

Carbrooke Memories by David Vincent

Who do you think you are?! When I was a child this phrase would be directed, with some consternation, at an individual who was behaving above and beyond their position, knowledge or experience, someone with arrogance or just outright rude.

The question is now phrased more softly to express a desire to know what your heritage or ancestry contributes to your nature, given public popularity through several series of a genealogy programme investigating the ancestors of so-called celebrities.

Who do I think I am?! I really don't know. As a scientist I am very aware of the genetic inheritance that makes me what I am physically, but equally we are all shaped by our environment, the way we are brought up by our parents or guardians, our education, our interactions with our friends, enemies and everybody we meet and converse with on a day to day basis. Add to that all our experiences as we live our lives, growing up, whether alone or in company. As Alfred Lord Tennyson said "I am a part of all that I have met".

Carbrooke School

I regularly recall memories of the times I visited and lived in Carbrooke; they must have been some of the happiest times in my life, though sadly much was done during my youth to diminish or dismiss this. My paternal grandparents, Fred and Lily Vincent had moved to Carbrooke in the late 1940s and remained until about 1980, living in at least five of the village properties. I believe their first residence was a cottage opposite the church followed by a stay in Mill Lane. They then moved to Willow Corner, moving then into the next door cottage before moving to Step Cottages (there are some family photos outside the back door), but I only have memories of the other dwellings, some more than others, which included two of the Willow Corner cottages where they moved back to, and the Willow Corner Bungalow, plus White House, where I first remember my aunt, uncle and cousins, the Thompsons, originally living, spending many happy hours playing on the front lawn during the summer months. I believe my grandparents may have lived in each of the Willow Corner cottages at some time. I remember the garage of the outermost property being converted into a living room.

At the time I started at Carbrooke St Peter and St Paul VC School in around 1965, my grandparents lived in the Willow Corner Bungalow, of which I have many fond memories, and my Aunt Freda, Uncle Barry and cousins Sally, Jane and later Helen lived at White House. When I lived with my grandparents for just over a year, while my mother was in hospital and my father was stationed abroad, we used to walk down to White House so that we would then all walk together past the church and down the hill to the lovely small village vernacular style school, with its tarmac playground in front and the small meadow sloping gently down to the brook alongside Broadmoor Road. There was a large field behind the school looking up to the church above, making the holy edifice appear even more imposing, watching over the quiet daily happenings of the village.

At school it was always stated that the church tower was 100 feet tall; a very impressive size for a young child, whose exaggerations would frequently grab their imagination. With age, I have questioned the veracity of the bold statement as to the scale of the church, but discovered it to be fact. How wonderful for the village children to quite literally look up to the wondrous glory taking centre stage of the village without need of infantile hyperbole.

The small flint-faced village school was modest in scale, reflecting the size of the village, but easily recognizable for what it was at any distance. The school's black flint facade faced the brook as you entered the playground from Church Street through the large wooden gate. To the right, next to the chain-link fence stood the steel climbing frame, comprised of two triangular frames with bars across for climbing to the summit, from where the two frames were joined across the top by a steel ladder, from which we could crawl, swing or hang. Two long white lines a few yards apart crossed the playground, used for tag games, such as 'British Bulldog'. Straight ahead stood the outside brick built boys' toilets containing two WC stalls with latched wooden doors and a short floor trough urinal in the corner. The girls' facilities were around the back of the school, just in front of the cycle sheds. The stalls were covered, but originally the trough was open to the elements, making nature breaks during inclement weather a little uncomfortable. The headmaster, Mr Morris, installed a corrugated plastic sheet over the area to keep us dry but it was still bitterly cold in winter.

The entrance porch in the middle of the main building was entered through a large green timber door hung with old black metal hinges. On the left was a low bench with a row of coat hooks above; while to the right

were a series of wash basins each having a small bar of cold tar soap. Washing our hands whenever we had been outside and before dinner was second nature; I do not recall ever being instructed to wash our hands at particular times, just gentle questioning reminders.

Entering through another large timber door similar to the main entrance, the main hall opens up to full roof height, with white emulsion walls and polished golden wooden floors. This was the junior school area for those seven to eleven years. The schooling area was to the right while the open area to the left was used for morning assembly, country dancing (although some of the desks needed to be pushed back a little), some craft activities and dining.

When I first attended the school the desks were still quite Victorian, consisting each of a twin sloping desk top with pen groove and inkwell across the top, a high bench with a central foot rest across the middle. They reminded me of those described in the literature of Dickens. These were soon replaced with low Formica covered units, two of which fitted together to form a square seating four pupils on small plastic chairs.

