



John William CHEESMAN

(1935-2019)

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1935: John was born 9th August 1935 at Islington, London

Father	John CHEESMAN (1903)
Mother	Elsie STONE (1913)



1936: John CHEESMAN (1)

1939: 50 Albarry Cottage, Islington: John W CHEESMAN (36, Iron Plate Worker & Welder Heavy Worker), Elsie Louisa (26, Unpaid domestic) and two other closed records which would be John (4) and Joyce (2)

John CHEESMAN Remembers

- *A view of life from the 1930s both happy and sad.*

I remember living in Riversdale Road, Highbury and looking out of the window to see crowds of men walking along the road; these were Arsenal supporters leaving the stadium during one of Arsenal's pre-war successful years.

I did have an older sister called Elsie but she died when I was a baby so I never knew her. When Uncle George passed away we found a photograph of her in his wallet, it seems he carried it throughout the war and even when he was in a German P.O.W. camp so she must have made quite an impression on him.



Uncle George and niece Elsie (John's elder sister)

When I was three or four, my uncles Harry and George bought me a Fort for Christmas which had a draw-bridge which captivated me.

In 1940 my Grandad came to visit and showed me how to dry the small of my back with a towel so I thought he was very clever. I later found out that he was very violent and my Dad had the scars on his back to prove this. My own Dad was also very violent and I put this down to his own upbringing because at times he seemed upset at his own actions but could never show any affection.

In 1940 we lived in Popham Street Islington and this is where I first went to school. The teacher told my Mum that she would have trouble with me in the future because I was cheeky and argumentative; my Mum said that she didn't think so.

I remember looking out of the window, late at night, and seeing firemen and hosepipes outside. The first block of flats in our road had been bombed and we were told to keep away from the windows.

The next day we walked through the rubble to the local shops. I was fascinated to see some flats with just the upstairs fireplaces seeming to hang on the walls because all the floors and fronts had disappeared.



<http://www.islingtontribune.com/news/2010/jan/journey-blitz-bombsite-barnard-park>



Bomb damage on Barnsbury Road, 1940

As we lived on the third floor it was deemed safer to sleep on the ground floor during the Blitz so we, like many others, slept in one of our neighbour's flats sharing a bed, top to toe, with other children. With other boys we went to the top floor of the flats and used to collect pieces of shrapnel from the gutters.



St Pauls 29 December 1940



Daily Mail 31 December 1940

Because at that time there was a continuous 'Warning' people had to shop as and when they thought it safe. I remember one day when my Mum went out giving me strict instructions that I must get my three year old sister Joyce and my baby brother Harry into the hallway away from the windows and put the pillows around them. Sure enough a bombing raid started and I'm certain there was machine gunning. I had great difficulty getting Harry out of his cot and into the hall where we waited until a distraught Mum arrived home. We all waited there and my Mum cried.

I do remember hearing the song 'Bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover' which even at five years old I found very uplifting.

Evacuation – Landbeach near Cambridge

Later I was told that we were to be evacuated and was excited that we were going on a train to an unknown destination. I don't remember the journey but do remember being told that Mum, Joyce and Harry were to live with one family and I was going to live with a married couple.

So it was that I lived with 'Aunt' Lil and 'Uncle' Fred Thorogood in Landbeach near Cambridge and it proved to be a very happy and long lasting relationship, Aunt Lil eventually coming to our son John's wedding to Sue.

I went to the local school which had two classes, one for fives to tens and the other for elevens to fourteens. We had a dog called Tip who became a great friend and came with me to school and met me at the end of the day. He also used to eat all the fatty bits of meat that I slid off my plate and under the table.

I had a wonderful time living here and particularly remember being shown the orange night sky in the distance, being told that that was London burning, and seeing the heavily loaded bombers from Waterbeach RAF Station flying so low on their outward sorties that you could see the crews and they would wave to us. Aunt Lil must have counted them back in the morning because she would say that we lost a number of aircraft the previous night, but they had probably been damaged and had landed at another airfield.



Wellington bomber and crew ready for operational flight from Waterbeach RAF station

I remember being told-off by our neighbour for swinging on the gate and replying 'It's my gate so I'll swing if I want to'. I must have felt at home.

Aunt Lil made me a pair of Bib and Brace overalls and when I went with Uncle Fred, his mates and a ferret to catch rabbits, I was given a big stick and told to hit it hard on the head when it popped out of the hole. When it did pop-out I let it go and everyone seemed in agreement that they had a 'Townie' in their midst!

We used to see by paraffin lamps, to cook on a paraffin stove and a 'Straw' oven. We got our water from a village pump in the road and had an outside toilet with a bucket which Uncle Fred and I emptied by digging a hole in the garden and burying the contents. This was a job I hated.

Our milk was delivered by a local farmer who had a pony and trap and a milk-churn and various size ladles.

We used to snare rabbits in the corn field behind the house and shoot them at harvest time when the farmer cut the wheat from the outside edge of the field until there was just a small circle in the centre of the field. The rabbits seemed to gravitate towards the centre and then there was a mad dash to escape when the circle got too small. Then it was everyone for themselves and how nobody got shot I'll never know.

Mum, Joyce and Harry lived with Jack and Mag Rainer and their daughters Margaret and Brenda. My Dad came to visit a couple of times and Aunt Lil said that when he came, a house in the village that acted as a pub used to get in extra beer. Aunt Mag was very upset because my Dad always got Uncle Jack drunk. Uncle Fred was teetotal.

I was very happy in Landbeach and remember sitting by the fire listening to the football commentaries on the radio and which to be honest, I didn't quite understand. I was most impressed by a boy called Bernard Milton aged about seven who visited and explained an easy way to recognise when I had my wellington boots on the correct feet. I was less impressed when gypsies selling various items were in the village. Aunt Lil and I used to hide under the table until they had gone away. Actually I was terrified and now understand how intolerance between peoples can so easily start.

