**Mill Street Memories – James Whitty by Linda House**

How and when did your family come to the area?

I’m not sure originally but my grandfather was in the army in the Royal Artillery and as far back as I can remember, they lived at 10 Holloway Road which was adjacent to the Union Arms. My parents when they were first married lived over a shop in South Street that in the end was Fosters, the clothes shop next to the Templeman's and they lived in a flat over it and then moved to Holloway Road. My elder sister was born when they lived in the flat and then I was born when they were in Holloway Road.

My grandfather Whitty came from the Poole area originally, my grandmother her parents lived in Cambridge Road, their names were Grey and you know where the dance studio is Mr Snook had the house next door, that belonged to the Grey’s – that was my grandmother.

We lived in Holloway Road – 55. My auntie Joan that was Terry White’s mother, Terry was with me on Monday, he is a couple of years younger than me but she was widowed during the war, her husband – Len White went down on HMS Hood but his parents and family lived in Mill Street, Hardye’s Avenue around that area at the time. They lived in the cottage more or less opposite the shop by the bridge, which there are only two cottages left now the other two have been demolished. We moved round to 84 Mill Street which was the only one on that side at the time.

Linda: Right next to the river.

James: Yes, right beside the river, look out the window and there was a river right underneath you!

There was a yard beside us and a barn which belonged to the Barrett’s

Linda: Which was my great granddad.

James: That’s right and they had a farm house on the other side. I can remember them. I can remember one Christmas, my mother had been paying sixpence a week into Frenchs Newsagents in High East Street for Christmas presents and they bought me a wooden boat. Of course, that was also my birthday present as well. Anyway, Terry and my auntie Joan came round for Christmas day and we took the boat out into the yard, put it into the river on a string and Terry grabbed it and said “I want a go”, grabbed it out of my hand and the next minute it was sailing on down the river.

Linda: and you never saw it again.

James: No, never saw it again.

Linda: Your Christmas present didn’t last very long.

James: No that’s right, it was a total disaster. Of course it went on, underneath the Old Mill flats, never to be seen again. We raced down the road but of course, you couldn’t get underneath because there were gratings under there. So that was gone.

By a sad coincidence, years later in the 1960’s, my grandmother went the same way. My mother’s mother, she fell in the river by Swanbridge Caravan Park and she went down through the river, under the mill and she finished up at Louds Mill.

Linda: What was her name?

James: Barnes. I found her with two of my mates on a Sunday morning when the police arranged a search. I had been searching all the week for her, strangely enough; I was the only grandson or granddaughter that took time off from work to look for her. I took my mother and a couple of my aunties all around Cerne Abbas where she lived for a long time, looked everywhere and then the Police arranged an official search, so they did and I said to the person in charge, “well, I’m going down to Louds Mill and so two of the chaps I worked with at the time, Harry Pickersgill and Kim Smith, they came with me and went over this little wooden bridge, remember the flats that used to be there? We walked down there over the bridge and I said to them “go that way and I’ll wait here to see what they’re saying the other way” but I didn’t want to go that way because I had this feeling because I had seen a red colour in the water the day before and apparently, she was wearing a red cardigan. Here, it told me that she was going to be there, suddenly they shouted out “we’ve found her” and I walked towards them and they held me back and said “no, you don’t want to see her”, apparently rats and what have you.

That boat should go down that river, probably finished up that way, 35 years later, it did exactly the same. She lived with an auntie of mine that lived up Elizabeth Place and she had wandered out in the night. Milkman was delivering in Frome Terrace and he said that he heard somebody calling out “Peppy” which was the name of the dog she had and they think she walked along and because the river was flooded at the time, it had come over the path and she walked into the cold water and stumbled because there were bruises on her knees, stumbled and fell into the river.

Linda: What time of year was that?

James: I can’t remember off hand.

Linda: I just wondered if the cold of the water had got her as well sort of thing.

James: It was very dark and the river was flooded so it was obviously winter time. I have got cuttings somewhere; I’ll try and find them out sometime.

Linda: When you were in Mill Street, when you were living there, did you enjoy your life there?

James: Oh yes, different life altogether.

Linda: Was there lots of you lads together?

James: Not lots, it seemed to me that I was sort of the youngest. There were the Ottens...

Linda: Alfie Otten

James: There was... I can see people in my mind.

Linda: Do you remember any Damens?

