

Chailey and After

By Jack S Hayward

My earliest childhood memories are of my father bending over me as toddler while I was a patient in Bath Orthopaedic Hospital. He was visiting me before joining the Palestine Police in 1935. I had succumbed to TB of the hip and eventually arrived at Chailey as a six year old where I spent the next ten years in their care from 1939 – 1950. It is a remarkable reflection that, through their unique care and positive nurturing designed for a useful life and based on education and medical care, I have never considered myself disabled. I've had the good fortune to have always been employed, and have spent the last thirty years doing voluntary work. The Heritage Craft Schools comprised of three entities; St Georges, which was residential for disabled boys able to walk, St Martins Hospital for those who needed medical attention, and the third centre was St Helens for disabled girls. Most of my time was spent at St Georges with another 150 boys; we grew up within the bounds of our own set of disabilities, just different from each other, but active and able to get about, either on crutches, sticks, callipers or some other type of clinical support. However when medical circumstances required it I was moved to St Martins Hospital, which was about half a mile away across Chailey Common, where I spent two lengthy periods in the hospital ward. Even so it was, under the circumstances, a happy childhood, and we each gravitated around our own group of friends and built up lasting friendships which continued after we left Chailey writing to each other, before we went our different ways.



Left, Nurse Trestrale, Right, Nurse Vicarage (Vicky) outside St Georges Isolation Unit darning blankets 1947.

As a junior I slept in dormitory No. 2 at St Georges, which was on the upper floor of the east wing facing the windmill from across the drive. Our house orderly was Miss Rappley, or Minnie Rappley as we called her, she was tall and thin and to us very intimidating, with heavy-framed glasses perched on her nose giving her an owl like appearance. She kept us in our place with just a glare. I think we must have been the fastest kids to get into bed that Chailey had ever seen. However, with the introduction of double summer time, it remained light until 11pm, which meant there was very little inclination to sleep so, once Miss Rappley had left us, then play time resumed. There was an exciting event where one gained a fearless reputation though it required courage and daring, but not an option open to everyone as it depended on the nature of their disability. The ceiling of our dormitory, No. 2, was strengthened with iron tie bars coming down from the centre at a slant to where they met the walls about 4 feet (1.20 metres) above the heads of our beds. The idea was to cross the floor by swinging hand over hand Tarzan fashion on these tie bars. This meant swinging up from the starting point and down

the other side, but to do it we first had to climb up and balance on our iron bedsteads to reach the tie bars. There were many false starts but, for those of us who finished, the crossing earned the respect and admiration of the rest of the dormitory.

Along with the daily routine of rising to the sound of the bell at 7am at St Georges, come memories of completing our ablutions in large communal bathrooms where we were greeted with rows of neatly folded towels hanging from numbered pegs. We each had a life-time number, mine was 31, this was followed by making our own beds before gathering in ranks on the playground for inspection and marching into breakfast. I also have vivid memories of St Georges winters and of snowball fights in the playground and rushing to the bathrooms to warm our hands in hot water, which then resulted in ferocious chilblains, and also of trying to warm our hands and feet against the lukewarm radiators that never seemed to meet the challenge of heating the cathedral like vastness of St Georges.



Left, Stan Howarth Right, Donald Hutchinson on the veranda at St Martins Hospital Chailey 1947. Beneath their bed can be seen the wheels of my bed in the background, raised up on blocks, rising above the left shoulder of the boy who is standing is the pulley that holds the weights attached to my leg to stimulate growth.

The most memorable occasion in this respect was the particularly harsh winter of 1946 that brought the country to a standstill. I was in St Martins Hospital at the

time being treated for the after effects of TB of the hip, known today as osteomyelitis, which is treatable with penicillin. It had left me with scoliosis of the spine and my right leg 12 inches shorter than my left. I was put on extensions or traction to encourage it to grow. This consisted of lying in bed and having my leg strapped in elastoplaster, a stretchable fabric sticky plaster, from the ankle to my hip, and attaching weights to a pulley from my ankle and raising the foot of the bed on blocks. As I slowly became acclimatised to this procedure the weights were increased at monthly intervals and, while lying in bed at this angle, no matter how I tried to arrange my pillows, I could not avoid the pull of gravity and my inexorable slide to the head of the bed despite the contra affects of the weights. I remained in bed like this for about 18 months during which time I learnt needlework. I can remember it being a very stressful period of my life and it left me with a painfully disjointed knee and with a limb that had no chance of ever being able to approach normality. It was eventually decided to amputate the leg which was stunting my growth and dragging me down. Throughout this period of my life I received a great deal of empathy from the nursing staff who were obviously more cognisant of my predicament at the time than I was.



