life I put my hand up and said 'No, I didn't understand.' I was the only one in the whole class that didn't understand, presumably. So she went through it all again, but she did it the same way as the first time, so I was still none the wiser and she said, 'Well do you understand now girl?' And I said, 'Well no.' She said, 'Well I don't know why, because I do!' Now that was her answer and I thought then, 'This woman should not be teaching.'

Judith Clark

TRANSPORT AND THE CANAL

We used to do a lot of cycling around the Marsh but these days we tend to stay on the seawall because there is a lot more traffic on the road and I'm a bit nervous going round the country lanes. One route we used to cycle was out to Old Romney to The Rose and Crown and then on to Brookland. There is an old bridle way which runs from the bends going out of New Romney to St Clement's church at Old Romney. Cycling out to St Mary's in the Marsh was another route we would take.

We are lucky with public transport now – we have a 20 minute bus service to Folkestone most of the day from Littlestone. It goes through to Dover in one direction but every hour to Rye in the other. There is a bus every hour to Ashford during the day but the last bus back is about six o'clock which is a shame.

The high speed train service from Ashford to London has been fantastic for visits to London and going to visit our son in Cumbria.

Our grandchildren love the little train (the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway); we use it for trips to Dymchurch Fair, Santa Specials and other special days with Thomas the Tank Engine etc. It's just got better and better over the last few years.

Kate Shannon

It was the Day of Syn one year and the Hythe Venetian Fete the next. The Brownies would do floats for the Venetian Fete on the Military Canal at Hythe. Mums and dads were involved in that, we did 101 Dalmatians, the mums were making Dalmatian costumes for weeks. Then on the day two scouts had to row a boat that tugged the float of Cruella de Vil's car and 20 brownies in it. We won a first prize that year.

Tracy Brewer

When we came back to Hythe after being evacuated to Wales during the War we used to go boating on the canal as you can now. Rowing boats were used, I don't think there were any other type of boats on the canal at that time even though there are pictures of boats with six or eight people in them.

The lads from The Avenue used to go across to the canal fishing quite a lot. I had been given a fairly good rod – it didn't help me to catch anything! There was a boy who lived about four doors down and he used to fish and he never caught anything at all until one day he had something on the end of the line and we all had to help him pull it in. It was a huge bream. He had to go home to get a big bucket to put it in. He said he was going to have it for tea but whether or not he did I don't know. I'm not sure that a bream from the canal would be very tasty.

Roger Norman

When the power station was being built there were contractors' buses that came through the High Street every morning, obviously from collecting points around the area.

The 105 bus used to come through the High Street to Folkestone and in the summer the 105A would go around the coast to Littlestone, Lydd on Sea, etc. Now we have buses – the 102 – about every 20 minutes from Littlestone to Folkestone and Dover and Lydd and Rye in the other direction.

Before the Beeching rail cuts in 1967 you could catch the train from New Romney railway station, opposite the little railway, to Ashford and beyond.

Ellan Crooks

The last train at New Romney mainline station, 1967
(courtesy of Clive Wire)

People who move here permanently after coming for family holidays are generally mobile in that they can drive and have a car, some just use the bus all of the time. As far as holiday-makers and caravan owners go, some come down in the car and then don't use it again until they go home.

It was not a very good bus service but if you knew the ins and outs it's surprising how far you could go in a day. One of our favourite things to do, when we had the grandchildren was to have a day out on the buses. We could almost do a circular trip around East Kent from here. Romney to Folkestone to Canterbury, have breakfast, then on to Broadstairs for a couple of hours. Bus to Ramsgate for fish and chips, then on to Dover for coffee ready for a direct bus back to Littlestone. The bus service is a lot better now, the 102 service between Dover and Rye is every hour but the 11 service to Ashford has got worse. It's now difficult for hospital appointments in Ashford and almost impossible to go to the cinema.

John Gould

When my children were at Southlands School – now called The Marsh Academy – we used to walk round to the Burmarsh crossing where they would catch the little train to school in New Romney with all the other local children.

Margaret Walker

The Dunes and Coast Road, Greatstone
(courtesy of Joe Barnes)

There was a bus to Folkestone. I don't think there was a bus to Ashford but there was a train that used to run from Ashford to New Romney. It went sort of Ashford, Appledore then Lydd-on-Sea, went sort of round in a loop. The station was called Greatstone Halt and I think the driver sort of would look to see if anyone was waiting!

Where the light railway station is, the main station was the other side of the road to that, it's now a bit of an industrial estate.

Ann Cox

When the children were young we moved down from Folkestone because of all the building work taking place on the Marsh which kept my husband employed. Most of the time we walked everywhere

Carey Bros coach and driver
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

because the bus service was so awful. Probably less than one an hour so you were pretty isolated unless you had a car to get around. You needed to drive and I suppose you still do.

Ann Luckett

I love living at Dungeness but one of the few things that worry me is the need for a car, as there is no other form of public transport and what happens when they take my licence off me and how much more isolated I could become.

Helen Taylor

THE POWER STATION

Dungeness and the Power Station
(courtesy of Skyscan)

Then there were rumblings of a power station with meetings going on and on in the Assembly Rooms in New Romney. I always remember my dad going to one, and he poo-pooed anything, well he came back from the meeting and they said we would not have to pay for our electricity for the rest of our lives if we voted for it.

The late 1950s it all started to mushroom up, I

remember as you were approaching New Romney there was a bottleneck at each end. A lorry could not pass unless one went onto the pavement so several houses were demolished to widen the High Street and Lydd Road for all the wide loads that had to go through to the power station.

There were loads of people going to work down there, I was working on the farm then and the old shepherd said, 'You don't want to be working here, they're taking home £25 a week down there.' That was big money then as I was only earning seven or eight pounds on the farm and doing all them hours.

When they opened in 1965 there was a lot of adverts for health physics changing room assistants. I said to my dad that I was thinking of applying but he said, 'You don't want to go down there, you won't see the light of day and you will get radiated or something!' I should have gone down there in 1960 but stayed in my rut. In the end I had 35 good years down there and I wish I had gone there sooner.

The power station did a lot for the area.

Bernard Morris

The power station has been brilliant for this area, with higher wages during the building phase. It was hard work and hot; I have suffered with my hearing though. Now there is much more focus on

health and safety, protective equipment, hearing protection, hard hats, etc. and permits to work.

The 'A' site was built on time. They said it would take five years and it took five years. Everybody got on well, good laughs and good times. Yeah it was a happy site, the 'A' site. Mid '60s I would say it started generating electricity.

