

Kathleen Deebank and Ann Gilmour live in St Quentin in Bekesbourne.

Interviewer – *Kathleen, how long have you lived in Bekesbourne?*

Since 1943.

You lived somewhere before that?

I lived at Knapfield, nr Redhill, Surrey, in front of Redhill aerodrome for a year. We moved from there because the Ministry of Defence requisitioned the property to expand the aerodrome, and I lived for a year at Wingham at Ashentree, Preston Hill with my grandmother for a year, then we came here.

So you came here very much in the middle of the war. Can you say a bit about how life was during the war in the country area?

Exciting (both explaining). Shall we tell you how we got here? We left Surrey and I was four and Kathleen was nine, with my mum, some suitcases and a Labrador dog, and a goldfish, and a travel permit. We came into Canterbury West station from Redhill and on the bus to Wingham to my grandmother's.

Of course, there was a direct line then through from Redhill.

You went to Tonbridge and then to Canterbury West. And that's how we arrived in Kent.

Was it thought you would be safer here?

We had nowhere to live. They compulsorily purchased and I think we were the last ones out weren't we.

Right, so you arrived in this part of the world in 1942. Was it before the big blitz on Canterbury?

No, it was after. We arrived in August/September.

So it was very much after the damage was done. Mind you, you weren't very old. Did you go into Canterbury very much?

(Kathleen). Yes, my mother shopped there. I was aware of the bomb damage. In the High Street, what was it the Fleur De Lys was a smouldering wreck and everything else there was destroyed. Then, of course, we had things delivered rather than going shopping in those days.

Right, so what sort of food would be delivered here then?

We had the baker deliver from Bridge (his name was Mr Baker!), and we had our groceries from Mr Price. Then when Mr Price went, which was quite a long time after that, we had them delivered from Mr Bennett at Ickham.

I see, that was quite a way. Were they delivered by horse and cart?

No, by van.

They had a van, even during the war. So, you were too young Ann for school, is that right?

I started school when I was at Wingham. I had just turned five. I had one term there. Then I came on to school at Bridge, so did Kathleen.

Bekesbourne had a school then surely?

It was closed. They closed it because it was too near the railway.

Because after the war it opened again, is that right? It was too near the railway and I suppose they were frightened of the bombing?

(Kathleen) Yes it did open again, but it was a target during the war. We weren't there but they had a go at the railway because there were bomb holes out in the field there. It missed the railway. There was one in the garden and one up in the orchard.

That brought it really home to you, having come from Surrey where there was bombing and down here there was bombing! So, Ann, you had one year at Wingham and then came on here to Bridge, and then you Kathleen came to Bridge as well. Who was the head teacher back then, can you remember?

(Ann) In the infant school, Miss Bell. (Kathleen) I can't remember who mine was; I have a head like a sieve for names!

How long did you stay in Bridge school?

(Kathleen) I was there for a year then I went to the Simon Langton School for Girls which, at that time, was at Stone House at St Martins, where the mental hospital is, because the Girls School had been bombed. Moved into what is now St Martins Hospital. That was fun wasn't it.

(Ann) Would you like to know how we got to Bridge from Bekesbourne? We used to go down to the village hall, and a man called Mr Crump used to pick us up. It was like a pick-up truck really with a canvas roof over the top, and a little door, and he had seats all around it and a seat down the middle, and when it rained he pulled the canvas down. That was our school bus.

Can you say what it was like in the classrooms there?

(Ann) Oh I loved it and I was only little. In the winter we used to take a little tin of cocoa with sugar mixed in with it, and Miss Bell used to heat the school milk, which was delivered, on an open fire in a big pot and we all had hot cocoa with our sandwiches. (Kathleen) I was in the upper one (7 or 8 upwards).

Inside the school, was it divided up into rooms?