September 1947 St Martins Hospital Veranda Chailey. I had spent several long periods hospitalised at St Martins. This is a group of fellow patients sharing the veranda with me at that time. Back row, D Butler, Ivor Knox, Jack Hayward (self). Front row, Stan Howarth, Donald Hutchinson. We all slept on the veranda at night winter and summer. This shows me recovering after a long period recumbent on extension in an effort to restore growth to my leg. Note two boys under the veranda who have recently undergone operations.

During this time I slept outside on the veranda. We had rubberised sheets to protect against the snow and rain of the winter and the nurses would brush the snow from our beds in the morning. Wild life was badly hit by the weather and the nurses gave us crusts of bread to throw to the birds. The weather was so harsh that blue tits, robins and blackbirds and others used to line up on the handrail of the veranda waiting to be fed. I became imbued with a great love of nature during this period. It was around this time that Pets Corner was introduced at St Georges and it created a huge amount of interest with us kids. Suddenly we were keeping rabbits, pigeons and guinea pigs. One boy had 'Tumbler' pigeons that soared into the sky then tumbled downwards like a skylark. It was at this time that I became a member of the RSPCA and eventually the RSPB and for my fourteenth birthday in 1947, which was spent in St Martins Hospital recovering from extension, Sister Simpson gave me her book of British Birds suitably inscribed which I kept all my life until I donated it to the CHOSA archive just this year (2017).



Nurse Wadey and P Wilson, St Martins Hospital Veranda Chailey September 1947.

When I eventually rejoined St Georges, along with friends, we built ourselves a den in Pets Corner. We dug out a pit complete with roof and covered the entrance with a wooden hatch. Inside we set up a chimney made from cocoa tins which gave us ventilation and allowed smoke to vent from our attempts to have a fire, this was our headquarters. Despite this discipline was well regimented; it needed to be, after all there were 150 of us kids who could be quite unruly at times. Sometimes we sneaked out of bounds when the occasion presented itself. An adventure, which on one occasion had the potential to go drastically wrong and has always stuck in my mind, was when I joined some of the older boys and we sneaked down to the 'Dip' for a swim in the lake. The 'Dip' was a hollow

about half a mile away on the North Common. Nearby was a cottage with a small holding. The owner's collie had pups and at the time I left Chailey they gave me one

to bring home with me, which I christened Bob. I had never swam before and, with everyone piling in, I followed recklessly shouting 'hey I can swim' and promptly launched myself into the murky depths whilst still breathing in and swallowing large mouthfuls of dark green water as I went down, panicking amongst the reeds, with my eyes open. I thrashed about as I floundered to the top and hastily dressed but, by the time I got back to St Georges, I was in shock and went straight to bed till teatime.



I always enjoyed art at Chailey. This is the Art Teacher against the class room, which I was able to visit forty years later.

The teachers I remember were Head Teacher Mr Marchant, Mr Noble Leather Work, Mr Warner from the Print Class, Mr Leggatt Woodwork and Music, Mr Blundell Art, Mr Holgate Boot and Shoe Making, Mr Keating House Master, and Mr White Head Housemaster. The nurses I

remember were Nurse Buckley, Nurse Vicarage, Nurse Trestrail, Nurse Wadey and Sister Simpson or Simpkins, can't remember which. As I look back I embraced all of these people with great respect and admiration.

With my progression up the ladder from junior to senior, so I moved from dormitory to dormitory where I met up with older boys and, as the years passed, I eventually became a Monitor with all the privileges that came with it although, with the passing of time, I can't remember what they were. This was a period of wartime rationing and, with my father serving in the Palestine Police and my mother dead, my grandmother would send me a monthly ration of sweets. Not every child would receive a parcel so, once we had opened ours, they would be collected up and all the goodies were shared throughout the school. Having received the parcel we would then have to write a letter of thanks in class, which became a formality, i.e. 'Dear Granny, thank you for the sweets, I am keeping well and happy. I hope you are keeping well too.'

Also at this time food rationing was brought in, I can remember Mr White standing on the platform in the dining hall making the announcement that margarine was to replace butter and brown bread instead of white. It came in thick slices as hard as a plank of wood and spread with beef dripping, which I liked when the bread was fresh enough. We were also introduced to desiccated bananas; they looked nothing like the real thing but were transformed into a black elongated sticky oblong that happened to taste like a banana. We also had powdered eggs, which miraculously tasted like eggs but were served up looking like a pancake.



The Wedding of Mr Arthur White the Head Master to Matron 1947-48 (?). He was an ex spitfire pilot and came to Chailey after being invalided out of the RAF.

