

WRITTEN IN 1975

"LIFE OF THE PEOPLE"
FROM RICKFORD HILL TO PERRY HILL SCHOOL

WORPLESDON

1905 to 1925 by Albert Enever

Before I commence my story, I would just like to say a little about myself and why I am qualified to write about the following events in the village.

I was born at Rickford on February 21st, 1901. My father was huntsman to a pack of hounds kenneled at Merrist Wood. I was the sixth child, having three brothers and two sisters. I was christened, confirmed, sang in the choir and married in the village church.

I attended Perry Hill School from 1906 to 1915, after joining the Boy Scouts, I later became their Scout Master. After leaving school, I worked for a local builder (Mr. H. Rance) as a painter and decorator. I was in the British Army for a short period at the age of 17 1/2 years, but the war finished before I was ready to go overseas.

October 14th 1925, I left for Australia, so that is the reason why this story must finish then. Perhaps someone else may like to continue after that date.

To begin with, I shall write about the Village and its activities, starting about 1905 as that is as far back as I can recall. Rickford to Perry Hill was a very busy little place, so shall commence from Rickford Mill and do the mile to Perry Hill School.

Rickford Mill was owned originally by a Mr. Young and later by a Mr. Taylor. Here, they grounded wheat and barley, crushed oats, corn and cut chaff. We loved watching the old wooden wheels go round and hear them creak and groan. Continuing up the road and on the right hand side was a bake-house and store which was owned by a Mr. Christmas, later on I'll tell you all about some of the people who worked at these establishments.

On the left hand side was Brook Farm, later farmed by my brother, but on we go to the right again where there was another large farm. Now to Mr. Rance's builders yard, where I later worked with another twelve men of all trades. Then on the left was the Village Green where we used to play Cricket and Football.

On the Green there was a pavilion where we children used to play when it rained. Alas, the Green is all grown over now and a young forest has emerged. Opposite the Green was a row of houses, in one of which I was born, another one had a little sweet shop owned by a Mrs. Poole, so we called it "Poole's Hotel".

On we go by the Chapel and we come to Mr. Woodman's bake-house and corn store. There we leave Rickford and go up to Perry Hill. On the left side we come to the Timber Mill which was owned at first by a Mr. Hebburn and later by Gabriel and Wade.

It was in Mr. Hebburn's time that I shall talk about. We loved watching the big steam engine which worked the big saws and delighted in playing among the big oak and elm logs, having bark fights and catching big beetles that had horns on their heads, we called them "Pincher Bobs". They lived in the heaps of sawdust. After the Timber Mill, we come to the Post Office Store and bake-house which was kept by a Mr. Collins.

Opposite was the Cricket and Football grounds and we have now been travelling half a mile. A few hundred yards further on, we come to Perry Hill. The Church of England is on the left. This is a magnificent building, with a tower and peal of bells and beautiful windows. The village Green is on the right and on the edge of it is a blacksmith shop. This was kept by a Mr. Charman and next door is a wheelwright and coach builders which was owned by Terry and Primmer. Here they made and repaired carts and wagons. This was also the local undertakers. On the left, a little further down was another blacksmith, but as well as shoeing horses, the Smithy used to put the iron tyres on the carts wheels. This was done by heating the iron tyres in peat fires and when red hot, were lifted out by big tongs onto a wheel and belted on with sledge hammers by three men. When in place, buckets of water were thrown over the wheel to stop the wood from catching alight, On a winter's day we would love to go into this shop and watch the Smithy at work and feel the warmth from the forger. Sometimes he would allow us to blow the bellows.

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Next to the Smithy was the local pub called the "New Inn", then down the hill called the "Mount" and on to the village school and there we must leave it. We have now done a mile.

Halfway down the hill called the 'Mount' was a building which was used as a club room and oh what stories it could have told. Another industry I forgot to mention was a place where they made wine from fruit, parsnips, elderberries and dandelions. It was off the main road at Rickford. These were the industries of Rickford and Perry Hill until 1925. After returning from Australia in 1975, I found they had all gone except Christmas's bake-house and the Post Office Store.

After 1918, a village Hall was built in memory of the Fallen during the 1914-18 war and a Mrs. Tovey opened a small gift shop at Perry Hill

The Boy Scouts were formed in 1912 and the Guides followed later. Alas, the Scouts and Guides are finished. To me, the village seems dead; however, I must not get into the present time, but return to the 1905-25 period.