Highbury Grove

After the Blitz ended we returned to London and lived in a flat in Highbury Grove. I went to a school at Finsbury Park for half-days because the school had been bombed. Because of the air-raids we didn't go to school very often and we also had to go and collect our gas masks. I felt quite important because I had a grown-up one, Joyce had one that resembled Mickey Mouse and Harry's was a baby's one where he was completely enclosed. I don't recall being the least bit scared.



1941: *John CHEESMAN (6), David (cousin), Joyce(4), Harry(2) CHEESMAN Balfour Road*

Evacuation Milnrow, Lancashire

When the bombing started again I was told that we were to be evacuated again and was disappointed that we were not going back to Landbeach. I remember spending hours on a train. My Mum told me this was because we were going by a roundabout route away from the paths taken by German bombers who might attack trains, nothing like knowing the facts then!

We eventually arrived in Milnrow, Lancashire, complete with our labels and gasmasks. We stayed for a few days in a church hall, all sleeping on camp beds and I remember it being very crowded. Because Harry was young he and Mum were billeted with a local Doctor and his family.

Joyce and I were taken with lots of other children to another hall which had a stage. Each child went on the stage and people offered to take them in. I went on with Joyce who was about five and someone said they'd take the girl but not the boy but I said we were not to be parted. We had to wait until the end and were given to a very nice family who had two daughters and lived on a small farm on the Pennines.

It was a bit of a shock when I found out that Joyce and I would share the same double bed with the daughters but in those times everything seemed to be acceptable because of the war. A few days later Joyce was taken back to live with Mum and I had a bed of my own.

I really enjoyed the farm and had many jobs to do, like collecting the eggs from the field where the chickens seemed to lay them in the same bit of grass beside the same part of the stonewall. Cleaning out the cowshed with a blade-like broom and a hose wasn't so good and it took quite a while to get used to the smell. I learned to milk the cows using a traditional three legged stool but never as skilful as the farmer's wife could hit me in the face with a 'squirt' from a cow's teat from about ten feet.

They had an old car that had been stored in a barn for the duration of the war because they were not entitled to petrol. I used to sit in it and imagine going on long exciting journeys. I remember collecting wild berries and one dark and rainy night going on the moor looking for a lost sheep which we found in a gully.

I learned to make butter in a small churn and was given the job of keeping the new calves happy by just sitting there with them sucking my hand and wrist. I couldn't get over how clean and wrinkled my arm was. I don't remember going to school when I lived on the farm just continuous enjoyment. After we moved back to Milnrow I used to go back by bus and spend time there.

In Milnrow we shared a large house with perhaps three other families. When we first went there with a lady from the family placement services there seemed to be a mad rush by all the mums to claim the best rooms and we ended up with the smallest bedroom for Mum, Joyce, Harry and me. The same thing happened when picking the downstairs living rooms but the lady in charge said that as the Cheesman's had the last choice of the bedrooms then they should have the first choice of the living rooms, so we ended up with a beautiful large room backing on to the garden. The house had a large kitchen with a pump that took water from a well and transferred it to tanks in the roof space, from the kitchen was a tiny staircase that led up to the attic, I assume that this had been previously used by servants.

When we first moved in the local people asked if we needed any help and couldn't have been kinder. We must have looked a poor bunch especially as my Mum used to buy our clothes at the jumble sales. I used to go to school in a pair of old football boots that she converted by removing the studs, she once got me a pair of clogs with horseshoe type metal protectors on

the soles the trouble was they were a brown/blue combination of colours and were meant for a girl! Along with odd trousers and shirts and no underclothes I must have looked a sight. Not everyone was kind, I remember standing at a bus stop next to two middle-aged women whose conversation included such phrases as 'He looks like one of those evacuees, aren't some of them disgusting'.

When we attended the local school nobody seemed to understand the evacuees because of our accents so we were put in a separate room and told to read, it wasn't long though before everyone got used to one another and we joined the mainstream. Some older boys used to pick on the evacuees and there was a lot of fighting, one boy in particular picked me out for 'special' attention, especially because of my clothes and boots. I bade my time and noted that he and his friends went into the underground air-raid shelter which was quite dark, one day I hid in the shelter until he came in and his eyes were not used to the dark and hit him as hard as I could and then ran out. I don't know if he suspected it was me but from that day on he left me alone.

Joyce settled into school with no problem but Harry was young and was very upset and it seemed that every day he was brought into my class to sit next to me and this caused even more ammunition for the other boys.

Next to the school was a farm and one day I saw a couple of farm-hands trying to get a bull into a trailer and was astonished how strong and ferocious it was, there was also a small shop that would sell you a ha'penny worth of peas in their pods or a single Oxo cube which made an interesting snack.

At the back of our garden was an open field that had quite a big slope, from somewhere we found an old wooden barrel and wondered why we felt so sick when we rolled down the hill in it. This came to an end when one day we hit a stone wall and the barrel disintegrated. I was fascinated at the barrel's construction.

I used to go shopping to a row of local shops and must have started to use the local phrases because one day a shop owner said that if I carried on speaking the way I did I would soon become a 'Milnrow' boy.

Highbury

When things began to get quieter in London we returned home and moved into a house in Highbury which we shared with an older couple Mr and Mrs Harman who were very kind. When the landlord came to collect his rent I had to hide in the back garden with Roger because my Dad had only got the lease because he said he didn't have any young children. My Dad said that he had not lied because Roger was a baby.

Moving back to London was a bit premature because before long the Rockets and Doodle-bugs began to fall. At school (Highbury Vale) our teacher used to pray for our safety each day before we went home. We had a bomb explode in Legard Road which was about 500 yards as the crow flies and a rocket in Petherton Road which was about half a mile away.

When the air-raids sounded we used to sleep in an Anderson shelter which had been built in our garden and as Mr and Mrs Harman used to join us it was quite a squeeze. After a while there were so many raids that they stopped sounding the alerts and you just ran to the shelter as soon as you heard the characteristic throbbing of the 'bugs. As you never heard the rockets coming, most people, from my memory, ignored them. At this time all the schools were closed for months on end. One memorable sight was standing outside our shelter and watching a Spitfire chase a Doodlebug. We also had Barrage-Balloons in Highbury Fields and Ack-Ack guns in Finsbury Park.