Dungeness Power Station and lighthouse, c.1969
(courtesy of Joe Barnes)

There were people who were anti the power station but I worked down there and I always felt it was a safe environment to work in, regarding the nuclear side of it. I never felt that I was in any danger of catching anything or turning green or anything like that! It was very closely regulated. There were times when things got rough down there but no, I didn't feel threatened at all, or think

it was going to blow up or anything like that at all.

Every January we used to get sprats come in through the cooling tunnels and that used to block all the cooling water off. It was just looking down into the water all you saw was sprats, millions of them.

Joe Barnes

The power station is grey; it's a blot on the landscape and should never have been built. I came here before the station was built, starting in 1960.

Carol Simmons

I got a job as a Lady Guide at the power station and after training we used to take visitors around the station, school groups, colleges, engineers, etc. On a Wednesday afternoon the station was open to the general public so sometimes we had to do two or three tours in an afternoon.

I can remember in the 1970s Margaret Thatcher came to the station to visit, an engineer and myself took her round. I was very nervous and convinced I was not going to like her but she was absolutely charming. What impressed me was she spoke to all the cleaning and catering staff and made a point of speaking to everyone.

I really enjoyed working at the station.

Kate Shannon

Every electrical fitter had a fitter's mate to carry his tools. He'd carry your tools around and clean them and pass you stuff and go to the stores to save you walking round everywhere. You worked as a pair. And some people obviously got on better than others. But I was with a guy called Joe Cook – absolutely a better fitter than I was; I knew about electrical and all that, but as a fitter, he was a lot better than me. And in fact, 15, 20 years later, I'd moved up the management chain and I was actually able to promote him to a fitter, which was actually excellent.

The typical working day was eight till five but we worked a staggered day shift pattern. So I'd work two weekends out of four – one weekend you'd get four days off, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday - and then every three months, you'd got to do shift, so you'd do 24-hour shifts, so you'd do days, afternoons and nights. And I found that interesting, because two weeks after starting I was on shift, which was a bit of a shock. But nonetheless, it was okay. And then you go into that pattern. Of course, having long weekends was excellent, because you weren't stuck to going out on Saturday and Sunday.

You were maintaining the equipment on site – circuit breakers, control units, motors, fans, you know, the whole range, anything you can think of, in a big plant, we maintained it, whereas in the

latter days, a lot of that was handed to specialist contractors.

You had routine maintenance, so maintaining equipment from weekly, monthly, three-monthly, six-monthly, up to two years. And also you had defects which would come in each day that were given out to you by the foreman. So he'd give you that and you'd go off to have a look at it. And you may have an instruction with that. Or you may try to look at it first and then try and fix it depending on what safety grade the equipment was. You'd fix it yourself or you'd have to have instruction from an engineer on how to do it.

The biggest emergencies were sprat invasions. They came into the intake and the water is filtered coarsely by screens that go up and down, called band screens. And you can imagine, there's pumps pulling the water to cool the turbines. And once the fish got in, they were matted against the screens, and actually eventually stopped the flow of water. So you'd have to take the units off, the reactor off. And then it could be a week's job to cut and replace all these screens. A couple of times we'd just finished getting it all back and then they came again! The company spent tens of thousands of pounds trying to see how we could detect the fish and also distract them away from the intake.

What about the power station as a community?

That's a very interesting question. Generally the workforce were okay, but very diverse. But one of the things I really noticed from (previously) working in the colliery: everybody spoke to you, everybody said good morning to you, as you were walking into the place, or they'd all have a yarn with you when you were coming out. But here, certainly in engineers' space, there was a demarcation, certainly in the early days. But the fitters and the craftspeople and the operators – they were fine. Some of the office staff were a bit off-ish as well, because you know, you were just a craftsman. Some of the engineers – you could be playing table tennis with them at the social club the night before, then they just walk past you in the corridor, which is quite strange, compared with what it is now. As I went through my managerial career, the whole point was to get people working as a team, working together. And integrated teams: so you had engineers, and craftsmen – and all working together. And that was very, very successful.

In about '77-'78, I changed from being a craftsman to an engineer. And that, was quite a jump. Then I got another promotion in the early to mid-'80s. One of the things that came along in that era which was really interesting was the first computers. So previously, all of the maintenance

and all of the history was done on index cards. So a card was pulled off the system to go and do the work, and then the clerk filled in what you'd written down and put it in the history system, hand-written. We then moved to computer, and we had to re-write the whole plant catalogue and to put it into the computer. It was very, very interesting times. Two of us, were very into it, and we had the opportunity to develop the programmes, with people from headquarters. So we'd get the computer to do what we wanted it to do. And it was absolutely fantastic that you could get it to do stores, so it'd print out the stores list for the guys, so you didn't have to go around looking through catalogues – anything they'd used, it was all fed back in again. And the history – so if you wanted to find out the history of the plant, instead of it being gobbledygook written by somebody who's guessing, it was much clearer as to what was going on.

Privatisation started to take place, I would say in about '88-'89. And as the privatisation came along, the Magnox stations – which is the 'A' station – and there were about six of those (nationally) – the government decided they would not privatise those, they would remain in the state and the AGR, which is the advanced gas cooled reactors, the 'B' site, would be privatised, and they would become known as nuclear electric. So you

had to draw a line down the site, put new fences in so you couldn't integrate across the site.

The AGRs proved that they can and will make money. Their efficiency has improved. Unbelievable, over the last 20 years. The Magnox were very small units, and so would never make a profit (from that point onwards), even though they'd paid for themselves over their lifetime. And there's also the decommissioning costs, although again, they'd been paying into the fund – wiped away with privatisation. So the decommissioning costs will be paid for from government sources. Us!

(Some years later) we had a new station manager. And, again, he was a challenge. He's my best friend now. But he came onto the site, and we spent ages clearing up site to make it look good for when he came. And I took him around. And I said, 'So there you go. What do you think of that?' And he said, 'Well you've obviously done a lot of work,' he said, 'but to be quite honest, Mike it's not good enough.' I thought, 'God!' And of course he was right. So we then set about how we would make it better. The condition of the plants in those days was pretty poor, in general housekeeping and the way that we'd not spent any money on infrastructure. So the places hadn't been painted, and when I look back at what it was like – horror, and then when I went to the B site, horror of horrors! So anyway, we set about that, and we set standards. So that

was quite good. But then, when it came to the next A Station outage (stoppage for maintenance), the best outage we'd had was 43 days. And Andy said to the management team,' That's not good enough. It needs to be 30.' And they all said, 'Can't be done'. So I said, though, 'Well, actually, I think we can have a go at that.' So I've got my team leaders, who were now integrated, working together, and they said, 'Yeah, we think we can do that, we get the plan right we can do that.' So we integrated the contractors into those teams as well, which is again completely unheard of, but made a huge difference where we had our team leaders directing the contractors. And the first outage we finished in 32 days. The day's average cost for a nuclear plant to be off is about a million pounds a day. So the benefits were absolutely huge. And then the next one we did in 30 days. So it was absolutely phenomenal, really.