My pet hate when it came to wartime food was sago. Under no circumstances whatsoever, with its frogspawn like appearance, was I allowing it ever, to slide down my gullet. On one occasion I was forbidden to leave the table until I had cleaned my plate. I had been sitting alone in the dining hall for some time, retching each time I glanced at it. Immediately behind me was an open window, and my cunning plan was to throw spoonfuls of the stuff over my shoulder and out of the window however, after watching the first spoonful slide slowly down the wall, I realised I needed a plan B and, as I began shovelling it into my

handkerchief, a very loud voice from above shouted 'Hayward'. I looked up in panic and there was not God but Mr White the housemaster peering down at me from the balcony. He could clearly see what I was doing yet he gestured me to go. Hastily squeezing the squidgy mess into my pocket I beat a hasty retreat and emptied the contents into the toilet and cleaned myself up. I still shudder now when I think of it 70 years after.



Dining Hall at St Georges. My pet hate of wartime food was sago. It was impossible for me to look at it let alone eat it and, having been forbidden from leaving the table until I had cleaned my plate, I was left sitting in the baronial dining hall with my back to an open window. My cunning plan was to flick spoonfuls of the stuff over my shoulder and out of the window. However, after watching the first spoonful slither down the wall, I realised I needed a plan B and as I began shovelling it into my handkerchief a very loud voice from above shouted 'Hayward'. Looking up in panic I discovered it was not God but Mr White the housemaster peering down at me from the balcony.

Then of course being close to the south coast in wartime we were witness to a lot of enemy activity. On one particular occasion, while walking in squads to school across Chailey Common, we saw a Messerschmitt 109 being pursued by a spitfire. It flew very low and machine-gunned the traffic as it went

overhead. Some boys said it strafed us, nevertheless we all dived for cover in the bracken. Later we heard that it had been shot down as it reached the coast. Being on the south coast during the Battle of Britain we witnessed many dogfights, as squadrons of German planes came over high in the sky in formation to attack the airfields and bomb London. On sunny days they left white vapour trails across the sky.



A typical wartime recognition poster showing both British and German aircraft. These would be displayed on classroom walls along with posters showing anti-personnel mines dropped from enemy aircraft.

We were also on the flight path of the doodlebugs (V-1 flying bombs) as they flew towards London. Where children's classrooms these days show posters of nature and wild flowers, ours portrayed war time posters warning of anti-personnel mines that would have been dropped from enemy planes. One I remember was the butterfly bomb because of its outstretched attachments and, of course, they were all lethal if picked up. Other posters showed how to recognise German planes, and these could be seen all round the classrooms. Military airfields surrounded Chailey and we witnessed many dogfights as spitfires and hurricanes chased

the doodlebugs to shoot them down. I can remember one being brought down on the common and when we went out onto the playground in the morning pieces of shrapnel were sticking out of the tarmac that had melted. Barrage balloons were a common sight and on one occasion a doodlebug sliced through the cable and a hurricane had to go up and shoot balloon down.

This was the time of the thousand bomber raids on Germany, and we would see hundreds of American Flying Fortresses (B17s) forming up in formation before setting off across the coast on their bombing raids in the morning. When they returned about five hours later they would come back in dribs and drabs, many of them badly shot up. One aircraft had a wing so badly damaged we could see the sky through it as it limped very low overhead. We later heard that it had crashed when trying to land at Plumpton airfield. This remains vivid in my memory because at the time I was laying on my back in bed during one of my spells in St Martins Hospital and had a good view looking up as the bombers flew over Chailey. While the Americans flew bombing missions during the day the RAF switched to night-time raids. We could distinguish our planes engines from theirs by the droning noise that the German planes made.