VE day (May 8th 1945)

I remember May 1945 because of all the talk locally and on the wireless about how well the war was going. A neighbour had a very large map on his wall and used to plot all the battles with British and German flags. We had the radio on constantly for news and on May 9th the announcement was made that the war in Europe was over and everyone was shouting and running around with excitement. It was also my brother's 5th Birthday but that got lost somewhere along the line. Everything seemed to get back to normal and it must have been very unfair for the families who had loved ones who were still fighting in the Far East.

The war against Japan ended in the August after the dropping of two Atomic Bombs. From what I remember people were jubilant that peace was now here but very concerned at the enormity of the destruction and suffering caused to the two Japanese Cities. I suspect that the newsreel pictures and first hand reports of the vicious treatment of the Allied prisoners, civilian women and children by the Japanese prison guards tempered the sympathy that was felt for the Japanese themselves. I remember the 'War Crime' trials and when they finished thinking that the future looked great until I saw a newspaper front-page showing a 'H' Bomb explosion and that shocked me immensely.

Just after the war we went as a family for a walk around the City of London and it just seemed to be a series of holes in the ground, a result of all the bombing. We also went to Trafalgar Square because there were post-war celebrations. I remember there being a Spitfire fighter plane and you could buy special stamps that were stuck on in aid of something or other.

We also had a walk around the West-End to see the statue of Eros whose protection against bombing had just been removed. We also saw a barrow-boy who was selling peaches which I had never seen before, Dad brought a couple at an extortionate price and we all had a taste. At this time certain exotic fruits, such as oranges and bananas were becoming available but rationed. There was a special page in our Ration-Books for special items which the shopkeeper marked with an indelible pencil to show that you had received your share. I was mortified when after queuing for ages for oranges the greengrocer asked, in front of everyone, who had been rubbing out previous cancellation marks. When I asked, Dad insisted that he hadn't touched them. The first time we had bananas Harry tried to eat his with the skin on.

As for queuing, we used to wait for hours at the Fishmongers because fish wasn't rationed. I would join the queue and wait in line until my Mum would take over. It could take a couple of hours.

Our wireless ran on an accumulator which had to be recharged and it was my job to take it to local Ironmongers who performed this service. The accumulators were made of glass and filled with acid. The Ironmonger also sold canes to beat children with! I wonder what Health and Safety and Social Services would make of this today.

Things at school went well and I remember that all children were to get a gift of chocolate bars from the Canadian people but I couldn't understand why it was distributed as a powder until someone explained that as sweets were rationed this was the only way of distributing this gift! I remember how lovely it tasted and I also remember that a few children nearly choked themselves sucking it up through straws. We also had a daily spoonful of cod-liver oil and one of malt extract along with orange juice; I believe this was the Governments way of building up the health of the children after five years of war.

Harry joined Joyce and I at the school and this caused me a lot of grief because Harry had a speech impediment and I just knew what would happen. Sure enough after school finished for the day a gang of boys were waiting outside the gates and started to tease him, this led to many fights and scraped knees also torn clothes. It even happened after Sunday school, so much for religion producing a better type of person. Harry had speech lessons and ended up sounding so posh that he read out, in front of the whole school, a nativity poem at the school Christmas concert. I remember being so proud of him.

My aunt Rose visited us one day and she brought me a proper fountain pen, I was really pleased and ever since have considered one to be an essential instrument to write with. Aunt Rose and Mum were live-in scullery maids when they were young.

1946 – 11 plus

For my eleventh birthday I was given a dictionary which I loved because it had various coloured pages that illustrated various subjects, it also had drawings of mechanical movements which fascinated me. There were also lists of French and Latin phrases and I would try and use them in the compositions we had to write at school, why, I don't know. Maybe I was trying to impress.

We took our 11 plus exam which I passed and had an interview to go to the Grammar School. During the interview my Mum was asked about our family finances, what was my Dad's profession and would we be able to afford the uniform. On the way home my Mum said that I probably wouldn't get a place. She was right and when the list of those who had been successful was read out I was the only one who didn't get a place. I remember looking through my tears and noticing that I had odd shoes on. Mr Jarvis, the Headmaster, took me aside and said it was unfair but he was sure that I would do well anyway. I vowed there and then to prove him right.

One thing that stands out in my memory was when the whole school witnessed the first ringing of the school bell since the beginning of the war because up until then bell-ringing signalled an invasion. Another memory is watching a crane with a heavy ball on the end of its arm demolishing a bombed out house just opposite the school, it was so fascinating that most of the pupils ignored the bell that told us school was starting.

Also memorable was when the Arsenal Football Club, who were about 100yards along the road, attended a joint service at St. John's Church, with all their players, to bless the start of the new season, seems unbelievable now.

At this school Joyce was chosen to go on holiday run by 'The Country Holiday Fund'. I learned later that this was an organisation set up to aid children from deprived backgrounds. She spent a week with a family at Tring in Hertfordshire who must have had older daughters of their own because Joyce came home with lots of books and some dolls. She said that she had had her own bedroom and had a wonderful time. I don't think she ever forgot it.

I went on a school trip to a gas making plant; everyone looked into the furnaces and the workers raked out the spent coke, with sparks flying everywhere. It was hot, noisy and smoky but there wasn't a hard-hat, pair of goggles, ear-defender or fluorescent jacket in site.

1946 Tollington Park Central

My secondary school was Tollington Park Central which had 'Technical' and 'Commercial' streams and I followed the technical side. The school uniform was a maroon blazer and grey trousers. Mum surpassed herself and brought me a bright red jacket from the market which led to a very embarrassing first day. Some houses next to the school had been bombed and when the site had been cleared some Nissan Huts were built to house German prisoners of

war. There wasn't any hostility within the local community because they used to clean the local shop windows and do various jobs. They were distinguished by their clothes which had, if I remember correctly, a white circular patch sewn on the back of their jackets. When we played football in the playground and our ball went over the wall into the camp we would climb up and ask for it back. They seemed nice and I wondered why we had been at war.