James: John Damen and his brother, I can remember back when they lived in the Old Rectory, in the High Street. I actually knocked John out, put him in the hospital. We were playing cowboys and Indians at school, up at Colliton Street and of course, we used to watch cowboy films in them days and we were playing cowboys and I turned my gun round the wrong way and pretended to hit him on the back of the head like they did in the films; unfortunately, I actually hit him. He just stood there against the wall, like that. I said “come on John” – nothing. I had to get the teacher and they had to call an ambulance, took him into hospital, he was off school for several weeks. I actually knocked him out. I don’t think he ever remember it. I often see him but I never say anything. I will do one day; every time I see him I think “shall I” but no. That’s one thing I always remember.

Linda: What sort of games did you play? What did you do when you came out of school?

James: Well, I played football, fishing – down in the swimming baths.

Linda: What at Grey’s Bridge?

James: Yes. Salisbury Fields, up on the swings and the big bumper which they took away for safety say, although I don’t remember anyone getting hurt. I can remember once when we were over there at Salisbury Fields, it was obviously during the war, we were only kids you know and of course, we were giving a load of cheek to these soldiers and they suddenly started to chase us, I can remember coming down the alleyway, running across the High Street, down past the School and as I got down the bottom at the school there, my laces broke and my trousers started falling down and I was running along the road tugging them, I managed to get down over the step and they stood at the top laughing, they weren’t going to do anything to us. They were just playing, a bit of light heartedness. I never forgot that. It frightened me when my trousers started falling down, I thought they were going to catch me but they never did.

I remember having an old bike, an old post office bike it was, when you think, when I left school, I was five foot two, I was always a little shortie when I was a lad, I shot up between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. When I went into the army I was five foot eleven and three quarters. I couldn’t make six foot, they told me off. On my pay book my height is five foot eleven and three quarters. By coincidence, I asked a nurse up at the hospital back in December, she said “I want to weigh you first” and I said “I wish you wouldn’t keeping weighing me, it’s embarrassing”, anyway, I go to take my shoes off and I say “any chance you can measure me” and she said “why” and I said “well, to be honest with you, I don’t ever remember being measured since I came out of the army” and I said “when I went into the army, I was five foot eleven and three quarters, when people ask me how tall I am, I always tell them that I’m six foot one, because my father was six foot two and my grandfather was six foot four and my uncle was six foot one”, so she said “alright”. So she measured me and she said “guess what?” and I said “six foot one?” and she said “your five foot eleven and three quarters”. I said “You’re joking” and she said “no”. I said “I’m the same height I was when I was eighteen” and she said “that’s quite unusual really, because people quite often shrink, you’ve done really well to be the same height you were when you were a teenager”. So I was quite pleased about that, for all my other problems there’s nothing wrong with my bones.

We used to go fishing down by blue bridge sometimes.

Linda: What job did your dad do?

James: My father, when he first got married, he was a builder, a builder’s labourer; my uncle was a coalman (Uncle Len). My father was getting married and on the Friday, of course in them days they didn’t have honeymoon’s; he said to the Foreman “I won’t be in tomorrow morning” and the foreman said “why”. He said “I’m getting married”, “oh, are you” he said “congratulations, good luck to you” so my father left work and on the Saturday morning he got married and on the Monday he went to work, the foreman said to him “what are you doing here then”, he said “I’ve come to work”, the foreman said “you don’t work here”, he said “yes I do”, he said “no, you didn’t turn up Saturday” he said “I thought you’d finished”. He gave my dad the sack for not being there on the Saturday. So anyway, they had a labour exchange at the top of town in those days...

Linda: can you remember where it was?

James: I don’t know, I think it was next door to Savannah House which is the very last one which used to be GPO offices. He went there and they told him there were vacancies at the GPO, he got a job with the GPO and he finished up as an inspector, he finished up with permanent work, sick pay and a pension when he retired and I often think to myself now “I wonder what happened to that foreman on the builders”, he probably finished up with absolutely nothing because those firms didn’t have pensions and if it rained, bad weather, they didn’t get paid either, so I thought that foreman thought he was being clever I should imagine but it backfired, because my father was better off. Eventually he got to the position when he could offer his brother a job on there and he also got a job for his brother in law on there. It must have been a shock for my mother and father though but that’s how things were in those days.

Linda: Where did they live when they were first married?

James: I think it was in a flat over.... next to Templeman’s, then it was a butcher that I remember, Dewhurst was it?

Linda: There was a Dewhurst in South Street.