To the right of centre a door gave access to a small communicating room from which you could either turn left into the primary schoolroom at the back or, to the right, enter a small yard at the rear of the school where the girls' toilets and cycle shed was located. A door to the left of centre accessed the primary schoolroom directly, while in the far left corner was a door leading to a small kitchen area and side entrance and porch to the school. Through here the school milk would be delivered in the one third pint bottles specially produced for schools. In winter it could be frozen solid and we would have to wait for it to thaw, while in summer it could be uncomfortably warm, something between the lovely comfortable warmth of a milky drink and skin temperature, a taste that, for me at least, was only just bearable, but it was a break from studies and a healthy drink of wholesome full-fat milk. Those were the days when the straws were made of paper which we collected from a tall box in the corner of the classroom and buckled them stabbing them through the foil bottle caps (unless we removed the foil first). After consuming the bottle contents we were left with a soft and soggy piece of paper.

The classroom at the back of the building was for the youngest of the pupils; being introduced from about age four on a part time basis. The desks were more traditional wooden units with lift tops, pencil groove and inkwells, arranged in three neat rows with a single row along the left side wall. The windows were high up below which stood jars of various wild flowers, selected for study at different times of the year. Sticky buds from horse chestnut trees, catkins and 'lamb's-tails' in the spring and meadow flowers from spring to summer. Jars with some water in the bottom also had a sheet of blotting paper placed around the inside with broad bean seeds between the paper and glass so that we could watch the seeds sprout and grow. Small trays of cress seeds could also be placed in the sun to sprout and grow, with the ultimate treat of cress sandwiches a week or two later.

Against the main inner wall in the centre stood a large black stove, with the chimney disappearing into the wall. Just before morning break our dear teacher, whose name I cannot recall, would place a small saucepan of milk on top of the stove to warm up for morning coffee. A skin would form on the surface which as the milk heated would expand to form what appeared to be a large potato growing over the top of the pan. We were always alert to the browning skin swelling above the pan so that 'Miss' could remove it before the pan boiled over. That generally signalled morning break; the rapid extraction of milk through the paper straws from the tiny bottles then a dash to run around the playground, climbing on the metal frames, playing various tag games or hopscotch. Autumn saw shoelaces being knotted and threaded through horse chestnuts to play conkers, sustaining the inevitable bruises and abrasions on the knuckles.

During lessons a traditional blackboard and easel would stand just inside the door, the same position taken by a television on a tall stand wheeled in after dinner to view 'Watch with Mother' (Trumpton, Camberwick

Green, Pogles' Wood, Bill and Ben). Lessons taken with the board were usually mathematics and English spelling and grammar. Exercise books had printed on the back cover either the times tables or conversion tables; tables of various measures whether length, area, volume or weight. These we learned by rote but practical applications were always to hand so it never felt like a chore. These were the days before decimalisation and metric measures, so we had pounds, shillings and pence; inches, feet, yards, chains, furlongs and miles; pints, quarts, gallons and other measures, so it was as natural to think in fours, eights, twelves, fourteens, sixteens and twenties as it is to think in decimal notation today. As we learned our times tables marks could be achieved by individual pupils reciting them alone in class. I sat by the fire at my grandmother's to learn my tables, just so that I was ready when called to stand on my chair at school and correctly recite them to the rest of the class. I spent many hours studying the back of my exercise book, asking questions, just to understand what it all meant, along with lists of a dozen new spellings issued regularly. Learning to read from the Ladybird books, short stories with Jane and John in the reader series and other educational informative units. I constantly yearned to reach the next grade, progressing from book 5b to 6a, or whatever level I was at. I was assisted by my grandmother who would always buy a book for Christmas, (Treasure Island, The Three Musketeers, Black Beauty...).

I recall the field at the back of the school when it was just overgrown waste ground. It was all cut back and harrowed, then we all went out one autumn afternoon to pick up stones to clear the field to prepare it for playing football and summer sports. The wooden fence was painted with creosote and a small football pitch was marked out with a goal placed at each end. It was also used for Sports day in the early summer with the mothers running an egg and spoon race. I also recall using it for a maths exercise in the junior school when we went out to measure the length of the perimeter and area simply by measuring one diagonal and the distances to the other corners from perpendicular points, then by scale drawing and "Pythagoras Theorem" to calculate the answer. Two pupils from the class were then sent out to wade through nettle beds in the corners and along the edge to obtain a measurement using a measuring wheel to confirm the actual distance (or demonstrate any inaccuracies in our earlier measurements). It was a practical and enjoyable exercise that demonstrated the main points.

