*Typist’s Note: The interviewer’s comments have been underlined for ease of reading*

**Mill Street Memories – Allan Bailey by John Smith**

We must have been one of the last families in Mill Street, we moved in in 1953 approximately when I was a couple of years old and we initially lived in Pound Lane in Fordington next to the Church, between the Church, well between the Moule Institute and Holloway Road, No.1 Pound Lane. It is now 1 Pound Lane but at the time it was no 1 and no 2 Pound Lane because it was 2 cottages, absolutely tiny they were. We lived there for a couple of years and then we moved down to Mill Street, 24 Mill Street which was at the top end of Mill Street not in the particular are we think of as being typical of Mill Street, we moved into a bakery which had been my great grandparents and it was a very extensive house. The bakery closed just after the war in 1949/50. The house had become increasingly derelict since then when my first memories of the property are when my great grandparents were living there, it was a traditional family house with multiple generations there. There were 4 I think generations living there when I first knew it, my great grandparents, a couple of my great aunts, one of their sons and then another generation as well, which was quite surprising because it was quite small as a house – bedroom wise but everyone just piled in together in those days, there wasn’t any overcrowding restrictions, people were very lucky to have anywhere to sleep.

It was a big old house, Alfie Otten who is a real local historian who knows a lot about it, thinks that at one time it was a farmhouse, the land attached to the bakery was quite extensive and now comprises all of what is now Riverside Crescent.

Also, on the other side of Mill Street, there were stables and store houses, I guess for the making of bread for the corn and I daresay that some of that came out of Fordington Mill out of the back door.

Grandfather also had a big property on the other side of the river, another big barn which became Hobson & Matthews, the painters, I think now that Mill Street Housing has bought it and they are going to convert it to houses or build something there, anyway... a very big old house when we moved in and the shop had closed sometime before but everything attached to the shop was still there and also the ovens and so on in the bakery were still there but everything had been thrown into the actual working room and it was quite honestly, it was to... us kids still went in there but it was too dangerous even for children to go there because there was just so much stuff there and it was just falling down.

At this time, some of the bedrooms weren’t useable as the water was coming through the roof and the house had gas but no electricity, we did have mains plumbing but that was quite a recent introduction. It was quite interesting to note that when it was a house with about a dozen people living in the house and also a bakery with perhaps 4 or 5 people working in the bakery, there was one toilet and there was no washing facilities, which was fairly typical at the time, there was a standing tap in the back yard and there was an open gully which served the kitchen for drainage, of course being boys we used that to pee in, as you would quite naturally.

The property was as I said quite extensive and the grounds were fairly extensive. At one time, it must have been almost self contained because there was a piggery, an orchard, pigeon lofts and a fruit garden as well and one of my standing memories is when my great grandparents were still there, almost every available space in the house was filled with fruit, bottled fruit which had obviously been picked and bottled after the harvest. I assume that they sold that in the shop because I don’t see how they could have used it all otherwise, which would have been another source of income from it.

We moved down there in 1953/54. My dad was a slaughter man; he worked at Lears Slaughterhouse, round in Kings Road. Mother didn’t work, she was bringing us up and father used to play football for Dorchester Football Club – The Magpies but he had stopped by this time. During the war he had been in the Royal Navy, a sailor on landing craft, they took him from Dorset to America to be trained and then brought him back again. He was actually on the landing craft in Normandy which landed the tank regiment, known as Hobarts Funnies. After Normandy, they did various things, they took part in the invasion of the islands in the Scheldt Estuary and they did a lot of transporting of relief and supplies back onto the beaches.

Dad was working as a slaughter man and he was working six and a half to seven days mostly because he also worked on a small holding at Tolpuddle and of course the animals had to be fed. My family had history in Dorchester, we were actually Barrett’s. The Barrett family came from Sherborne in the 1850’s and somehow they became quite well known and several brothers seemed to have moved down at the same sort of time and they were all builders, relatively skilled workmen, self employed and so on. There were cobblers, carpenters, builders and there are still some remnants of the family, Barrett’s the double glazing people in Dorchester now. There used to be a building firm at Puddletown called Barrett’s and so on, there are still a few Barrett’s around. They all came from the same stem.