James: There was one down High East Street as well. I knew the lady that worked in there when I used to go down because every Saturday morning after we moved up to Windsor Road, I used to have to catch the bus on the corner of Marie Road there, near where your mum and dad live, go down to that Butchers, I’m sure it was Dewhurst down there, to get the meat, that was my job first thing. The lady that used to serve me, when I was working over at Southern Electric, I went to a place in Weymouth, knocked on the door and this lady answered, I said “I remember you, you used to work in the butchers in Dorchester”, she said “that’s right”, I said “I used to come in there every Saturday and get the meat for my mum”, she couldn’t remember me because I’ve changed a lot, I mean, all she’s done is got older but I’ve grown up. I think she’s gone now because the last time I saw here must have been twenty years ago, she was working in a charity shop in Weymouth. I had this old bike and I had to put my legs through.... I couldn’t sit on the saddle because I was too small.

We used to play football.

Linda: Do you ever remember being hungry? Did you always have food on the table?

James: Always, always, things were on ration but I remember my mum saying how they used to go up the town on a Saturday evening, to be butchers to get cheap stuff, of course, they never had freezers in those days, so they had to sell the stuff off cheap. You would see the women going from Mill Street and Holloway Road and they would go up the town.

I remember once, my mum was outside talking to somebody and somebody walked by and said that this shop had some chocolate in, so she and the lady she was talking to put their coats on and went straight up the town with their ration books to get some chocolate, that’s how it was in those days.

Linda: You never went hungry then?

James: No. I always seemed to have plenty of what I wanted. My mum raised four of us but I don’t ever remember being hungry.

Linda: What was your house like in Mill Street?

James: Well, we had gas lighting, the mantles which I quite often managed to break. A coal fire, we had a galvanized bath, I used to have a bath every Saturday night.

Linda: Did you all have a bath on Saturday night?

James: Yes.

Linda: Your Dad first?

James: Yes and then the kids. That’s how it was done and the bath used to hang outside, it was a sort of cottage there and the garden was on the side. You can see the fence around the garden there (showing Linda a photograph). That was outside. That’s my older sister, me, my next sister and the youngest sister. I remember we used to play firemen and fire engines in the garden, me and my cousin, friends that were there. I always remember we used to have chairs and cover them with blankets that were the fire engine. It’s amazing really.

Of course, we used to be really naughty sometimes, got out, taking birds eggs.

Linda: That was fairly normal at that time wasn’t it?

James: That was normal in those days. It’s strange to think that many years later, I used to take bird walks for the RSPB, I’ve always liked birds, I’ve always had birds, and my dad had birds. I’ve kept them and gave them up when I left school of course because I started going out with my mates to the pubs and one thing or another and then I went into the army when I was eighteen and I got a discharge after three months, I was one of the last National Service men, they didn’t really want me, they spent all the time trying to get me to sign off, told them no, I didn’t want to be in the army, so then in the end, any people like myself they said you might as well go home, we don’t want to know you, so I came out early and then a couple of months later, I met my wife and if I’d stayed in the army I wouldn’t have met my wife.

Linda: Can you remember what you were earning then?

James: When I was in the army?

Linda: Yes

James: I think I got about ten shillings a week when I was in the army. My first pay was two pounds and fifteen shillings which I had to give my mother two pounds. So for the first couple of years working, I had fifteen shillings a week, seemed to make it last. I even finished up owning a car. My first car was a 1936 Morris 10, I don’t know if you remember that programme, The Untouchables? Where they used to drive around in Prohibition days, it was one like that, big running board, big leather seats, big square job. We had twelve of us in that car one night, all managed to squeeze in and go round the pubs.

Linda: There were a lot of pubs wasn’t there?

James: Lots of pubs, you didn’t have to drive far. One day, I drove down over the High Street, passed the fish and chip shop, went to pull out into High East Street and it went bang, so I walked from there down to Walt Studley’s garage down in Holloway Road. Walt was there working, he used to work for the GPO but he worked in the garage in his spare time; I said “Walt, my car’s broken down”, “where is it” he said. “Down the bottom of the High Street” I said “Going on to the High East Street”. “Alright” he said “I’ll come up and get it”, so he came up, towed it back to his garage and he said “I’ll have a look at it in the next couple of days”, so I said “alright”. So I went back and said “How are you getting on Walt”, he said “to be honest with you, it’s not worth spending the money on, it’ll cost you more to have that drive shaft replaced than the car is worth”, so I said “what should I do?”, he said “I’ll take it down the scrap yard for you” and that was my first car. I had just passed my driving test, I was about seventeen, that happened in Fordington and I was already living up the Park. That was back in the 30’s.

Dominic’s van you notice. They used to have a shop in Trinity Street, Wine Merchants.

Linda: Yes, at the top of Antelope Walk wasn’t it?

James: Yes, that’s right. That was their van.