For morning assemblies we were arranged in rows in front of the big bay window at the front to face the wall where the morning hymns were displayed on large A1 sheets hoisted high for all to see. Occasionally some of us would also play recorder. There was quite an emphasis on learning the recorder, with lessons often being given in the village hall. The headmaster's daughters were really competent and had treble and bass recorders while the rest of us played descant. I was grateful later for having learned to read music so young, as I was able to progress and understand more when I was reacquainted with music lessons some five years later.

The village hall was also used for the visits and examinations by the schools doctor. A rather uncomfortable experience, stripped to your underwear, being poked, prodded, weighed and measured in a cold, damp and unfriendly environment. The boys didn't need encouragement to 'cough', particularly in winter.

The open area used for assemblies and slightly enlarged for country dancing, was also utilized for expansive art and craft lessons. I also recall using the larger sized units of 'Dienes Apparatus' for mathematics, placing 'blocks', 'flats', 'longs' and 'units' appropriately positioned on the floor for calculations in the larger bases up to 12. In the sixties we were using only imperial measures so the use of many bases became second nature, unlike the adherence to a purely decimal system, although there was a meter rule available. Volumetric work was sometimes done in the small kitchen area, stretching up to the taps to fill the various aluminium measures (gill, half pint, pint, quart and gallon cans), then emptying them in the sink. Children and water can always be relied upon to make a splash, so there was always mopping up to do at the end, however careful we tried to be.

One summer we were learning about the measurement of time using candles, water clocks and sundials while working in groups of three or four. I was looking at how sundials worked and measuring the movement of the sun with my group. On the second day I had to set up an experiment early, placing a pole in a stand placed in the sunniest corner of the playground, trying to ensure it would not be disturbed. A mark was placed at the end of the pole's shadow with the time, the length of the shadow and the time being marked on our worksheet. My group enjoyed the exercise because we were allowed to leave the classroom every half hour to mark and measure the shadow, regardless of what was happening, although the last mark was at four o'clock when we were dismissed to go home and we had to record our work and put the stand away. We all stood around the marks on the playground the following morning, looking at how the length had shrunk during the morning then grown again in the afternoon.

Craft lessons beyond simply drawing and painting to illustrate projects included designing a creature from outer space, then making a soft toy of it (I think this was inspired after the introduction of 'The Clangers' on television), building model log cabins from sticks and twigs while learning about Canada, drawing huge skeletal trees for an autumn or winter project and knitting dishcloths. While learning about growing crystals we were each given a substance to dissolve then allow to evaporate naturally to see what would grow. We were each given one of salt, sugar, flour, cocoa and something else that would definitely form good crystals (I have forgotten now, but it may have been copper sulphate; I vaguely recall growing the blue crystals). I had the misfortune to be given cocoa, but those who did manage to finish with a crystalline structure were able to try growing the crystal further by tying a suitable piece with cotton and suspending it in a concentrated salt solution.

I remember one nativity play which we had to perform in the church one evening. It was bitterly cold; if the church had heating then, I am not aware of it having any effect. I played one of the wise men, suitably dressed in my long wool dressing gown, with its cord tied around my waste and a suitably created cardboard crown perched on my head. The shepherds also wearing either dressing gowns or long nightshirts fashioned from sheets, with a large tea towel tied around their heads. Another play was performed for the parents in the school one summer term. We took up the Tale of Peter Rabbit, where I was fortunate to get the title role. Suitable costumes were made for each of us: the Flopsy bunnies and Mr McGregor I clearly remember. I had a small blue jacket with large brass buttons, one of which I was to get caught in garden netting as I escaped from the garden. A piece of netting had been suspended at the side of the stage area for me to run past and get caught. I still recall having thought about it and practiced my part, on the actual day I flicked my jacket out to catch the netting then perform my pratfall, I slipped on the loose netting at my feet, flying up in the air and landing with a thud on my back, amid gasps from some of the mothers in the audience. It didn't hurt, that I remember, and I was suitably pleased with myself, though I do not remember much more about the whole performance. It makes me laugh even now. I was, some years later, to take the part of the White Rabbit in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" with similar hilarity.

Moving into the junior school, under the tutelage of the headmaster, Mr Morris, we were divided into four groups, unrelated to the groupings of where we sat, to collect points for achievement. We each had a round coloured badge denoting the group to which we were part: red, green, blue and yellow. These 'teams' were named Mars, Pluto, Jupiter and Mercury accordingly. I was in the Mercury (yellow) group. The group names were neatly written in the top right corner of the huge blackboard, where, on a Friday afternoon all the individual points for each group were added up and chalked up, giving individuals and groups some sense of achievement.

