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# Memories (Barbara de Mornay Penny)

(Contributed November 2013)

## A Vey Naughty or High Spirited Person

My name is **Barbara de Mornay Penny** (nee **Davies**). I was born in the one of the timber cottages next door to **Mrs Thompson's grocery shop** down in the dell at **Gustard Wood** on the 15th of September 1940.

One of my memories of Gustard Wood, apart from picking raspberries and playing on the common, was the **huge bonfire** which I believe was to celebrate the **end of the war**. It was around this bonfire that we children were handed old hats and into these hats we were each given a jacket potato to eat straight out of the fire. Delicious it was too.

Moving on to 1946 we moved to a brand new Swedish house at 44, Marford Road. Just across the road was the Marford Stores where you could buy all beautiful fresh groceries. It was here I used to see dear old Teddy Clark with his push cart which he used to deliver groceries. The name of Bangs was written on the side of this cart, presumably the name of the previous shop owner. The shop in my day was run by a Mrs Oldfield. Teddy lived at 36 Marford Road with Mrs Foulds.

## **Our playgrounds**

**Wright's meadow**, now **Garrard Way**, was where **Jimmy Wright** would leave his horse and cart, I believe he was some sort of dealer. The roads were well used with skipping ropes across the road to skip whilst being turned at each end. Our tennis courts were **Conqueror's Hill** and the grass bank outside our home. But it was during the winter when great fun was to be had on the treacherous slides we had going down the pavement and road on Conqueror's Hill and sledging down the same, as well as **Ash Grove** and the playing fields into **East Lane**.

During the summer months it would be down the meadows by the river where we would pick gorgeous **kingcups**, **swim**, and **picnic**. **Devil's Dyke** of course was a very popular play area. Here we would pick bluebells, build camps and slide down the banks. Here too was a wonderful place to play hide-and-seek. On one occasion who should be watching us children but **Gipsy Petrulengro**. When Autumn approached we mushroomed on **Wick fields** (now Wick Avenue), gathered hazel nuts, sweet chestnuts and of course blackberries from the lanes all around.

Another fond childhood memory of mine was, when lucky enough, to ride on the running board of **Ena Dawes' horse and cart** as she delivered the milk. **Milk** was passed from **churn to jug** to jug. During the late 40s

early 50s **Mrs Fletcher** (a school teacher) formed a choir, the **Golden Singers**. **Derek Frost** also had a small choir and we would practise in his home which was **Jessamine Cottage**. So you see I was not naughty all the time.

## School days

**Mr Housden** was the headmaster, firm but fair. He not only caned the boys, he caned the girls too. I know. He caned me. Just one stroke. This was because I was caught passing/ throwing a girl's boot across the room. Occasionally, time permitting, he would take us for a lesson of his choosing, anything from parliament, to churches and the structure of, to manners and horticulture. These times I thoroughly enjoyed because you not only learnt something different, but he generally started off on one subject and ended on another. One boy in particular was good at distracting him, but the finale was generally a verbal spelling test with those who answered the first ten spellings correctly being allowed to go home early.

There were many outings made with the school to museums and galleries in **London**, also **the Tower of London**, **Buckingham Palace**, etc. I remember a tour of the **Houses of Parliament** with an MP named **Lord Lingram**, after which we were taken to the top of **Big Ben**, and of all places we walked around the top looking down between the turrets to the **Thames** below. For all of these trips we travelled by the train from **Wheathampstead station**. The excursion of **1951** will always stand out in my memory more than others. While waiting for the train to go to the **Festival of Britain** we watched as the firemen put the finishing touches to extinguishing the **blaze of the Murphy Chemical factory**.

The teachers I remember were, **Miss Warren**, **Mrs Fletcher**, **Miss Ireland**, **Miss Crawley** (very Victorian), **Mr Price**, **Mrs Jasniak**, **Mr Thrussell**, **Miss Slow**, **Mr Griffith**, **Mrs Rowe** (domestic science) and a woodwork teacher. In my days there were no teaching assistants and class numbers were between 20 and 30 mixed. Our very good school dinners were cooked by **Mrs Lizzie Latchford**, and **Mrs Thornton** in the school canteen.

After school I would go to my father's office which was next to/ part of **Pearce's the newsagents** and get **3d**. With this I would go to **Mr Hall's the baker**, and if lucky get a penny worth of **broken tarts!** Then on to **Mrs Pateman's** (the **green grocer**) and for **2d** buy a Lyons maid ice cream. If I could not get any broken tarts I would get a **3d Walls** ice cream. **Mr Hall's** bread and cakes were delicious. My poor Mother never received a complete loaf if I had to shop for it as I would nibble the crust off as I walked home. Three times a week **Mr Hall** would deliver bread and once or twice a week we would have meat delivered from **Simons the butcher**.

## Nurse Smith and the Girl Guides

I was a **Girl Guide** for a short while. The guides were run by **Nurse Sally Smith**, but due to my honesty I was banned for three weeks. We had been to meeting to learn the language of the deaf and dumb in Harpenden and while waiting for the bus home some of us decided to play **Knock Down Ginger**, i.e. knocking on doors and running away. The next week at our guide meeting we were asked who had participated in this game. Thinking that everyone would admit to it, I put my hand up, but nobody else did. For this I was given a three-week suspension, I never did return due to the injustice.

## Assorted village memories

Summer fetes I remember in the grounds of **Bury Farm** house, and **Rectory meadow** where prizes of savings stamps were given for races and fancy dress etc.