James: That’s Harry Burden, he used to live in that first house. His father used to work on the railways, when he retired; he worked for Corona on the lorries. Harry got married, he worked on the railways as a guard, he went to Weymouth to live then. He lives back in Dorchester now.

Linda: Did you have a toilet inside or was it outside when you were in Mill Street?

James: Outside

Linda: Did you have your own or did you have to share?

James: Our own. If I remember rightly, it was actually part of the house. Not like my grandmothers out at Cerne Abbas, when I used to have to go up the top of the garden.

Linda: Did you go to Fordington St George’s?

James: I did, when I was three years old.

Linda: What are your memories of the school? Can you remember who your teachers were?

James: Yes, Miss Kimber, she retired in 1944. She lived in Allington Road, I think if you spoke to Brian Caddy, I think he was some sort of relation to her. I think there was a chimney sweep in the same house. I can’t remember what his name was – that’s where she lived. I remember she retired in 44; I’ve got my notebook somewhere.

Miss Kimber was my first teacher.

There I got it here; William Vallard fell in the river, swept under the old mill. I haven’t got a date. Probably around 1940 that must have been.

Linda: So there were a few deaths under the mill.

James: Oh yes, I think so over the years.

Linda: I suppose quite a few people were drunk?

James: Probably because they were very fond of the pubs in those days.

Linda: Well, there wasn’t much else to do was there?

James: No. I remember my dad used to go into the Union Arms with my uncle, a chap called Slapper Payne, used to work on the railway and several others. Lofty Adams who used to live in Dagmar Road, all used to be in the Union Arms which was handy as they had a little jug and bottle. We used to go in the Jug and Bottle and Sid was there, he used to be quite miserable at times, we would knock on the little door “bottle of lemonade and a packet of crisps, Mr Rimmer please, my dad will pay” and I’d point out, he would give them to me, he wasn’t going to say no to business. Of course, then I’d say “Terry wants the same” and my cousin because he would follow me around a bit, we’d get into trouble the next day because by the time father came home, I was in bed.

Linda: What did you learn at Fordington school, what did they teach you?

James: Music, I learnt to play a drum in there. After I’d moved out I joined the Life Boys, then I joined the junior boy’s brigade and played the drum, then I left there and joined the sea cadets and played the drums. I then joined the 4th Dorset TA drums and played the drums there and I would like a pound for every time I marched through the keep playing the drum. We used to do parades, beat retreat at different places, shows – I loved that, absolutely loved that but I didn’t want to be in the regular army.

Linda: Did you learn to read at Fordington school?

James: Yes.

Linda: Was Miss Kimber a bit of a disciplinarian?

James: No, I’ve got no bad recollections of that. I think the other one was a Miss Jones there and Miss Dominy or was it Miss Dominy at the boy’s school, no. It was a Miss Jones; she used to slap your leg if you misbehaved.

Linda: Course you only had short trousers.

James: Yes

Linda: Then you went to Colliton Street.

James: Yes, a year or two early and sent me home again. Funnily enough, I took Terry, my cousin to St Georges on his first time because we used to go to school when you were three years old in those days and I took him up there and one day, we decided we weren’t going to go to school. So went off over Salisbury Fields and spent the day doing whatever we wanted. Of course, we never had watches so we were guessing what the time was, so when we thought it was time to go home, we went home and my auntie was in my house in Mill Street and of course as soon as we went in, she said “oh boys, how was school today? What have you been doing then?” so and so and so. Nothing was said, eventually my father came home from work and I heard my mother say “the boys haven’t been to school today”, we looked at each other and though how did they know we hadn’t been to school. Apparently, my auntie out of the blue decided to come and meet us from school and of course, we weren’t there and didn’t get back home until an hour after school.

So, anyway, my father gave me a clout like they did in those days, there was nothing of this human rights rubbish. It was, you’ve been naughty – you got punished, which I didn’t mind because, the one thing I didn’t want was to be kept in. Anyway Terry just stood there then his mother turned around to me dad and said “you can give him one as well Jim, he thinks just because he doesn’t have a father, he gets away with it, he’s mistaken” and my father gave him a smack as well.

I’ll never forget that.

Another favourite was if I didn’t behave myself, when I got home from school, I would have to stay in. My mother would have to take my shoes off me, so I had nothing to wear. So one day, I didn’t behave, my school plimsolls which were kept in a bag at the school, so I took them home with me one night, my mother took my shoes off you see, stayed in and had my tea and when they didn’t notice, I crept out as I’d left the plimsolls out the back door, put them on and was gone. Of course, when I got home I got a clout.