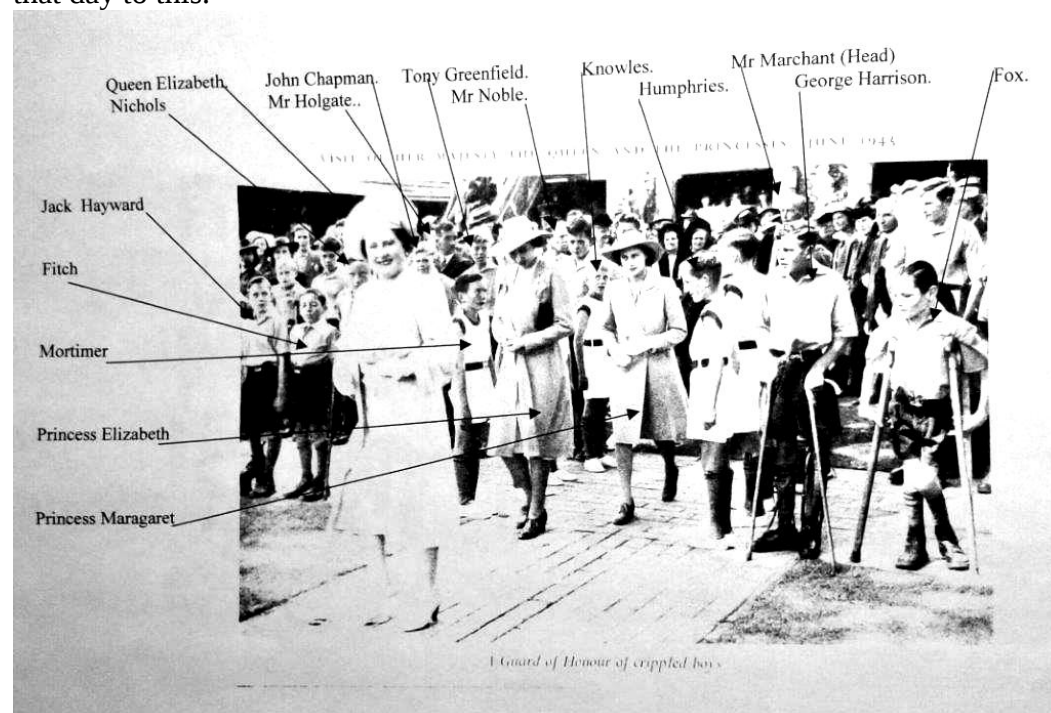
Taken in 1949 on the North Common where we walked the head teacher's dog 'Major'. Chailey Common was an important facility for us. It was a wide playground providing a variety of natural habitats in which to play and get close to nature. But, at the height of the war, it was taken over by the military and naturally became out of bounds.

Before the D-Day landings Chailey Common was used

as a training ground for British and allied troops, we saw brengun carriers, tanks and field guns on manoeuvres; it resembled a huge battlefield. For a long while the common was out of bounds but when we did eventually get back I found a packet of live 303 rifle bullets, I had more mates that day than I'd ever had. We pulled the bullets out of the cartridges and set the graphite on fire with a magnifying glass held up to the sun. It just went up with a fizz, we loved it!

The closest I ever got to a doodlebug, although they were a daily sight during this period, happened while staying at the home of Eric Fryer during the summer holidays in Snodland Kent. A neighbour across the road was watching a doodlebug go overhead and saw its engine stop but, before it hit the ground, she burst through the living room door where I was sat in the tin bath in front of the fire, scooped me up in her arms and threw me down into the Anderson shelter in the back garden. She tumbled in on top me and there followed a huge explosion as the doodlebug crashed a few streets away.

Most of my Chailey experience was spent at St Georges during the wartime where much of the common was out of bounds for us children but, when during the times we did play there, we were never allowed to go to Chailey Village nor did we ever mix with or visit the girls' school. I don't know how the situation arose but at times the topic of cigarettes entered the frame. Although it was impossible ever to obtain any but, using our initiative, we gathered dried hawthorn leaves from the hedge row and rolled them in toilet paper and lit them with our magnifying glasses. It wasn't very successful as they kept falling apart however my brainwave was to tear a strip off my shredded wheat box, roll it up into a giant cigarette and set light to it with my magnifier. It was soon smouldering like a bonfire, smoke everywhere, and that was the best thing I ever did in my life. It made me so sick that I have never smoked from that day to this.



The Royal Visit was a special occasion; we formed up on the lawns in front of St Martins Chapel to greet the Royal Family. The Queen is followed by Princess Elizabeth (now our Queen) who is followed by Princess Margaret.

The Royal Visit of 1947 was a very special occasion for the Heritage and sticks out in my mind, with the Queen and the two Princesses, Margaret and Elizabeth, our present Queen. The whole school turned out in our best Sunday clothes for wearing to church at St Martins, blue and white pin stripped shirts with white collars, rich mahogany corduroy shorts, and knee length grey socks turned over at the top. It was a bright sunny day and we all lined up in two ranks around the lawns in front of St Martin's Chapel where we formed a guard of honour to be greeted by the royal party as they walked past.