The vast blackboard was regularly marked up with a series of parallel lines by Mr Morris using his large yard rule, so that we could be taught handwriting. We all used pencils, neatly prepared by the sharpener fixed to the corner of the teacher's desk, winding the blades with the handle and watching the shavings fall in the orange tinted perspex box beneath. Week by week we learned to shape the individual characters and join them proficiently. Once we could perform the exercises competently and consistently, without undue

pressure and breaking of graphite points, we were presented with a cartridge pen; a long, tapering blue pen with a medium nib to which we could attach a cartridge of ink. However, we could be set back to pencil again if the standard of our handwriting fell below a suitable standard. It was a great sense of achievement to be presented with your pen.

It's incredible how many memories can be tucked away, to come forward at the most unexpected moment for reasons unknown. One particular lesson that comes to mind is a nature walk along Meadow Lane. We were walked up the hill, past the garage, gravedigger's cottage, general store and a couple of cottages turning into Meadow Lane, a somewhat overgrown, grassy track. We walked past the old public house, long closed and looking rather tired. As we slowly made our way along the track, various hedgerow trees were pointed out and identified. We learned how bryony hooks onto the leaves, twigs and branches of the hedge, spreading through and around these elements. Various insects were dispersed as we trampled the undergrowth looking for tracks and signs of other wildlife, listening for and looking for the numerous hedgerow birds and nests. On returning to the classroom time was given to writing about and drawing our discoveries, while specimens in jars were discussed.

One year our teacher brought in a small jar of frog spawn, which was placed in a suitably prepared tank so that over the following days and weeks we could watch the tadpoles emerge and develop through their various stages into young frogs, before they were released.

At the bottom of the playground was a short grassed area in front of a low chain-link fence, beyond which was a small overgrown area of meadow sloping down to the brook. The meadow area was cut and a gap made in the fence so that during the summer term we could run around and play. The girls would make daisy chains and pick buttercups with other wild flowers. We would all pick sticky sweetheart to throw at each other, getting covered in the remnants of leaves and seeds. Also, we would chase butterflies and other insects and beetles though the long grass around the edges, and look for life in the shallow waters babbling by.

The grass at the end of the playground had decorative areas of garden cut out where we were taught to dig, weed, plant and tend a variety of flowers. We were always in awe of the, what seemed to us, huge sunflowers that were grown in the central area. The heads were cut off, dried then used for study in class as we removed the seeds. Looking at the spiral patterns and using the seeds in maths came back to me years later as my interest in recreational mathematics grew.

Running between the front meadow and back field, behind the boys' toilet block was another strip of grass that we also ran up and down on. The school premises boundary along the far edge was a three rail wooden fence with a square wire mesh nailed to the back. In spite of weeds and nettles growing up from the base during the summer we would climb up to peer over at the horses, and occasionally foals, frolicking in the vast undulating field that appeared to have bunkers all over. We learned that there had been a monastery or abbey there and the hillocks showed where the remains lay beneath. Occasionally we would be caught out climbing the fence after it had been treated with creosote, gaining sticky brown marks on our hands and clothes as well, gaining the wrath of our mothers.

On one occasion I was taken out of the class by the headmaster and told to collect my bicycle from the shed. I had recently been given a second-hand cycle to replace an earlier one that I had almost outgrown. It was a little large for me so my father had screwed wooden blocks to the pedals to enable me to ride it comfortably. This appeared to displease Mr Morris. I rode along the grass strip towards Mr Morris, as requested and when told to stop, applied the brakes, moved myself forward off the saddle and stood astride the cross-bar with both feet comfortably on the ground. This appeared not to be the required approach and I dutifully repeated the exercise with the caveat that I was to remain on my saddle. I knew what the end result was going to be and having been prevented from explaining, I nervously complied. On the instruction

to stop, I again applied the brake and tentatively put out my left foot trying in vain to reach the ground as the cycle started to lean to the left. Thankfully as my foot touched down I avoided a fall but remained with my steed held at a jaunty angle between my short legs. This was the result the headmaster wanted (although I'm sure he was hoping I would possibly roll across the ground) and took pleasure in explaining that my cycle was unsuitable as I could not put my feet down when stopped (even though I managed quite adequately by slipping off the saddle) and that it was dangerous, so I was not permitted to ride it to school until I was of a suitable size. I was extremely embarrassed and not a little hurt by the remonstrations, but I never did ride that bike to school again. When I lived in Watton, I would regularly walk the two miles along Drury Lane (I believe it is now called Watton Green), if I did not have a lift.

The headmaster, Mr Morris, had a vintage coach that he used for school trips and other outings from the village. We were regularly taken to the outdoor swimming baths at Watton, long before the sports centre was built. A few of us went one winter when we had to break ice away before we could get in. After doing a quick couple of widths of the main pool, it was out to get quickly dried in the wooden cubicles. The showers were frozen, but would still have been missed as they had no hot water.