A chap who came from Sherborne in about 1850 was Caleb Barrett, now he became very well known and he was known as Coley Barrett, he was a porter, a coal porter but he must also have been everybody in the family seem to have been attached to 2 main things, either the market in Dorchester, we had two markets, a cattle market and an ordinary market or the fishing industry off Chesil Beach in Abbotsbury and there are a lot of connections in the families between the two things. Coley was a very well known, local character I believe, I don’t know how his reputation was made but I assume that he was the principal porter for one of the auctioneers that would seem to be the thing but as I said he had been a coal porter at one time. I’m afraid that no one seems to know any longer. He had the usual half dozen children at the time and my great grandfather Charles Albert Barrett was born about 1870 or something and he became, what was known as a general dealer which meant that he just bought and sold things at the market, became the middle man for people at the market and just evened out the surpluses and the deficiencies in things. However, at some point, some money must have rolled up because they bought the bakery at 24 Mill Street sometime just before or during the First World War, it had previously been owned by someone called Dodge I believe. My great grandmother was Emeletta Tanswell which is a very well documented family locally and nationally. Now she was a servant previously and somehow, the money was gathered and they did buy this shop and they made a success of it, it was in my great grandmother’s name – Emeletta, probably for tax reasons, I would think. My family had a great aversion to paying tax on anything if they could possibly avoid it.

Certainly the general management of the shop was given to my great grandmother. Great Grandfather was a still a general dealer at this time although before the war he was a general dealer, during the war even though he would have been coming up to 50 at the time, he did join up as did a number of other people of that age from this area. Now, whether they did that, whether it was entirely patriotic, they did that, it would certainly have been a major factor, but I think that they also quite like the idea of getting away from the day to day grind of life in Dorchester and getting paid for it. A number of people that I’ve spoken to have these reminiscences I’ve heard have said that the first time they’ve ever had beds of their own to sleep in was when they went into the services. Likewise, the first time they got to keep their pay was when they went into the services, otherwise, when they were younger, their parents would have had it and just after they were married their wives would just have had it of course but there were number of questions about that.

When they joined, they were too old for first line service but they were joining up as the service battalions who were the people who built the trenches, laid the railways and everything else. So theoretically, it was certainly not a cushy number but it was a bit of an adventure for them as well, they were doing their patriotic duty. Somehow Great Grandfather ended up in the Royal Air Force, not at all sure how. He started off in one of the Dorset battalions and then he became part of the RAF regiment, as it was the RAF, it had to be very late in the war, it would have to be 1917/18 because before that of course, it was the Royal Flying Corp before it was reorganized. Anyway, he went away and did that and my other great grandparents did exactly the same thing from the same family so I think there must have been a local movement towards doing this during the war. So great grandfather came back after the war, great grandmother was running the shop and great grandfather was being quite successful in his dealings and so on, he was a very big man, Jumbo they called him, very big man, very authoritative. People would not have argued with him. One of the things I’ve often wondered is whether anybody ever had the nerve to ask for credit in the shop, I doubt it somehow.

The business carried on till after the Second World War when they were getting older and there were no obvious children to take the business over and so it was closed down. My great grandparents moved out. I understand that my paternal grandfather owned the property at this time but I don’t have any records of that at all. We moved in there in 1953/54 and as I say, myself, my sister and my mum and dad and I started at Fordington Infants School, next door. We were very lucky, it was one of those traditional family places where my aunty lived next door with her children, two doors down lived my uncle with his children and at the bottom of the garden, if you hopped over into Hardy Avenue, my great uncle Bert lived with his wife and just down the bottom of Holloway Road, my great aunty Nora Lake lived as well and there were family everywhere so it was very complacent, very safe place to grow up in. It’s got a reputation nowadays, people have got completely the wrong idea, it was never the Wild West which people make it out to be in my recollection. As children, we were wild, just a gang and just went round and did what we wanted to, nobody interfered with us very much but it was quite something having the whole of Fordington as a playing ground. We were in gangs, although I say it, there was never any violence from any grownups at all, us kids just used to fight and fight and fight but that was just boys I’m afraid. We had a great childhood. When I first moved in there, the bottom end of Mill Street flats was still very much in its original condition with all of its old alleyways and the old houses still there. But gradually over the next few years, slum clearance had started, there were a number of children from poor families at that time but as the houses began to be pulled down, people would move away and the original Poundbury council estate was built to move the people out of Mill Street and of course by this time, the Mill had been converted into flats, which also provided a playground for us because all of the public areas we just used to play touch and catch and things in there. I have very few memories of the old bottom Mixen Lane part of Mill Street if you like, just a jumble of crowded houses, there was a sweet shop down there, the roads were mud, the tracks between the houses were mud, the floors in the houses were earth and so on but we were considerably luckier where we were than the people who lived in those houses because we had a small family, just the two of us whereas a lot of people were living in much more overcrowded conditions. There was a sweet factory still there at the back of Hardy Avenue, the sweet factory was at the bottom of Hardy Avenue where the National Tyre Service place is now, just by the alley which leads out onto Kings Road. The sweet factory used to suffer from bad batches of sweets because it was an awful job, just imagine boiling sugar up in the summer surrounded by wasps but sometimes they used to dump stuff which hadn’t worked so well and that was quite a game trying to get hold of that, everybody wanted the sweets but it was also the fun of doing it. Trying to avoid the people who owned the place, the girls who worked there who didn’t want all these kids running around all the time and also the wasps, there were millions and millions of wasps and we used to get stung and stung, so the sweet factory was still there but then the individual houses began to be pulled down and quite honestly, nobody ought to regret that at all because it was quite disgraceful. Although the houses, people talk about the housing conditions, although the actual housing as a housing unit was probably no worse than it was for agricultural buildings on farms, there were still agricultural farm labourers cottages were always disgracefully inadequate and the individual cottages were no worse than they would have been if they had been on a farm but what made Mill Street different was the density of it, simply the density of the accommodation because not only did you have the rows of tiny little terraced houses all sharing toilets, probably sharing stand pipes for water as well, there were also tenement blocks there which you don’t often see mentioned or don’t often see pictures of but there were tenement blocks as we know tenement blocks in Glasgow and so on, perhaps with six housing units in them, they were pretty awful by this time, they had been very heavily used at the time.