Another going concern before 1914 was the "Worplesdon Band". I was just a boy, but if anyone is alive who was in that band, they could write a story about its members and activities.

For the children in those days there was plenty to do. Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Choir, Gleeclub, Band of Hope, Girls Friendly Society and fishing in the mill stream. In the winter holidays, we could run with the hounds and even skate on Whitmoor Pond when the ice was good enough.

During summer holidays we could watch the soldiers from Pirbright camp having sham fights on the common. We used to pick up empty blank cartridge cases and if we found a live one, we would try to set it off by putting it in a crack in a log, hitting it with a nail in a piece of wood. Another game we played was putting a parcel in the road, hide behind a hedge and when someone went to pick it up, we'd pull it away, very naughty but oh what fun. We had paper chases and at night played "Dickie Night". Show your light or shout. There are miles of common land adjoining the village so we had plenty of scope for fun and games, kite flying being another favourite.

On August Bank holiday, the local flower show was always held in the Cricket ground. Besides the show, there were sports including foot races, sideshows, hoopla, roundabouts, coconut shies and swing boats all the fun of the fair with dancing at night - in all a great day.

In the summer, Lady Walker used to give a party for us, the day school children, with sports in the afternoon, followed by tea. After that, prizes were presented for awards at school.

We all marched from the school to her home at Worplesdon Place, naturally dressed in our best clothes and led by a band from the Gordon Boys School at Bisley.

November 5th came and we had a huge bonfire complete with Guy, generally the village policeman. Everyone turned out for this occasion. Then just before Christmas, Miss Cunliffe always gave a party to the children. Tea, a huge Christmas Tree and Father Christmas complete.

When Mr. Stanley Brotherwood lived at Merrist Wood, he gave a party on Boxing Day to all the families of the people who worked on the estate. This was a grand affair, held in the big ballroom where a tree laden with presents and lights reached to the ceiling. After tea and amusements, we would go into the ballroom where Father Christmas came knocking at the door. If it had been snowing, he had snow on his suit, otherwise bits of cotton wool which looked very real. Gathered in the room were all the servants in their scarlet coats, yellow waistcoats, white breeches and hunting boots. The gamekeepers would be in their green jackets, brown breeches and leggings, a truly Christmas Card scene.

I realise I should have mentioned this before, as between the mill and the school there were several houses and the owners employed gardeners, gamekeepers, grooms, coachmen, butlers, footmen and maidservants, about fifty in all. Also there were farms where lots more people lived, so you can imagine what a thriving part of Worplesdon, Rickford and Perry Hill were.

I suppose I could write lots more about what we did as kids and as we were growing up; but time is on the wing, as I have to return to Australia soon and must complete this before I go.

One instance I must record, even though it did not occur in Worplesdon, my brother and I were cycling home from Bournemouth on a moonlight night, there were no trees to cast any shadows and the road was straight, and when approaching Winchester, coming towards us was a figure dressed in a monk's cassock (cowl over his head, girdle round his waist and staff in his hand). It was just a form, as we could not see a face; and we were just about to run into him when he disappeared. My brother said, "Bert, did you see old Hordle John?" and when I said "Yes", we knew it must have been real.

The story was that Hordle John was a monk who went on Crusades and took unto himself a native girl for a wife. Because of this, he was excommunicated and his punishment for doing so was that his spirit would walk the earth until the last day.

Between 1918 and 1925 I saw every airship that was at Farnborough pass over the village. It was a wonderful sight, never to be forgotten.

There were some amusing characters who lived in the period from 1905 to 1925. I shall start from the mill and work up to the school. Employed at the mill was a Mr. Chuter and a Mr. Warham. When you were served by Mr. Warham, he used to wipe his hand across the top of the measure, just so, but when Mr. Chuter served you, he was more generous and piled it to the top.

Mr. Warham's wife wore big red bloomers, some of which you would always see hanging on the line. A male who lived nearby had an airgun and he took delight in firing slugs at the bloomers, but the material was so tough the slugs would just bounce off. We called them "Mrs. Warham's rice bags."

Mr. Christmas employed a baker by the name of Mr. White, nicknamed Bogey. He was of short, stocky stature and used to drive a white horse. Bogey was about fifty and was sweet on the publican's sister-in-law, but definitely not the marrying type. On the way home from his rounds if short of cash, he would call in at the New Inn about 8.p.m. holding his chest, he would stagger into the pub, saying "Oh, Lord, oh me heart, oh me heart", and poor Sarah would run and bring him a noggin of brandy and that would make him say that he felt much better and that Sarah had saved his life.