The school was also taken to the Royal Norfolk Show, where we could see all the animals, plant and equipment that was on show along with other displays in numerous marquees. We were encouraged to view the educational marquees run by the various Councils and wildlife organisations, learning more about our wildlife, local environment, architecture and history. There certainly wasn't the ruthless and rude dash to grab as many free materials as possible that appears to be the norm today. I had just obtained my first camera, a plastic film camera, purchased with a half crown postal order and half a dozen ice lolly wrappers. My father showed me how to insert the roll of film in the dark to protect it from exposure. I went round taking photographs of a military band and some birds of prey from one of the displays. Much to my surprise, I also won a book token for identifying trees from a display of about thirty different twigs and leaves.

As well as my cousins, Sally, Jane and Helen, I remember a few of the other pupils with whom I grew up and shared such happy informative days. Keith lived at the garage at the top of the hill opposite the church; Phillip, like me, was small but athletic. He was also especially good at drawing trees demonstrating his skill when we had to draw detailed autumnal skeletons. A couple of other children and I helped him to make copies of the large drawings for a display to show our parents. Adrian Baugh was the gamekeeper's son, who lived at the large house up the lane to Fen Farm. He was very keen on steam engines and drew them really well. I remember playing in his garden with my cousins, when my grandparents lived in one of the cottages at Willow Corner, backing onto his lawn. He had a small white duck as a pet that we would chase around the lawn. Nigel was more robust and lived on his father's pig farm. Rosemary Hood (who had several siblings) lived at Step Cottages. Claire Bowes lived opposite Garden Close in Watton. I sometimes had a lift to school with her and her younger sister Sally, in a Morris 1100. Her family owned the slaughterhouse and butchers on the far side of Watton.

Another girl in the class who had a lift with Claire was Joanne, who I believe was the daughter of the vet in Watton. She was of a very nervous disposition and rather timid. She found it difficult to communicate, stuttering much of the time and had an almost permanent tremble. As a consequence, Joanne spent a lot of time on her own although she was never entirely left out and she did have her friends. But now, looking back, as children I am sure she was cruelly teased and excluded at times. However, Joanne was an intelligent girl and certainly learned as much as the rest of us. She only had difficulty in communicating fully and expressing herself.

For reasons unknown to me, I was often asked to work with Joanne, which at times I enjoyed, although I am ashamed to admit there were times I felt embarrassed about it, even to the extent that it felt like a punishment. But that was, and still is, part of childhood. I remember well helping Joanne with mathematics, especially using the 'Dienes Apparatus' for large base calculations. When working with the large base blocks

and flats etc we could use the assembly area, where we could easily spread the work around. I was told that Joanne was to do the work while I was only to assist, but sometimes, I became bored with the slow pace, I gave slightly more assistance to ensure an exercise was completed. I am sure she knew what to do, but due to her communication difficulties and slow physical responses I 'encouraged' the answers. I was more than nervous myself when Mr Morris would come along to check our work and ask Joanne to explain a particular answer, but between us I think we covered the situation well. I have often wondered what happened to Joanne, whether her 'nervousness' improved and what she did.

Then of course, there were the headmaster's daughters. There were three, I think, Penelope, Gillian and Clare Morris. They had moved to Carbrooke from Redditch and lived in one of the new bungalows between Willow Lane and Willow Corner. I can remember that I sat next to Clare or Gillian, but cannot recall who else sat at our table. Her drawings were good, especially the way she could draw people, something I was unable to do. I would always try to avoid adding people to my drawings, as I couldn't get them right, even after trying to copy their method using a stick-like outline. It's strange the little details that spring back from your memory, yet others that seem to elude you.

Mr Morris introduced the school news sheet and we were fascinated how it was printed out. Initially we had been given two pieces of paper with a sheet of carbon paper, so we could see how we produced copies, writing a short article or making a small drawing. But the production of the template for the news sheet was bewildering, with the inking of the rollers on the hand operated duplicating machine, a large metal box with two large rollers and a handle on the side. We were amazed by the freshly printed sheets that were flicked out of the bottom as the handle was turned and the template revolved around the drums.

I can remember having two articles in the newsletters. The first one was about a visit to see my uncle in Norwich. He was a policeman with the County force and drove a panda car. He showed me how the flashing blue light worked and I described this for my article. The second article was about the imminent Apollo 11 moon landing. I described the rocket and its launch along with a drawing at the side. That was the last item I had printed, as I moved away very soon after that.