Mike Shannon

THE FIRE SERVICE

We used to sell the fireworks and we would always put on a display for them on November 5th. That used to happen on the beach or the recreation ground wherever they wanted it. And in the 1990s health and safety started to rear its head. The local firemen said that they would do the fireworks. They left a box of fireworks open and a spark came from one firework and set the whole lot off.

Colin Walker

(What a beautiful house) it was, and Father nearly burnt it down! He had been playing football. And he came home feeling rather cold. Nobody else at home. So he got a faggot – bundle of twigs – about a foot in diameter and about four feet long. Normally you used two or three handfuls to get the fire going. Well he put a whole faggot on. Went upstairs and changed and he could hear a bit of a rumbling noise: thought 'Ah, it's the (First World War) tanks.' He comes down and into this room and there's soot rising and bumbling and running across the floor in great balls. And a pal who had been with him to the football, went off to get the Fire Brigade. 'Cause there was no phone. This chap had to run from there to Tenterden to get the Fire Brigade. Anyway Father got a shepherd's crook. And of course, it burnt the end of the crook. He got a wheelbarrow and was scooping up and filling

this wheelbarrow with all this blazing soot and the Fire Brigade arrived. They ended up giving the firemen a glass of cider each. And of course his father and mother came home and everybody sitting round drinking cider.

Derek Homewood

Ernie Taylor the welder was in there (the power station). A big area with all the boxes that delivered the busbars in. Ernie was on top welding. He set the whole thing alight. Then of course, the site fire engine had to come out and put that out.

Don Smith

Lydd Fire Service, the 1890 fire appliance beside the new 1952 fire engine (courtesy of The Old School Trust)

He (Mike) joined the Fire Brigade. And we used to do a lot of family things with the other firemen. He was a retained fireman and they did a lot of community things: Cubs and Scouts, fire badges – that sort of thing.

Kate Shannon

I joined the Fire Brigade in 1971, when you had a bell in the house and the fireman used to go. I had always wanted to be a fireman since I was a little lad in Deal. It was absolutely great. Not just the fires, going to help people. I have to say that I've been fortunate enough never to see someone burnt. You're interacting much more with the locals. They accepted you and we had a good time.

You had drill nights (training) on Thursday for two hours, which you got paid for. Not much, but you did get a bit. You had to climb the ladder and put the ladder up and run the hose. After three months you had a test by an officer at the New Romney old railway station that was still there. So you'd get your ticket, saying you're really on, rushing down to the fire station on your bike to get on the pump. I was available two-thirds of the day. So not the eight hours I was at the power station. That caused quite a few family discussions because normally you had to have three for the pump to be available. It did curtail what you did because you became obliged to keep the pumps available. There is nothing worse than to take off when you have a fire. That would be terrible.

They introduced breathing apparatus. Previously whole-time firemen could wear breathing apparatus. In the '70s they introduced breathing apparatus for all volunteers. That was quite difficult because you had to be physically fit.

That was also quite a protocol of controlling people wearing breathing apparatus. I then took my driving test after instructions for driving a fire engine. And then driving on 'blues and twos'. Sometimes they used to have a nominated driver, because you don't want drivers becoming out of practice.

Farm fires, chimney fires, gorse fires, house fires. Everything. Power station fires. There was a big fire on the 'B' Station camp. Your knowledge of different things was helpful to the Fire Brigade. They were big jobs. There were like four pumps normally. You'd get Lydd, Romney, Dymchurch, Folkestone would come down.

Most of it (dealing with the emotions) is humour and talking about things. The worst incident I attended like that was not long after I went onto the run. There were reports of a couple of boys in the water, you got one boy out, and they said they thought there was another one so we started pumping. But the little lad died. That made you think. My boys were of a similar age. But firemen, they talk about it.

(The relationship between volunteers and professionals was) not particularly good. The professionals look down on you because you're just retained. But the retained crews have more skills: you'd probably have an electrician, a mechanic, a rigger, a builder. The whole-time people would just have Fire Brigade. And

everybody I remember in the Fire Brigade – Lydd, for nine years, and Romney for 11 years – there was not much money in it, but they would all have done it for free. When I moved to New Romney we had these Services Days. Well, we had three of those. The first one was with loads of fire engines. The second one was an air show. We had Army helicopters on display. We had a Hawk jet. 17,000 people came over a weekend at the school. And the third one was even bigger. So we had dancing in a big marquee. Dancing in the evening. And New Romney raised more money for the benevolent fund than the whole of Kent put together.

New Romney firemen 2000
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

I was quite instrumental doing training for Scouts, Guides, Red Cross fire badges. You would have six or 10 people come round for about four weeks to do training. We'd also do talks to the Women's Institute.

A couple of anecdotes: when I was a manager in the power station I went to Hythe Imperial for a meeting. This really smartly dressed young woman, came up and she said, 'It's Mike Shannon, isn't it?' So I said, 'It is, but I'm sorry I can't remember your name.' She said, 'Sheila – Fireman's badge 1978.' And another one we went to was a fire at Brookland. And driving down the road is a young girl and she's waving. And we sorted out the fire and she said, 'See, you told us what to do, and that's what I did. Stood in the road so that you could see us.' That's what it's all about, isn't it.

At New Romney I got made up to Leading Firefighter. You'd do the training and make it interesting for everybody. It's all about team work and camaraderie. Myself and another we tried to get people to train properly. We'd have the book out and train the guys to put the ladder up by numbers, or doing this by numbers 'cause the drill book does all that.

Mike Shannon

The Fire Brigade celebrated their hundredth year in New Romney. I went in for a competition and won 1st prize: a ride in a helicopter!

Roy Jackson

A lady at Lydd, her daughter drove off the main Lydd to Dungeness road in a Range Rover and went into one of the gravel pits and was drowned. The Fire Brigade had to stand by because they weren't allowed to go into the water to rescue her. And I thought that was absolutely scandalous. The Fire Brigade did have 'still water' rescue equipment at Faversham. All it was, was a dinghy with some water-proof gear. So I campaigned. I got 'still water' training for Lydd and New Romney fire engines.

Clive Wire

LYDD AIRPORT

Dad used to work at Ferryfield. And I am aware of it being built. Now I had obviously been there. Dad had taken me whilst they were building it.