The one thing I always dreaded was not being outside. I didn’t like the idea of not being outside. That more or less was my childhood being punished that way. I can remember once up Windsor Road, some of my friends came round and knocked on the door to see if I was coming out, my mother said “no, he’s not coming out for a week”, I was up in the bedroom looking out of the window and it was terrible, I used to say to my father “give me a clout dad, go on give me a good hiding” I didn’t mind the pain because I could go out again.

I always say to people now, you’d never find me in prison because I would never do anything to keep me inside. The thought of being restricted like that.... being in hospital is exactly the same, can’t wait to get out. I was down in the old Dorchester hospital once, I was in there a week and on the Saturday, I said to the Sister “I’ve got to go home”, she said “why”, I said “I’m climbing the wall, I can’t deal with this”, she said “well, the doctor will be round tomorrow morning and we’ll see what he says”. So she told him “he’s getting hot .... staying”, so they let me out. They could see I couldn’t deal with it stuck inside. That’s one fear I’ve got. I was always out somewhere. That was how I grew up.

Linda: So even from a little boy, you were allowed to go out in the evenings and that?

James: Oh yes.

Linda: Your mum and dad weren’t particularly worried about anything untoward happening with you?

James: No.

Linda: Were you mostly with other children?

James: Usually but even that didn’t matter, it might have just been Terry and myself, Nicky O’Connell – they lived in Holloway Road where I lived and I can’t remember their names... Maureen, Pat, and Nicky – when they moved to.... because their father got killed in the war, I’ve got it here somewhere... CSM O’Connell, 1st Dorset killed in Normandy, married Florrie Barrett, sister of Sunner, Sunner died in his 20’s on a motorbike, I remember him, it was the first time I knew anybody who had actually died and that was Sunner. Sometimes, they say Sunny but I always knew him as Sunner. Nice young chap but that was his sister Florrie Barrett and they lived... you know where the bridge is, just past there, there was a turning in and there were some cottages that faced into the river, just opposite Hardye’s Avenue, four of them, he lived in there.

Sunner was killed on a motorbike after the war. Leonard White, that was Terry’s dad, HMS Lambourne, missing, died, married four years, to aunt Joan 1944 he died.

Linda: Did your mum ever work after she got married?

James: Yes, my mum worked in The Antelope Hotel as a chambermaid for a good few years. My auntie Joan worked in the laundry which was up where Olds garage was up Bridport Road. That used to be the Dorchester laundry. That’s the only place I can remember my mum working.

Linda: Did she work all your childhood?

James: No, she never worked when we were kids, she did that after we moved up to Windsor Road and we were old enough by then, about fourteen I suppose, we were old enough to be left on our own and Shirley, of course, she was two years older than me but she died when she was sixteen.

We moved from Windsor Road to Baynards Road when they first built Baynards Road, she died in Baynards Road so my mum wanted to out, so we finished up at 154 Coburg Road. I would have liked to have gone back to Fordington but it wasn’t to be. I met my wife after I came out of the army, I used to play football for Dorchester, when I came out of the army, I signed on again, so I wasn’t playing but I was standing on the embankment, I don’t know if you know the old Dorchester football club, it was like when you went in the top end, there was a bank and I was stood up there with somebody, we were talking and watching the match and this man and girl walked by, she had this pink suit on, black shoes and black gloves, that was how they used to dress in those days when they went out. I looked at her and thought, I like the look of her and then I thought, I don’t know who she is, I’ve never seen her before, not knowing that she lived in Cambridge Road when I was living in Mill Street, anyway, we had been down Weymouth on the train on the following Thursday evening and I think it was about the ten o’clock train coming back; she was sat in one of the carriages with a friend. I looked at her and just turned around to my mate and said “does anybody know who that is”. “Oh yes” they all said. I said “Oh”; they said “yes, she lives near us”. We had friends in Kings Road, Alfred Place and one of the others went to the catholic church where she used to go, so I said “where does she live then” and they said “Kings Road”, I said “You’re joking” and they said “no”, I said “well I never saw her until last Saturday”, “oh yes” they said “she goes to dances and that”. So anyway, on the Friday, we had our usual jaunt around the pubs and then into the Corn Exchange because it was the only bar left open. Anyway, she was in there with a couple of friends, so they said to go and ask her for a dance, and I said “no, I can’t, I don’t dance”, so anyway, they took it in turns because they knew her you see Ron Adams, Bryan Booth, Dave Tutton, they all knew her and were dancing with her and then they said “go on, we’ve told her that you’re going to go and ask her for a dance”, I thought “oh Christ”, I went up there and she said “apparently, you’re a very nice chap”, I said “oh, am I”, she said “they’ve been signing your praises all night, that’s all I’ve heard, what a nice bloke you are”, so anyway, at the end of the dance, I said “can I walk you home”, “yes, alright” she said, so we got half way down South Street and I said to her “hang on a minute, I’ve got to go back and get my over coat”, I managed to forget my overcoat, anyway, a long time later we were talking and she said “that first night, I went out with you, you were drunk”, I said “no, I wasn’t”, she said “you were, I carried you down to my house, you were leaning all over me”, I said “I don’t remember that”, she said “well I do”. I don’t remember, I thought I was sober, that’s how we met and we were together right up until she died. I sat down one day and worked out how many days I didn’t see her in my life – 27. She went to China for ten days as I didn’t want to go, so she went with Alison, our eldest daughter, I went on a course at Bristol for five days and then I went on a bird watching holiday in Scotland for seven days and that was more or less the only time we were apart. Even when we were in hospital, we saw each other every day. The only girl I ever had that.