I also have memories of a very hot summer, I think it was a summer holiday. Many of the boys had gone home, but some boys remained at Chailey for one reason or another, while some boys went with their friend to their homes. I was classed as a orphan at the time and so remained. On this day we were on the playground at St Georges and, because of the hot weather stripped to the waist and, in the event, filling bottles with water from the outside tap and spraying each other. The person in charge of us on that day so happened to be Mrs Kimmins, later Dame Grace. She was dressed in her usual long purple dress with her customary large white starched hat. At this time, she was using a walking stick and of course was quite elderly, but she was relishing being with us naughty boys, offering us advice to be good, but all the time with a smile. Of course we took not a blind bit of notice and continued with our splashing about.



Treasure Island 1948. The Heritage Players at St Georges in the Liberty Hut. Mr Arthur White, Head Master, is centre back row with a parrot on his shoulder. To his right is Mr Keating House Master.

Also, for those of us who remained at Chailey during the holidays, coach trips were arranged on days out. The two outstanding ones I remember were being taken to London to see Bertram Mills circus. There we had ringside seats, and met Miss Ellen the lion tamer with her lion Mushie, where after the show we each received a signed photo from her. While on another occasion we attended Glyndebourne House where at the time Sir Thomas Beecham was conducting an opera. We were invited to a tea party in the extensive grounds, where we picnicked on the lawns with sandwiches cakes and lemonade, such goodies as we had not been accustomed to throughout the war years. Meanwhile this was in glorious sunshine surrounded by the celebrities in their costumes. We did have our own special occasions at various time of the year when we would put on plays or pantomimes. These would be held in the 'Liberty Hut' where social activities took place. We also had our own scouts' hut, both of these buildings were in the same area as Pets Corner at the bottom of the playground. We also had our special occasions at St Martin's chapel. Of these Harvest Festival comes to mind. St Martin's was decorated with flowers, vegetables and sheaths of corn. Animals would be led in by the children,

rabbits appeared and even a donkey visited on one occasion. Christmas and Easter was celebrated with children dressing up as characters from the bible and processing into chapel. St George's day was another day celebrated with a flagged procession into a special commemorative service.

The decision was eventually taken to amputate my leg. I was 14 at the time and it was carried out on 22nd February 1948 at St Martins Hospital. I cried for two days afterwards. I don't know why, but I just did. The operation was carried out by an eminent London surgeon with war time experience in the Royal Navy, whose name escapes me. The first attempt was postponed because of his other commitments and I returned to St Georges until it could be re-arranged.

After my amputation the summer was spent in St Martins Hospital sleeping on the veranda; my buddies were Ivor Knox, Stan Howarth and Donald Hutchinson. My best mate was Tony Greenfield (Lanky) for obvious reasons, then John Chapman, we wrote to each other after Chailey. I was also friendly with Dickie Douch and stayed with him at his home during one holiday. I also stayed with Eric Fryer who lived in Snodland, Kent. His father worked in the docks, which became a target for German air raids during the war years, both of these parents treated me as one of their own even though we had never met before. Eventually I was reunited with my friends at St Georges and as a senior I moved into dormitory No. 6, which was on the top floor of the west wing. The top floor of St. Georges ran from east to west with one long corridor, running through the balcony and linking up with other dormitories and the masters' studies branching from it. To assist boys with perambulatory problems, which now included me minus a leg, we had trolleys (like large skateboards) which we could lay down on and push ourselves along by our hands on the floor. Soon the corridor was like Silverstone Racetrack, with trolleys whizzing about a breakneck speed. Obviously things could not continue like this indefinitely and, on one of my express excursions to the east wing, Mr White the housemaster stepped out of his study straight into my path. With no brakes I had to make a quick swerve to avoid sending him as an adult patient to St Martins Hospital. So not unexpectedly, and without any announcement, our beloved trolleys just quietly disappeared from the scene.



The Raven Patrol of the newly formed St. Georges Scout Troop in 1949. Mr Warner, teacher of the print class was Assistant Scout Commissioner and escorts the patrol. Jack Hayward is Patrol Leader with John Chapman, George Pike and R. Jones. Following is the Peewit Patrol with Patrol Leader Petch.

Some time in this period it was decided that St Georges should form a Scout Troop. I was duly promoted to Patrol Leader of the Raven Patrol and my assistant leader was my

mate John Chapman. It included George Pike and Robert Jones. Mr Warner the Print

Master was Assistant Commissioner. We used to meet in a hut behind the sewing rooms although, shortly after I had left, they moved to the windmill. During our early year we attended an International Disabled Scouts Jamboree in Utrecht, Holland. This was a great adventure. We met up with disabled scouts from all over Britain and caught the ferry to the Hook of Holland and headed to the International camp at Nijmegen. This was 1948 just three years after the war had ended and there was still a lot of war damage and bombed buildings that we saw while travelling through Holland. These made a deep impression on me. It's difficult to imagine what it could have been like to be caught up in a bombing raid with buildings on fire and crashing down around you.