I look back with fond memories of the school, where we could run around with gay abandon, graze our knees after falling during a chase or tag game and take in the wonderful world around us. Some of the instances may seem harsh or unacceptable by today's standards, but we grew up with a sense of purpose and inner strength. Perhaps it was this that helped me endure the bullying I received later at other schools. We had our disagreements, as all children do, and petty squabbles, but nothing that lasted; it would never have been permitted, and it always seems to be the good, even from the not so pleasant instances, that remains with us.

Remembrances from the village and growing up.

Many memories of the village that come to mind of the times I lived with my grandparents or visited them or my aunt, uncle and cousins.

At White House, the outside earth closet with a double seat, behind the chicken run. The layout of the house is imprinted in my brain, with the living room where everyone met for all occasions throughout the year, the 'best' living room, which I do not recall ever being used - I only went in a few times, feeling the cool damp air and musty smell; looking at the various ornaments in glass cabinets or shelves and table. The kitchen at the back which, from the back door, was entered through a low door, stepping down a good distance into a low ceilinged room was quite large. The pantry was adjacent, along a short passage and at the rear corner adjacent to Church Street, the back room which had been a play room with a piano when my cousins lived there. I believe it had originally been a butcher's shop.

The wooden stairs up to the narrow landing with access to three bedrooms and a large bathroom that you stepped down to, which was located above the kitchen. There were family photos hanging from all walls. Photos of immediate family hung in the main living room but there was a large collection of photographs of uniformed men that were clearly old, hung along the hallway and landings and other spare rooms.

The front garden had an apple tree in the bottom corner next to the road from which a seat swing hung. The chicken coup next to the house had bantams and chickens, from where my aunt would collect eggs. Sometimes I could watch. From the side of the house the wide grassy track that led down to Meadow Lane, long before a bungalow was built there, spoiling the view and overshadowing the lovely White House.

I once went with my cousins one Sunday morning to attend Sunday school with them. I was staying with my grandparents at the time, at Willow Corner, and walked down to White House in time to walk to church with my cousins, all wearing our Sunday best. I was nervous, the first time I had been introduced to the idea of Sunday school; my cousins had been attending for a little while. As we walked up the gravel path to the church the vicar walked out from the porch, a tall and imposing figure in his long flowing vestments and bald head. For whatever reason, the sight of him standing at the end of the path looking towards us as we approached, scared the living daylights out of me and I turned on my heels, racing back to the safety of the house, in spite of the calls from my cousins. It seems very strange now; the image is as vivid now as if only last week, and I can laugh about it, but I do not understand my reaction at the time. I must have seen him before, as he must have performed my Aunt Hazel's wedding at which I was a page boy.

Ivan was the verger, who lived in "Gravedigger's Cottage" next to the garage house. He was short, even by our young measures, being severely crippled with a hunched back. I was always a little afraid of him when I met him alone, although he was always pleasant, politely greeting you and 'passing the time of day', a very gentle nature and character. He was seen walking regularly between his cottage, the church opposite and up and down the hill to and from the vicarage on Vicarage Corner. I always admired the large square building with the large trees overhanging the hedge around the corner. I often stopped to see the horses in the field next door. I have recently learned that I am distantly related to Ivan by his marriage to the sister of one of my grandmother's sister-in-laws.

Mrs Smith ran the village post office well into her ninth decade. She had been there for many years, being postmistress when my father was a boy. In 1967 I went to purchase the new set of stamps commemorating the investiture of the Prince of Wales. My grandmother had sent me down alone from Willow Corner with my pocket money. When I entered the small office through the old white door, the bell above tinkled, then

again for a second time as I closed the door behind me. As I turned back to peer across the top of the counter Mrs Smith stepped through from her living room. Even then, as a child, she was an old lady to me. After her cheery greeting and request to know how she could help, I politely asked for the new set of stamps. As she tore first the single strip of three silver stamps showing images of Caernarvon Castle then the single gold stamp (Celtic Cross) and single black background portrait of a young Prince Charles, to my surprise she looked directly at me with her gentle eyes and said "You must be Anthony's boy?" "Yes" I stuttered in amazement at how she might have known that, and was informed about how she had served my father similarly. I then passed over the princely sum of three shillings, which was quite a sum for me in those days, when sixpence (6d, a tanner or half a shilling) bought a large amount of sweets. I would always enquire after Mrs Smith on visits in later years, incredulous at her stamina and strength.

When visiting my aunt and playing with my cousins at White House during those long balmy summers we would often skip along to the general store for a treat. This could be either an ice lolly or a few sweets, often a 'Jamboree' bag with a variety of sweet confections that we would swap or play with. On one side of the bag there was often a simple puzzle or game to entertain us as well. If we were particularly lucky we may have been bought a drawing book or 'magic painting' book or a few colouring pencils. More often the store was visited in the company of my grandmother to purchase a few provisions for that day's lunch or supper a few items for baking. The store itself was compact and everything was served from over the counter. There was so much to grab the attention of young enquiring mind but we were kept in check and were not able to venture far.