Ferryfield was called Silver City and also Skyways. Now they were flying out of Lympne, and, I think I am right that Lympne was in fact all grass. And in those days quite often the mist or fog would clamp them down and they couldn't fly. So I am not sure who built Ferryfield. It may even have been Silver City which was the one that had the cars in. They were all Bristol Freighters, 32s. And they would flit across to Le Touquet, Calais.

But the problem is they want to bring in jets. And when you look at the flight path they have to do, when they come in now they have to be careful of the ranges at Hythe. They are not in line with the runway. They have to do a bit of a kink turn to actually land. For some reason they don't appear to be allowed to fly freight out over the sea because the wind that is prevailing from the west. They have to come up the runway, turn right and swing round over Lydd which seems rather dangerous when taking off with a plane because of getting engine failure because of the shortness of the runway.

I've seen some strange military stuff taken up there. And the one thing you learn, particularly in Lydd, is that you don't express an opinion on the

airport, one way or the other. It's a very divided area.

Andrew Dennis

They asked if I would like to go and work at the airport and give them a hand working with the Trislanders – three engines, one on the tailplane and one on each wing. And they had to be rubbed all down and resprayed. They call it 'donkey work.' The professional fitters thought it was beneath their dignity to do donkey work. So they employed a 'donk' as they called them. So I was a donk.

I rubbed them all down. Took them right back to the aluminium. And then you had to treat it. It has like a fungus that sort of spreads out through the aluminium. I worked there for about six years.

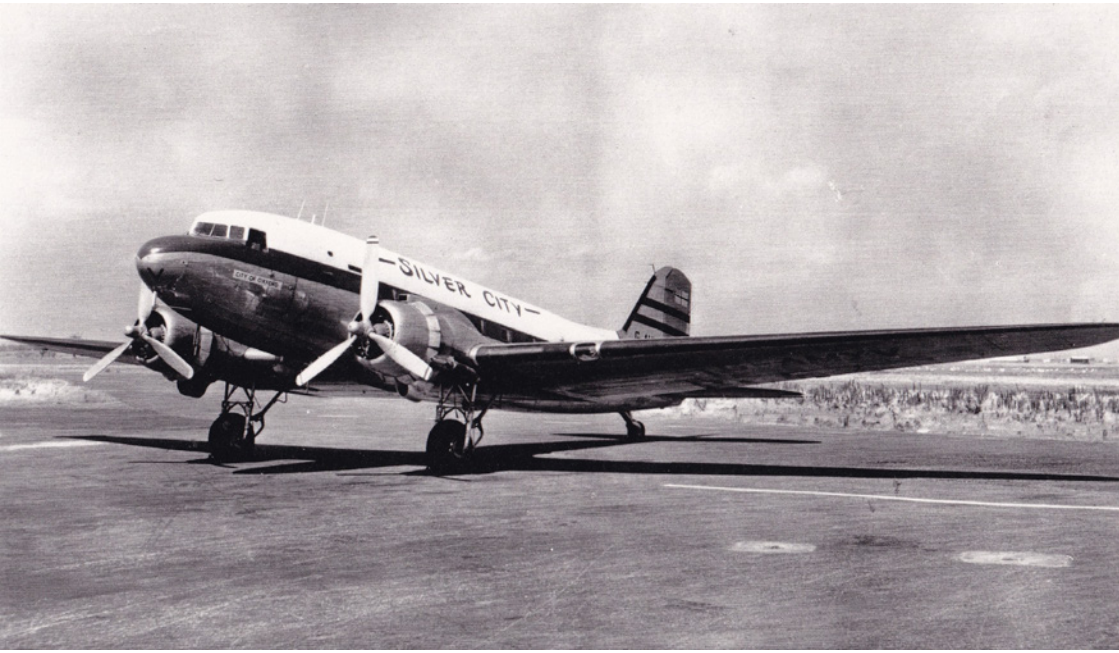
They had a big picture of Biggles on the wall. It was done by some quite famous artist apparently. And there was a picture of a Trislander on the wall. And Jonathan said to me, 'I'd like to get all this art work freshened up. Would you like to have a go for me?' So I said, 'Yes certainly.' I done Biggles all up and it was a thing about eight foot high – Biggles head and shoulders, you know. And I done the London, Lydd Airport, I think it was called, and I done the Trislander. And I'd hardly got it finished when new people took over and Jonathan came up to me and he was very uncomfortable. He said, 'I don't know how to put this to you, Colin, but the

new owners said they wanted a jet,' he said. So he said, 'Can you paint it over?'

Colin Hill

I worked for Silver City and would go in the kitchens in the evening. And actually I am the only one that's got a photo of the Queen Mother; she was coming down to officially open Silver City. But nobody was allowed to take photos. I've got a photo as she's actually coming in to the airport in her car. It was all done in secrecy at the time.

Margaret Phillips



A Silver City Bristol Freighter at Lydd (Ferryfields) Airport (courtesy of Joe Barnes)

As regards the airport, you see, they can't extend the runway because they can't get this extra piece of land, which is presenting problems. So really there's nothing happening which is a bit concerning.

I was always involved with the business of the day. And the reunions I've been to. When I was Mayor, I went down to that. Because it was Silver City. The big bulbous-nose aircraft – where my father farmed they used to fly up the valley and he loved seeing them. It was part of our lives.

David Niven (used the airport), and of course Paul McCartney had his own jet down there when he was married to Linda because he farmed at Peasmarsh. We always knew when it was Paul McCartney. His children went to Peasmarsh School.

Victoria Dawson

I joined there in 1958 and I mean it was such a unique company to work for. The flying side was called Silver City Airways and then the engineering was called Aviation Traders but it all came under the umbrella of being Silver City Airways but it was like a big family there, it was a wonderful company to work for and people still say now, 'Oh best company I ever worked for.' We had Hugh Kennard and his wife Audrey Kennard, he was the Managing Director in charge of the passenger division with all the hostesses and everybody knew everybody there.

Every year we used to have an annual football match with Le Touquet and we would all go over to Le Touquet and I can remember twice I forgot to take my passport but they just sort of hassled me in amongst all the other people and I just went in and that was it, and then we used to have the odd trip where we paid so much in and they would hire an aircraft and we went to Amsterdam to stay for a weekend. But I've never really liked flying; it was one of those silly things. I was quite happy to work on the ground but I didn't want to really be up in the air much!

It was just a wonderful, wonderful company to work for and the amazing thing is although we've obviously ceased operations for years now we still have our reunions and because obviously the numbers are going down, we decided to form what was called an Associate Membership where people could join if they hadn't actually worked at the airport but had a genuine interest in you know air ferries.

No it was a fabulous company to work for and we have a huge, huge collection of memorabilia.