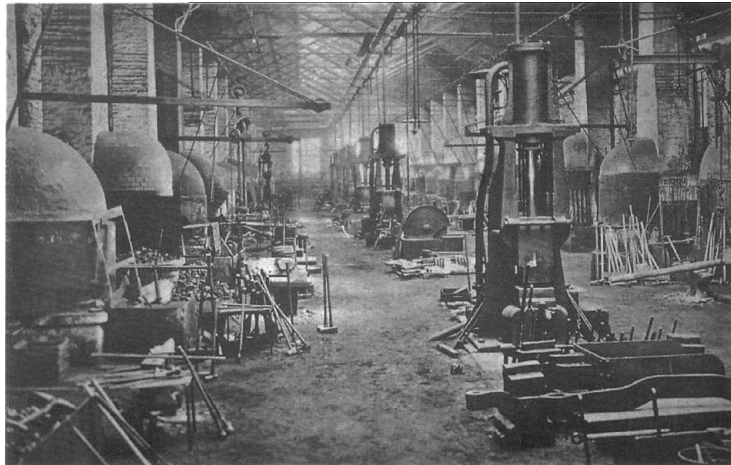


The 1948 International Scout Camp for Handicapped Scouts at Utrecht Holland. I had only recently been fitted with my first prosthesis and borrowed this tricycle for a photo with Leo a Dutch scout.

When the time came for me to leave St Georges I had only been wearing my new leg for a short while, besides which I was very apprehensive about leaving. I would have loved to have been placed in employment

within the Heritage Craft Schools, such was my feelings for the whole Chailey experience. It was a place where I had spent practically the whole of my life up until then, but this was not to be. However I did have a talk with Matron and pleaded my case to be allowed to stay on at St Georges for an extra term to become familiar with my artificial leg, which I can remember having been made and fitted at Roehampton. Staying on was a bittersweet experience, enjoying my final term to the utmost yet realising it was coming to an end. Finally I did leave St Georges at the end of the August term but with a heavy heart. It was only after leaving and entering society where I had to earn a living that I slowly adjusted to a world of employment and, with a sense of independence that I had acquired from my Chailey upbringing, find my place in the community.

Since leaving the Palestine Police in 1948 my Father had remarried and set up home in Swindon and it was to here that I was to live with my new family. Although it was a roomy house with my own comfortable bedroom I found the space very restrictive after the more spacious dormitories and halls of St Georges. My priority was to find employment and contribute towards the home. I landed my first interview with a local jeweller to become an apprentice watch and clock repairer. The wage was seventeen shillings and six pence per week (91p) from which I would pay an apprenticeship premium of two shillings and six pence (12½ p). This proved to be inadequate to provide me with a living so I fell back on the trade of boot and shoe repairing that I had been taught at Chailey where indeed I had handmade the very boots I happened to be wearing at the time. My wage was a step up being one pound ten shillings a week (£1.50). However after a couple of years in the job I had to admit defeat for, while using the machinery, I was inclined to lose my balance and didn't feel safe so I decided it was not for me.



The Blacksmith Shop, Swindon Railway Works. I began work here on 16th January 1956 as a Shop Clerk. My work was of an admin nature, dealing with the men's pay bills, and personnel records etc. The office was at the bottom of the shop and I had to walk past gangs of blacksmiths operating these clattering steam hammers while they were in full flood.

Finally on the 16th January 1956 I left the shoe trade and began work for British Railways in the

Blacksmith Shop at their Swindon factory as a shop clerk, starting with an annual salary of £350. I had never been in a factory before and the industrial scenes that met my gaze as I walked through the huge doors of the Spring Shop appalled me. The noise from many clattering and banging steam hammers, heard for the first time, was unnerving, whilst the air was filled with fumes from the many blacksmith fires and the hot metal being worked, all mixed in with a fine dust rising from the ash floor. This had to be hosed down every hour or so to dampen it, nevertheless rising dust covered the walls like a coating of black snow. I followed my chief clerk down the shop to our office. Passing the Spring Shop's gas furnaces we approached a huge circular saw in the middle of the shop. A blacksmith with the help of two mates cradled a large billet of red hot metal from the fire and, with the aid of their tongs, pushed it under the unguarded blade of the saw. As I drew level, I stepped into a blaze of sparks that shot high into the roof and showered down onto me from every angle like a fiery rain. I casually sauntered through it past the screaming saw as though I always did that kind of thing and arrived at the shop office. I was wearing my best suit and feared for the worst, expecting at least a few singe marks from walking through the fiery storm, but there was not a mark on me. Apparently the sparks were harmless and fizzled out before landing. When I arrived home at lunch time I told my mother that I wasn't going back, but she explained that all of the men folk in our family had worked there for generations, and that I would have a job for life. So I returned and stayed for over 33 years.