(Ann) The bottom bit was in two rooms; it was like a wooden bit with a glass partition at the top half. Now who was it, was it Miss Paignton who took the next class?? I remember knitting dishcloths. (Kathleen) I can't really remember whether the upper one right at the top was divided up or not. (Ann) You used to go out the school door round the corner into the toilets, which joined up with the two schools together.

If you started at five and went on until eleven, could you go on to 14 or not?

(Kathleen) From Bridge, you either went on if you were lucky enough to pass your 11 Plus, or you went to Sturry. People of my age, a lot of them went to Sturry.

To what became the Montgomery School. So, if you came in at five, you had five or six years?

(Ann) No, I went to Bekesbourne when I was eight.

How did you get to Bekesbourne School because it is quite a way?

We walked.

You walked, so that's a good mile and a quarter, which is what children did in those days.

(Kathleen) I used to cycle to Simon Langton across the footpaths all the way round.

You used to go down that little road that goes over the railway bridge and then through the orchards (Yes)?

(Ann) Yes, because this road down here now wasn't a road. It was known as the cinder track. Just a layer of cinders put through it, a right of way sort of thing.

Yes, through the orchards I suppose? Because I can remember dragons teeth on one side there.

They're still there.

Were they putting them there across the railway or not?

(Ann) They are just this side of the railway.

I don't know what the plan was with those.

Just seems odd. You'd think they'd go both sides of the railway and both sides of the bridge to stop them going over.

So just keeping on about the war. Were you aware of soldiers going through at all. Was there much movement?

(Ann) They did, they went down to Dover didn't they, because I can remember going to school and picking up the post. (Kathleen) That was at Redhill. (Ann) We picked up post down here as well and used to be it in the letterbox down School Lane. What we did see was the doodle bugs go through. Because out the back, which is now field, was an orchard which my dad owned, and we used to sit up in the trees and watch the doodle bugs go across.

(Ann) Then we watched the old dogfights up in the sky, we could see them. But we enjoyed it, didn't we. Being honest, we had so much freedom it was fantastic.

So where would you play? I suppose around on the field and orchards?

(Ann) We had the field the orchards, down in the woods. Mum used to pack us up food and drink, didn't she, and a box of matches, and away we would go. We would cook out in the open air. We used to take potatoes and stick in the fire and a frying pan with bacon in it.

Were there other children around?

(Kathleen) Yes, I don't know if you have come across them. Harry Goodwin, his two daughters, Peggy and Janet. Over at Cow House Cottage, just across the railway bridge, there was the Clark's. You most probably know David Clark in Bridge (Yes), well he used to

live just over there with his mum. He had four brothers and two sisters. There was Claysons, Eileen and Alan, and further down there was Janet Fairbrace, Rita Bellsey and Nora Groombridge, Tony Houghton. And over there, what is Springfield Nurseries, Pamela, Peter and Raymond Smith, and Mr Smith ran a nursery during the war with the land army girls. He came over from Guernsey. He got out of Guernsey before the Germans got there, and managed to get himself and his family out.

So he was someone who managed to get out and set up as a nursery?

(Ann) No he worked for Fridays, the nursery people.

Right. Anyway, so there were lots of children around and you had great fun in the countryside. Now... shops in Bridge and people, what can you remember in Bridge?

(Kathleen) In Bekesbourne there was a little shop, which is now in the street and is a house. (Ann) And the Unicorn pub used to sell from the back door. Biscuits and sweets and all sorts of things. Don't know what else he used to sell because we were always interested in the biscuits and sweets, and bottles of pop. They had papers. Where did they come from? – I think they were dumped on the station because Mr Hogben, who lived in the same row as Mrs Smith, and he used to bring papers up, and when he got too old they somehow got them to Bekesbourne and dumped here because my mum used to deliver them round these few cottages. Then of course, at Bridge, there was Mr Price, and there was a little shop (well, it has not long gone) in the High Street further up, which is now the Saddlers

The bakers of course was there. (Ann) What was up by the Post Office, was the Post Office there and the chemist. (Kathleen) I don't know about the chemist but I know there was a Post Office there. Dr Hunter was more or less a few doors down from the Post Office in the big house. (Kathleen) All of Western Avenue were fields and you could go round the back of the garage and get in the back there. I don't know if you can still do that. You could at one time because there was nothing there at all.