If Old Bogey stayed too long at the pub, the old horse would fall asleep and collapse on the ground. On these occasions, the men from the Inn would help unharness the horse to get him up and re-harness him so that Old Bogey could go on his merry way home.

Another horse that Old Bogey used to drive was one my father had used for hunting. One day when Bogey had gone into a house to deliver bread, the hounds were hunting a fox in the nearby fields. The horse heard them and took Bogey off, complete with the breadcart, down the lane, through a gate and across two fields until he eventually was stopped by a hedge. Old Bogey was trying to run and shouting, "stop him, stop him", whilst we children were almost bursting our sides with laughter.

A little further up the road was Nortons Farm where lived a Mr. Tiley and his two sisters. One sister, fat and a little retarded, delighted in giving folk presents. One night, clad only in nightgown and coat, she knocked at a friend's door. On opening the door, she said to this friend, "You are a good man. Mr. Tiley, and I'm going to give you a present which will be a surprise" and out of her basket she proceeded to pull two dead rabbits. Luckily, by this time her brother and sister found her before she was able to go too far, and took her home. Sadly, the poor soul later had to be placed in a mental home.

After the farm, came the builder's yard which was owned by Mr. Rance. He was a dapper little man, always wearing a navy suit, bowler hat and sporting a beard. You could always hear him coming, by his singing, 'Haw, haw', into his beard. He was an accomplished musician, playing both the violin and piano.

One day, my mate and I were whitewashing a ten foot high ceiling, whilst this character was watching us, a cord on the trestle broke, causing it to collapse, when alas the bucket went up in the air and this little dapper man was covered in whitewash. He liked to go to Chapel in the morning and the Church of England at night. when asked his religion, he would always say he was a "Devil Dodger". When old Nick's at the church I go to chapel and vice versa. The poor little man lost on every job, but somehow still managed to end up reasonably well off. This was the case with most of the business folk in the builder's yard.

A labourer by the name of Mr. Hill worked for Mr. Rance. A smallpox hospital was being built on Whitmoor Common and when some old ladies asked what was being built, Mr. Hill would always reply, "bricks and mortar, Ma'am".

Another time, we were working at a big home while the owners were away. The phone started to ring and Mr. Hill (the labourer) answered it. The person at the other end wanted to speak to his chauffeur who also happened to be named Hill. Great was the confusion with the ensuing conversation, because the labourer Hill couldn't understand what the caller wanted, and just kept repeating "Pardon, sir, Pardon, sir". By this time we were in fits of laughter, where upon Hill shouted to us to shut up as he couldn't hear what the silly old was saying. When the voice at the other end exploded, the labourer hung up. At this stage the chauffeur Hill arrived and when the phone rang again, he just told his boss that he must have got the wrong number before.

Or another occasion, as a lad of fifteen, I was working on a job with a sixty-year-old first class painter and decorator named Butcher. Mr. Butcher never spoke whilst working. We were staining an oak staircase making the new wood look like old. There was complete silence when Lady..... popped her head out from a door saying, "I don't hear you working out there painters". Mr. Butcher looked up and quietly said, "Do you think we put it on with a b..... hammer?", to which Lady..... replied, "What did you say, man?" Butcher just said, "Ma'am, I didn't speak a word." I had great difficulty in controlling my mirth.

Another carpenter, by the name of Os, used to eat sulphur tablets to keep people out of his workshop,

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enough said. He owned a white female dog, which was always being pestered by a white male dog. Outside his home was a common with bushes. One dark night, Os thought he saw the dog behind the bushes, so he put a pebble in his catapult and let fly, but alas it was the white shirt of the dog's owner he saw; so the fellow copped the pebble just where he sat down. I still wonder what that man was doing behind the bushes that night.

We had a plasterer who needed a quart of beer to get him started each morning and a big red-nosed bricklayer who obviously was nicknamed "Strawberry Nose". Then of course there was Arthur the apprentice who made a mistake in making a window sash. I said "Arthur, I would have given you ten shillings to stay away today", whereupon Arthur replied, "Give me ten shillings and I'll stay away tomorrow".

Further along the road, Mr. Badcock lived. He used to walk to Guildford and back delivering newspapers. Always dressed in a check suit and bowler hat, he looked more like a bookie than a paper man. He was the father of four children, Perky, Pork, Cuff and Sis. I think it best not to tell you the rhymes we children used to write about them.