Sally Maycock

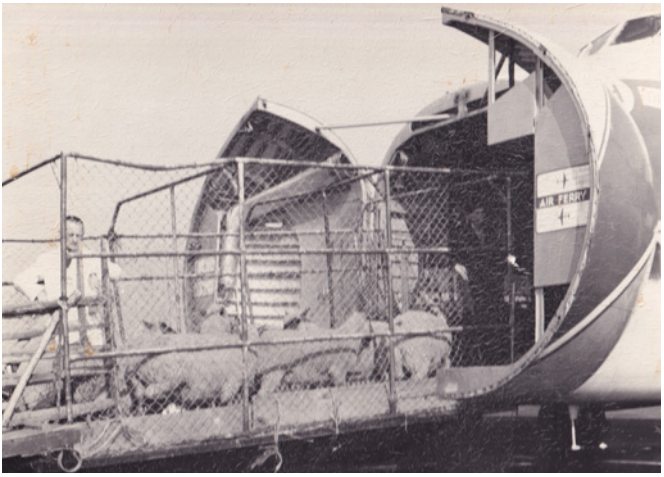
Another thing that Lydd had which made money on the rates was the airport. Silver City used to fly freight out of here. And a lot of film stars used to fly out of Lydd Airport and we used to have an air

show every year and we even had the Red Arrows.

Don Smith

When we used to come as children, my dad had a little old Austin 7, and every Sunday we used to go out for a picnic and he loved going to Ferryfield to watch the planes take off. They used to drive the cars onto the planes, which sounds incredible – I think they flew to Paris from here.

Kate Shannon



Sheep being loaded onto a Bristol Freighter
(courtesy of Joe Barnes)

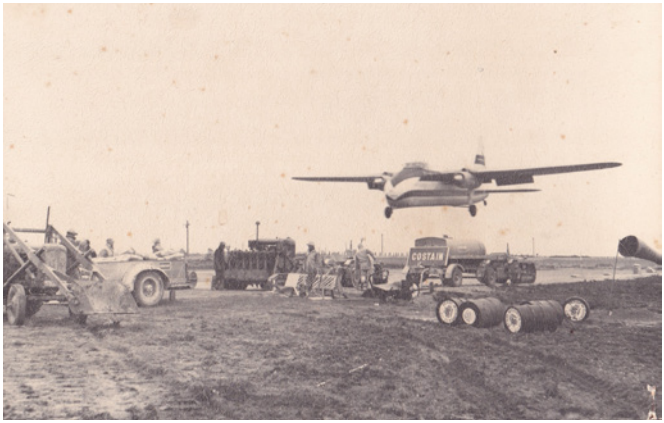
I always remember one farmer I went to just outside of Romney Marsh. The planes were doing some spraying. There was like an archway across this field. And this plane came in under the arch spraying. I thought he was going to hit it. He never

did though. The farm was at Peasmarsh – that was where Paul McCartney lived.

Fred White

1961-'62 – at that time, Lydd Airport was very, very busy. Bristol Superfreighters used to carry not only passengers but cars and tractors and scooters. They were quite an odd shape. You wouldn't think that they were able to fly. But at that time, I read somewhere that in the mid-'50s Lydd Airport was the second busiest airport in the country and I believe they had flights arriving and departing about every 20 minutes.

John Poole



A Silver City Airways Douglas DC-3 at Lydd (Ferryfields) Airport (courtesy of Joe Barnes)

They complained about the planes, the noise of the planes. I say, they should have been here when it was Silver City – they'd have had something to moan about! It used to bring the mail in at half past six in the morning. So you didn't need an alarm clock. But the point is that you get used to noise. It's like when I come back from being evacuated and there used to be guns going off, it used to make me jump. Now it doesn't bother me at all, no.

Margaret Phillips

ALL SORT OF JOBS

My grandfather was the gasworks manager of Lydd. And my mother was born in the gasworks house in Lydd in Station Road. My granddad and my uncle were the gas lighters in Lydd.

Clive Wire

I found myself an apprenticeship locally as an upholsterer and carpet fitter. I started that job: £8 a week. Out of that I paid 43p stamp and took home £7.43. I was like a millionaire! Mum didn't want any keep but I insisted on giving her £2 a week. Bought her a present with my first wages as well – a set of brasses like we used to have in the old days.

Don Smith

When I came to Dymchurch, the job was a baker's roundsman, from here to Dymchurch to Aldington and all round. Went from baker's roundsman to a job on Romney Marsh Potato Company, and had 26 years there, humping potatoes.

I do a bit of entertaining. I used to sing, tell jokes and little, tiny oneman sketches. When I was on the potato company I knew every farmer on the Marsh. They used to say, 'What's the latest joke Fred?' And I used to tell them a joke.

Fred White

I was Town Sargeant of New Romney: only civic occasions, church services, Remembrance Day and that sort of thing or the Cinque Ports. I went to the Queen Mother's 90th birthday parade on Horse Guards Parade and her 100th birthday parade. With all the massed bands: everything – the Army, the Royal Marines, the Air Force. Everything she was sort of involved with.

I was working down at Dungeness B power station. And the office manager said: 'You do realise that you are working in an environment where there are a lot of men.' Now the only person who swore was the tea lady, Mrs Smith, who in a past life had worked in the NAAFI. They used to hide her tea trolley. And what she wasn't going to do to this effing whatnot was nobody's business.

Judith Clark

When I was in Lydd working late on a Friday night occasionally I had to go out and collect library books that people hadn't returned. I used to knock on the door and say 'The County Solicitor has asked me to call. Please can I have the library books. It doesn't matter about the fine, but if we could just have the books back.' 99 per cent of the time I got the books back. They used to be horrified that the County Solicitor had asked me to call.

I remember Derek Jarman used to come in on a Friday evening and chat to us and get his book.

Kate Shannon

Dymchurch thrives on its characters. Iris who had the sweet shop was a lovely lady. She used to worry us like mad, because she would stay open till late at night, put all her takings in a little bag and walk through the village carrying the takings.

Colin Walker

I ended up working for the Borough Surveyor at New Romney Borough Council. Then I went back to work for Shepway District Council and I got involved with New Romney Country Fayre. And I've been Chairman of that for 12 years. And off of that came the Light Up New Romney – the lantern parade at Christmas, which is now in its third year.

Frances Wire

I went to college in the '60s. I have a degree in graphic design. Yes I love painting out here, but the weather is not conducive. I'm more likely to go out with my camera, take pictures and paint from the photographs. I know Dungeness so I can paint with feeling. Especially the old sheds and the old fishing boats. My joy in life is to get out there, especially with the sketchbook.