Discipline at school was very strict but the punishments were quite informal. Any boy caught misbehaving was invited to attend 'Boxing Lessons' in the school hall at lunch time. A makeshift 'Ring' of four chairs and rope was set up and the sports master (who had been in the Navy) gave you a chance to hit him, which you couldn't, and then gave you a few punches just to remind you what would happen if you misbehaved again.

My cousin David, who was slightly younger but had a strong family likeness, had misbehaved in some way and was sent to the headmaster to be punished. The headmaster told him to come back later because he was busy. In the mean time I had been told to stand outside my class because of some misdemeanour, the next thing I remember was being called into the headmaster's office and being given 'six of the best' and assumed that I deserved it. Later I was called back to the headmaster's office where he apologised for his mistake and told me that next time I was sent to see him I should remind him that I was in credit when it came to caning. Because of the strict ethos at the school there was no bullying or trouble and I loved being there.

Sports and boxing were high on the agenda and every Christmas we had a Schools Boxing Championship. When I was fourteen I reached the final and the contests were held in front of the whole school. We were told to bring shorts but in her wisdom Mum knitted me some swimming shorts and I never lived it down but my boxing prowess stood me in good stead for the inevitable battles with the other boys ahead! When we had P.E. lessons we had to wear plimsolls that we got from a special cupboard, these always had a sweaty smell and sometimes were still warm from the previous class.

We also had some great music and singing lessons because we sang the latest popular songs as well as the school classics. We also staged the operetta 'The Mikado' and had a school choir. All the schools in North London had a joint recital in a local concert hall. We were taught Handel's Largo and everyone was told to wear a white shirt, my Mum thought that the cream one she managed to get would be fine; I wasn't that happy when I was told-off and made to stand on the edge of the back row.

In the final year's exam I came top of the school and couldn't wait to get home to tell my dad, his comment to me was 'If you're the best then what must the worst have been like'.

While at this school I used to earn pocket money by doing various jobs. To be allowed to do this we had to have a medical and this was carried out by the visiting school nurse. The medical consisted of the nurse asking if I wanted to have a job and then passing me fit.

One job was as a butchers-boy. I used to work after school skinning rabbits, making sausages and learning how to bone various pieces of meat. I also had to scrub the wooden blocks with saw dust, sweep up and clean the windows. On Saturdays I would deliver all the meat that had been pre-ordered. I had a very heavy bike with a basket on the front which took a bit of getting used to because the first time I rode it I fell off because I was expecting the basket to turn with the handlebars but it didn't. Of course I had to have a proper butcher's apron and this was supplied but then I found out that I didn't get any wages until the cost of the apron had been met.

One Saturday delivery was to a Jamaican Mission and I surprised one woman who was injecting into her arm, another was to a Catholic Home that had a lot of young girls who were

having babies. I was about fourteen at the time and couldn't work out what was going on so I asked the butcher. He told me not to ask so many questions and just concentrate on my work.

At one time I worked for a couple of men who made their own television sets and installed them into up-market wooden cabinets; I used to assemble sub components to make transformers.

At this time my Mum did a lot of 'Outdoor' machining which mainly consisted of sewing sleeve linings together. After finishing at the butchers I would cycle to the clothes factory with the completed sleeves and bring home the next batch. My Dad had built a large shed in the garden and equipped it with a treadle guillotine and a fly-press. Here we made special cabinets for a man who was making X-ray viewing equipment. We also made pastry cutters, tin toy boats that propelled them-selves when a methylated spirit burner was placed under a coil that protruded from the rear; metal toy Lorries but most of all, Yo-Yo's. Most of these items were assembled in the kitchen by Dad and me, although Joyce used to help with the painting.

One Saturday when assembling a cabinet a drill bit broke when dad was assembling and I was holding the parts together. The remaining stub went through my thumb. I had to wait until the Monday then pretend that I'd had an accident at work before going to the hospital to be treated.

All the toys were made before I started fulltime work and these we used to sell in the local markets, holiday fairs and at the sea-side. I used to have a tray around my neck to hold them while demonstrating how to use them. My all-time dread was that someone from school would see me.

One year we had a week's holiday at Southend-on-Sea and we all slept in one room at a bed and breakfast. We went by train and took two case loads of Yo-Yo's which we sold along the beach to get the money to pay the holiday costs. The saddest thing was that we would spend months making these toys and selling them and made a lot of money, but Dad had a terrible gambling habit and would lose it all in one visit to the local greyhound race track. I used to go with him and he would even gamble in the streets on the way by playing 'Crown and Anchor' with one of many tricksters that were around. We would then go to the pub and arrive at the stadium the worse for wear. He would then try out one of his many 'systems' that he was convinced would give him a big win. Many times he lost everything and we even had to walk home because we didn't have the bus fare.

When we arrived home all hell broke loose and verbal slanging matches started and this usually ended up with him punching Mum and all the children being sent to bed. This would lead to weeks where he lived on his own in one of the spare rooms; the atmosphere was unbearable. At this time he must have been mentally ill because at bed time we had a biscuit and a drink and he used to tell me to eat up because he was going to kill my mother. I was so scared that I couldn't swallow so he used to try and force the biscuit down my throat.

There was a time when our neighbours had some fireworks and he wouldn't let us go outside to see them, this made us all cry. He then said would we like to go upstairs and see them from the window, obviously we said we would and got excited and then he said 'Well, you can't'. He seemed to think this was most amusing.

I'm convinced the cause of all his troubles was his own vicious father, his upbringing and the loss of his daughter when he thought that his life had taken a turn for the better. Years later a cousin told me that her mother, Dad's sister had a deformed arm that had been broken by my grandfather who didn't even take her to the hospital.

Speaking of treatment, there was no Health Service when we were small and I remember my mum giving me a half-crown to visit our local doctor, when I tried to pay him he insisted that he'd already been paid and told me to give it back to mum. I'm sure there many such examples of such philanthropy that time.

