

Early recollections of life in Farnham from Meg born in 1942

Born during the war I clearly recall the sound of the aid raid siren, tanks which rumbled through the town and voices of Canadian soldiers who sometimes travelled on the local buses. Living above our grocery shop in East Street I remember all the little shops further up the street, the shoe repairer, the bow fronted Post Office which also sold hardware and paraffin and other little shops selling vegetables, sweets, fish and meat. Our shop employed a gentleman who was too old for war service, a Mr Barrett, who cut the cheese and bacon for the customers. Although we had a grocery shop Farnham friends living in Australia sent us food parcels. The day sweets came off ration was a thrill. My father served with the Royal Observer Corps, so after a days work in the shop he went on duty in a field off Castle Street. Both he and my mother served with Farnham St John. He was also a Freemason so use to slink off to meetings in Castle Street and then with Mum attend the annual Dinner Dances.

All the shops had wooden floors which had a distinctive smell, especially Miss Cummins wool shop in West Street. The town was full of independent shops apart from the Co-op in Union Road and Sainsbury's in the Borough resplendent with its marble counters. Spencers the local drapers had an amazing paying system with tubes of money flying on wires above customer's heads to an unseen pay point in the shop, we children looked on in amazement. South Street was busy on market days and animals came in for auction from all the local farms. I think I remember the last cattle being driven down Castle Street to the market. The Aldershot and District Traction bus service brought people into the town from the villages as few folk had use of a car.

The Churches paid a full role in the community. The Methodist Church in South Street had a packed Sunday School on Sunday afternoons and St James Church in East Street was still open for the 'working people' to worship at that end of the town.

I clearly remember the Belisha beacon being installed near East Street School.

The swimming baths were a most important part of summer social activities and a season ticket cost 10 shillings. For young people Scouting, Guides and singing with a choir were all popular interests along with tennis and football. Mary Joynes started the Farnham Children's Choir in 1947 with encouragement from Sir Hugh Robertson when she left her native Scotland.

Farnham St. John was foremost covering any local public event and there was a very big junior section which helped with duties. Their headquarters was at the far end of West Street. The Farnham Red Cross headquarters was at the other end of the Town in Stoke Hills.

My mother and her friend were among the regular Monday night audience at the Castle Theatre, as a rep it was the first night so only cost one and sixpence.

The Armistice Sunday parade was a major town event with hundreds of groups taking part. It was well reported and photographed by the Farnham Herald.

I remember the respect paid by townspeople who paused as a cortage passed by and how the gentlemen doffed their hats. Envelopes edged with black were always used for notes of sympathy.

For those of us living in the town, Brightwells, Gostrey Meadow and Farnham Park were our play areas. In the big snow of 1947 the dell in the park was magic with children and adults queuing to slide down the slope on toboggans and tin trays.

Summer days were spent playing in the River Wey and later in the season we gathered blackberries in Farnham Park or down beyond the Shepherd and Flock in Waverley, where we imagined all sorts of mysteries in Mother Ludlams Cave.

Farnham had a big gas works in the area of the Riverside industrial estate and sports centre. It regularly belched smoked and sent out particles of black grit and dirt which stuck to fresh paint work and clean washing. I recall carrying an accumulator each fortnight to a shop in the Borough where it was charged so the very old couple next door could listen to their crackly radio. They had no electricity in the house and I remember the hissing sound as they lit the gas wall light at dusk.

I have vivid memories of going by bus to Aldershot with my mother and buying yards of parachute material with which she made underwear and nightgowns.