Trouble was some of those bloody cameras were horrible. I’ve got a couple of photos of her but they’re black and white. You can’t see faces clearly but that’s what cameras were like in those days.

Linda: Did you ever go to the Mission?

James: Not that I can remember, no. I can remember being there, people going in there but I don’t personally remember going in there myself. It’s not as big as I imagine it and there was an alleyway down the side of it at one time. A chap called John...... and his wife, she was a Baskett and they lived in Harvey’s Terrace, they live up Whitfield Road now, I thought they might have come, old John lived in the High Street, his mother lived in the High Street, Neil.... John Neil, he married one of Charlie Baskett’s daughters. Charlie lived in Harvey’s Terrace, you might remember him, he worked on the railway.

Linda; There is a lot of Baskett’s.

James: Blue language was nothing. Charlie could swear for England, he could. Every other word was a swear word. Even when he was just talking. He worked on the railway.

John’s still about, I think she might be a bit older than me, so she probably remembers a little bit more.

I remember the Taylors who lived up the little alleyway by the school, Jim Taylor used to work on the railway and ride a motorbike and I think he used to sort of do insurance as well, I can remember he used to come to our house every week and collect some money for the insurance.

Linda: You obviously rented your house? Did the rent man come round every week?

James: Yes, I don’t remember seeing the rent man. Not in either house, they must have paid it in an office somewhere. Probably Edwards & Edwards, something like that. I wasn’t old enough to take much interest really.

That was also, the last time that I saw my granddad Barnes, my mum’s dad. They visited us one Saturday morning.

James is showing Linda a photograph and pointing out his auntie.

James: That’s my auntie there, she died when she was 41.

Linda: Is there anything else you wanted to share, memories, you want to record?

James: I can remember being told the story of the Union Arms when the Americans visited. Apparently, they were in the Union Arms one night, bragging and apparently Lofty Adams, used to live in Dagmar Road there, he must have been about six foot six, the yanks are going on and bragging until he stood up and Lofty said “you won’t find anybody bigger than me” and they reckon that the Americans left the pub.

I can remember Mrs Condon, she lived... you had some cottages opposite our house in Mill Street, where the Dufalls used to live, I remember the Dufalls, then they moved to St Georges Road they had a son, just further along there was an alleyway with houses in and the Symes used to live up there, Peter and Barry; Peter took me to for the very first time to the Boys school in Colliton Street.

I remember Mrs Conlon coming to our house one evening crying, apparently, she had just had a telegram telling her that her husband was missing in action presumed killed. She stayed with us for a couple of days and then she eventually married Mr Williams, the Wool baker and the chap that used to deliver the bread for them, around Charminster and Herrison. Anyway, he was off sick or something and she did the delivery, it worked out that she had a van full of bread left over, apparently, he was taking twice as much out and selling it on the side. One afternoon on the way back from Dorchester, she was driving along the weir there at Charminster – got involved in an accident and got killed. I remember her husband dying and now she had died as well. Few years back now.

Linda: Did many of the men work at the farms?

James: A lot of them worked on the building, some worked in the gas place in Icen Way, I remember as a lad them going to work in the morning. They all wore hob nailed boots and they’d whistle. They would actually whistle going to work and you never hear that now. I used to lie in bed and could always tell what the time was as they went by regular ever morning.

Some of them worked in the gas place, used to make coke, Jim Smith, the chap who found my grandmother used to work in there at one time and then he became a postman.