I used to have to get the shopping for an elderly neighbour, light the gas under prepared meals for some strictly religious German-Jewish family who lived two doors along, and chop wood and carry coals from the cellar for the elderly couple who lived upstairs. Similarly a Jewish neighbour, Mr Agassi, who had an old car used to fill it up with children from our road and take them for rides to places like reservoirs or ponds to view the wildlife. As we had Italians, Indians, Jews and Gentiles in the road we were quite a cosmopolitan bunch.

Mr Agassi was the perfect example of an entrepreneur; at the end of the war the government sold lots of Army Surplus and he bought a very large American truck at auction and started a freight delivery company. There must have been so much surplus equipment because at the auction when he went to collect his truck he found about six despatch-rider's motorbikes in the back. When he told the authorities about the mistake they said he'd bid for a 'Lot' and the 'bikes' must have been part of it. After he sold the bikes I think he got the truck for nothing and made a profit.

He also had a large shed in his garden where he manufactured clothing. In one of his upstairs rooms he made lead soldiers and I used to help him pour the molten lead into the moulds, his wife and son Aaron used to do the painting and packaging. The fumes were overwhelming at times and not a 'Health and Safety' notice to be seen.

The Indian family lived four doors away and there were about eight children and their surname was Scott. Mr Scott used to give the local boys boxing lessons and Donald, one of the younger sons, was one my friends. We were most surprised when, at latter part of the war, Donald said that his older brother was coming for a couple of days and we saw that he was a decorated RAF Navigator.

At this time, Roger was about three years and we shared a single bed and he wouldn't go to bed without me. Mum used to get me to go to bed early with him just to get him asleep the trouble was that I would fall asleep as well and wake up just in time to go to bed again. As I was about eleven I used to go around with my friends train spotting, playing football and just messing about. Roger would want to come with me and I'd say no but Mum would say 'Oh go on, he won't be any trouble' so I had to take him. I then spent the rest of the day telling him off and generally shouting at him. From my earnings I used to get him to warm up the bed especially in the winter when the only fire in the house was in the kitchen and it was freezing. It couldn't have affected him very much because for years now he's been my best friend.

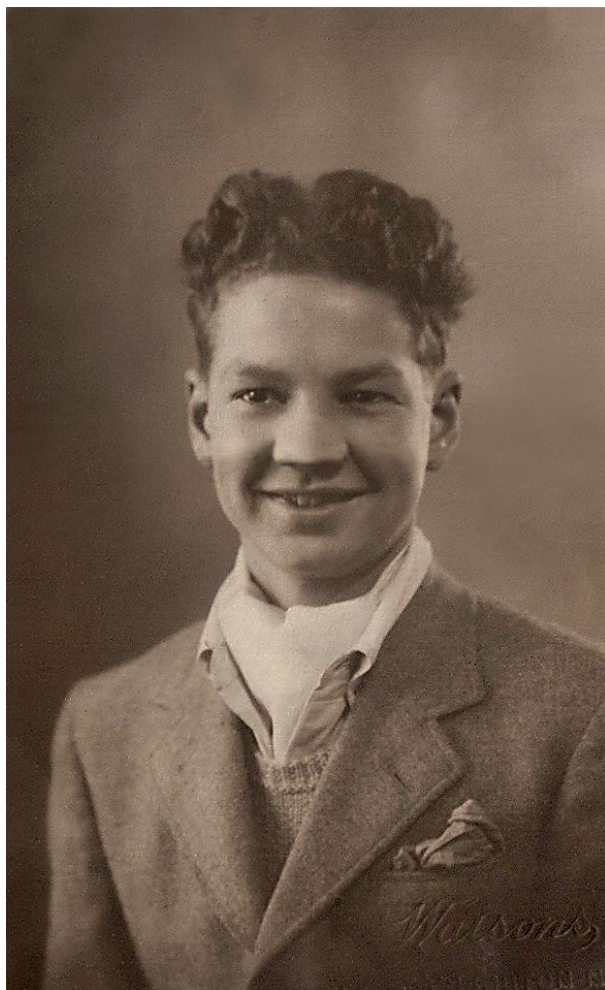
Also at this time I went to stay with my Godmother and Godfather who had a jewellers and watch repair shop at Brixham in Devon. I used to help cleaning the watch mechanisms and reassembling them and he gave me some pocket-money for holiday spending. There was a ferry that ran a shuttle service between Brixham and Torquay; the boat they used was a Second World War Motor Torpedo Boat that had been converted. I took a trip one day and noticed that it only had the captain and a man who looked after the engines as crew. On the return journey I said that for a small wage I would see the passengers on board and collect the tickets, they laughed but when I was getting off they said that I could start the next day. I told my Godfather and he thought it was a good idea because a holiday was supposed to be outside and in the sunshine. I must have spent three weeks or so doing this enjoyable job before returning home.

Other jobs that I had were helping on a milk round and collecting wood from bomb sites which I would chop up into bundles and sell door to door as firewood. I also used to work in a mobile cafe outside the Arsenal on match days.

In the last year at school we were allowed to wear long trousers which made us feel very grown up. It seems funny that prior to this all boys wore shorts and a cap even though some were six feet tall. My friend Guthrie announced one day that a new family had moved into a nearby house, he said they were 'posh'. When asked why he said that the son not only had a proper handkerchief but that he had a clean one every day!

At secondary school I was chosen to represent the school in an All London woodwork competition. I did reasonably well and thought I might follow carpentry when I left school. At the end of the year, when I was still fourteen I was looking forward to the summer holidays and finding a job. No such luck, Dad said that I was starting work with him on the following Monday and took me to the local market to buy a cap, white scarf and a pint mug, he showed me how to wear the scarf in the cockney fashion and as I was only about five foot nothing tall I must have looked ridiculous.

After a couple of months of work I'd saved enough money to buy some clothes of my own choice, I was so proud of them that I had a photograph taken at the photographers. Sometime later I found this had lots of holes in it where it had been on a dartboard.



John restored



(original)

I also found my Christening Certificate which Dad had been using the back of to write down his choice of horses to bet on. In the last year of school I won the school prize which was a

book on space and the solar system. When I later came home on leave from the RAF I found that Dad had been using it to prop up a chest of drawers that had lost a foot. I still have all these items and even now it makes me sad to see them.