So when I was there, I really have no memories of Mill Street at its height, I would think that the vision most people have of it is as Thomas Hardy describes from the mid 1850’s and so on and certainly whilst there were still some of the old characters around, most of the characters had gone by this time, they were long gone, dead or been moved out, there were a few around but I don’t know enough about that, you will have to talk to some of the older residents of the area.

We were very lucky, we had a bigger house, one of the things that we did always have was transport. My great grandfather, Charles L Barrett when the shop closed, he had a very luxurious car, he had a Ford V8 Pilot which he kept in one of the store areas. My uncle Bert who had been a driver in the Desert Rats during the war, a lorry driver and worked for Adams on London Road at this time, his job on a Sunday morning was to polish the car and then on a Sunday afternoon, great grandfather and great grandmother would go off in this beautiful, shining Ford V8 Pilot and go out for their Sunday afternoon drive and we used to go sometimes and have a picnic basket, very posh but we did always have transport in one form or another which was unique down there because with his work, Dad had the use of a land rover so our family by this time, my father’s father – my grandfather – Jack had moved to Milborne and the family were all at Milborne St Andrew and there were a number of them out there and we always had the transport to move about so we could get out of the area quite easily.

We were also, as a family... another thing was, we had a number of different, a very diverse family. Believe it or not but my maternal grandfather was a Yorkshire man and he was born in Keighley. So we had this Dorset agricultural background and he was a toolmaker, he had been a toolmaker, that what his trade was, very highly skilled man and so he came from Keighley and I think he married up there but I guess during the depression after the first world war, the family seemed to move South and at one time, he worked at Whiteheads in Portland where they were building the torpedoes at the time and then I guess, he moved to Mere in Somerset, at this time, he had no work as a toolmaker and he was going round on his motorbike – cobbling, cobbling people’s shoes up. Eventually he got a job, they moved to Gloucester and he got a job at Gloucester Aircraft where he was a toolmaker and he became the Chief Quality Control person on fuselages, so on the very final.... he had a dye and when his dye went on an aircraft fuselage it was ok, he said that it had been built properly and they built the first 2000 Hawker Hurricanes, the ones that fought in the Battle of Britain and later on went and built the Tempest and Typhoons and so on and he worked on the Meteors and Javelins and all of the rest of it, a highly skilled man, that’s the point I’m trying to make, but also highly politicised of course, very strong, very staunch Methodist labour people, he wouldn’t want to hear Winston Churchill described as an unconditional hero, he always knew better than that.

So, he was a very highly skilled man and he left Gloucester, shortly before, they were the biggest aircraft manufacturers in the world, which seems impossible to believe now but before the second world war, most aircraft factories were very small time outfits and we call them Gloucester but of course it was Hawker who did all the designs and Folland who later on designed a lot of their aircraft as well, very well done.

After the war, he stayed there until, I guess 1957, which was just about when our aircraft industry was being closed down, they closed Gloucester’s and one of my memories, and I was very small, it must have been 1960 was seeing the final fly past of the Gloucester aircraft across the skies in Gloucester when they did close it down.

Anyway, the point of all this is that he came to live with us in Mill Street as well by which time he was... I won’t say any of that.