Yes, so I understand. Were there any great celebrations at the end of the war – VE Day?

(Kathleen) Wasn't it in the village hall. (Ann) Wasn't there that big thing in the field, what is now the Hop Garden? Wasn't there a big do in there? Yes.

That was inside, you didn't have a street party at all?

No.

What about any other celebration that you were aware of?

We always used to have a village fete every year in Bekesbourne on the recreation ground, regularly. Then it moved to Cobham Court in the field by the church. Mrs Whigham used to let them have it there because it got a bit smaller. It used to be a big village fete but seemed to fade away.

When you say the recreation ground?

That's the one near Patribourne.

Of course the Whighams lived in the big house at Cobham Court. Who lived in, what I call, the Manor House, the next one up from the old School House by the bridge?

Oh, that was the Old Vicarage. We used to go in there for Sunday School, Mr Lamplugh and his wife, the vicar.

Oh, I hadn't realised that.

(Kathleen) Who lived in the old palace. (Ann) Delano Osbourne. He was very good, he was like a governor at the school and because the recreation ground was so far away for sport because we only had the playground, we used to go over there and play on his big lawns at the back. It was close to the school and we used to walk over there crocodile style and play games over there.

Now, any eccentric characters you knew?

We had a man over the road who was ex army, Mr Mason, and he was a funny character. Very upright and precise wasn't he. And his wife had the only car I had ever seen except for somebody's old land rover type thing. She had a funny little car all during the war. It was a two-seater thing with a humped boot, an old fashioned car.

Of course, the roads must have been really empty around here.

We used to roller skate down this one and we used to toboggan down those steep hills. (Kathleen) And Mr Mount, who used to live at Little Barton, at the top of Spring Lane estate, his daughter who is now Ann McKeever, she had a pony and she used to have that and we all used to ride on the sledge pulled by the pony. All out in the road.

What did your dad do?

He worked for the North Thames Gas Board in London and he also was a smallholder because we had the 14 acres here. To the next cottage down there right down to the woods. We had a big orchard at the back with about 500 chickens. Next to that was a field that old Mr Clayson used to have to graze his sheep. And the top meadow we had, during the war it was compulsory to grow certain amount of cereals, so we had to grow 6 acres of cereal. It was done by a contractor because we couldn't cope. The only bits we did was stook the corn, and the footpath here now which should be a right of way, the old traction engine went up there and did all the corn. Then Mr Holman in Canterbury used to come with his threshing machine, you know the big steam engine with the belts.

(Ann) Mr Clayson had a horse and cart. Not only did he have sheep and land, he was also a woodsman wasn't he because he made hurdles and all that sort of thing. He used to cut the wood and make all the chestnut hurdles.

Who did the woods belong to?

(Kathleen) I don't really know who they belonged to but Mount had, I don't know if that was during the war or not, but Mount had half of that big one there. It went across and there was a dividing line, which went like that in the woods. And Rickard's had the other half. It has now been sold. I don't know who they sold it to first. I think perhaps Mr Holdstock who bought Hope Farm. He shoots there and I think he shoots over the whole lot. It might only be rented out, like Mr Mount has rented out his orchard to Newmafruit..

Just a few more questions. Canterbury at the time, when you first arrived, there had been the blitz or the raid. Can you remember anything more about Canterbury? I am sure you do because you used to cycle in and go to school?

(Ann) Before then we used to go in on the train didn't we. It used to cost 2d return and it was a steam engine. That was exciting wasn't it, steam engines. One of the most exciting times with the railway down there was my Dad wasn't it. He used to have 100 day old chicks come in and they always came in on the train. Where they came from I have got no idea, and Mr Coombs used to look after them until we picked them up.