I worked with Dad for the three years then I was called up for National Service. At this time I used to go to evening classes four nights a week to study engineering. The college was fifteen minutes cycling distance away and lectures started at six o'clock, as I didn't finish work until six I asked if I could leave a little bit earlier only to be told that I could but I would lose a quarter of an hour's pay each day. As I couldn't afford this I missed the first part of each lecture. So much for day-release.

The things that stick out in my mind during this period were having cheese and pickle sandwiches every day for lunch, going in early to light the stove in the winter and getting rid of the rats from the traps by dropping the cages in the forge quench water tank and burning the rats on the forge fire.

Having started work it didn't stop me getting a slap around the face for no apparent reason, some of the other workers complained and I was moved to another part of the factory for a short while. Dad had a very short temper and when he was younger used to box, I remember one fellow worker who started to argue him and Dad knocked him out with a single blow. Another side to his character was that he could be extremely generous as when a new worker started and had no money and had to work for two weeks before being paid, Dad gave him sufficient to tide him over and took him in sandwiches for his lunch every day.

Once when it became too bad I decided to leave home and just put a few things in my saddle bag and set off. I didn't have a destination in mind but thought it would be a good idea to go to Landbeach where I'd been so happy before. I also didn't realise how far it was from London and didn't arrive until late at night. I told Aunt Lil and Uncle Fred that what I had done. Unbeknown to me they phoned my Dad the next day and told me that he'd said that if I went home then we would make a fresh start. I took my bike on the train back home and when I knocked on the front door Dad answered and dragged and kicked me all the way along the passage into the kitchen. I didn't know what was worse, the kicking or the betrayal.

We had a Manchester terrier named Prince which I looked after but one day I was told that we couldn't keep him anymore and I had to take him to the vet's to have him put down. I found this very traumatic and the vet giving me a 'Not just for Christmas' lecture didn't help. I was given his collar and lead and when I got outside I threw it away in the street and spent the rest of the day just wandering around not knowing what to do with myself. I'm not a child psychologist but even I know that this wasn't a good idea.

1949

When I was around fourteen I remember taking Joyce, Harry and a six year old Roger out for the day, Mum made us some sandwiches and gave me some money. I had seen that Cockfosters was at the end of the Piccadilly line of the London Underground so we walked to the Arsenal Station and just went in. How we were allowed onto the station I'll never know but we did and when we reached our destination we found a park and went back home in time for tea.

Because of food rationing the council put a 'Pig Bin' on street corners and any food waste was put into them. They were emptied on a regular basis but my, they did smell. There were special lorries with panels to do the collection, deliveries of other services such milk or coal. The rag and bone men were usually drawn by horse and cart.

I joined the Cubs and Scouts which I enjoyed and went to the Saturday morning pictures where we had community singing and talent contests. One thing that was very interesting was making a two valve radio. A local shop used to sell the boys a blueprint on how to construct it. The shopkeeper would put all the parts aside and you would buy them when you had the money. He was available to give help and advice for free.

There were lots of bomb-dumps around and groups of boys would clear a space and mark out a track and have speedway races on our bikes. One of these dumps was used to store building gravel that was so high it reached above the surrounding houses. It didn't take long for the boys to find a curved panel from an Anderson Shelter drag it to the top, all pile on board and toboggan down. When we got to the bottom we crashed through a garden wall, after a quick executive discussion we decided the best plan of action was to run away as fast as possible.

Another time a boy said he knew how to make gunpowder and would we like to try it out. We all agreed and bought the relevant constituents from a local chemist shop. We mixed them all together and decided for safety reasons we would sit about six feet away. Luckily we were not able to cause an explosion but we did manage to produce a flash that singed our hair and eyebrows. It also produced small ball-bearing look-a-likes where our eyelashes used to be. From memory, two boys had to go to their doctor for treatment.

Some evenings we would play football in Highbury Fields where they had a cinder pitch. We'd play until about eight o'clock and then stand around a street corner talking. About nine o'clock the local policeman would come along and say something like 'Okay lads, it's about time you were getting home' and we just did as we were told because disobeying a member of the constabulary was just not done.

Dad decided it would be a good idea to keep some chickens so we'd have extra eggs and also a bird for Christmas lunch. This was a complete disaster when it came to the festive season. My Cyprian Aunt who, during the war had been in the Land Army, offered to kill the chicken for us. She just stood on its wings and cut its head off with a carving knife. Coupled with the execution, cleaning out and plucking the bird, who over the months had become more of a pet, nobody would eat it.

Mum had always wanted to own her own house so all the money earned from her machining plus that from all our other activities was enough to save a deposit on our house. The owner had decided to sell but as we couldn't get a mortgage allowed us to pay the balance on a weekly basis which now seems unbelievable. A local solicitor drew up an agreement and to Dad's credit the house was put in Mum's name. I think the house cost £1200 and we didn't have to pay interest on the debt. When our rent and that of other tenants were added together we virtually got the house for nothing and it took about four years to become ours.

The best part of this period was getting a motorbike. At weekends I used to ride out into the country and once went to Cross Hands in Wales and camped in a farmer's field, the farmer's main topic of conversation was how much work was there in London, which was probably a throw back from the hard times this community had previously suffered. It wasn't until I was nearly eighteen before I could go out on a Sunday because Dad insisted everyone was at home for Sunday lunch.

Another experience, which today seems unbelievable, was when I was fifteen I had a poisoned finger and went to the local A&E department on my own where I had a general anaesthetic to lance it. Afterwards I just sat down until I felt okay, then had my arm put in a sling then got the bus home.

Around about this time Joyce asked me if I knew that Mum and Dad weren't married. I didn't know this and it wasn't a problem to me but at this time it was generally frowned upon. It

turned out that Dad was a bigamist and his first wife must have died in the 1970's because Mum and Dad got married then but never said a word about it.