So, our family unit was grandfather, his daughter – my mum, my dad and myself and my sister. Father and Grandfather never got on I don’t think. When mum and dad got married in Gloucester, they had a coach from Dorchester to go there, to take all the family which was quite an expedition in those days, unfortunately, there was a bit of an altercation and Grandfather Joe got punched in the nose from somebody which as he was a proper Yorkshire man and not shy it probably wasn’t a great surprise but anyway, so that was our family there. We were very happy, I went to Fordington St George’s Infant School as we all did and that was fine, I’ve got no memories of that at all so it must have been good. Mrs Dennison was our headmistress, it was a real Victorian school just two big rooms and we didn’t do anything but play I don’t think.

Our next school, at 7, we went to Colliton Street Boys School which was a very different and at this time they, boys from Mill Street were simply pushed into the remedial classes, there was no real attempt at education as such, we were just perceived as being louts, not louts, that was the wrong word but just oiks I suppose. Although later on, some must have did ok but as a form of education is was an absolute disgrace. The school was a Victorian school, no facilities whatsoever, it was designed to feed the grammar school with the more academic people and many of them did very well but it was pretty useless for the rest of us. We had no school grounds, no playing fields and so we used to, in the winter and the summer, we used to have to walk either from Colliton Street in Dorchester either to the old Magpies ground which is where Tesco’s is now or down to Fordington playing fields in Kings Road. They were the only facilities we had. So there was no changing room for us at any of these thing, we used to get changed on the terraces or on the side of the field, regardless of the weather and then at 4 o’clock they used to tell us to go home, remember the first time we went down to Dorchester town to the Magpies ground, they said go home, I had no idea where I was, I didn’t go to that end of town, we were so local to Fordington that we only really knew the bottom end of High East Street, Salisbury Street and Icen Way and around Fordington Green, we really didn’t know very much else, but that was not a good experience and we all took our 11+ and quite honestly, we might have as well saved the paper we wrote it on, there was no chance.

I don’t think it was done in an entirely nasty way, I think there was a degree of paternalism going on in the town at the time which was run by a serious of councillors and people who ran well known local businesses, estate agents, the auctioneers, one of the saddlers – Frank Mills was heavily involved in it and I think there was a degree of paternalism where they thought..... our parents couldn’t afford the school uniforms and so on and they... I would hope that it hadn’t all been so nasty as I suggested.

Did you go to Salisbury Field? That wasn’t used as a school thing?

No, but there was great rivalry because Fordington Green was where our gang went to and Salisbury Fields had their own little group of people who came more from Icen Way side of Dorchester and on Bonfire Night for instance, there would be bonfires on both those places but for the couple of months beforehand, we spent all our time burning the other one’s bonfire down and just generally fighting. It was terrible, I mean some of the firework injuries ... my sister was very lucky, a big firework was thrown at her and it landed in her hood and she just flicked it out just before it went off, another guy lost an eye, it was pretty rough, in some of the fights, we were pretty nasty for quite small children, just heaving bricks at each other. So, I stayed there until I was 11 and then Dorchester Modern School and that was it really, that was the education we got.

When I finished at Modern School with my O levels, there was a chance to go to Hardye’s which was the grammar school to do my A’s but it was practically impossible by that time, I would have been so far behind trying to catch up on those subjects, my O’s weren’t brilliant.

I went to work for the Royal Insurance in Napper’s Mite at that time, it was very good. My first boss was Lieutenant Colonel Miles who owned Wareham House which later on became the Trumpet Major, he had been a Lieutenant Colonel in the Gurkha’s in the war and he was a big man, very authoritative and when you are a little 16 year old, sniffy, first time clerk, when he rollocked you, you stayed rollocked. He was too used to shouting at Gurkha’s to have a lot of time for us. I worked there for a couple of years and then I went to the NHS in 1969 and there I stayed for the rest of my working life. Working at various different places around here; I worked at the original West Dorset Group Hospital Management Committee, it still had the structure then from the 1948 setting up of the NHS so it was a Hospital Management Committee and we ran the non mental health hospitals in West Dorset, so Dorset County, Weymouth & District, Bridport, Yeatman, Lyme and just the hospital units. The mental health hospitals which were basically Herrison, just outside of Dorchester, now known as Charlton Down and Cold Harbour which was a hospital for severely mentally and physically disabled children where they had a disastrous fire in the late 70’s I think, a ward burnt down and a number of children died. In 1974, we went through the first of many NHS re-organisations and they moved us out to Herrison, we became part of the West Dorset District Health Authority and we took over not only the Hospitals but took over the Community Health of Clinics from the County Council where they had been before. It then just became the NHS nightmare really, very proud to have worked in the NHS in those days, it was a very good place to work, very good people.