Blacksmiths, Swindon Railway Works. Blacksmith Harold Akers and his gang working a hot billet of steel.

My clerical duties entailed preparation of the men's paybill, writing out coal and old-timber tickets for deliveries to be made to their home addresses, and for payments to be made through the men's pay packets. Also writing out works orders for materials to be drawn from the Iron

Stores and issued to the blacksmiths, writing applications for free train passes at trip time, keeping personnel records of sickness, and writing out accident reports.



Blacksmiths, Swindon Railway Works. Blacksmith Ted Mitchener working a hot billet with a sledgehammer. Striker Charlie White uses tongs to assist while the piece is held firmly under the steam hammer with Reg Terry the hammer driver at the controls.

The office was at the far end of the Blacksmith Shop and was made of steel sheets and glass, as were the structures in other hot shops within the group (i.e. stamping, foundries, and smiths). My desk and the stationery were always

filthy from the ash drifting in from the shop floor. The thing that amazed me was the fact that the clerks were still using steel nib pens and bottles of ink, but these could not be used on carbon copies so indelible pencils were allowed as an alternative. This was ok so long as you didn't put them in your mouth or lick your fingers which would leave you with purple lips and fingers. The slightest signs of moisture and the writing would run and turn the paper purple. The biro had not yet reached the shop floor.



Gordon Glover, Blacksmith Chain Maker, Swindon Railway Works 1956.

My lasting memory of the F1 Blacksmith Shop rests on a lunchtime event when I returned to the office early, while the shop was empty, and found the roof on fire. Workmen had been welding some roof girders and, while they were away for lunch, the corner of the roof flared up. I phoned the works fire brigade while the roof crackled above me and spoke to the chief fire officer, but he didn't sound too impressed by my story and, instead of arriving with the fire brigade, walked down alone from the fire station and met me where I was struggling with an extinguisher. Wisdom caught up with him and he called them out, which I thought

was a bit casual.

Having spent six years in the Blacksmith Shop I was ambitious for promotion but needed more experience, to this end I transferred to the Chair Foundry, another hot shop. As a way of explanation, rail chairs are heavy cast iron fixtures that hold the railway lines to the sleepers and we cast them in the thousands. Here the Chair

Foundry atmosphere was different from the Blacksmiths Shop. The air was filled with a mixture of thick fumes and blue smoke rising from the hundreds of filled moulding boxes of molten iron laying in rows on the floor. The sand was mixed with horse manure to bind the moulds together during the pour and the overwhelming stench rising from the boxes soon filled the air. As opposed to an ash floor in the Blacksmith Shop this one was laid with iron plates so that the ladles of molten iron could be wheeled down the shop from the cupola. Mixed in with these toxic fumes was the fine dust rising from the dried out moulding boxes, disturbed by the knocking-out process done by the men to recover the casting. When in full production it was impossible to see across the floor through the fumes. It was the most inhospitable shop I ever worked in and best described as Hell's Kitchen.



The Rail Chair Foundry, Swindon Railway Works. The foundry man is pouring molten iron into moulding boxes to cast rail chairs, these fixtures hold the railway line to the sleepers.

Looking back on these events, I am amazed that a disabled person was ever allowed to work in such a potentially dangerous environment. It would not happen in today's Health

and Safety conscious environment. In hindsight I would have experienced considerable difficulty in dealing with any hazardous situations that could have arisen. My duties took me in between trucks being shunted, and visiting the shop floor while ladles of molten iron were being pushed about the foundry from the cupola to the moulding boxes, to be poured. My reason for accepting the post was primarily for promotion but also I considered the work to be within my capabilities as a younger person at the time.

The men worked day and night shifts. Most of them were Polish émigrés escaping from communism after the war. They were extremely hard working and would always clock in to start their shift early. My first job at 7.30 am, before they went home, was to count the casting as they were thrown into the wagon for despatch to the stores which they had made on the night shift. Once back in the office I crunched the numbers showing the weight of pig iron used by each man.

Having spent a year in this depressing environment, with no sign of imminent promotion, I decided to look for pastures new and handed in my notice. I could see that my boss was surprised and after a friendly chat he persuaded me to stay and I was promoted to the ledger section at head office. I spent the next 25 years working my way through several departments, doing ledger work, accountancy, competitive tendering and computerised pay bills.