I received my first visit from Jack Valentine when staying with my grandparents at Willow Corner. I was sent by my grandmother to answer a loud knock on the door to find no-one there, but there was a bag on the doorstep containing some sweets and a painting book. The mystery of the gift, how it arrived and from whom, was maintained for many years. How my grandfather managed to do it without detection is still unknown to me, even though I have one or two ideas.

I have many memories of the bungalow at Willow Corner where my grandparents lived at the time I stayed with them. The patch of grass outside the French windows seemed like a large lawn as a small child. There was a wooden summer house at the far end where my cousins and I played during the summer months. Behind the summer house and beside the bungalow was the garden area tended by my grandfather after his long days working on the farm. I remember often watching him in the early evening before having to go in and get ready for bed, and recall the time a small fresh carrot would be pulled from the soil and passed to me. I would brush it on my shorts or shirt and bite into it. Sticks of sprouts would be cut fresh from the garden in winter, being brought into the kitchen coated in the early morning frost.

At the back was an enclosed yard which was partially covered at the back and covered at the end with a door giving access to my grandfather's vegetable patch. At the opposite end was a cement board garage in which our bicycles were stored and often a pheasant or two would hang, awaiting plucking. The yard was a well used playground when at my grandparents, running between there and the lawn at the front, either along the a narrow path past the front door or along the vegetable patch. My cousins and the gamekeeper's son, Adrian would often play tag games, where you could be safe by jumping onto objects above the ground or, in desperation from being caught, hanging from a beam.

My grandmother sometimes kept a chicken in a run on the lawn where we could watch and wait for chicks to hatch and run around the confines of their pen.

When I was living in Watton, my grandmother had cycled over to say that my aunt and cousins were going blackcurrant picking at Bradenham Hall and asked whether I would like to go. However, I had to be quick as they were about to leave, so having received permission from my mother, I simply jumped on my bike, leaving my nan behind, and raced over to White House, along Drury Lane with my little legs pedalling as fast

as I was physically capable, arriving, breathless, just as they were leaving to board the coach owned and driven by Mr Morris, the village school headmaster. I remember earning twelve shillings that day, the sum of which I was really pleased, but never achieved that much again. I proudly placed the silver coins in my money box on returning home at tea-time. On another occasion, I had fallen unwell during the day, a rainy one at that, and returned early to be wrapped up in blankets on my grandmother's sofa, before being taken home later in the day.

One summer when staying with my grandparents at the bungalow on Willow Corner, I was given a bowl of fresh gooseberries and a separate bowl of sugar in which to dip them to abate the sour taste. I was happy sitting on the doorstep munching my way through the gooseberries, sharp though they often were. However, on one occasion some were particularly sharp for my taste and in disgust had thrown the remnants high over the hedge into Fen Lane. Then, later that afternoon my grandmother had cause to go to the front gate and noticed the evidence lying in the lane. I got a ticking off for that, but it was soon forgotten. Our misdeeds and misadventures, though scorned and for which we would occasionally be scolded, soon melted away; as young children we appeared unable to do much wrong in our grandparents eyes. Iced lollies and summer fruits along with their ever present affection would soon dry away any tears.

One incident I recall from this time when I was living at my grandparents was being aware of a commotion outside the gate and beyond the high hedge in what was a peaceful lane leading up to Fen Farm, which saw very little traffic. I ran to the gate to see two horses ridden by young women, unknown to me, trying to urge their mounts up the bank. A cattle grid had recently been placed at the entrance to the lane and this was preventing the riders from continuing in that direction. The horses were certainly not happy about being forced up the bank to by-pass the grid and proving difficult to handle. I was spotted viewing the scene from the gate, at which point a degree of abuse was launched in my direction as to the disgraceful act of preventing their access. This was a little unsettling to me at the time, I'm sure I was an easy target for their frustration, especially as the bungalow was closest to the grid and assumed to be the cause of the problem. My grandmother brushed the episode aside saying they had no right (at that time) to be there and to keep away.

My cousins and I spent a lot of time at my grandparents, particularly during school holidays. We always had something to do. If we weren't outside playing in the yard, on the lawn or in the summer house we would be indoors reading, drawing, colouring and making things. My cousins each had a cotton reel with four small nails in one end which was used for 'tattling' or 'french knitting', making a long woollen tube that could be sewn together to make a place mat. As we always shared activities I was provided with a similar cotton reel and leant with them. My enthusiasm extended on one occasion to wanting to knit. My cousins had arrived with a pair of needles containing a short length of knitting. I wanted to be involved so my grandmother found a reasonably thick pair of needles from her vast selection and a ball of fairly thick wool. Having casted on a row of stitches she showed me the basic knitting stitch and set me on my way. As I got to the end of the ball of wool (a few days later), she showed me how to cast off, leaving me with a rectangular woollen piece of stocking stitch that was sewn together to make a hat. Eager to learn more, my grandmother showed me how to do purl stitches and to alternate the rows and that was all I needed. In later years she would often help out with difficult stitches or picking up dropped stitches.