Coronation of the Queen 1953

We had a television set so we could see the Coronation of the Queen (2nd June 1953). It was such a new experience for everyone and with such a poor picture we had to have the curtains closed to see it. We also lined up the chairs in rows as if we were at the cinema. So much was made about the first transmission from across the channel, we all waited with bated breath and after much waiting and solemn exhortations from the commentators; we had some flickering images of a painting, Dad thought we were going to see something a bit more risqué so it turned out to be a bit of a damp squib.

RAF

When I first went into the RAF everyone was complaining but to me it just seemed like freedom and I loved every minute of it. To carry on with my trade I had to sign on for four years, after my experience in Brixham I did ask about joining the Air-Sea Rescue but changed my mind when I was told I'd have to serve for ten years.

At this time Mum wrote to say she was pregnant which was a bit of a shock to say the least. David was born in the January and as I couldn't get a weekend pass I left camp by jumping over the fence and walking over the fields until I reached the A5 road where I hitch-hiked all the way to London to the maternity hospital to see them. It was quite easy at that time to get a lift because most drivers had done their National Service or had been in the war. There were always a lot of us waiting for lifts and there was an unspoken protocol. At major road junctions you just joined an orderly queue and most cars pulled up and took the next in line, All very British.

I used come home some weekends on my motorbike, one set back was that Mum used to get me to take the baby to the clinic for his check-ups and injections. Some nurses thought that he was mine!

During my training I was sent on a Coppersmith/Sheet metal workers course. Each course had dozens of men on them but as my trade was unusual I was the only one on the course and I spent six months being taught by three civilian instructors so it was as good as a civvy street apprenticeship. The course was held at RAF Weeton near Blackpool and I even managed to get a Saturday job in a sea-front cafe. My main task was peeling thousands of potatoes and working as a waiter.

I then spent nearly three years in Germany where I met people from all walks of life and visited places that opened my eyes as to what was available outside the close world I'd been used to.

Part of my work in Germany was picking up crashed aircraft all over Germany and Holland so we went to out of the way places where this was the biggest thing that had happened to them. It usually took a couple of weeks at each crash site and most communities held a dance for the unit which was about twenty of us. They also arranged a football match with the local team, as we lived in the back of the trucks and had a mobile kitchen it was a great experience and we met and got on very well

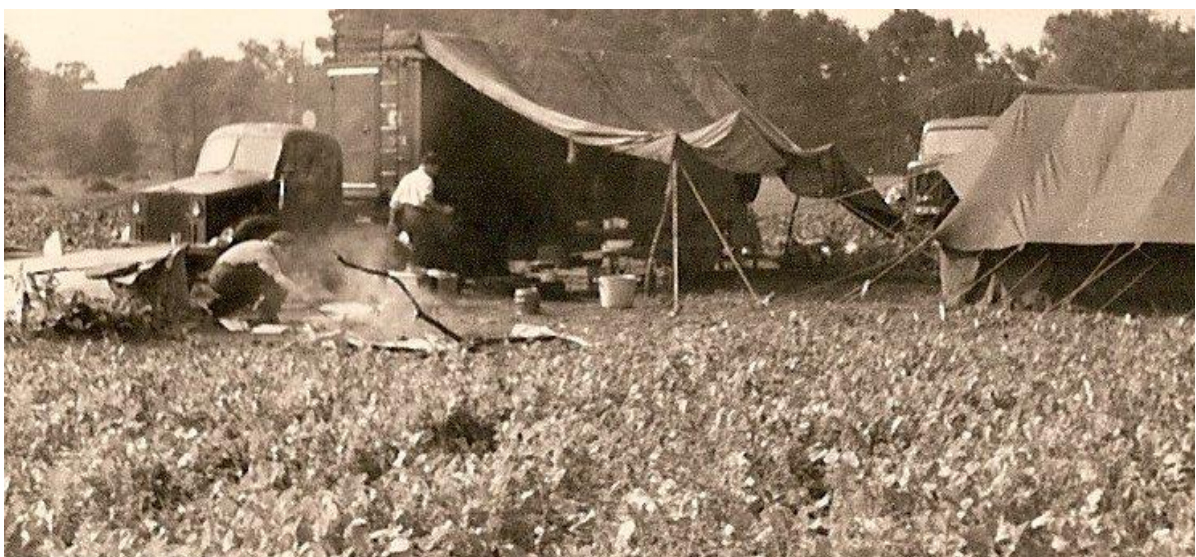


with everyone. It just seemed surreal that our countries had been at war just eight years before.



Salvaging aircraft parts in Germany and Holland

When back at camp any parts that could be salvaged were repaired and used to repair other aircraft. The unit exercised a unique quality control system which used a list of all personnel. As each plane repair was complete the person at the top of the list had to fly on its maiden flight and then everyone moved up a place.



When I was demobbed I returned home only to find that Dad had arranged for me to start work with him at a new company he had joined. After a couple of weeks I left because I had, by this time, become completely independent.



July 1954 John going on the Jankers at Weeton (Coppersmith course)

1956 – John meets Margaret Mary

I now thought it a good time to find new friends and joined a Dancing Class. This turned out to be the best decision of my life because it was there that I met a young sixteen year old girl who was to change everything. Her name was Mary and seemed to come from a much quieter family whose interests were more about literature, music and harmony. I don't remember any books at home and the only music I recall were a gramophone record about 'The Lion and Albert' and one called 'The cow on comical farm'.

One day I met Mary at the dancing school where they used to have a drink of orange in the interval. I asked her to come to a neighbouring pub instead; it was the first time that she had been in a pub and the only drink she knew was a Martini. Thus her descent into the wicked world. I even introduced her to treason if you count the time when we later lived near Sandringham and I borrowed a perfect Christmas tree from the royal estate for the festivities; alas it wasn't in good enough condition to take back.

When I told my parents Dad asked if I was baby-snatching, but I said that I'd invited her to tea. Everyone was on their best behaviour and Harry and Roger had their best clothes on. When Mary arrived, Dad stood up and said 'Good evening' and we sat down to one of Mum's special teas. Mary was given a cup with 'Mother' on the side and no saucer, and then we had tinned peaches served in the saucers. One of Mum's skills was to make a small tub of cream be enough for everyone no matter how many people were sitting around the table. Roger got a dig in the ribs because he kept calling Mary by the name of a previous girlfriend called Margaret. Other than that it went well and Mary agreed to come out again.