Helen Taylor

A lot of lads I was at school with went off, farming or became agricultural engineers: selfemployed agricultural engineers. So they ended up with a van or a company that went round fixing farm machinery.

Charlie Davies

The main employment in those days was farming. Then the power station started and that wasn't until 1965-'66. Apart from that there was the Railway Works at Ashford. Some people would commute to Ashford on the train. And some worked for the airport. I went back to the pea factory, 'cause they were advertising for night workers. I worked up at the pea factory for about eighteen months. Even in those days, night work was not very well paid at £8 a week. When you're young it's just the way you think – you think 'I'm working all night, I've got all day to myself.' And of course you don't think about resting, do you. And of course I was working in the daytime as well. I went and worked for another farmer at John Paine's, and I used to help with the lambing. Well I was getting four hours sleep and eventually I keeled over. I'd worked all night. I'd come home and have a bath, then very often we'd go back down to my parents' place. And I'd drive down. He had an old Morris 8. He had to keep digging me with his elbow to keep me awake when I was driving back. Dr Landshill, I went to see him as I'd passed out. He said, 'The trouble with you young chaps,' he said, 'you think you've killed a German,' he said, 'but you'll soon find out you've not,' he said. 'You need your rest.'

Colin Hill

Mrs Oiller owned it (the local chip shop). And we used to do the chips. And we'd get 2/6d a bin in those days when I was 11. And then she'd give us a bag of chips as well as our money.

Don Smith

Before long Dad was selling vegetables out of his garden, bagged up every night, meat from the local farmers, buying half a pig at a time and putting it in our freezer.

Gary Fagg

I went to college in Canterbury. I used to catch the steam train from New Romney. In the winter they used to have a lovely roaring fire in the waiting room. And in the winter months the train used to stop at Lydd station and they used to put on all the paraffin lamps on the train.

Clive Wire

They came out and found me. 'We're stuck for a roundsman.' I could do a round one day, and pretty well do it the next. And eventually, they had 70 rounds at New Romney. I covered them all at one point. And two at Dover. And another one up London Road. There was milk, bread and squash, and potatoes. They were always stuck for milkmen at Dover. And the same at Folkestone. People do sometimes try to get you talking. If you didn't stop the next day they'd get offended.

I worked for the dairy 27 years. One of the times I went back and the manager said to me, 'Glad to have you back.' Jim Hood, one of the directors, was standing at the doorway of the office one day. 'What's he doing here?' The manager said, 'Well I took him back. He's promised to stay at least 12 months.' He said, 'He's the best milkman we've got.' I stayed there until I was 60.

Colin Hill

I've just recently come out as President of Kent County Photographic Association. I judge in photography and I'm an active photographer as well. So when the conditions are right I am out taking photographs as often as I can.

Chris Shore

I had to be there early one morning of the week. They took the beer out on a dray they would deliver the full barrels and pick up the empties and bring them back. And on the boundary wall of the brewery, adjacent to Red Lion Square, the barrels could be delivered across the wall. They used to lay a plank and then roll the barrel over. I had to arrest its movement. And write the number down and record the number in a book: what size barrel it was. It was wonderful to see the dray horses coming in their finery and pull up. Something you don't see any more.

Roger Norman

My father was a bricklayer. And my brother was a carpenter, a very good carpenter. I first worked at James & Clifford when I was 15. I stayed there for a few years. And then I went up to Lewis & Highlands, and I had my own department – Haberdashery. Then I went to Batchelors. I started off stamping boxes. Packing and sealing and of course machinery. And then I became a teaching assistant, a dinner lady and a cleaner, right up until I retired at 60.

Carol Simmons

When I moved here I was one of about 12 policemen on the Marsh actually stationed at Lydd and covered from Dymchurch through to the East Sussex border near Rye. And the northern border was actually the Royal Military Canal. We covered the whole of the Romney Marsh.

Nigel Evenden

We had the shop. That first year was tough – that was 1972, our first year. The thing that really put us on our feet was in 1975-'76 winter a company called TN Thomas, who produced buckets and spades for the whole country, had a massive fire and their factory burnt down. Now a friend of mine who supplied us stock, he went into the factory there and bought up all the stock they had left. Well when he came there was this great big lorry full up back to front with buckets and spades,

and he offered them to me at a penny each. Well I'm a bit of a gambling man so I bought the lot. I brought them home to my house – the garage was full up, back to front. And what happened, the year of 1976 was that summer of all summers: the heatwave. The biggest problem that everybody had – there was no buckets and spades to be had, because there wasn't any. Now I had my family at home washing all these buckets and spades in the bath. And we had just an amazing season. We were selling them at tenpence each. And that really put us on a good foot.

Colin Walker

My friend Brian said, 'Oh I'd like you to meet my new neighbour, Derek Jarman,' and I said, 'Oh, I say, I saw your "War Requiem" on Channel 4 last night, I was very impressed.' So that was quite nice.

In fact we got to know him not enormously well. The children after a storm would go down on the beach looking for stones for Derek because he was looking for big stones to go round his planter beds and this was a popular game and in fact in his diaries.

We went in to see him and have tea couple of times I suppose, looked at his paintings and I remember one time he said he was terribly impressed with the sunsets at Dungeness and he had about 28 hours-worth of VHS tapes of

Dungeness sunsets. He was trying to think of somewhere he could use them. He said unless he could persuade Channel 4 to reintroduce the Interlude he thought they were going to be permanently wasted.

The thing that he thought was typical was that the cottage when he bought it had no bathroom. So he wanted to build a small extension, so that he could have a bath other than pouring boiling water into a tin tub. He applied for planning permission on about three occasions and each time was told that it wasn't in keeping, and as he said, 'How can anything not be in keeping in such a strange environment?' Not only the railway carriages, but two huge nuclear power stations!