My grandmother was a wonderful seamstress. I remember her making bridesmaids' dresses and creating the furniture covers from spare or oddments of material. I learned that she hand stitched her own wedding gown and bridesmaids' dresses. I remember her making page boy outfits for me on two occasions. One was for the wedding of her youngest daughter at Carbrooke church. They were both made from velvet like material, one in deep red the other in royal blue. There was an off-cut of the royal blue 'velvet' that my grandmother sewed into a pad and filled with foam that I used for many years to give the final shine to my shoes.

Wherever my grandparents lived only one room was in regular use. There was always another room that was hardly ever used and rarely visited; the best room. It had the best furniture in it, with beautifully embroidered or *broderie anglais* antimacassars on the sofa and armchairs, highly polished wood and glass and all the best ornaments displayed in the cabinets. The best room always felt slightly dank when entering, but occasionally it would be visited to retrieve a stored item or to be shown a photograph or ornament. The main living room was always warm and cosy, with an open fire most of year. Friday nights were often set around the fireplace, with the wire mesh guard in place, eating fish and chips. Any chips left would be reheated in the morning and eaten with a fried egg for breakfast.

The walls were always hung with family photographs, and as the family grew, so more photographs were added to the gallery, filling every available space. I remember also as a small child three china mallard ducks aligned in flight across one on the walls. Any drawing or painting made by any grandchild, and then great grandchild, was always proudly displayed, often for more years than was necessary, much to our embarrassment at times.

Learning to ride my first bicycle, received for Christmas. My grandmother held onto my saddle as she walked, then trotted, to White House as I went to school. After a week, I was getting my balance, and she would release her grip but still be there to catch me, until one morning I pedalled away as she released her grip, unknown to me. Then I heard a shout to slow down (my grandmother could not keep up) and I was heading for the Willow Lane corner and the deep ditch that ran along in front of the cottages. As I slowed, applying the brakes, I wobbled as I glanced over my shoulder at my grandmother chasing after me. Then, just in time I was caught as I started to tip towards the ditch. After that I was able to ride solo down through the village without any difficulty. My cousins had already got cycles and were already riding unaided.

I wonder now how we ever fitted in the living rooms of the houses my grandparents lived in, particularly at Christmas when most of the family would gather. I have vivid memories of one Christmas dinner at White House, when there must have been at least six adults and five children (possibly a further two adults and a child) all crowded around a fully extended table that filled the available space in the middle of the room, with the sofa and armchairs pushed right up against the walls and into the corners. All the paper decorations hanging from the low ceiling (paper chains, lanterns and streamers), a glistening tree in the corner and a roaring fire added to the excitement. How my grandmother coped with all of us I really don't know, but she never seemed to be put out. Chicken and pheasant were the usual fare with assorted cold meats that my grandmother had prepared, including fresh tongue. Sitting next to my uncle I had to be on my guard. He was a brilliant tease and trickster, distracting you playfully while stealing the delights from your plate, then denying any knowledge of it. My cousins and I would lose sausages, buns or trifles before we had time to taste them. Such happy times

The majority of my memories are from the 'sixties, when most of my school holidays were spent at my grandparents, growing and learning, along with my cousins who then lived in the village. After that I did not visit again, other than for a couple of Christmases, until the late 'seventies, having moved away and then managed to venture forth on my own, at first cycling twenty miles or more each way for a brief visit. At this time my grandparents lived at White House, my aunt, uncle and cousins having moved to the Dereham area. My grandparents would eventually move away in the early 'eighties, at first to stay with my aunt and uncle then Bradenham before living out their final years in Yaxham. Often when visiting my family in the area I would make a detour through Carbrooke to remember my younger days and the happier times I had, I recall some of the names and faces that would spring to mind without the need for invitation. The biggest visible changes were the sudden growth and development of the village school that when I was there looked as it had been for nearly a century, with little change from the time it was built. The loss of the petrol station at the top of the hill and the closure of the village store were plain to see. Meanwhile, odd pieces of land between houses and cottages, and older run down farm buildings were cleared to provide new dwellings,

though this has not seriously affected the overall appearance of Carbrooke. My mental visions will always be of an earlier more innocent time.