Watching the harvest in progress in fields where now stands the **Memorial hall**.

**Dramatic society plays** being staged in St. Helens school hall. Watching my godfather Mr Westwood shoe horses in his forge in East lane.

My first hair-dressing appointment to have a set was at the hairdresser's in Church Street where they cut men's hair too. The awful huge looking hair dryers had always put me off going to have a hairdo, but on my first occasion it was a must due to wedding, so I had to go. Everything was going well until ten minutes under the dreaded drier when I noticed steam coming from under my chair. Having called the assistant she was most apologetic, the cause being she had switched the kettle on for their tea just before I sat down. It was some time before I ventured here again.

My **Bert Cobb and his Serenaders** would put on a jolly good show. He had a dance troupe, of which I was a member for a short while, but I preferred to watch. His two comedians, **Johnnie Warner** and **Mr Cox**, were hilarious and Bert Cobb himself, who not only trained the girls in their dance routines and organised the whole show, was a brilliant caricaturist. **Johnnie Warner** was also the village chimney sweep, and it was while at our house he would tell us funny stories to get us in a good mood so that we would go out into the garden to check the brush had come out of the chimney.

A daredevil pastime on a Saturday morning was, with a friend, to hide behind the Mill lorry when it was parked loaded and ready for the off. As soon as the driver got into his cab we clambered up on top of the sacks and toured the farms around Kimpton and Codicote unbeknown to the driver until his first delivery. It was going through orchards where apples would sort of get knocked off the trees by our heads. This was the driver's fee for our entertainment.

My poor Mother had many confrontations with neighbours and friends parents due to some of the pranks I had pulled, but lucky for me my Mother for 35 years had been a psychiatric nurse so she knew how to handle these situations.

We had a youth club in the village run by **Mr Lea** followed by **Mr Bob Beckwith**. This was in the two Nissan huts next to **Hall's bakery**. Here we'd jive to old records, play table tennis, billiards, etc.

## Working at the Murphy Chemical Co.

In **1955** I started work for the **Murphy Chemical Co.**, in offices housed in **Garden House**. This was just opposite the **railway yard** and my office was at the front so when not busy one could watch the trains. This was quite an interesting job especially the **switchboard**. I remember when entomologists were abroad if we wanted to make a telephone call to them we had to book the call several days in advance, but when we made the contact I was so surprised how clear the line was. One call I had to make was to Tanganyika. It was if we were talking internally. Then of course when meeting our reps it could sometimes be a let-down putting a face to a caller. Still a bit naughty even at this stage of my life we did have fun listening in to some of the calls. On another occasion whilst making a three-way call for one of the directors I was told off as it had taken 38 seconds to finally connect

up the third person. Whilst working for Murphy Chemicals two evenings a week I had to spend an hour with Mr Lee (organist/youth leader) for shorthand and typing lessons.

### **Working at the Swan and the Bull**

From **1969 to 1971** I worked as a barmaid for **John and Doreen Underwood** at the **Swan** public house. It was quite a different affair when later in **1971** I changed jobs and worked for **Mr and Mrs Rose**, who managed the **Bull Hotel**. They succeeded **Mac**, a very tall Scottish landlord who would shuffle about in his slippers. My job here was very busy and enjoyable meeting many personalities: **Reginald Bosanquet**, **Eric Bartholomew** (or Morecambe), **Peter Haigh** who later came to live in Wheathampstead for a short while and many more.

Monday was always the quietest night of the week, but as the week progressed so did the punters, and by Friday and Saturday night it was really difficult to get to the bar. **Christmas** time we had three weeks solid of **parties** booked in for both lunchtime and evening parties, companies using us from all over. During all the time I worked here I can honestly say we never had a single spot of trouble. If there was someone a little unsteady **Mrs Rose** would see them safely off the premises. Mr and Mrs Rose were wonderful hosts, both very entertaining and hard working. It was a good life, like a party every night, people came in looking all glum but always left cheerful.

During the sixties I brought a mothering [nursing] chair at a one-off auction in the Memorial Hall. On seeing this chair at the end of the auction sitting alone outside the hall I asked one of the organisers if I could have it for all the money I had left in my purse, "Oh, go on!", they said. So I bought this dear little chair which I still have in my possession for the grand cost of 22 and a half pence. When I became a little richer, I had Mr and Mrs Frost reupholster it for me at a cost of £80.

**Mr and Mrs Cory Wright** who had lived at **Four Limes** for many years eventually sold up and moved to **Mackerye End House**. This was very sad because it was **Graham Dangerfield** the naturalist who moved in with his menagerie of smellies turning the Cory Wright's immaculate landscaped gardens into a smelly quagmire.

### **A few nicknames I remember:**

**Dimple Fuller** (Evelyn), **Bubby Coates** (Ruth), **Lefty Wright** (Brian), **Polly Shields** (Brian), **Wobblers Wright** (Michael), **Oddy Brandon** (Les senior and Brian junior), **Noggy Potter** (Eric), **Lulla** (Valerie Martin) last but not least one name which I know. I was called was **battle axe**.....?

I do hope this jogs a few memories and will gladly like to hear from any who have remembered me, good or bad.

After living at **44 Marford Road**, I married **Anthony Penny** and we moved to **Caesars Road**. Living there for forty years we raised our two daughters **Deborah** and **Yvonne**. In **2004** when my husband retired, we joined our daughters in the west. The girls live in **Glastonbury** while we live 6 miles away very happily in **Wells** home of my ancestors.

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