Michel La Rue

SOME WARTIME MEMORIES

War had broken out. It was 1940. We drove down to Greatstone – we wanted to check on the bungalow, to lock it up or whatever before they put the ban on the coast. We got to the bungalow, because it was going to be requisitioned by the Army, or the government. It must have been the early part of the summer, because it was a beautiful day. We got to Greatstone. Arthur (gardener) and my dad did their thing. I must have been coming up to four - I was born in December 1936. It must have been during the early part of the Battle of Britain, or that period. My sister and I were on the sand dunes opposite, which are now gone – there are no sand dunes down there any more – and we were playing rolly-pollies, just the other side of the coast road, on the seaward side of the road, and the siren went, the air-raid siren, and my dad called us over to the bungalow. We went over to the bungalow. There were no other buildings around, apart from behind the bungalow towards New Romney – there were very few other buildings. There was a little wire fence ran down the side of the plot. I was picked up by Arthur; my dad picked Sheila up. She had her shoes on; I didn't have shoes on, and this is one of the reasons that this sticks out so much in my memory. We were put over this wire fence, onto an open patch of ground which was covered in thistles, small thistles about

six inches high. I didn't have any shoes on and we ran towards a great big sand dune which has now gone – there's been houses built on it (my sister told me it was known as Mafeking point). On the top of this sand dune they had built a pillbox (we used to play in that after the War). We got to the base of the sand dune and got to an alcove part of it and we sat in there and looked out to sea. We were safer in the sand dunes than in the bungalow. We didn't know what was going to happen. Then we saw a formation of aircraft coming across from France – they were just black, black specks in the sky. We couldn't see the horizon because we had sand dunes on the other side of the road, so there was not too much air space, so they approached us pretty quickly, came up on us all of a sudden. And one was shot down. There was this aircraft buzzing around and I saw one drop down into the sea. We couldn't see the sea because we had the sand dunes in front of us. After that the all-clear went and we went back home.

I'd never seen anything like that before. I'd never seen an aeroplane before. But the thistles, my feet being stung... it certainly wasn't a figment of my imagination. It's something I couldn't make up.

Mick Burns

The first thing I can remember is the War. The Americans building a corral out in what we called the Hoy Field; no animals out there. But they used

to bring the animals in of a Sunday. And they used to have a mini rodeo. These American troops used to ride the bullocks, which to us kids was quite an exciting thing. We got on quite well with the troops. It was always friendly. The Americans it was always, 'Got any gum, chum?' and you'd finish up with packets of coffee and packets of biscuits. Sometimes you'd get a free meal from the good cooks.

I can remember German pilots coming down on parachutes, that had been shot down and running through the fields. The police would be there before you and tell you to clear off.

Joe Barnes

Margaret Philips and family next to their Anderson shelter
(courtesy of Margaret Philips)

(At Lydd) school there was a long air-raid shelter, that would be round about where Rype Close is. Soon as the siren went off, we all were led out into there. And it was a long building with several entrances into it so you went in, turned, and then separate classes went into their own one. But we only sang, 'Ten green bottles' and things like that, we didn't learn anything.

Margaret Phillips

We were not far from the Royal Observer huts at Dymchurch. And they were the first observer posts in the country to have to report the word 'divers.' The government were aware that Hitler was working on some secret weapon and the Polish Resistance somehow managed to capture one of these V1s, which landed about 10 miles away from the research centre, but fortunately, much closer to a Polish underground squad. They covered this beast up and got in touch with London SOE (Special Operations Executive) and they landed an aircraft in Poland and brought back this V1 in pieces.

Roy Jackson

A mulberry harbour was like a big concrete bunker laying off shore. They were caissons built in the Second World War for D-Day. Caisson 121 was going to Arromanches. There were three here. There was one still there and one they couldn't

blow because it was too near the houses and it'd shatter the windows. There are two towards St Marys Bay and Dymchurch and they blew them. But the one down there had a machine gun turret on top of it. I can remember the ironwork on the top.

Pluto (Operation Pluto): big cotton reels and they had the pipes on and they towed these across to the other side, to the French coast, and they pumped petrol through there. Some of the bungalows at Dungeness were pump houses. When I worked in the quarry there was a pumping station – it was all top secret, one section didn't know what another section was doing. You'd have a gang of blokes digging a trench from Ashford to Brooklands and putting in these steel pipes and another one from Brooklands to Lydd putting another steel pipe in. And they sent a lot in the little light railway and there is a photograph of Italian prisoners of war down here putting them all together in the light railway workshop.

Bernard Morris

Mrs Gill lived in this house, and she was altering a coat for me and she was sitting behind one of the windows in her house with the sewing machine. Every pane of glass bar the one she was sitting behind was broken. This German plane came and machine-gunned it. And this pane of glass wasn't broken. I think the Gods were looking after her.

Derek Homewood

When there was an air-raid, the teacher led us down to the basement. We would wait there until the all-clear.

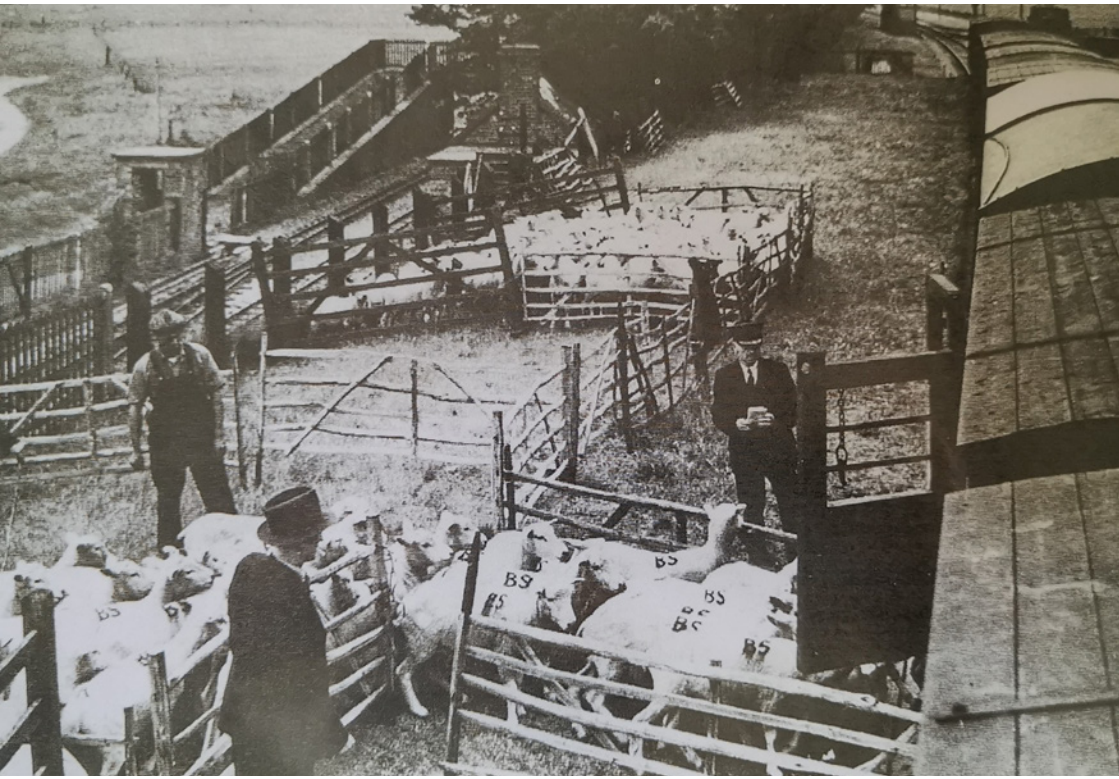
Oh yes, you can't mistake it (the sound of the bombers). It's a deep throb. Our bombers were totally different. Then in Wales as an evacuee in 1943 I was sitting outside and I heard a German bomber overhead. So I rushed into the house and said, 'Auntie there's a German bomber.' She soothed me down and said, 'Don't be silly. You don't get German bombers here.' Then we heard the policeman in the High Street blowing his whistle and the distant sound of the air-raid going off in Cardiff. We all clambered in the cupboard under the stairs and got up to see the bomb crater. And I wasn't allowed to go. I was a bit upset about that. Another evacuee who lived 400 yards away, she heard the bombers and told her foster parents, but we were the only two people in the whole of the village that recognised the sound.