One day, I got taken to hospital on a Sunday, I was feeling bad. I had diphtheria, I finished up down at Herringston Road Hospital, it was an isolation hospital at the time. I can remember it was a Sunday afternoon, my mother called for a doctor and he came round and said I had to go into hospital, I remember a grey ambulance turned up and when they carried me out on a stretcher, I looked round and all the neighbours were outside watching. What I can remember, in particular is Sheila Bartlett, she must have been about ten at the time, she was right in the middle and I can see her to this day, Sheila eventually lived just up the road here to Bill Bartlett but he died of TB, they had a couple of sons, one of the sons used to come here every Saturday and help me with my birds and aviaries, then she disappeared. After Bill died, I think that must have been at Brewery House, so she disappeared for a bit but now I see that she was living up at Marie Road, I often see her walk by, she didn’t recognise me but eventually I saw her. I haven’t seen her for a couple of months. So I did think one evening, I’ll go up round and see..... I think she lives.... not opposite the block where your mum and did live but the next one up, she lived in one of them houses. I’d like to see because she is one of the last....

I was thinking in the last few weeks, Mary Sansom, she died, she lived with her sister in London Road, she was my age. Mike Gail, he died. Gilly, his sister died years ago and Jeff brother in law died last year. I knew the parents there.

Scotty next door, he had a son who got killed when he was twelve I think.

Linda; How did the boy get killed?

James: I got a feeling it was a car accident but I’m not sure.

James: Pauline Aves, Pauline died, now she was a friend of Anne’s, they went to the catholic school together. Pauline married Owen Brewer but Owen died quite young and she lived with Joe Butler and then she married him eventually. Joe lost his wife, they lived up Blagdon Road and their son Ray, he used to come in here because he wanted to keep birds so he came up here, quite funny really. George, your dad I remember him very well.

I expect you remember.... oh what was his name, used to be a drover... he lived down Weymouth eventually. We always used to say what nice teeth he had. Long black curly teeth. His teeth were so bad.

I can’t remember if his name was Barrow or Bartlett.

Linda: Do you remember the shop that my great grandmother had in Mill Street, next to the Ottens?

James: No I can’t. I can remember the one at the bottom of Holloway Road and I remember Sophie’s. I used to sit outside of Sophie’s with penny Oxo’s, black ones because they were stronger, the kerb used to be up high and you would sit there and lick these.

Linda: Is there anything else you can remember?

James: No not off hand. Like I said, I can remember my granddad coming down to Mill Street one Saturday morning and that was the last time I saw him. I was outside kicking a ball about and they went on into our house and of course I went off, you came home when you felt like it and I never saw him again. My grandmother, we found her in the river a few years later.

A lot of the people in Hardye’s Avenue before it was all knocked down and Durnover Court was built and I remember my mother and father moved down to Durnover Court. I said to them “don’t do it, don’t do it”.

Anyway they did it and after that my mother was always telling me she said “Jim was right, we shouldn’t have come back”. I said to them “mum, the people aren’t there, the people you knew “ and that’s what makes an area. There’s rubbish about policemen walking around in pairs, I said that’s rubbish, in them days, the policemen used to walk around in pairs in the middle of town. I said it was the done thing everywhere, if its further away, they would be on bikes. I don’t remember seeing anybody being arrested or the police doing anything – “oh yes, that’s why the police go around in pairs”. “Oh, don’t talk rubbish” I said “that’s a load of rubbish that is”. I’m afraid that what’s his name in that book he said about gangs, I don’t remember seeing any gangs, I lived there longer than he did, I didn’t see any gangs, of course there were groups of us together but you never saw gangs of men, only time you saw men together was either when they were in the pub or when they were going to work and they all walked in them days, of course you had a group of men together they were walking to work and walking home from work.

Linda: So you don’t remember any violence or anything?

James: No. I’m not saying that it didn’t take place but it was kept in the home; there were one or two chaps we knew that were a bit nasty and aggressive.

Linda: They took it out on their wives?

James: Yes, that’s right. That’s how it was in them days but if you were ever ill. In that house in Holloway Road, I suppose when you went down over the steps and came down like that and then down like that, there was a big stone wall, holding the garden back and I suppose it’s probably as high as this ceiling, I was stood on their one day leaning over, I was only a nipper, going to St Georges School actually and a chap called Ian Ealy who was some relation to the Bascombes who lived the other side of the road, he kicked me up the backside, of course, I went down onto the pavement underneath and I was knocked unconscious; when I came to, it was like fairyland, there was stuff there for me, you’d never believe, half a barrel of chocolate, a cake, an apple or two, there was all the neighbours “oh poor lad”, everything was on ........ as you’d know but what they could spare or what they had they brought round for me because I’d been injured and I think you would never see that today.