What is now Kings Road playing fields, is that during your time that they sort of ceased being a meadows?

No, I can only remember it as it is, it was there as it is but I believe it was in the 30’s when it was levelled and the land reclaimed. I remember when the steam engine was put there, from Edison’s, because Edison’s had a big yard and they were the only place in Dorchester which actually owned a whistle, you know a time whistle for clocking on and clocking off. So you had the Eddison whistle and it was a very big place, they were one of the major providers of ploughing engines originally before farms started being mechanised in I guess 1850, 1860 something like that and later on, their stuff was used for road rolling, asphalting the public roads. Originally all of the traffic on the main road went on the first bridge by the Mill Street flats and we used to go swimming out at Greys Bridge which was originally the swimming hole for one of the schools, it was a swimming baths originally, there is still bits and pieces, you can see where the concrete was but there had been a big polio outbreak in Dorchester in the late 1940’s which came from that river, I can remember swimming in there quite young, so it couldn’t have harmed, I don’t know, I wonder just how safe it was then. My cousin had polio, there was a number of children who, because of course polio is a very serious illness.

So, what were they, iron legs?

Iron’s on the legs, that’s how I remember my cousin and so on. But it was a big outbreak but it doesn’t seem to be documented. Perhaps, it’s got to wait another generation before that’s done. Yes, we used to go swimming out there, the traffic was just as bad, in the summer, the traffic was very bad in Dorchester, to get back across the road, from the far side of Greys Bridge of course could be a bit of a nightmare and I was knocked down on there one night, a car went over my foot, my ankle actually and Dr Fullerton who was a well known local character came along, he had an original Aston Martin DB something or other, an Irish doctor, smoked all the time, horses.

His place was up the top of town, the big house, specially designed as a sort of health centre

Anyway, he came by and picked me up, put me in his car and took me up his surgery, patched me up and told my dad to come up and get me.

So, it was a really different NHS then?

I was saying earlier on about my great grandfather volunteering for the first world war and the trenches, for service but my actual grandfather, my dad’s dad has got a very interesting history at this time. He was born in 1896 and Looke Farm in Puncknowle near Beaminster. He was an illegitimate. His birth certificate has the name of a father written on it but is crossed out and no further farther has been added to it and it says, words to the effect of ‘Document altered in the presence of the registrar’. Anyway, so, Grandfather’s mother later on married someone called Bailey and I don’t know how official the adoption is but after that he was always referred to as Jack Bailey, Jack Albert George Bailey. I think actually Albert George Bailey but everybody called him Jack and he became a very well known character but he must have been very strong willed, he was born in 1896. In 1911, these Baileys were in Mill Street at the time of the 1901 census. 1911 census, he’s described as a fish hawker, he must have joined up quite early in the First World War, he became a sergeant and then became a private and then he became a sergeant and he’s going up and down. In 1917, he won a Military Medal for rescuing people from the no man’s land and in 1918, he won a Distinguished Conduct Medal for something similar and it must have been quite.... I can’t imagine what he had to do to, from being a fish hawker, I know that the promotion would have been quick and so on in the services, in those conditions, but he must have been a very outstanding character to do that with that sort of background.

Dorset Military Museum haven’t got proper records of these medals and it’s not on the forces war records either, although I’ve told them. Because I’ve got the citations for them both and the medals are still around, I’ve got pictures of the medals but I can’t understand why the forces war records haven’t got complete records, I really don’t understand it.

I know a lot of it was destroyed, in the second world war, a lot of the records from the first world war were bombed, weren’t they. But at the same time, it seems pretty soppy to me that the records aren’t just there. Particularly at this time, when people are making such an effort to record the First World War. He must have been quite successful because he came back from war as they all did and I suppose tried to forget about it and get on with his life. He went back to almost the same life he had before. No official recognition of it, of his service, they went the way like all the other millions I assume. He went back to doing almost what he did before. He was connected with the fish trade at Abbotsbury, they did sane fishing, all the villagers would have shares in the boat or in the catch rather and what they would do is, there would be boats on Chesil Bank by where the coastguard houses are now, I believe and they would row out towing a net behind them, with the tide coming in at right angles to the net and pull the far end back in, pull the whole thing back in and hopefully you’ve got mackerel, which is what they were after. So grandfather was very involved in that trade.