The centre of Canterbury, is there anything you can remember. Of course, you were out at St Martins so didn't really to into the centre.

(Kathleen) We used to go to Lyons and get cakes, that was still standing. It's now Burtons. Of course, where Boots the chemist was, that was still whole. The Long Market was just a bomb site from what I can remember, and all the way up there I can't remember anything standing. The clock tower was standing but the church went. Then a bit further up, still standing, the co-op was still standing on that corner. (Ann) But that was originally a theatre or cinema wasn't it. And Twyman's was still there on the opposite side of the road. There were corner shops and then the cinema; there was Pilch Collards on the corner and the bakers, because I got my wedding cake from them. Then a bit further up there was a clock or watch shop and that was still standing. Then there was Martin Walters, the garage. Then by the cinema there was a temporary building, which must have been put up, called Bates, and used to sell all sorts of batteries. Bates the garage was at the top of Burgate. There was a big hotel, that went didn't it. Also, down the High Street, the Guildhall wasn't there, that got burnt.

I think the Guildhall got damaged, the walls were still there and I think the council tore it down?

(Kathleen) From the Guildhall downwards that was all still standing. Where was the Fleur de Lys. (Ann) That was opposite Pilch Collard and Chittendens. That got demolished and they put temporary shops there. It was between Pilch Collards & Chittendens and Gordons.

Final question. You went to school in Canterbury, if I can just talk to Kathleen first of all? What did you do when you left school?

I went back as a laboratory assistant because I had got a job. My dad said to me, you'll have to do something and Miss Groves, who was then head of the Science Department, somehow found out that I was unemployed, so she offered me a job as a laboratory assistant. I was there for about four, four and a half years. Then, in the paper one day, there was an advert for a laboratory assistant over at Wye College which was much more in my line. I wasn't really interested in preparing things for school kids and then clearing up the mess after them. So I went over for an interview and he offered me the job. So I went back and told Miss Camprey the head that I wanted the job and she said I didn't have to give any notice. I started in January 1958 and spent the rest of my days there. I worked in the Horticultural Department to start with, because I knew it was only a temporary job. The person whose job it was had to do National Service. So when the time came I was told that there would be a job for me, then I could either go into the Agricultural Research Council Unit or into Hop research. So I went into Hop research because I wasn't really a chemist, I was much more interested in the growing and things like that. I worked in plant physiology, and then I had to go from there because they ran down that department (they didn't make you redundant), so I shunted sideways into biological science.

Well they obviously valued you to keep you there.

Yes, they didn't like making people redundant or get rid of people. They asked people to leave rather than sack them.

How did you get to Wye from here?

When I first went, I used to cycle from here to the West station and walk up, or if it was too bad to cycle, I usually used to walk to the West station and walk back again at night. Then I had been there about a year or so and I bought myself a scooter. Then I managed to pass my test and eventually got myself a little car. The scooter was all right except when it got a bit icy; it didn't seem to want to go the same way as I wanted to go.

And what about you Ann?

Well I left Bekesbourne School, passed my 11 plus and went to the Langton. Left there in 1955. Hadn't got a job, Dad wasn't very well then, so I went into Canterbury, saw an advertisement and did nine weeks in what was called Martins. It was in Sun Street, it was a ladies dress shop. I was general dogsbody really. I used to run round carrying parcels to people's houses and do all that sort of thing. But in the meantime I had also applied to Telephone House. So I went to Telephone House and was there 3 years and I got fed up and I said to somebody "how long before you get any promotion" here and they said six years. I thought blow this for a lark so I applied to a Post Office Savings Bank in London and transferred up there. I got engaged so I went and stayed with my future in-laws in London when I worked up there.

Well thank you very much.

It was very free here, we had so much freedom it was incredible. The only time we were told to come inside was air raids and things like that going on, and at night time we weren't supposed to be going out and looking at things upstairs. You could hear that big gun go off that was at Bishopsbourne. It used to run back on the railway.