After that came Mrs. Wall, the local laundress. Next to her was old Mr. Chuter who always had a chew of tobacco in his mouth. He would cut peat turf on the common for any who wanted them. People used them to cover their potato clamps to keep out the frost in the winter and the Smithy used them when dry to heat the iron tyres for the cartwheels.

At Woodman's you could buy bread, horse and chicken feed, bacon and pork, as they killed their own pigs and made bacon. Mr. Woodman had two lovely old English Sheep Dogs.

As a boy I often rode on the baker's cart up the hill to the timber yard and mill owned by Mr. Hebburn. He was a funny little old man who always wore a smock. When we kids came too near the engine or saws, he would pick up a long piece of timber and threaten to poke us if we didn't get away. If we climbed a tree he would do the same thing; we always obeyed because we knew he meant it. Earlier though we had him bluffed because we would pelt him with little pieces of bark and he would give up in despair. He also kept goats and on one occasion my two mates milked one, using Mr. Hebburn's hat as the container and then drinking the milk.

The Carter who drove the timber jinkers horses had two favourite ones, by the names of Major and Mick. As they would be pulling a load of logs along the road he would sing a little ditty to them (Major and Dick went down the dark hole, Major set light to Dick's Dick woke up in a terrible fright, called blimey Major my alight.) The Carter never cared who heard him.

Farewell to the timber mill and on to the post office and store which was kept by Mr. Collins (a little man) known to all as Uncle Pug or the Lord Mayor of Worplesdon. His brother who worked in the bakehouse was a great cricketer. He would shut his eyes and hit the ball for six, very different from the way they play today. He was always good for at least fifty runs. There was another fellow by the name of Cutter Childs, who used to deliver letters across Whitmoor Common. Needless to remark he was called "Lightening" because it used to take him half a day to walk two miles.

Then came Mr. Woods, better known as "Splinters" and after two pints of beer, you could fill his half empty pint with water and he wouldn't know the difference. However, he was not too stupid as he sometimes served in the Grocery store. One day the Vicar's wife rang Splinters (who was a little bard of hearing) at the store and when he kept begging the Lady's pardon, the lady in desperation exclaimed that there must be a fool at the other end of the telephone. Old Splinters quietly said, "Yes Ma'am there is, but at which end".

Last, but certainly not the least, there was Bill How who delivered bread, if a dog pestered him, he would just stand still and stare the dog in the face, whereupon it would go away with its tail between its legs. Bill had been to the U.S.A. and could tell some good stories of his travels.

Next to the post office lived the local doctor. A grand Irishman by the name of Paddy who was loved by all. When visiting patients across the commons or at the farms, he always rode an old white horse. When patients had little money and were concerned about payment, Paddy would always say, "Pay me tomorrow", to which of course the patients would reply that they wouldn't be able to. Paddy would always however, kindly say "Tomorrow never comes because when it does it is today". Luckily he had a private income to keep him going; but the day dear old Paddy died everyone was very sad.

Across the common lived Mr. Wheeler, an ex Lifeguards Trooper who had the longest reach of any man I've ever known, seven feet from fingertip to fingertip. On the wall of the pub were two marks which marked his span and free beer was available to anyone who could match it. However, the publican never had to give any free beer.

At Worplesdon lived Sir James and Lady Walker. On their lawn stood a pigeon coop on top of a high pole. During a storm, the wind blew the coop over and it smashed. When my boss was asked to make a new one, he painted it white and erected it in place of the old one. His Lordship looking at it, turned to the head carpenter and said it was painfully like the old one. The carpenter said, "Ain't that what you wanted my Lord". However, he insisted on it being painted brown, as the white fantail pigeons would not show up against the white wood.

The next morning a man was sent to paint it brown, but before it had time to dry, the pigeons rubbed against the paint thus making their white feathers brown. When Sir James inspected the coop he took one look at the pigeons and said, "My goodness, a miracle has happened; the pigeons have all gone piebald".