We’re moving pictures of that on Sunday, Bridport Museum have got pictures of that on Chesil Beach

It was all going on when I was small. I can remember when we were small, we would go down on a Sunday afternoon and they would be hauling the nets in, of course what they hated more than anything was jellyfish because Jellyfish just fill the nets up and they’re a nightmare to get rid of and they just stopped you working but apparently, the people in the village would go out and help for a share of whatever it was.

The Lugger in Chickerell was also a base and they’ve also got a lot of late 50’s colour pictures.

Father and his family, they used to live down there at weekends, on the beach, you know, it was quite good. He carried on and he was very successful but a bit of a rogue, wouldn’t pay tax, didn’t believe in it, something to do with his experiences of things and all very unofficial. But I was very lucky as a boy because he would be buying and selling, particularly with a lot of old country houses closing down and being demolished, quite big places, I had the most lovely toys, at Christmas, I had a Hornby O Gauge sets, boxed sets. You see them on Antiques Roadshow now and think Whoooa, check that out!

Although we didn’t have electricity, I had some of the early electric ones as well with the third rail that they used and of course, it didn’t matter if you were running clockwork trains on them. So we were very lucky and the point I started making a long time ago was that we had all these different sources, we had much more varied inputs from people than a lot of the families did down there who had been in Mill Street for generations and generations. So we always had newspapers which wasn’t the case for everyone.

Were they delivered or did you have to go fetch them?

No, they were delivered. The milkman used to come up the lane and so on.

Politics wise, there is little point in West Dorset being anything other than Conservative, but I mean the family were never Conservative with a big C, if you see what I mean, they never supported because they had been working on the land for generations, all the farmers were Barrett’s.

They knew farmers were out for themselves. There’s this fairytale about merry England, you know, it’s just complete nonsense. When you see pictures of rose covered cottages and that, well they may have been rose covered but they probably had 20-30 people living inside them. Of course the cities were exactly the same, Great grandfather came from Keighley in Bradford, he was a .......... as well as everything else, his daughter, my aunt Mary, married Bill Maddocks who was a convener at the time for the textile workers because they lived in Stroud and there was a big centre of cloth production what they call west country cloth which was very high quality, stuff that Rolls Royce put in their cars and things. The cloth mills went up to Oxford, Witney, all the places like that, a very big industry. I guess I’m one of the few people born in Dorset who has actually been in a working cloth mill. A tremendous noise of it all, people just rushing about, all very different but there would be a number of cloth mills working, particularly in Stroud which was where they came from, a little place called Leonard Stanley, just outside Stroud and there were a number of very high quality cloth mills, I guess because of the sheep and originally because of the, same as Yorkshire, very fast running rivers, you know. Of course, that all closed down and Uncle Bill was a very strong labour person, he ended up as general secretary of the textile workers, bleachers, dyers, something other else and something other else and he actually stood as an MP for Stroud a couple of times. So he had this very.... a fairly militant at the time.

We did have this very diverse background in a lot of ways.

When did you leave Mill Street then?

Eventually, it was most probably the most traumatic parts, things that ever happened to me. Gradually they were pulling the houses down from the Mill end of the street up, they were pulling the houses down and one day, I used to go home from school for my dinner and I remember ever so clearly, I got home one day and there was a JCB effort knocking down the wall of the house, not our wall but the wall between the two houses, I couldn’t believe it, it hadn’t been mentioned, my family don’t talk about things until they, you know. I was traumatised by it, absolutely traumatised by it. Then I think that was probably a Thursday and we moved out on the Saturday/Sunday, it was pulled down on the Monday. All of it just went.

What sort of year was that?

That would have been 1962 I think. I was 10 so it may have been 1961. I was in my last year at the Boys School then, so I would have been coming up to 11. My birthday’s in July, so I’m one of those unfortunate people who was always one of the youngest in the class. We moved from there up to Victoria Park which was a council housing estate and it was just awful, just awful. You know, there was nobody to play with, all your mates had gone and most of them had gone to the Poundbury council estate. We were in this other one and I didn’t know anybody. I used to go down to Mill Street every night, catch a bus down there or go on my bike but it was pretty.... we weren’t made very welcome.

Where did the others in Victoria Park come from?

Well, I don’t know, there’s a thing about Mill Street about being a sort of impoverished area but there was another area just as bad which was the Grove. From the top of town down on the left hand side, that was all tenements, but big tenements and that had been, that was probably I would have thought, more, whatever the words is than Mill Street and so a lot of them had come from there. People talk about Mill Street but every town had its area like that, it had to have, because it’s where poor people live. You know, there’s nothing particularly bad about it, it’s just poor people, it’s the cheapest place for people to live.