I’ve seen my parents finish up with a nice council house and my dad had a nice job and everything and I got even better. When I finished work, what twenty years ago now, I said to my wife “shall we go and find a bungalow somewhere?” she just sat there and said “what for”. I said “well, we’ve been in this house for what thirty years”, “I like it here” she said. “Don’t you want a bungalow or something”, she said “we’ve got what we want, what do we want to go expensive for, getting a bigger place” I said “oh alright then” so we never did. She was happy living here and like she said, the shops are just down the road, stroll down there, she knew everybody, in them days, even when we came here, you got to know everybody unlike now, where people now walk past you a dozen times a day and not say anything.

At one time, if people come down and knew that they’d moved in, I’d say “good morning” or “hello” and you’d ..... “Oh sorry, I didn’t mean to talk to you” and gradually over a period of time, I don’t know their names. There’s a chap up here, he’s got some garden thing, his wife will always speak, they’ve been there about fifteen years now and I’ve spoken to him once, he’ll walk straight past me. I think “what is it sunshine” we’re all the same, ordinary working class people, you try to enjoy your life, be pleasant, be polite and yet they don’t speak. Now, when I was down there, you knew everybody and everybody knew you, I’ve seen people arguing in the street down there, arguing like hell but if anybody ever came along and said anything about them, they’d turn on them. They could argue amongst themselves, they’d shout and threaten one another because sometimes, we’d sit there and laugh but god help if anything happened to one of them. The first person to help them would be the one just arguing with them, that’s the way it was. That’s why I miss that. That’s what I tried to explain to my mother, I said “don’t do it mum, those people are not there”, they’ve all dispersed to Wessex Road, up the park, I said “they’ve gone mum; there’s very, very few people there now that you knew”. I’ve seen them working like I did, I could see people disappearing.

Another old friend Mike McAdams, I see he’s died; he founded DAM over at Poundbury many years ago with Bob Symes, who died back along, about 5 or 6 months ago now.

Every time I go out, I see less and less people I know. I read the Echo and I read names and I don’t know who they are. Yet, they’re talking about Dorchester, my town. I get angry because I think they’re destroying Dorchester. I love Dorchester but I don’t like Dorchester as it is.

I used to earn a bob or two when the market was in Charles Street, I used to go up there Saturday morning, the farmers would used to say “here you are, my son, take them up to the railway”, give me a bob and I’d take probably a couple of cows up Weymouth Avenue, pop them in the yard there, waiting to be put on the trucks to be taken away. Pigs, sheep, chickens – lovely times.

Linda: My uncle Bert used to pluck chickens up there.

James: At Christmas, when all the turkeys come, I couldn’t do it. They would have a couple of weeks each evening to pluck chickens and turkeys.

We’d go rabbiting at one time as well and during the summer holidays when I got a bit older, I used to go out to Cerne Abbas and stay with my grandparents. My grandmother, she came from Scotland, my granddad came from London and they finished up at Cerne Abbas, he was a stonemason, right opposite us was a farm; the Maidment’s and Gordon and his brother. Gordon, I went to school with, so I used to spend quite a lot of time at the farm. We had to milk the cows first before they could come out, so I would go over there at five o’clock in the morning and get the cows in, we would sit there and hand milk the cows. When I was older and went to work, I used to go to a farm and the blokes would say “yeah, nice job you’ve got in your suit and everything”, I’d say “yes, but I’ve earned it”, “oh, they said, we work hard, you don’t know what hard work is”, I would say to them “how many cows can you milk by hand in an hour”, they’d look at me and say “what are you talking about, you don’t milk cows by hand” and I would say “no, you don’t now but when I was a nipper you did, I used to do it”. I said “how many two and a quarter hundred weight sacks” have you had on your shoulders, that’s how corn came about at one time”. I said, in two and a quarter hundred weight sacks and you would get it off the elevator and onto your shoulders and if you didn’t stand right, your legs were wobbling about and I said “I done that”, “no” they said. “Yes I have, you people, you don’t know what it’s like”. Since they’ve all started work there was all the mechanical ways, corn was delivered in bulk on the back of a lorry and down into the Silo I said “I know”.

I said to Morris, we had the best, we’ve seen the best and from now on it’s going to get a lot worse and I really believe that, we were probably born at the right time. When you look back at the history, see what’s happened, you can see what is going to happen and you think that wow, I’ve been pretty lucky. I’ve seen progress in aircraft.