I invited Mary to have Christmas lunch at our house and this must have been quite an experience for her. First a taxi arrived with my Dad lying on the floor; he was drunk, had a

black eye from being in a fight and had lost his bike. My Nan began telling Mary about 'The old days' when my Grandad was being arrested by the police in their flat and my Dad and uncles were fighting the police in the passageway allowing Grandad to make an escape out of the rear window. She also regaled us all with tales about him diving off Westminster Bridge, again to avoid arrest.

Mary evidently wasn't put off and we went on to have a wonderful life together. One evening I went to see Mary and for a joke put a mop on my head before knocking on the door. Mary's mum answered the door and said 'Hullo Joyce' before realising it was me. I'm not sure what upset Joyce more, being mistaken for me or having her hair denigrated.

One disadvantage of courting Mary was the fact that she had so many aunts and uncles living in the surrounding streets, so when I used to start-up my motorbike at a safe distance away so that her parents didn't know what time I had left, there was always a relative to remind me and telling me that I'd woken them up.

When Mary was seventeen I asked her to marry me, she said yes and we decided to wait for a couple of years. When I told an older workmate he asked why the wait and I thought he had a very good point so that evening I decided to ask Mary's dad if it was all right to do so. Mary was in the back garden and peering through the windows making signs to boost my courage because we thought he'd refuse. When I said that we wanted to get married as soon as possible he just turned white. As Mary was so young he said he'd give his consent but only if we could find a place to live. As it was virtually impossible at that time to find such a thing he probably thought he'd given a 'No' without causing a row. Due to bizarre range of circumstances I actually rented two unfurnished rooms from an elderly lady and her daughter, who lived in the same road as I did on, the very next day. I don't know who was the most shocked that evening when I visited and just put a key on the kitchen table, Mary or her mum and dad. I must say that from then onwards we only had complete encouragement from them although some of the aunts and uncles couldn't see the marriage working. O ye of little faith.

At that time I worked as a sheet-metal worker and was employed by a family firm near Kings Cross station. They ran a bonus scheme as part of the wages and because I could work so fast I was the highest paid worker. I also earned much more than my dad despite all his experience. I thought that there was no way of bettering myself unless I could get myself a job as a draughtsman. The only thing was that you had to have completed an apprenticeship to do so. I scoured the national newspapers every day to see if anything was available. Then I saw an advert by the Fairy Aviation Company, who had just designed the world's fastest aeroplane, they were going to start a drawing office training school which was only open to entrants who had a 'hands-on' engineering background. After an interview I was offered one of the ten places available. Mary and I discussed our finances and decided that even though my weekly wage would fall from £30 to £9, with her salary at the bank we would be able to manage, so I accepted.

When I told my metal-work employer he acted just as one would expect from an honourable man. He wished me luck and asked how much all the books and drawing instruments were, when I left he gave me enough money, out of his own pocket, to cover all the costs.

Just after I started the course Mary found out that she was pregnant which meant that we had reduced our weekly income by two thirds and were about to increase our family by a third.

I managed to get a Saturday job at a chemist's shop in our local high-street. The owner was an example of the 'unacceptable face of capitalism'. I used to work from 8.00am to 5.00pm for pittance, which I then spent with him on baby creams, powders and other baby essentials. The trouble was he charged me the full price for everything so I probably worked for him for

nothing. Beggars can't be choosers. One thing that did surprise me though was that if you put on a white coat and served ladies in a chemist shop they would ask the most intimate questions; little did they know to who they were talking to.

We lived in our lovely little flat for a couple of years and were sorry to leave it when we bought our first house in Hockley in Essex.

Because of my past I was determined that my children would have a very different upbringing. Once when they were a bit boisterous in front of their Nanny Bardwell she remarked that I should tell them off more and that they twisted me around their little fingers, I considered this to be a job done.

To briefly sum up, I came from a humble background, experienced a World-War at first hand, started work at fourteen, served in the forces both at home and abroad, have never been unemployed or received any state benefit and have always paid my dues. I'm happy with that.

I have written this just to show how things have changed over the years, not to judge anyone or suggest that life had been hard for me. I couldn't be happier having had the happiest married life possible and been blessed with wonderful children, son-in-law, daughters-in law and seven beautiful grandchildren. I hope it may be of interest and I love you all. xx

Pax vobiscum {It's in my dictionary!}
("Peace be with you")

1959: Married age 23 [Mary Doris BARDWELL](#) (18) on July 18th at St. Jude's Church, Mildmay Road, Islington.



John William CHEESMAN (23) - Mary Doris BARDWELL (18) - Major Road Ahead!



1959: Jennifer TWITCHETT (17)
 Janet STILL
 Margaret BARDWELL (18)
 Joyce CHEESMAN (22)
 David CHEESMAN (5)



2009: Margaret BARDWELL (62)
 Mary Doris BARDWELL (69)
 Jennifer TWITCHETT (68)

Children:

1. Ann CHEESMAN (1960)
2. John CHEESMAN (1962)
3. Paul CHEESMAN (1965)

m. Andrew Charles BROWN (1959) in 2001
 m Sue CHERRYMAN in 1986
 m. Lynette McDONALD in 1993



John William CHEESMAN (64) at work and leisure 1999: 20th June: London to Brighton



2009: [John William CHEESMAN](#) (74), [Mary Doris BARDWELL](#) (69)



2009: *Mary and John's Golden wedding*

*Roseanna, Lynette, John, Sue, Caragh, Michael, Andy
Paul, Rebecca, Emma, John, Mary Matthew, Ann, Katy*



2009: *Cheesmen: All direct descendants of John and Mary*
Ann (48), Katy(2), John, John (74), Mary, Michael, Paul, Caragh, Roseanna, Emma (4),
Rebecca, Matthew(7)

2019: John died 4th April age 83