Although, I’ve heard from various other people, not everybody in Mill Street was poor, there were big families there, there were, like the Edwards and there was the Barrett’s, there were people with money there but chose to live there because they were out of the way. When things are a bit so so......

Were there houses beyond your house, what is now the garage side, going up the path towards Dorchester.

Yes, we had that big site which was Riverside Crescent and that there was another series of other terraced houses again. At right angles to the river, there were some on the riverbank, quite nice houses but then there were a series of terraces at right angles, leading out to London Road, but it didn’t go that far, because around the back, the dividing thing about the property was the brook which ran in a sort of semi circle....

Oh yes, I’ve seen it on the maps...

That’s right. That’s where the boundaries were, that’s where there still is, you can still see lock gates, if you’re on what we call the bank, the actual pathway alongside the river with the garages on your left, when you get to the bottom there. There are a lot of gates there, which were used to control that at some point. So that’s why Alfie thinks it was a farm you see. Because it is such a distinct property and by the time that we left (1962), almost everything else had gone because a lot of it had been bought by the Mill Street Housing Association and either renovated, some of it or mostly, it had been knocked down and cleared, because Durnovaria Court, the flats down there, of course they were being built at this time as well.

It seems quite likely that it was some sort of farm or small holding there before but I can’t find any maps at all going back that far, going back further than the ones I’ve shown you, not detailed enough to do anything with. I don’t know how to get into the deeds and so on to find out who owned what. Our family properties were 21 Mill Street, 22 and 23 which had been pulled down, sometime around the turn of the century for some reason 24 which was our house and next to that there were 25, 26 and 27 which are the three houses still standing, there are still three houses, the only houses left in Mill Street.

That was the Voss’s, one of them anyway

Yes, but the Ottens next door - that was Alfie.

His father wouldn’t move out or something

Yes, that’s right, he wouldn’t move out, he was a bugger. They were quite a family, the kids have done brilliantly, you can see Alfie’s pictures, I never knew he could draw, never drew.

That particular building and that plot of land had stayed as a plot for a long time and there were some sort of shenanigans about how it was actually sold to Ricardo’s who built the houses which are there now at the present time but I don’t know the story. You’re going to have to edit all this.....

If too many of my family hear about this, I’ll get into trouble.

So that was it, we were moved up there, I went to the Modern School the year after, yo-yoed about a bit, made friends as you do and settled down to it, that was our family home and unfortunately, now at the moment, my father has just gone into a nursing home and so we’re just clearing the house at the moment.

So he still lived there....

Yes, my mum only died the Christmas before last and Dad’s gone downhill quite a lot recently and so a couple of months ago, something had to be done, not a couple of months but last month, he had to go into a nursing home, it’s a great shame, because so much of the family stuff has gone and of course, one of the reasons why I wanted to be involved in the Mill Street business was that the people who actually know all about the history are actually gone now, we’re just trying to catch a few memories because if you think that the oldest person now would be, after 1920’s something wouldn’t they be. The very oldest person would be.

You won’t get anybody with any memories of before the First World War and yet, 20 years ago, I had my aunty Ethel who knew everything about everybody in Mill Street, who knew all the gossip and she had stories, she just knew everything.

As far as the actual Mill Street Mission goes, we used to go there for Sunday School, it was open as a youth club at the time as well but we used to go there for Sunday School because our parents made us go. I think it was sixpence or something. We always had these very kind and very well meaning spinsters who used to come down, genuinely kind and interested. Really, they couldn’t do anything with a bunch of kids like us. It was just a question of keeping us occupied for a couple of hours on a Sunday afternoon but we had to sing hymns and have bible readings, everyone wanted you to read the bible all the time for some reason but I think the old ladies were a bit overwhelmed, all I can remember about Mill Street Mission is they had a really nice rocking horse, a big rocking horse, you could probably get 2 or 3 people on it, we used to have fun on that and also the thatch roof had burnt down in the 30’s or whenever it was and had been replaced by tin and it was just the noise of the rain on the roof, absolutely deafening because it was a big place and of course only being open on a Sunday, it had a musty smell, damp and everything.

When you left Mill Street, that was it for the Mission, you didn’t go back?

I think it had been pulled down by then actually, I think it had gone by that time. That was one of the things that went as they knocked things down. It was the last thing that went in that particular area but I don’t remember it, it might even still have been there but just as a shell, it wasn’t being used by then.