This was a time of great upheaval in the railway industry at Swindon Works. We had been designing and building world-class steam engines for 125 years. It was a labour intensive industry and employed highly skilled craftsmen who had spent years in their trades, but now great change was sweeping through the industry as it switched from

the heavy locomotive building of the past to the new less labour intensive method of fabricating diesel locomotives. Over a period of ten years the labour force dwindled from 14,000 to just 2,500 when the works closed on 26th March 1986. During its heyday Swindon Railway Works had hosted over 200 different trades, which had now been lost over the space of few years. While in my time I watched the demise of many skills and witnessed the working of Blacksmiths, Steam Hammer Drivers, Blacksmith Welders, Oxyacetylene Welders, Coppersmiths, Tinsmiths, Chainsmiths, Forge-Men, Pattern Makers, Foundry Moulders, White Metal Workers, Brass-Finishers, Machinists, Locomotive Fitters, Turners and Erectors, Carriage Fitters, Carriage Finishers, Carpenters and Cabinet Makers, French Polishers, Sign Writers and numerous other trades that have now disappeared from our consciousness.



Swindon Locomotive Works 2005. The Carriage and Wagon Works to right of the Gloucester line, had closed in 1964. The London to Bristol main line runs along the bottom, while the Gloucester line is on the right. The main office block can be seen bottom right where over a thousand staff worked in its heyday.

When the rumours started to circulate about the Works closing I was aged 50 and too young to draw my pension. Without educational qualifications

and with a burgeoning unemployment force, I realised there was not much chance of acquiring another job but, to my good fortune, being from amongst several other applicants I was fortunate enough to transfer to the Civil Engineering side of British Rail working in admin. I remained there until redundancy eventually caught up with me and I retired on 29th September 1989. Searching for something useful to fill my days, there could be nothing more appropriate than working in a railway museum, and so within a few weeks I volunteered myself to help in STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway. At the time of writing (2017) I have been a volunteer there for twenty-eight years, creating a second career and working with the most welcoming people you could wish to meet. I became a member of the ‘Friends of the Swindon Railway Museum’ and with my contacts I acquired the GWR Goods Van No. 114202, which is now on permanent exhibition in STEAM. This was purchased by Harry Roberts, (former Swindon Works Manager) for the ‘Friends’, and was brought to Swindon by road from Bristol.



I'm seen here with my office manager. I retired in 1989 after a varied railway career stretching over 34 years.

For 18 years I contributed regular articles to the *Friends News Letter* ‘North Star’ and became its editor for a very short time. We

have a feature in the museum whereby former employees can have a plaque in their name erected in the gallery. My early interest led me to form a team of volunteers to assist with work on a computer system designed by a fellow volunteer, Roger Green (retired IT Manager), so that families can access their details on the Wall of Names. I have also designed the on-screen design for the Book of Honour and recruited volunteer helpers to assist with both projects.



St Georges Windmill in War Time Camouflage 1948.

During all of this time I had often thought of my days at St Georges, Heritage Craft Schools, Chailey and, after retiring in 1989, I decided to go back and visit the place that had cast its magic over my formative years. Not knowing what to expect, some forty years later, in hindsight I can say I was a little naïve in expecting to find things as I left them. I should have been forewarned when the taxi driver at Haywards Heath railway station said he had never heard of the place. We eventually arrived and my heart sank. I was stunned. St Georges was closed and abandoned. I found the janitor who let me into the front office. There I found some old school magazines showing photos of some of my contemporaries. I returned home

saddened and utterly convinced that the Heritage Craft Schools had been wiped off the map.

Yet it was by coincidence that in 2011 I idly Googled Chailey and to my amazement rediscovered the utterly transformed Chailey Heritage School Trust. It had been re-established at the completely refurbished site at St Martins. The old hospital and veranda has been replaced with modern buildings equipped with state of the art technology. There, in place of the wards, are residential bungalows fully adapted and fitted with self-catering accommodation. There young people with multiple disabilities can achieve their own potential, while at the same time receive the finest medical care that medical science can provide. This discovery was a revelation for me and led to my first reunion visit at 81 years of age in 2014 and there, much to my pleasure, I found that an Old Scholars Association had been formed, and has built up a superb 'on line' archive showing the history of this outstanding humanitarian endeavour. The Heritage Craft Schools is the creation of an inspirational young woman Grace Kimmins, later Dame, born in the late 19th century, who was so affected by the plight of crippled children in the slums of Bermondsey during the 1890s and with complete dedication spent the whole of her life fighting for their cause. The Heritage Trust still flourishes today with the same dedication of purpose as that established by its founder Dame Grace Kimmins.