Roger Norman

I remember you couldn't get directly onto the beach here because it was all barbed wire (just after the War, in Greatstone) – you had to walk up the road and go onto the beach. And there was big cracks in the road; it was a concrete road where apparently the Army Ducks had gone along

and broken the road up a bit. Also there was the aeroplane that was out here because we used to walk out to it at low water. You could see the wings and part of the fuselage, but we weren't sure if it was a German plane or a British plane. I know some people would stand on the fuselage bit. Gradually it got muddier and muddier around it and it sank. There's no trace of it now.

Ann Cox



Sheep being evacuated from New Romney Railway Station, 1940
(courtesy of The Old School Trust)

The little school just up the road there was my first school and then when you got to 11 you went to Southlands. (It) was a lot smaller. There were about 129 children went to that school just after the War, when it first opened. But I remember going to this school here quite well, because we used to walk up across the fields from the War Memorial – that was our quickest way into school. I can remember them building the new housing estate which is now called Churchlands. They had German labourers in, prisoners of war still at that time doing the labouring, putting the roads in. Because you used to say 'Which way are you going? Are you going across the fields or are you going the Germans' way?' It was always called the Germans' way up through Churchlands.

Joe Barnes

I can remember them at the end of the War the troops lining up outside the Town Hall and my dad wasn't among them because my dad had been taken ill and so my dad didn't come home when all the other service people came home from the War. And I can remember my mum telling me that my daddy was coming home and I walked up the road towards what is now the Red Cross Charity Shop – and it's still the same the front door to it – and I can remember standing on the steps there and this man in uniform coming towards me and I

remember saying to him, ‘Are you my daddy?’ and he said, ‘Are you Sally?’ and I said, ‘Yes’ and it was my dad.

Sally Maycock

VE Day Parade in New Romney High Street, 1945 (courtesy of Bernie Morris)

FINALLY… A GHOST STORY

In the 1980s I was working in the evening and I had this young lad Steven who was working with me. And I said to him, I'm just going to nip next door to have a quick pint.' When I come back in there was a person standing there. So I quickly went behind the counter, looked up again and there's no one there. And I said to Steven, 'I just saw somebody there. I know I did.' He said, 'I'm really glad you said that because I did too and I'm looking for them.' So hence the Wellworth ghost. Now the previous owners also reported similar things.

But going back to 1971-'72 when the shop was being converted, an old boy came into the shop and said, 'Have you found the secret cellar? It's up in the corner there. Just bang on the floor and the floor opens up.' But I didn't believe him.

When the builders were knocking the place about – the floor opened up.

Down there was this big walk-in safe. But it was all locked and they just couldn't get into it. There were several tunnels leading from there. So the builders' fitters got the lad to crawl along the tunnel to have a look. As he crawled through – horror met him – there was a body there. Just the bones. It was just a torso, no head, no arms, no legs. The Coroner decided that it was a tramp that got down there. He died and the rats took away his bits.

Now my argument today is I cannot believe that rats would take away a head, arms and legs and just leave the torso. So could our ghost be that person looking for his head, arms and legs?

Colin Walker

The enclosed CD has extracts from the interviews.
All of the contributors are represented.
The full interviews will be archived at Kent History
and Library Centre, Maidstone,
from where it is planned that they
will be made available online.

CD Track List

1 Roger Norman, magic
2 Francis Wire, calming
3 Tracy Brewer, riding on beach
4 John Poole, Hi-di-hi
5 Kate Shannon, Littlestone beach
6 Judith Clark, pony rides on the beach
7 Pat Alston, plots by the beach
8 Colin Walker, buckets and spades
9 Frances Wire, bingo and paddle boats
10 Gary Fagg, toffs and golf
11 Geraldine Hennessey, Marlie's Farm with a caravan
12 Tracy Brewer, May Underwood
13 John Gould, a hurricane on the campsite
14 Nigel Evenden, a coach blown off the road
15 Andrew Dennis, guest houses
16 Ellan Crooks, 'drawing' for fish
17 Gary Fagg, laylines for fish
18 Charlie Davies, sea fishing
19 Judith Richardson, a sinking boat
20 Ken Thomas, fishing families
21 Judith Richardson, early for the herring
22 Charlie Davies, on the lifeboats
23 Judith Richardson, lady launchers
24 Helen Taylor, it blows here all the time
25 Chris Shore, wildness
26 Helen Taylor, 'I thought we could go anywhere'
27 Michel La Rue, Derek Jarman
28 Carol Simmons, 'you either like or you don't'

CD Track List

29 Helen Taylor, birds and rabbits
30 Roger Norman, birding
31 Derek Homewood, mosquitoes and frogs
32 Fred White, rabbiting
33 Stuart Adams, crossing the fields
34 Charlie Davies, eels
35 Anne Luckett, ditches
36 Clive Wire, dykes cleaned
37 Nigel Evenden, a swan in a dyke
38 Gary Fagg, tadpoles and change of land use
39 Colin Hill, farming as it used to be
40 Dennis Wimble, changes in farming
41 Brian Washford, a tractor in a ditch
42 Roy Jackson, Marlie's Farm and the War
43 Ann Cox, a plane in the sea
44 Sally Maycock, meeting Daddy
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50 Margaret Phillips, Silver City
51 Joe Barnes, the power station a happy site
52 Mike Shannon, sprat invasions
53 Margaret Walker, the Heritage Group
54 Andy Winter, a very old house
55 Victoria Dawson, the Lydd community
56 Francis Wire, books and reality

Back cover top: The Putting Green, Dymchurch (site of the present funfair), c.1950 (courtesy of Joe Barnes)

Back cover bottom: Lady launchers at Dungeness, c.1960 (courtesy of RNLI Dungeness)

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