Sir James also employed a staff of gardeners, the head one being a Mr. Spreckly, but known to all as Speckle Belly. My boss had the job to repair and paint the green houses and sheds. The apple storage shed was a large weatherboard building without windows and only one door. This door was double locked and nobody could enter without the head gardener's key. One day, Mr. Spreckly showed us the best crop of his apples which were stored on wire netting shelves, ".ain't they lovely" he remarked, but didn't offer us any. When all the gardeners had gone to lunch, one of the carpenters's prized off a weatherboard paling and made a spear with a baton and a nail poking out at the end. He speared six large apples from the hole he had made and replaced the paling neatly back. A few days later the gardener went to collect some apples for Sir James. After he had been to the storehouse, he came round to where we were working and exclaimed that a great mystery had occurred. Six of my biggest apples have vanished and nobody could possibly have got in without my permission as I am the only one who has the keys". Not a word did we say, so it still remained a mystery.

Opposite Worplesdon Place lived our first scout master, Duncan Tovey. He was also a member of the London Scottish and Territorial Regiment called the "Grey Kilts". Once a year they came to Worplesdon and had a parade to the Church of England, singing as they marched along. Duncan was badly wounded in the 1914-18 war and died of his wounds, some time later. Today I still have in my possession a book of his poems.

In the next house lived an artist by the name of Mr. Symes. He caricatured most of the local people I have written about and today his sketches can still be seen in the picture gallery in the village Memorial Hall at Perry Hill.

Next door, the blacksmith's shop was kept by Mr. Charman who went to Australia in 1912 and was tragically drowned in the Hunter River while trying to save his son's life. Mr. Phelps took over the shop after Mr. Charman left. He owned a cream coloured pony and one summer evening while taking it to the common to graze, the pony bolted and dragged Mr. Phelps along a gravel path. On hearing the commotion, Mrs Phelps came running out and bending over her unconscious husband, said "Speak to me Frank", whereupon Frank just opened his eyes and said, "Where is that b..... pony".

Nearby lived Mr. Burch who ran the Band of Hope - a Temperance group. He always read the Bible lesson from the Book of Proverbs, as follows: Wine is a mocker. strong drink is raging - down with the drink", but some very naughty young fellows would always call out "Down with every drop you can get hold of", nothing to be proud of, I must admit.

The pub was kept by my Godfather, Mr. William Brewer Buckle, who was known only to go to church on four occasions in his life, when he was christened, married, and when I was christened, and when he was buried. The day the Kaiser abdicated, he wrote outside the inn "Big Bill and Little Bills opped it, Old Bill's customers mobbed it, Sold out". In the bar those days, the lamps were lit by oil, but great games of darts and crib were played there. The Buffalo Society always held meetings there, and a Slate Club was held. A favourite joke in the bar was to pin a jumping jack firework to a man's coat tail, light it and delight in watching the victim trying to get away. However, it was all taken in good fun.

A minister at the Chapel used to thump the top of the pulpit while delivering his sermon and on one occasion he thumped so hard that the candles used for light jumped out of their sockets and one landed on a lady's lap. Another time, this minister who was so small, had to stand on a box to see over the top of the pulpit. He had just delivered the text, "A little while he shall see me, a little while he shall not". When the box broke and he fell behind the pulpit, much laughter rang from the congregation.

The school master was a great fellow who loved to teach Religious Instruction, singing and physical drill. At 76 I can still do all the exercises he taught me and can walk as far as any man today.

Mr. Gunner, a gardener who was employed at Merrist Wood was sometimes called Pick or Punch. The boys would often meet him with "Good-day Dick Punch, Mr. Gunner". He was indeed the best vegetable grower in the district.

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Another identity was a Mr. Pool, who was known to everyone as Push . I never did know the reason. His eye-brows were the bushiest I have ever seen and they always appeared around the corner before he did.

I have not said much about the ladies of the village. but I think it will be kinder to let them rest in peace.

However, I mustn't forget two other colourful characters. One lived very roughly on the common and was called Jack Pom Pom. He had flaming red hair and beard. A very harmless man. he just minded cows on the common where he picked wild flowers to give to passersby. The other fellow, Kidley Kale, lived in a van and used to do hedging and ditching and sometimes worked on a threshing machine on the farms. He was a very devout man who always went to Church twice each Sunday. Often during the sermon he would stand up and shout out, "I have seen the Holy Ghost with mine own eyes". I often wonder just what did become of these two men, as they were still living when I left Worplesdon for Australia.

I feel I must mention the gypsies who lived on the common. They used to make clothes pegs which the women sold from door to door. They mainly lived by stealing vegetables from the farmer's fields and snaring rabbits and pheasants by cunning means. They were seldom caught as they seldom stayed longer than a couple of days in one place.