

MY MEMORIES OF THE 1950s

The 1950s was the decade during which I grew up; at the start of 1950 I was seven and at the end of 1959, I was 17.

1950 saw me living in New Malden and I was attending my primary school 'The Study' there. That year, my family started going on our summer holidays, hiring a beach chalet on Mudeford Sandbank near Christchurch, then in Hampshire, now in Dorset. We went there in August almost every year after that and we loved it. I am the elder of two sons.



Aerial view of the Festival of Britain site

1951 was the year of the Festival of Britain and it opened on my birthday Thursday 3rd May. That year, Easter was so early that the date was Ascension Day, and I have not had an Ascension Day birthday since. I went to the Festival of Britain just once, when my Mother took me. There was an outbreak of chickenpox at school that summer, when I succumbed to it and had to be absent from school for the rest of the term. The same year, the family acquired a dog – a golden-coloured Norwich terrier, and she survived into the 1960s, and I joined the Wolf Cubs at 7th Malden (St. James'), where I remained until 1953.

1952 saw the death of King George VI and the accession of our present Queen on Wednesday 6th February and my Mother broke the news to me when I came home to lunch and we were told again when we got back to school for the afternoon. I remember that television programmes were disrupted for several weeks because of being in mourning for the late King and how frustrating it was for our favourite TV programmes to be off the air! It was about this time that sweet-rationing ended and I remember my Mother giving me the coupons from the ration book to use in the sweet-shop. The family went to church at St. James' New Malden and that year, I joined the choir there. In those early years, we went shopping in Kingston every Saturday and it was a delight to go round Bentalls and the market there. At Christmas, Bentalls used to put on a Father Christmas experience that was second to none. I changed schools in the autumn of 1952, when I went to a prep school called Chinthurst at Tadworth, (going the long journey on two buses), where I remained until 1956. At the end of 1952, my maternal grandfather died; (my paternal grandfather died before I was born) and both my grandmothers survived well beyond the 1950s. My parents came from Southampton where we would have family visits.

1953 was the Coronation year of our present Queen on Tuesday 2nd June. It was a dull cloudy day; we had the day off school and watched the proceedings at Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace (and en route) on our black and white television set. I had a Coronation mug from school, which I still have. Later on, I went on school trips to see the Coronation in the Granada cinema in Epsom and to a cinema in Reigate to see the "Conquest of Everest", which took place that year. In the autumn of 1953, the family moved from New Malden to Epsom Downs. After the decorations had been dismantled, I remember acquiring a ball from the crown that decorated the junction of Epsom High Street with Ashley Road and Waterloo Road for the Coronation and I would play with it. I went on a cub camp near Whitstable, Kent for the week beginning on Saturday 22nd August.



High Street decorated for Elizabeth II coronation June 1953

1954 onwards, we were able to go to the race meetings on Epsom Downs and the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh used to arrive by train at Tattenham Corner, where I was able to see them in the flesh. That summer, I went a few times to the swimming pool that used to be situated in Epsom at West Hill. All through those years, my Father worked in local government at Epsom Town Hall. Consequently, he was actively involved with Civil Defence and on at least one occasion, I was taken to a display at Kiln Lane, where the site used to be. My Father was a building inspector and in school holidays, he used to take me by car, around the building sites he would visit in his work. The family car we had in those days was a Singer super ten - registration number GAA 472. My Mother returned to her teaching career that year, after she had brought up my Brother and me.



The Civil Defence Training Ground, Kiln Lane, Epsom . Date Not Known

1955 I was confirmed that year at St. Mary's Burgh Heath on Saturday 21st May by the then Bishop of Guildford and at the time, I was a choirboy there. At the beginning of that year on Wednesday 19th January, a new scout troop was formed – 1st Tattenhams (St. Marks) and I was a founder member. My Father was already Akela to the cub pack there. On Saturday 30th July, we went to summer camp in the New Forest for the week.

1956 saw a change of schools for me, to Radnor House at Redhill (which does not exist anymore). That was the year I went into long trousers. Summer camp took place at Broadstone Warren in the East Grinstead area from Saturday 4th August for the week, after which the family and I went on holiday to Winchelsea in Sussex for a further week. During that week, I went abroad for the first time, when on Wednesday 15th August, we did the day trip to Boulogne. As it was the Feast of the Assumption, it was a public holiday in France that day.

1957 summer camp took place at Kingsdown near Deal in Kent, on top of the cliffs. That was Saturday 10th August for the week. In those days, August bank holiday Monday was at the beginning of August and in that year, it was on 5th August when I went on a day trip to the World Scout Jamboree taking place at Sutton-Coldfield and it was the 50th anniversary of the Scout movement, as well as the centenary of the birth of Baden-Powell. That year, I had my first holiday abroad when I stayed in Brussels, Belgium for nearly a month from Tuesday 20th August to improve my French.



*The Queen and Prince Phillip visiting the
World Scout Jubilee Jamboree 3 August 1957
As well as the 33,000 participants from 85 countries, an additional
17,000 British Scouts were camping on other organised sites spread
over a fifteen mile radius from Sutton Park, Sutton Coalfield.*

1958 saw me old enough to smoke. I tried my hand at it but I never got into the habit, fortunately. I also became old enough to see A-films in the cinema without being accompanied by an adult. Summer camp again took place at Broadstone Warren from Saturday 2nd August for the week. I had a further week camping (not under canvas) near Whitstable in Kent from Saturday 16th August.

1959 was my last year at school, together with exams – College of Preceptors and ‘O’-Levels. It was a gloriously hot summer that year and summer camp again took place in the New Forest from Saturday 15th August.

What a lot we could do for £1 in those days! Even if I had 10/- - ten shillings – (50p in new money), I thought I was rich!. A pound then must have been worth £20 at today’s prices. I would be paid half-a-crown – 2/6d – (12-1/2p) to sing for a wedding as a choirboy. A lot of things would cost only sixpence or a shilling.



*The Eagle Comic which has an Epsom Connection,
Dan Dare illustrator Frank Hampson used to live in Epsom*

Among the comics I used to read were – the Eagle; Dandy; Beano; Enid Blyton's Magazine; Knockout. Of these, some have long since ceased publication. My Parents used to order the News Chronicle each morning and that ceased publication in 1960.

The 1950s were happy times and fun times. Those years give me happy memories of my Parents, Gavin and Dorothy Rogerson, who are sadly no longer with me. My Brother is called Ian.

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