We’ve all got through it somehow and we’ve all done pretty well really, one way or another and people do like.... it’s funny, you get such different responses from people, people in Fordington lived 100 yards away who wouldn’t dare go near the place, you know, it was just stories, but the actual bottom part of Mill Street, people moved in there who were forced out, if they weren’t liked, didn’t fit in for some reason, they were forced out. There was a conscientious objector in the first world war who eventually committed suicide because of the consensus of the people was so strongly against him and that would apply to any strangers or whatever, it would be interesting to find out, that tithe map shows who owns the properties, it would be interesting to find out how people got tenancies there, you know, I don’t know how you would do that.

There wouldn’t be any rent books or anything, any official documentation at all, it would just be interesting to find out because there does seem to have been a core of people, families who stayed there for generations but there were always other families drifting in and out, a lot of people who were day labourers in the markets for instance, just hired by the day on market days really.

But strangely enough, where did the people at Louds Mills live?

Fulling Mill, most of the people in the census described themselves as agricultural labourers obviously as they were working in the fields.

There were big men down there, there must have been people with money down there, not money in bags but there must have been money about somewhere, because I say, the Edwards came out of it, other families, people would have wealth one week and then would just be gone.

Our family were never a drinking family until me, but there was a lot of hard drinking done, a lot of hard drinking and it was very much a male society, men would just ignore children, that was for the wife to look after, market dealers would... well they had their own little world of course and they used to drink in the New Inn in South Street, do you know the New Inn?

Yes

Which was a real old spit and sawdust pub, that was where a lot of them used to meet, because there were always the side deals going on with one thing and another and not being able to borrow money from banks or anything, of course, you would borrow it from people, you would have to make sure you were well in, if you were ambitious, and a lot of people did come out of there, you would have to be trusted by them and it was a little world of its own.

So when David said the policemen didn’t go down there, well they never went anywhere, the police did as little as they possibly could.

How many pubs were there down there?

When I was there, they had gone, the only ones down there were the Swan and then the Union Arms which is the Meeting Hall now. That was a nice pub.

There used to be another one, The Kings Head and the Queens Head, Alfie keeps finding new ones all the time. It’s odd but the pubs, I suppose they always seemed to be busy, we, as a family didn’t drink really, I don’t know why.

It was always the men, I remember little old ladies going up to the Union Arms with a jug and bottle and getting a jug of British Wine or whatever they used to call it, horrible sherry stuff.

We used to go up there and buy sweets at the tap window but the landlord, he’d make sure everyone else was served before he came out to serve us little kids, a penny liquorice please.

There must have been a lot but whether they were pubs in the sense that we know them but mostly they were just houses, probably just beer houses, not spirits, they didn’t have licences for it.

The Swan was still going when I first came here because I used to play skittles and for various things and for the White Hart, I used to play down there and as you say, in those days, even then, which was late 80’s early 90’s it was all male and the same round at the other one on the high street, it was all males.

That’s right, you didn’t see women in pubs, you really didn’t. When I started going out with girls, the girls did go into pubs but not on their own, there were only certain pubs, the Sun Inn at Lower Burton, that used to be run by the most vile, repulsive, bastard you can imagine, it was much smaller then, just a front room, like the Blue Raddle when it was the Dolphin, it was absolutely tiny if you remember, you couldn’t go into the Sun, take a girl there. He would just be so objectionable and rude that you would just go on, all he wanted to do was sit down and play cards with his mates.

The Union Arms always seemed to be very busy and the last couple in there had a couple of great big dogs didn’t they? Do you remember that?

No, they had gone by then.

It was a Quaker Place then.

As far as religion goes, we were always brought up as Church of England, Mill Street is dominated by the church tower, we never went to church at all, St George’s was obviously a church school, sometimes we went to St George’s for some certain lessons, certain occasions, which was ok but they had a vicar up there called the Reverend Brookes he re-introduced the sheep, when they roast the sheep on the green. I think he reintroduced that. He wasn’t liked, he was always having collections for Africa and he’d say don’t forget your envelopes children, don’t forget our envelopes.

People who had nothing at all, having to give money to him.

Where did he live? Did he live in what is now Fordington Hill House? Or did he live in the one by the Church?

I think it was the one by the church. It was very different, when I went back up there a few years ago, it seemed a very different layout, because between the church and overlooking Mill Street, there was a cottage there which you approached by a little pathway, I don’t think it’s there anymore but it was sort of opposite No.1 Pound Lane.

Probably where those flats are now.

Yes, definitely.

Probably the path went along there and down to the graveyard, because there is still a gate there.

The graveyard is full of Bailey’s and Barrett’s and everybody, we’ve got quite a big plot there and I was quite surprise, I was down there, I took my daughter and granddaughter for a walk around there the other day and I don’t know the rules about this but there seems to be quite a lot of extra urns appeared on my great grandparents grave.